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PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

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About

Perspectives on Terrorism

Established in 2007, *Perspectives on Terrorism* (PT) is a quarterly, peer-reviewed, and open-access academic journal. PT is a publication of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), in partnership with the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) at Leiden University, and the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at the University of St Andrews.

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Words of Welcome

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to announce the release of Volume XVII, Issue 3 (September 2023) of *Perspectives on Terrorism* (ISSN 2334-3745). This Open Access journal is a joint publication of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) in The Hague, Netherlands; the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV); and the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) at Leiden University. All past and recent issues can be found online at https://pt.icct.nl/.

Perspectives on Terrorism (PT) is indexed by JSTOR, SCOPUS, and Google Scholar where it ranks No. 3 among journals in the field of Terrorism Studies. Jouroscope™, the directory of scientific journals, has listed PT as one of the top ten journals in the category free open access journals in social sciences, with a Q1 ranking. Now in its 17th year of publication, PoT has close to 8,000 registered subscribers and many more occasional readers and website visitors in academia, government and civil society worldwide. Subscription is free and registration to receive an e-mail of each quarterly issue of the journal can be done at the link provided above.

The Research Articles published in the journal's four annual issues are fully peer-reviewed by external reviewers, while its Research Notes and other content are subject to internal editorial quality control. The current issue opens with a Research Article by Michael Boyle, who offers an alternative to conventional descriptions of terrorist groups making rational calculations of costs and benefits to decide whether to use terrorism. Instead, he argues, some types of terrorist groups may be more oriented towards achieving 'milieu goals' (non-material, non-exclusive efforts aimed at shaping the international environment) rather than seeking concessions over territory or political power. Next, Rizky Alif Alvian provides a case study of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia that reveals how extremist movements respond to the mainstreaming of religiously moderate teachings as strategies for preventing violent extremism. And in the final Research Article for this issue, Joana Cook examines the complexities of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes in Iraq, and the unique challenges faced by children from ISIS-affiliated families within these programmes. Following these Research Articles is a Research Note by Emanuel Patrick Quashie that examines how the War on Terror has impacted countries in the Caribbean.

This issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* also includes an extensive bibliography on the Taliban, compiled by our information resources editor, Judith Tinnes. This is followed by two book reviews: Marco Gabbas reviews a recently published book by Paolo Persichetti about the 1978 abduction and murder of Aldo Moro by the Italian Red Brigades, and Alex Schmid reviews the book *A Woman's Place: US Counterterrorism Since 9/11*, by Joana Cook. Our Book Reviews Editor, Joshua Sinai, follows with brief capsule reviews of ten books on terrorism and counter-terrorism-related subjects. And finally, this issue concludes with an announcement about the finalists and winner of the *2023 Terrorism Research Initiative Award for the Best Doctoral Dissertation in Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism* completed in 2021 or 2022. Our September 2023 issue has been prepared by members of the Editorial Team, with significant assistance from Maria Shamrai (an intern at ICCT), for which we are most grateful.

Prof James Forest, Editor-in-Chief

PT PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

Research Article

The Choice for Terrorism: Possession and Milieu Goals Among Terrorist Groups

Michael J. Boyle*

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Abstract: Why do armed groups choose terrorism? Within political science, the prevailing approach to explaining this choice is known as the strategic model. It assumes that terrorist groups make rational calculations of costs and benefits to decide whether to use terrorism, and that the choice is predicated on the goal of winning material concessions from an opponent. This article challenges this view by introducing a distinction between possession goals and milieu goals, drawing from research on the foreign policy goals of states by Arnold Wolfers. It argues that some specific types of terrorist groups may be more oriented towards achieving milieu goals – defined here as non-material, non-exclusive efforts aimed at shaping the international environment – than possession goals, such as concessions over territory or political power. Expanding the typology of terrorist goals to include milieu goals helps to address some of the persistent puzzles around the rationality of terrorism and raises new questions for theoretical and empirical research.

Keywords: Terrorism, strategic, rationality, milieu

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Introduction

Why do armed groups choose terrorism? Within political science, the predominant framework for explaining why armed groups choose terrorism is conventionally known as the strategic model.[1] Although there are a number of theories advanced under the strategic model, they are united by an approach that casts terrorism in utilitarian terms as a tactic whose benefits outweigh its costs.[2] The strategic model holds that terrorism allows armed groups to achieve goals that they cannot achieve through normal politics or on the battlefield, such as forcing political change,[3] holding territory,[4] or thwarting an occupying power.[5] At its most basic level, the strategic model suggests that terrorism is chosen by armed groups because of a perception that it works to achieve their goals, even if the reality is more complicated.[6] It also emphasises the instrumental rationality of armed groups, seeing their motivation to use terror as a plausible option given their strategic objectives, ideology, and organisational constraints.[7]

The theories advanced under the strategic model share some underlying assumptions derived from a rational choice foundation about why and how armed groups choose terrorism. Much of the work on the choice for terrorism under the strategic model rests on the assumption that terrorist groups operate as if they are unitary actors like states. This is in part because much of what we understand as the strategic model operates from the realist premises of bargaining theory, which sees terrorist groups as trying to coerce states into giving up concessions.[8] This is in contrast to the organisational model, which opens up the "black box" of terrorist organisations, and sees activities that they undertake as driven by internal considerations rather than the hopes of coercing their government opponents.[9] Drawing from this implicit analogy between states and terrorist groups, the strategic model assumes that the leaders of armed groups calculate like the leaders of states, and calibrate their use of terrorist attacks based on a rational assessment of benefits and costs. These benefits and costs are measured against an external enemy and judged on objective metrics like concessions over territory or political power,[10] or recognition and legitimacy from a more powerful opponent.[11]

At the individual level, there has been considerable research into whether terrorism can be considered a rational choice. Scholars have examined why individuals might choose to participate in terrorism given its uncertain benefits and high costs.[12] Similarly, there has been a rich vein of theoretical and empirical work concerning the apparently irrational decision of individuals to participate in suicide missions, because in doing so they obviously deny themselves any of the political or ideological benefits given to their group as a result of the attack.[13] At its core, the problem of rationality in the choice for terrorism revolves around free-riding, as individuals will always be better off letting someone else pay the costs of direct involvement in terrorism, particularly when the tactic in play is suicide terrorism.[14] To resolve the puzzle of individual motivation, a number of scholars have located an individual's decision to use terrorism as deriving from collective action, framing their incentives as drawn from and directed to their communal or social environment.[15] According to this logic, the presence of a supportive network or milieu that promises future material and non-material incentives for their participation allows individuals to see beyond their incentive to free-ride and pay a price, perhaps up to including death, for being involved in terrorism.

With groups, the underlying rationality of the choice for terrorism has received less attention. With some notable exceptions,[16] research within the strategic model tends to assume the underlying rationality of the tactic for armed groups and focus more on the how, when, and why it might be used. Deviations from apparent rational behaviour are then explained away as a consequence of misperception of the preferences and level of resistance of the target,[17] flaws in the internal decision-making processes of the leadership and organisation,[18] or ideological and religious blinders that make their decisions less than fully rational.[19] But even if these factors play some role, they are not enough to fully explain some of the puzzles around the rationality of terrorism for armed groups whose behaviour strains the limits of what the strategic model and rational behaviour would predict.

More specifically, there are three puzzles about the choice for terrorism that existing work on terrorist decision-making leaves unanswered. First, why do groups initially choose terrorism – as opposed to other violent and non-violent strategies – when it is obvious that the costs of terrorism (especially in terms of manpower, resources, and political backlash) are so high? Rational choice theory suggests that armed groups should make an ex-ante calculation of the costs of using terrorism against the alternatives, and decide that it is the best of their options before embarking on a campaign of terrorist activity. But empirical evidence of terrorist group decision-making suggests they do not always make the kind of careful calculation that this implies, nor are they always forced into it as a matter of last resort.[20] Instead, some armed groups "jump" to terrorism, making it their starting tactic, and then remain fixated on it at the expense of other tactics. This does not conform to the notion that armed groups are only settling on terrorism after concluding that they have no other choice.

Second, if armed groups are selecting terrorism as a rational way to get what they want, why do so many of them have protean political agendas and underdeveloped theories of victory?[21] To some extent, some vagueness over the long-term strategic goals of an armed group might be politically advantageous if it encourages other groups and neutral parties to tolerate the rise of an extreme group.[22] But the degree to which terrorist groups often fail to specify how terrorism achieves their goals in their public manifestos and private strategy documents is striking. If armed groups are selecting tactics on the basis of a rational calculation of means and ends, it does not follow that across ideological categories (i.e., from separatists to communists to jihadists) they would so often fail to identify how terrorism actually helps them achieve their goals.

Third, why do armed groups persist in using terrorism despite evidence that it is not working? Research on the effectiveness of terrorism found little evidence that it is effective in achieving the long-term goals of armed groups.[23] Yet many terrorist groups persist in using the tactic long after it has failed to show success on the battlefield, often repeating highly theatrical forms of terrorist violence (like car bombs and suicide attacks) even when the available information points to alternative options that would be more likely to succeed. Terrorism is, in other words, a tactic that fosters path dependence and leaves some groups loathe to give it up. This is true even when it would make sense for armed groups to pivot from terrorism to other violent or non-violent techniques in the face of backlash over their activities. Instead, some terrorist groups – such as the Islamic State – double down on terrorism even when this backlash becomes

so significant that it jeopardises their overall survival. Why continue to use terrorism once it becomes clear that it is so counterproductive that it endangers their future?

Drawing from seminal work on the foreign policy goals of states by Arnold Wolfers,[24] this article casts new light on these puzzles by expanding the types of goals that may motivate armed groups to choose terrorism under the strategic model. It suggests that much of the work on the strategic model has hereto been focused on possession goals – in other words, the type of goals which are exclusive and material in nature. These are indeed the goals of many terrorist groups, but they are an incomplete guide to what terrorists may be seeking. This paper suggests that terrorists are just as often motivated by milieu goals, which are non-material and non-exclusive in nature and directed towards shaping the international environment for themselves and for similar groups. Shaping the international milieu is important because it allows other similarly-positioned ideological, religious, and nationalist groups operating in their milieu to thrive and achieve goals similar to what the terrorist group hopes to achieve. Due to the demonstrative effect of the violence, the terrorist group hopes that others in the milieu will attract resources and political power even if they will not. Applying the concept of milieu goals to terrorist groups helps to explain some of the puzzles discussed earlier, such as why some armed groups might select terrorism first when it is suboptimal to other tactics and persist with the tactic when the payoff remains unclear. It would also explain why so many terrorist groups frame their activities as charity or altruism for a greater cause rather than as a self-interested pursuit of power.[25] As this article will show, applying a new threefold typology of goals (strategic, organisational, and milieu) to the choice for terrorism lays a stronger foundation for rational choice approaches to terrorism while raising new questions about terrorist decision-making for future research.

The remaining discussion in this article will be organised in six parts. First, it will review the core elements of the strategic model. Second, it will discuss the three puzzles that this model presents about the choice for terrorism. Third, it will present Wolfers' concept of milieu goals and apply it to terrorist groups. In this sense, it will build on existing work on how radical milieus – both online[26] and offline[27] – affect terrorism, but unlike these accounts, it will cast the milieu goals as an output or goal of terrorist behaviour rather than an input. Fourth, it will consider how a milieu goal approach explains the three puzzles identified previously, proposing answers to them in ways that a strategic approach focused only on possession goals cannot. Fifth, it will illustrate the value of this framework with brief illustrative case studies of the Italian Red Brigades and al-Qaeda. Finally, it will raise questions for empirical research around the use of milieu goals for terrorist groups, particularly around how they may clash with possession goals for terrorist groups and how tensions between these goals may will ultimately influence their behaviour.

Elements of the Strategic Model

According to the strategic model, the decision to use terrorist violence begins with a collective decision to pursue one or more goals *vis-à-vis* an external enemy. This decision may not be uniform among all members of the terrorist group; it is reasonable to assume a heterogeneous set of preferences for terrorism among individual members of an armed group, with some favouring more aggressive attack postures and others suggesting caution. According to

scholarship on the internal dynamics of terrorist groups, this variation in motives and willingness to attack is common.[28] Moreover, it is likely that these differences in preferences result in potentially significant compromises about what to do across different levels in the organisation.[29] However, these differences should be mediated by leadership structures of varying coherence and institutionalisation, theoretically allowing for terrorist groups to have ranked sets of preferences much in the way that states do. Although they may not be as coherent as states, terrorist groups under the strategic model should be able to bargain with states, much in the way that states do with each other in the international system.

The strategic model offers both a general and specific formulation of the goals of terrorist groups. In the most general form, these goals revolve around extracting concessions from an opponent by inflicting painful terrorist attacks until the opponent relents on an issue. The assumption behind this approach is that the concessions will increase directly in relation to the degree of pain inflicted, with government opponents hitting a threshold where it is a lower cost to give in than to keep fighting. Ratcheting up the pain in this way may also yield concessions more quickly, which is useful for a terrorist group impatient with the pace of political change. Other general goals of a strategic approach to terrorism revolve around signalling credibility and resolve.[30] The use of terrorism sends a signal that an armed actor is a serious player and a credible threat of future harm. For this reason, a government responding to an armed group who used terrorism might reasonably calculate that more pain is coming (credibility) and that the armed group will not back down without getting what it wants (resolve). One way that this message is conveyed is through audience costs. By their theatrical nature, terrorist attacks may carry their own audience costs, which enhance their credibility and signal their determination to fight no matter the consequences.[31]

Beyond this general formulation, scholars working within the strategic model have proposed a number of typologies of specific goals that armed actors may pursue by using terrorism. In part, this is a difficult enterprise, because the language expressing the ideological and political goals of a right-wing terrorist group will naturally look different from that of a jihadist group, and so on. But beneath the language describing a political and ideological agenda, the specific goals are articulated repeatedly by terrorist groups across the ideological divide and permit some kind of classification. One early influential classification came from Paul Wilkinson, who cast terrorist goals as either revolutionary – that is, aiming to transform the entire international system – or sub-revolutionary (discrete) goals.[32] Along similar lines, Max Abrahms offered a classification of goals that is divided between limited goals (such as evicting a foreign power or seizing a piece of territory for self-determination) and maximalist goals (such as transforming the political system of a state or annihilating it altogether).[33] A more detailed classification was proposed by Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, who identified five goals of terrorist activity: regime change, territorial change, policy change, social control, and status quo maintenance.[34]

One general problem with some of the literature on the strategic use of terrorism is the assertion that terrorism is a strategy on its own terms. In fact, terrorism is a tactic, used in tandem with other tactics like guerilla warfare to achieve a goal. More precisely, there are a number of strategies that use terrorism and are designed to serve these general and proximate goals, with the chief difference among them lying in how directly terrorism achieves the goal in question.

Direct strategies employ terrorism as a central element, using it as a linchpin to get what the perpetrator seeks. Kydd and Walter offer five direct strategies that use terrorism to achieve any of the goals above: attrition, intimidation, provocation, spoiling, and outbidding.[35] Working from a threefold typology of the types of strategy (controlling, coercive, and consensual), Lawrence Freedman argues that a strategy of terrorism must be understood as coercive alone, for it is adopted only when political conditions preclude the use of other possible strategies.[36] Others have similarly argued that terrorism is a residual strategy, one only adopted and employed when guerilla warfare or direct combat approaches are unlikely to bear fruit,[37] or when the group cannot hold territory for long enough to find any other reasonable way to fight.[38]

For other scholars, terrorism serves as one element of a wider political strategy, at best serving an indirect purpose which brings goals closer to reality over time. Martha Crenshaw describes terrorism in this way, largely as an agenda-setting device for future fighting or negotiations.[39] David Lake argues that terrorism rarely achieves either limited or maximal goals on its own but is really about altering the relative power and terms of negotiations between extremists and moderates, thus making it more likely that the ultimate settlement is closer to the preferences of extremists.[40] Others like Peter Neumann and M.L.R. Smith have suggested that the intermediate goal of terrorists is fear, rather than any immediate effort to win concessions.[41] Fear is then an enabling factor that allows other elements of the political strategy to come into play to draw concessions in the long run. This account sees terrorism as a psychological strategy designed to instil such demobilising fear that an enemy is paralysed and relents on one or more political goals in the future. Another strategy of terrorism sees it as provocation which is designed to provoke the government into overreaction, thus alienating the civilian population and encouraging more people to join the terrorists' or insurgents' ranks.[42] The theme underlying most of these indirect strategies is that terrorism is not valuable as a strategy in and of itself, but rather for the secondary effect that it has on the long-term political fortunes of the armed group itself.

All of the elements of the strategic model – the general goals, the specific ones, and direct and indirect strategies used to achieve them – are premised on instrumental rationality, where the selection of means is seen as (broadly and imperfectly) optimal to achieve a specific end given the constraints of the organisation. The assumption of instrumental rationality within the field of terrorism studies has been investigated on conceptual or philosophical terms, although in the political science literature, it is generally assumed.[43] But it is worth asking whether this assumption of instrumental rationality within the choice for terrorism always holds water. As C.A.J. Coady has argued, there are cases where terrorism fails to conform to any reasonable kind of instrumental rationality – for example, in cases when the means to use violence are so atrocious that it is hard to fathom how any enemy could grant concessions to the attacker.[44] In these cases, terrorism may descend into pure nihilism,[45] or may be recast as reflecting an expressive rationality[46] designed more to show frustration or humiliation rather than achieve any specific goal per se. But such cases are, by and large, exceptions; for the most part, scholarship using the strategic model assumes instrumental rationality in its analysis of the general and specific goals of terrorism.

Puzzles

This assumption of rationality within the strategic model presents three puzzles. The first concerns the initial choice for terrorism. If terrorist groups are indeed operating rationally (as states do) when identifying their goals and finding strategies to achieve them, there should be an ex-ante calculation by the leadership that identifies how terrorism will help to achieve their goals. This choice should be measured against other potential options – such as non-violent protest, guerilla activity, and more selective forms of political violence like assassinations – before concluding that terrorism is the best choice to work at that point in time. In other words, the strategic model suggests that the initial choice for terrorism should be a deliberate and rational calculation given the group's constraints, and should involve a cursory review of the evidence of the failure of other approaches.

Scholars working within this broad approach have offered different perspectives on whether terrorism is the last or first choice for armed groups. Much of the early literature on terrorism suggested that terrorism was almost always an option of last resort, usually by weak armed groups that could not hope to win by other means.[47] But this assumption that the choice for terrorism must be a last resort for the weak was often not developed or empirically verified.[48] One important exception was Crenshaw, who developed a theoretically-grounded account that terrorism may be a last resort tactic because the group lacked the strength and mobilisation base to win in normal electoral politics.[49] The choice for terrorism was then one of impatience and frustration, with armed groups who previously eschewed the tactic coming to support it through a learning process where they saw the failure of other violent and non-violent tactics. If Crenshaw is correct that terrorism is usually (but not always) a last resort, it conforms to the assumption of the strategic model that there was a rational decision-making process which evaluated other courses of action, assessed their likely failure, and settled on terrorism as the best hope to get what the group seeks.

A contrary view is provided by Abrahms, who notes that some terrorists make terrorism a first resort, effectively "jumping" to terrorism without exhausting the other available options.[50] This decision to lead with terrorism – and indeed to make it the pre-eminent purpose of the organisation – seems like a puzzling one, as rational choice would suggest that other, less costly options should be explored and discarded before this happens. But it is not an uncommon one across the ideological spectrum; both jihadist groups like al-Qaeda and accelerationist right-wing groups have, for different reasons, opted to choose terrorism first as a strategy of provocation rather than exhaust the other violent and non-violent options. But even given the benefits of provocation – for example, mobilisation of supporters and advertising an ideological cause – the choice for terrorism as a first resort still implies an unstated theory as to how this move will produce political success for those who choose it. At a minimum, the terrorist group must have estimated a high probability of the likelihood that its followers will be mobilised, and the morale of its enemy will be damaged, in order for a first-mover approach to conform to the assumption of instrumental rationality under the strategic model.

This raises the possibility that the underlying strategic logic for adopting terrorism might be different for first-movers and last-movers. While last-movers have the advantage of seeing the

failure of other types of non-violent and violent approaches, and then coming to terrorism through impatience and frustration, first-movers must make a different calculation without already knowing the failure of the alternatives. They may calculate that terrorism will have a catalytic effect, mobilising supporters and bringing about rapid change; they may also calculate that the enemy is a paper tiger that will reel and fold from the first blow. This does not mean that it is irrational for first-movers to use terrorism, but it does mean that their choice cannot derive from a learning process of their own group's successes and failures because they have not really tried yet. Their strategic logic must be different. One possibility is that they value other goals, such as provocation and symbolism, more than direct concessions which are unlikely to follow after a first strike against an opponent. Another possibility is that they might apply a different, perhaps lesser, weight to the costs and risks of backlash around terrorism in order to justify the initial attack on the basis of provoking the enemy and making their presence known to a wider international constituency. These are possible explanations, but most of these depart from the assumption that rational terrorists are primarily concerned with drawing material concessions for themselves. And they point to the possibility that first-movers may be more focused on the impact on their global movement or milieu rather than material concessions. Their definition of "wins and losses" might be different, counting not just material concessions granted by the enemy but also metrics like the impact on the momentum of the social movement of which they are a part.

A second puzzle follows from this discussion of the calculation of first-movers with terrorism. Why do so many terrorist organisations have what some call "protean strategies" with underdeveloped political programs?[51] It is well known that the political programmes of terrorists can shift over time, waxing and waning in their ambitions in relation to their tactical success. Change in a political programme is not a problem for the strategic model in itself.[52] But a lack of specificity and practical details for achieving political change is. If terrorism is strategic, it should be tied to a political programme that is achievable in broad terms given the risks and costs of terrorism. The challenge is to understand that programme and how terrorism relates to it. This is not easy to do because not all terrorist groups produce public manifestos or see advantages in making their end games clear. Quite the opposite, terrorists may engage in cheap talk and inflate their aims; they may also prefer to rely on maximalist demands without revealing their internal preferences and what they would be willing to accept. Vagueness also has internal and organisational advantages. Terrorist organisations with broad or amorphous goals may be able to command more support, or mask intra-organisational divisions, compared to ones with clear but divisive political programmes.

Yet it is not too much to ask how terrorism is related to the goals of the armed group and why it is chosen. Some terrorist groups manage to sketch out a clear theory of victory: the Provisional IRA, for example, produced sophisticated strategy documents that laid out its ultimate political objectives and spelled out how terrorism will produce costs on the enemy that will make them relent. But for others, the theory of victory is less clear. In cases of small, highly ideological or idiosyncratic groups, the terrorists are unlikely to achieve the kind of sweeping material goals that Kydd and Walter identify, unless terrorism leads to a massive mobilisation of supporters and unprecedented political change.[53] Of course, groups may miscalculate that this is likely to happen; they may also believe that symbolic acts of terrorism will get the population to

reveal their preferences to gauge their actual political support, as Crenshaw suggests.[54] But for the smallest, most idiosyncratic and unlikely-to-succeed terrorist groups, the rationality of terrorism becomes harder to justify if they cannot articulate how their act of terrorism will yield political victory. It is this category of terrorists which Ariel Merari argues comes closer to "expressive terrorism" – that is, cases in which terrorism is an "emotional response with no clear strategic aim, even when the acts of violence have been perpetrated by a group in a tactically organized manner."[55] This set of cases – where there is no political programme or no realistic one, and only a slim chance that terrorism has any hope of drawing a broad goal closer – where the instrumental rationality of terrorism within the strategic model can be called into question.

The final puzzle connects to the previous point. Why do armed groups persist in using terrorism well beyond the point of any possible success? There is evidence that terrorism is a "sticky" tactic and that once an armed group commits to attacking soft or civilian targets it does not relent. In the Iraqi insurgency, for example, highly ideological groups like al-Qaeda in Iraq remained wedded to the tactic of mass-casualty bombings despite growing backlash and a renewed response by the United States and the Iraqi government to stamping them out as part of the surge. Similarly, right-wing neo-Nazi groups in the United States have continued to use mass shootings, assaults, and other terrorist attacks without varying their strategy to include other types of violent subversion or non-violent protest. Although these groups are notable for their commitment to terrorism, they were not alone. In a comparative study, Victor Asal et al found that armed groups who use violence against civilians do not relent in doing so and continue to use that tactic once that threshold has been crossed.[56]

This persistence in the use of terrorism by armed groups stands in contrast with evidence that terrorism is generally ineffective in winning concessions from opponents.[57] If the strategic model is viable, it needs to explain why armed groups can persist in terrorism once it is clear that it will not yield successful returns measured in terms of government concessions. One potential explanation for this, offered by Peter Krause, is that the organisational returns from ineffective terrorist violence are sufficient to keep them using the tactic even if no real concessions are forthcoming.[58] This is logically possible, but it requires the terrorist group leadership to convince members that organisational gains are so great that they outweigh the lack of progress towards the strategic goals that Kydd and Walter identify.[59] This may be a hard case to make if the persistent use of terrorism invites even more repression from a government opponent, weakening the group's organisational base. Another possible explanation is ideology: highly ideological groups may be indifferent to inflicting harm on other groups because they see them as beyond the pale and worthy of attack.[60] From this point of view, ideology acts like a filter for understanding terrorist effectiveness, obscuring its ineffectiveness and casting its success in non-material terms in order to allow the group to continue. But this approach – prioritising ideological gains over material ones – does not square with the assumptions of the strategic model as it is typically understood. This is one of the reasons why Thomas Schelling concluded that international terrorism serves few, if any, purposes and is rather best understood as keeping a lost cause afloat rather than generating any real or meaningful concession.[61]

These puzzles do not suggest that the strategic model fails as a first-cut explanation of why armed groups choose terrorism. This critique does not go as far as Abrahms in suggesting that terrorists in general engage in non-strategic behaviour or that psychology should be used to explain their decision-making and compensate for their failings.[62] Rather, it suggests that certain categories of terrorist groups – first movers, those small and idiosyncratic groups without identifiable political programmes, and those wedded to the tactic despite enormous costs and decreasing likelihood of success – act in ways which test the limits of that model. Their behaviour is not necessarily irrational, but it does test the limits of rationality, especially if they remain fixated on a tactic that cannot possibly yield coercive success given the maximalist goals that they pronounce. For these boundary cases, their behaviour requires some additional level of explanation (for example, organisational or psychological approaches) to make it appear rational under the strategic model. The theoretical question here is whether it is possible to adapt the strategic model in a way that makes sense of their behaviour without resorting to these organisational or psychological approaches.

Possession and Milieu Goals

One way the strategic model can be adapted to accommodate these boundary cases is to expand the types of goals that terrorist groups may pursue. To do this, it is possible to turn to previous theoretical work on the types of goals held by states. An important contribution to this discussion was made by Arnold Wolfers in 1962.[63] Wolfers drew a distinction between possession goals and milieu goals. Possession goals are defined as "aiming at the enhancement of one or more things to which [a nation] attaches value."[64] Examples of possession goals for states would include territory, a change in trade tariffs, or even membership in an international organisation. These goals are broadly material and exclusive. By definition, a possession goal cannot be shared with another state. For most terrorist groups, possession goals represent the core of their demands, which are typically material and exclusive. Examples of possession goals for terrorist groups include claiming territory or forcing a change in government or policy.

Wolfers argues that milieu goals are different. Milieu goals are not designed to win a material possession on an exclusive basis but instead "aim at shaping conditions beyond their national boundaries."[65] Milieu goals are by definition immaterial and non-exclusive. For states, milieu goals include seeking world peace as a principal goal of foreign policy, as well as promoting international law and establishing international organisations. None of these things, Wolfers argues, are exclusive possessions of states, but rather they aim at changing an international environment in ways that shape the behaviour of other actors. Milieu goals can be seen as a means or a way station to achieving possession goals, but they are more than that. Like public goods, milieu goals are valuable on their own terms, much in the way that people are intrinsically interested in the orderliness of their city or the safety of their environment more than just their material possessions. Pursuing a milieu goal is a rational decision, as it can be seen as a down payment on a propitious environment that allows the group to achieve both material and non-material things, such as moral satisfaction for a cause.

Milieu goals, as defined by Wolfers, are not the same as the revolutionary goals proposed by Wilkinson.[66] A milieu goal is defined broadly and can vary; it is possible to imagine, for example,

an animal rights milieu, a far-right milieu, and a radical environmental milieu, among others. Milieu goals are also not necessarily maximalist in Abrahms' terms, as milieu goals may be directed towards smaller, more incremental changes than a maximalist goal might suggest.[67] For example, a terrorist group operating in a radical environmentalist milieu might be operating with a narrower goal – raising awareness of the costs of climate change and shifting public opinion towards mitigation – rather than abolishing all fossil fuels. Milieu goals are not synonymous with ideological goals, as some ideological groups may be exclusively focused on possession goals in a domestic context (for example, seizing power in a country) and pay little attention to the international context. Milieu goals are non-exclusive and cooperative; a world of international peace, for example, may require an investment from one party but also requires the eventual cooperation of others to be achieved. This is one reason why Wolfers notes that milieu goals are long-term as a matter of definition.[68]

Although milieu goals can lead to possession goals, this is not necessarily the case. Wolfers points out that milieu goals are shaped by the logic of altruism, whereby states make a decision to devote resources to a better environment without clearly seeing a material benefit. This altruism has limits; no state is willing to engage in altruism to the point of its own destruction, but he suggests elsewhere that states can sometimes engage in self-abnegation, where these non-material and non-exclusive goals can be pursued to the degree that they impose costs upon, or take precedence over, goals of advancement or even self-preservation.[69] This suggests that states behaving rationally may discover moments when their attempt to achieve possession goals and milieu goals conflict, with milieu goals sometimes taking precedence. It further suggests that some – not all – states may pursue these milieu goals in ways that from the outside seem irrational or self-defeating.[70]

Applying Milieu Goals

The concept of milieu goals has not been applied to discussions of the goals of terrorist groups, though it has often been hinted at by those who suggest that terrorists seek to make drastic changes in the international environment and seek legitimacy from others for doing so. Rather, the concept of a milieu has been applied to terrorists, but largely as an input into their behaviour, especially when it comes to radicalisation. There has been considerable work done on how the online environment provides a febrile atmosphere conducive to radicalisation.[71] More recently, Stefan Malthaner and Peter Waldmann have offered an account of the milieu as a sympathetic community which enables terrorist groups by providing moral and logistic support.[72] But these accounts of milieus are largely directed as inputs into group behaviour, rather than seeing the milieu itself as the objective of terrorist group behaviour.

Applying the concept of milieu goals to terrorist group behavior is useful because it presents a new classification and interpretation of terrorist goals. First, according to most accounts under the strategic model, terrorists are drawn to both general and specific goals that are material in nature and largely exclusive. These can be identified as strategic (or "possessive" in Wolfers' language) goals. Second, as Gordon McCormick and others identified, terrorists also have a set of parallel goals in terms of funding, recruitment, and momentum that may be described as organisational goals.[73] Third, terrorist groups may have a third set of milieu goals that are

distinct from the strategic and organisational goals and are directed toward shaping their international environment. These would be measured in different, less exclusive ways and may reflect the logic of altruism in a way that a possession goal would not. For example, milieu goals might be measured by whether the outside world takes notice of a terrorist group's cause or whether another similar group or political party manages to win concessions or elections on the back of the attacks that the terrorist group launched. In this respect, terrorist groups might see their activities as a form of charity in the service of a better world, yielding no material benefits to them but real benefits to others who will go further than they could, perhaps even within the confines of the normal political system.

Table 1 summarises each of the three types of goals and their characteristics. This typology offers a modest refinement to the strategic model that explains some unusual elements of terrorist behaviour. First, it offers an explanation for the idea that terrorism is a form of altruism. While this idea has been well-known to scholars within the field of terrorism studies,[74] it does not square with the self-seeking behaviour predicted under the strategic model. If terrorist groups are being perfectly instrumentally rational, they will care about achieving concessions or organisational gains for their own group. But it is not obvious that they will have broader concerns for the international environment or for their political fortunes of similar groups in other countries. Yet there is evidence that some do; anarchists, for example, often expressed concern for the good of the global anarchist movement even if their own political fortunes were poor.[75] Similarly, as Crenshaw points out, there are terrorist groups who see violence as agenda-setting and accept the reality that others will realise the gains from it.[76] Fatah leader Salah Khaldef put this succinctly when he said, "We are planting the seed. Others will harvest it."[77] Obviously not all terrorist groups confess such selflessness, and even fewer are actually selfless, but the claim to be attacking for the benefit of others recurs in many terrorist pronouncements and suggests that (at least for some) achieving milieu goals is part of their strategy.

Table 1 – Possession and Milieu - Goals Among Terrorist Groups

Goals	**Characteristics**	**Measurements**
Strategic (Possession)	Material, exclusive	Concessions by opponent
Organisational	Internal, exclusive	Recruitment, funding, momentum
Milieu	Non-material, non-exclusive	Global public opinion, electoral success, or concessions to similar groups

Another element of this typology that is important to consider is how armed groups may relate to each other in different ways than the literature suggests. For example, it is well-known that armed groups will sometimes seek to outbid each other for greater levels of political support among their self-ascribed constituency.[78] Equally, research shows that terrorist groups can make

alliances with states and other terrorist groups for a wide variety of benefits, including legitimacy, funding, weapons, and political support.[79] But there has been comparatively less attention paid to cases where these alliances are loose, offering little or no tactical or organisational benefit, and cases in which alliances are rhetorical but have virtually no formal or material grounding. These latter cases open up the possibility that terrorist groups in the same milieu may act *as if* they are allies, hoping to advance the fortunes of similarly-focused armed groups or make a fertile international environment for their activities, but without drawing any direct strategic and organisational benefits from doing so. Such behaviour is far too altruistic to make sense in most readings of the strategic model but may make sense once milieu goals are located within the model. The degree to which milieu goals might matter for terrorist groups may also vary depending on whether they consider themselves part of a transnational advocacy network[80] or a social movement.[81]

Finally, it opens up the possibility of asking some new questions about how these types of goals may conflict and, if so, what sort of trade-offs armed groups will make. It is clear that a terrorist group exclusively pursuing its strategic (or possession) goals has few trade-offs to worry about. Equally, it is not difficult to imagine cases where the organisational benefits of an attack – for example, funding or political momentum – are greater than the strategic benefits of an attack. But how do milieu goals weigh against strategic and organisational goals? Do terrorist groups with an external orientation towards their milieu behave differently from more selfish terrorist groups? What happens when milieu goals clash with other goals in the organisation? Do milieu goals foster tactical restraint for fear of jeopardising the future of other groups? Or do they lead the terrorist group to use even more theatrical forms of violence in the hopes of pushing others in the global milieu to extremes?

Answering the Puzzles

If milieu goals are added to the strategic model, and the assumptions of instrumental rationality are relaxed to allow for some types of non-self-seeking behaviour, some of the puzzles around the behaviour of some types of terrorist groups become easier to explain. One of the puzzles around the initial choice for terrorism is that it is a high-cost, high-risk option, one that may be seen as suboptimal compared to other violent and non-violent options. Much of the literature using the strategic model assumes that it is a choice driven by impatience and desperation, with armed groups concluding that they have a limited chance of success unless they resort to terrorism. The last resort cases are fully consistent with the strategic model. But first-mover cases may not be, as these groups have not learned from their own bitter experience. However, if they have milieu goals directed towards shaping the international environment and indirectly aiding other groups with similar goals, these first-mover attacks make more sense if the leading purpose of the violence is to have a catalytic effect on the fortunes of others in the milieu rather than trying to achieve direct concessions from the enemy. Importantly, if this amendment is made to the strategic model, it is not necessary to conclude that these groups have misperceived their enemy or judged the impact of their attack wrongly. When an armed group “jumps” to an atrocious terrorist attack, they may be prioritising milieu goals over possession goals, seeking to prompt concessions that benefit similar groups, or aiming to shape the negotiating environment for those groups in the near future.

Second, the puzzle around why some terrorist groups have protean political agendas becomes clearer if milieu goals are added to their objectives. Not all armed groups are equally goal-oriented; some may be directed towards achieving measurable concessions from an opponent or achieving organisational flourishing, while others may believe that their actions are directed at shaping an international milieu, so immediate concessions or organisational benefits are secondary to them. This does not mean that they are acting without strategic logic or in ways that violate instrumental rationality. But it does mean that they would not need to have a well-developed political programme or a plan to turn their attacks into "political wins." On the contrary, a milieu-oriented terrorist group might have incentives to keep that programme vague and acceptable to a wider pool of potential allies than it might otherwise find. Moreover, if the goal is a provocation or agenda setting,[82] relying on a banner headline as a goal – for example, the end of colonialism or capitalism, the overthrow of the US-led order, and so on – has some advantages over one that is more specific but potentially more alienating. In other words, a terrorist group with strong milieu goals has an incentive for a protean political agenda, while one more directly focused on concessions from their opponent might have reasons to lay out a political programme that sets a ceiling on their demands and encourages the opponent to come to terms with them.

Finally, adding milieu goals to the strategic model helps to explain why terrorist organisations may persist in using violence even when the tactic does not appear to be yielding any kind of immediate strategic return. One possibility is that terrorist groups that prioritise milieu goals may have a longer time horizon and measure success and failure in different ways than those that prioritise concessions (or "possession" goals). It is also possible that terrorists focused on milieu goals may grant a larger role to uncertainty and change in their interactions with governments, shifting away from a core notion implicit in instrumental rationality – if I do X, they will give me Y – in favour of one which adopts a less determinative posture to how that interaction may pay off in the future.[83] Such an approach would not mean that they fully reject instrumental rationality, but rather that the armed group is less focused on short-term concessions and more focused on long-term environmental (or milieu) benefits with their actions. This would mean that they could persist in using terrorism even when the short-term results are poor, if their investment is that the long-term results for the milieu will pay off.

Illustrative Examples

Applying this model to two notable terrorist organisations illustrates its value. Consider, for the example, the behaviour of the Italian Red Brigades, in some ways a quintessential left-wing Marxist-Leninist terrorist group of the 1970s. At the onset, the Red Brigades attacked factories and other symbols of capitalism throughout Italy. Over time, their focus shifted to shocking acts of terrorism, kidnapping, and murder intended to weaken the Italian state, eventually hoping to separate it from European alliances and remake it in a Marxist image. But their actual theory of victory was "hazy" in the words of a classified CIA estimate.[84] Their leader, Renato Curcio, wrote in 1969 that the takeover of the Italian state is not an "immediate problem" while they organised to build political power.[85] Their political programme was both sweeping and protean, emphasising Marxist revolution but offering little practical detail about how the state

and its policies would change once the uprising by the revolutionary proletariat began. The Red Brigades were organised as an army, with compartmentalised divisions, and buttressed by strong family ties within the group.[86] But they were few in number and notably brutal, abducting and killing anyone who they saw as emblematic of the capitalist state while rejecting all forms of political compromise in pursuit of their strategy of revolution. In essence, the Red Brigades were a classic first-mover terrorist group, beginning with terrorism as a strategy of provocation rather than coming to it after years of failure and political frustration.

Some aspects of their behaviour are puzzling from a traditional rational choice standpoint. Against the power of the Italian state, it was hard to see how the Red Brigades would be successful in a wholescale transformation of the country and its separation from the NATO alliance and other links with Europe. Its resistance towards any alliances or compromise, even with other Communist parties, and the absence of a domestic front group would also make this harder to achieve. The theatrical and gratuitous nature of its violence, and its insistence on attacking in this way despite growing pressure and public backlash, suggests that ordinary calculations of political rationality may not be enough to explain them. This is one of the reasons why Alessandro Orsini concluded that the Red Brigades had a fanatical religious mindset with the goal of purification of society through violence. He argues that their violence had an almost sacramental, rather than directly instrumental, purpose.[87] But as Orsini notes, the Red Brigades were keenly aware of their place in the global Communist revolutionary movement, and justified their brutality with an outlandish claim that they were engaging in "altruism and generosity," even "love" for their fellow man in Italy and beyond.[88]

Some of these features can be explained if the Red Brigades are considered to have gradually prioritised milieu goals over possession goals at different points in their operations. Throughout their history, they were keenly aware of their milieu, seeing themselves as intricately connected to wars of liberation in Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere.[89] At the beginning of their operations, they mingled both possession goals (i.e., seizure of political power) and milieu goals (i.e., advancing international communism) like many ideological groups. By the mid-1970s, their ferocious opposition to the Italian state and resistance to any domestic political compromise had left them without a path to victory, making them closer to an "anarchist movement" that rejects any government at all.[90] Their escalation of political violence in the mid-1970s, and particularly their abduction and murder of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978, eventually separated them from their social base, reducing their numbers to a few hundred and rendering large-scale political change (their possession goals) impossible.[91] During the late 1970s, they offered a series of new revolutionary proclamations which emphasised the international dimension of their struggle, casting themselves as acting against imperialist states backed by "multinationals."[92] During the 1980s, the group continued with attacks and kidnappings in the hopes that other European revolutionary groups would join forces with them in an international war against the West.[93] One possible explanation for their evolution is that the slow shift towards emphasising milieu goals – that is, that their attacks had demonstrative value for the international Communist movement – sustained their members and momentum, rendering their actions rational even if they had no realistic chance of achieving domestic political power. This case suggests that a group which gradually prioritises its milieu goals – in the hopes of mobilising others and advancing its ideological agenda – may be able to

last longer amidst decay, backlash, and internal pressure, compared to a group solely focused on possession goals.

Another case where this distinction can be applied is al-Qaeda. From its onset in the mid-1990s, al-Qaeda has been focused on the "far enemy" as a way of striking a blow against its "near enemy," the Arab authoritarian states which have suppressed Islamist movements for decades. Al-Qaeda has always been focused on its prominence within its Islamist milieu, described by some scholars as the "global Salafi jihad."[94] Like many milieu-oriented groups, it focused on provocative acts of terrorism and had a protean political programme which was broadly appealing to other Islamist groups and characterised as a way of gaining their support and allegiance. Al-Qaeda did have possession goals – for example, it eventually sought to replace the government of Saudi Arabia – but its transnational ideology meant that it was naturally inclined to look beyond that, casting itself as the spokesperson for other jihadi groups worldwide. Its focus on repeating its success with terrorist spectaculars that draw global attention, rather than diversifying its means of attack for more success, may be indicative of a group that is prioritising milieu goals over possession ones (at least over the short term). It is this focus on the international milieu which explain some puzzling elements of al-Qaeda's behaviour, such as its considerable efforts to win a global propaganda war and its cynical efforts to tap into hot-button causes, such as calling for all nations to join together to battle global warming.[95]

The decay of al-Qaeda an organisation is due to a number of factors, notably the deaths of Osama bin Laden in 2011 and Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2022, and because of internal disagreements between al-Qaeda and its franchises in different countries. As al-Qaeda divided into franchise groups, it became more directed towards local civil wars and insurgencies, with local franchises prioritising their possession goals – for example, seizing control over a territory or extracting rents from it – over the global jihadi struggle.[96] The distinction between possession and milieu goals may be useful here; al-Qaeda deteriorated as the divide grew between al-Qaeda central (which remains focused on shifting the international milieu in ways sympathetic to the Salafi jihadist movement) and the local franchises that are focused on their own possession goals. It was not just a matter of overreach or strategic exhaustion that undid al-Qaeda but also a failed effort to reconcile the different priorities accorded to possession and milieu goals by factions within its ranks.

Conclusion

This approach to the choice for terrorism expands the goals under the strategic model and addresses some of the puzzles that more narrowly-construed or materialist versions of that model do not. Adding milieu goals allows for the possibility that terrorist groups, like some states, are primarily concerned about the international environment and are willing to sacrifice materially to achieve them. Such self-abnegating behaviour would explain the behaviour of specific types of terrorist groups that appear to test the boundaries of instrumental rationality. Importantly, this perspective does not suggest that all terrorist groups have milieu goals, or that all would be equally willing to sacrifice possession goals to achieve them. Rather, it suggests that the loose ends and boundary cases of the strategic model can be resolved within its own terms by expanding the types of goals that are considered plausible under it. It also does not suggest

that milieu goal-focused terrorist organisations are irrational, but rather that some puzzling aspects of their behaviour can be explained by incorporating non-material milieu goals into the strategic model.

There are a number of questions that are left for future empirical research. Among them are what types of armed groups are more or less likely to adopt milieu goals and adjust their behaviour accordingly? It may be, for example, that armed groups located in a transnational milieu like the global Salafi jihadist movement or far right-movement are less likely to outbid each other and more likely to cast their attacks in semi-altruistic ways for each other's gains. Another question is how the presence of milieu goals affects tactical behaviour. Here the prediction is unclear: armed groups with milieu goals may see themselves as vanguards, bringing about long-term change through theatrical violence, or they may be more tactically restrained so that they do not jeopardise the political fortunes of similar groups. Finally, how should counter-terrorism strategies change if officials are confronting terrorist groups with milieu goals? It may be that communication and counter-propaganda strategies are more important against armed groups with milieu goals, but these approaches may need to be cast differently to have purchase against a group whose ambitions are long-term and global. In the end, accepting this refinement of the goals within the strategic model may yield more carefully tailored counter-terrorism policies than have been seen so far.

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PT PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

RESEARCH ARTICLE

How Extremist Movements Delegitimise Religious Moderation Campaigns:
A Case of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (2018-2022)

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Abstract: This article examines how extremist movements respond to the mainstreaming of religiously moderate teachings as strategies for preventing violent extremism (PVE). Focusing on the case of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (2018-2022), this article argues that extremist movements react to religious moderation campaigns by operating a malign influence operation intended to delegitimise the projects. To do so, the movements try to undermine the trust of the Muslim audience in democratic values that underpin the idea of religious moderation, as well as authorities and community members who appear supportive of the campaigns. While the substance of the campaigns is labelled as incompatible with the 'true' Islamic teachings, the extremists also portray supportive authorities and community members as having malicious interests against Islam. Once distrust of the campaigns and their messengers is sown, the extremists then urge the Muslim audience to return to the 'true' Islam, resisting authorities, and contest the influence of community members supportive of the religious moderation campaigns. This study, therefore, sheds light on how extremist movements perceive and counter the promotion of religious moderation as an instrument of PVE.

Keywords: Religious moderation, trust, influence operation, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia

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Introduction

Promoting religious teachings perceived as moderate is considered by many to be an important instrument for preventing violent extremism (PVE), especially in Muslim-majority countries in the Global South.[1] Research on the religious moderation strategy, however, has largely focused on evaluating how ordinary Muslims in the West—loosely defined as individuals who do not wish to revolutionise the political order—respond to these campaigns.[2] Missing in the literature is an analysis of how elements of extremist movements—particularly those led by individuals who want to revolutionise political order and realign it with their interpretations of religious texts[3]—organise and frame their resistance to these religious moderation campaigns. This gap is concerning since the campaigns are often seen as instruments for reducing the ideological influence of extremist movements.[4] However, it is unclear whether the movements respond to the campaigns by stopping, or instead, escalating their ideological activism.

This article addresses this gap in the literature by examining how Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) challenged the religious moderation campaigns in Indonesia between 2018-2022. The focus on Indonesia is justified on the ground that the government has escalated and systematised the use of religious moderation campaigns for PVE purposes by designating the campaigns as their policy priority, especially since 2019.[5] The government also fears that perceptions about these campaigns could be manipulated to produce an impression that intends to harm the interests of religious believers, particularly by compromising the theological integrity of their religious teachings.[6] The focus on HTI, meanwhile, is justified because the organisation actively counters the religious moderation campaigns in Indonesia, despite being formally proscribed since 2017.[7] For example, in their *Al-Wa'ie* magazine and *Kaffah* bulletin, HTI activists portray the campaigns as parts of "toxic Western culture" which aims at "[weakening] Islam and Muslims".[8] The HTI can also be classified as an extremist movement, albeit a non-violent one,[9] since it seeks to revolutionise the democratic state system by replacing it with a transnational caliphate.[10] By revealing the manoeuvres of HTI activists, this study illustrates how religious moderation campaigns are resisted by elements of extremist movements.

Using articles from *Al-Wa'ie* and *Kaffah* between 2018-2022 as the primary sources of data, this analysis finds that HTI activists respond to the religious moderation campaigns by creating narratives that seek to delegitimise the campaigns. HTI activists perform this move by trying to undermine the trust of Muslim audiences in the campaigns, with trust defined as the expectation that others (in this case, the religious moderation campaigners) would not act to the detriment of the trusting agents (in this case, the Muslim audiences).[11] To achieve this goal, HTI activists devised narratives that attacked trust in democracy, authority, and community. In their attempt to weaken trust in democracy, religious moderation was portrayed as covertly promoting democratic values which were, in turn, framed as incompatible with Islamic teachings. When attacking trust in authorities and the community, HTI activists maintained that authorities and community members who supported the religious moderation campaigns pursued malicious goals against Muslims. Combined, these narratives encouraged the belief that religious moderation campaigns cannot be trusted, since the message and messengers of the campaigns did not serve the interests of Muslim communities. Following their argument that these campaigns cannot be trusted, HTI activists then urged Muslims to pursue three

actions. First, Muslims should return to the 'true' teachings of Islam, which include support for a transnational caliphate. Second, Muslims should resist non-religious authorities, and finally, they should contest the influence of malicious religious leaders.

By revealing strategies that extremist movements may employ to undermine religious moderation campaigns, this article contributes to the study of these campaigns as PVE instruments. The discussion will begin first by reviewing religious moderation campaign approaches in Indonesia, then the framework and research method for this analysis will be explained. Next, research findings that illustrate how HTI activists in Indonesia devise narratives to undermine trust in religious moderation campaigns will be presented, followed by a brief conclusion.

Religious Moderation Campaigns in Indonesia

The idea of promoting religious moderation as an instrument for countering violent extremism began circulating in Indonesia after the 9/11 attacks in the US, and especially after the first Bali bombing. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs—in collaboration with major Islamic organisations such as the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah—implemented initiatives aimed at promoting moderation. These included religious leaders' conferences, interfaith dialogue and international exchanges of religious leaders.[12] These early initiatives, however, appear to be concerned more with international reputation management rather than with limiting the domestic influence of extremist ideologies.[13] Domestically, a comprehensive campaign promoting religious moderation was rather underdeveloped, leading to major Islamic organisations attempting to fill this gap. In 2015, NU promoted the idea of Archipelagic Islam (*Islam Nusantara*), which (they claimed) represented moderate, tolerant, and inclusive teachings of Islam. The basic premise of this concept was that Islam should be "respecting and encouraging the expression of local customs, as long as they did not transgress Islamic teachings."[14] Moreover, Islam should also be compatible with the practice of nationalism.[15] The government provided strong support for the idea of Islam Nusantara — for example, in 2016 the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) funded the International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) convened by NU.[16]

However, the government only began to significantly escalate and systematise its religious moderation campaigns in 2019, with two important milestones. First, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) published a *Religious Moderation* book that outlined how constructed the concept of religious moderation.[17] Second, the National Development Agency (Bappenas) incorporated religious moderation into the Mid-Term National Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024, which implied that religious moderation was recognised as an important national priority.[18] The government interpreted religious moderation as avoiding extreme attitudes in practising and interpreting religion, and stated that individuals should balance the imperative of practising their religion faithfully with the necessity of respecting the beliefs of others. Since the government believed that moderate attitudes would prevent individuals from supporting fanaticism and revolutionary ideologies, religious moderation was expected to foster tolerance and peace, especially in a multicultural society like Indonesia.[19]

The Indonesian government adopted three approaches to promote religious moderation. First, it trained and educated civil servants and state security apparatuses to practise and disseminate ideals of religious moderation. Second, religious moderation was promoted in educational institutions. And third, the government sought to dominate the online information space by sponsoring digital campaigns of religious moderation.

The government viewed training and educating civil servants and security officials as an important priority. The main purpose was to encourage them to become tolerant, support nationalism, reject the use of religion as a pretext for legitimising violence, and respect Indonesian traditional culture. The training and education initiatives were mainly organised by Kemenag and targeted civil servants affiliated with the ministry.[20] However, the ministry also implemented training and education initiatives for other civil servants and security officials, including for the members of the Indonesian police.[21] While not always stated explicitly, these initiatives were often linked with broader strategies to counter extremism. Training for the Indonesian police, for example, was deemed essential since Indonesia was perceived to be in danger of conflicts fuelled by radical, extreme, and intolerant ideologies.[22] Through these training and educational initiatives, the government sought to increase the sensibility of its apparatuses against these dangers, and minimise the potential in which they demonstrate support to the extremist movements.

The government also promoted religious moderation in educational institutions, ranging from pre-school to university levels. The primary instrument for intervening in these institutions was the teaching of religious education. The government—again spearheaded by the Kemenag—introduced religious education teachers to the concept of religious moderation, with the hope that they would expose their students to the idea.[23] In addition, students were also provided with training and seminars on the importance of religious moderation.[24] Importantly, these initiatives were not limited to formal educational institutions, as Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and mosques were also considered important targets.[25] At a more systemic level, the Kemenag collaborated with the Ministry of Education to develop educational curricula that encouraged students to practise and spread religious moderation.[26] Underpinning these initiatives was the perception that Indonesian students were vulnerable to the appeal of extreme religious teachings. By exposing them to religiously moderate teachings, the government believed that Indonesian youths would grow resilient against the appeal of extreme ideologies. In turn, this was believed to decrease the potential for violent conflicts in Indonesia.

In addition to interventions targeting state apparatuses and educational institutions, the government disseminated the narratives of religious moderation in the digital space. Agencies such as the Kemenag and the BNPT were active in this area. For example, BNPT mobilised volunteers to counter extreme messages in social media and spread narratives promoting moderation.[27] Meanwhile, Kemenag collaborated with religious organisations and preachers to promote the idea of religious moderation in digital media. The purpose of these initiatives was to protect individuals from the appeal of extreme messages that were frequently disseminated through digital spaces.[28]

While diverse, these interventions were underpinned by the fear that extremist movements may disseminate messages, religious teachings or ideologies that encouraged individuals to grow intolerant, perform violence and destabilise the community. While the identity of these extremist movements was not mentioned in the *Religious Moderation* book, government officials and civil society elements endorsing religious moderation mentioned HTI as an "extreme pole" in the Indonesian religious landscape.[29] Kemenag also explicitly and frequently called the idea of the caliphate—which was strongly endorsed by the HTI and other organisations like the Khilafatul Muslimin—a dangerous concept whose influence should be countered with religious moderation initiatives.[30]

However, the government was also aware that its religious moderation initiatives may encounter resistance. It was feared that the campaigns may be perceived as compromising the theological integrity of religion.[31] Consequently, the government devised some anticipatory narratives—for example, Kemenag sought to convince readers that religious moderation did not demand its supporters to abandon their beliefs and rituals. Officials also emphasised that religious moderation did not aim at covertly transplanting liberal values in Indonesia by disguising them as religiously moderate.[32]

The remainder of this article provides an analysis of how HT—an organisation believed to be disseminating extreme influence throughout the Indonesian religious landscape—has sought to counter these religious moderation campaigns. After a brief discussion about the research methods used for this analysis, the article will present its research findings and conclude with some thoughts about the implications of this study.

Method

Following the work of Ingram, this research conceptualises HTI's narratives against religious moderation campaigns as representing malign influence operations, defined as activities aiming at influencing the public to support goals incompatible with democratic norms and principles.[33] These operations frequently operate by targeting public trust in authorities, democracy and fellow members of communities.[34] Trust is broadly defined as agents' beliefs that others would not act in ways that compromise their interests.[35] Extremist narratives challenge these beliefs by expressly damaging public trust in authorities, democracy and fellow members of communities. Two goals appear to be sought by the extremist groups. First, they seek to create a perception of crisis — by framing the authorities, democratic system and elements of communities as untrustworthy, agents are encouraged to believe that they are being harmed. This narrative may aggravate the polarisation between in-group and out-group identities. The in-group would be encouraged to believe that they are morally benevolent, fighting against corrupt and dangerous out-groups complicit in the crisis.[36]

Once this perception of crisis is fostered, the extremist movements may move to the second goal, which is the legitimation of their political projects. Since authorities, democratic systems and elements of communities have been resented, the extremist movements may portray themselves as morally superior agents whose political projects are capable of resolving the present crisis.[37] This implies that undermining public trust and fostering a perception of crisis is important for making the population more susceptible to extreme narratives that promise a

way to alleviate uncertainty.

To understand the strategic logic of HTI's narratives against the religious moderation campaigns in Indonesia, this study incorporated a content analysis approach. The data were collected from HTI's *Al-Wa'ie* magazine and *Kaffah* bulletin. Despite the government's proscription of HTI in 2017, both publications are published online and remained active as of May 2023. In general, HTI seems to be primarily interested in targeting the intellectual stratum of Indonesian society, as reflected in their recruitment activities which frequently focus on universities.[38]While it is difficult to estimate the reach of these publications, *Al-Wa'ie* and *Kaffah* can be considered strategically published by HTI, given the efforts that the HTI activists dedicate to continuing the publication despite government proscription. Further, these publications frequently feature the views of HTI's leadership board, indicating that they function to convey HTI's organisational directives to its followers. In terms of access, these publications can be easily read on the internet. In February 2023, Similarweb estimated that *Al-Wa'ie* was accessed by 16,200 visitors,[39] while *Kaffah* was visited by 2,000 visitors that month.[40] However, access to *Al-Wa'ie* and *Kaffah* may be interrupted by the efforts of the Indonesian government to limit the dissemination of extremist ideology in cyberspace. To evade government censorship, HTI activists often change the domain extension of their websites. For example, in 2023 the domain extension of *Al-Wa'ie*'s website was changed from .id to .net.

The time period of this study is limited to 2017-2022, as this is when the government systematised and escalated its religious moderation campaigns. Since this study is specifically interested in understanding narratives that are intended to counter the campaigns, it focuses on articles that explicitly mention events related to the campaigns. To filter these articles, the study used keywords such as 'moderasi' and 'moderat'. The collected articles were then checked manually to determine whether they used the terms for discussing events related to the campaigns. After excluding irrelevant articles, the following analysis is based on 88 collected articles, which were then coded with Atlas.ti.

The research looked for passages containing HTI's remarks about events related to religious moderation campaigns in Indonesia. These passages were classified into two major codes: 'representations' and 'actions'. The 'representations' code was used to capture passages containing HTI's depiction of the campaigns. This code was initially split into two sub-codes, 'positive' and 'negative', depending on whether HTI depicted the campaigns positively or negatively. However, the study could not find any passage in which the HTI publications depicted the campaigns positively. Following Ingram's framework, all the negative passages were then coded into three sub-codes: 'authorities', 'democratic system' and 'members of communities,' depending on which trust relations they sought to attack. While coding the passages into these categories, there was sensitivity to passages targeting trust relations that might not be classified into Ingram's framework. However, the framework proved to be sufficiently exhaustive, in that all passages could be categorised into these codes.

Meanwhile, the 'actions' code was used to capture passages containing HTI's prescriptions on how audiences should respond to religious moderation campaigns. This information is useful for understanding the strategic impacts that HTI seeks to attain through its negative representations

of religious moderation campaigns. Following Ingram's framework, the passages were clustered into two sub-codes, 'crisis' and 'legitimation'. The 'crisis' sub-code captures information that indicates HTI's endeavours to foster crisis, particularly by encouraging audiences to oppose authorities, the democratic system or members of communities. The 'legitimation' sub-code reflects information about HTI's appeals to its audiences to support its political project of building a global caliphate. It is important to note that this study is unable to determine how targeted audiences responded to these prescriptions. The study is able to indicate the types of impacts that HTI wished to achieve by developing a negative narrative of religious moderation campaigns, but we cannot determine whether these impacts were actually achieved.

The Strategic Logic of HTI's Narratives Against Religious Moderation Campaigns

HTI's narratives against religious moderation campaigns appear to serve two functions. First, the narratives undermine the legitimacy of the campaigns by attacking trust in democratic values—which are framed as underpinning the idea of religious moderation,—as well as to authorities and elements of communities who support the campaigns. Second, the narratives seek to legitimise the political projects of HTI by provoking audiences to contest religious moderation campaigns and by encouraging them to support HTI's ideological positions.

Undermining Trust

HTI activists seek to delegitimise religious moderation campaigns by creating three representations of the campaigns that attack trust in a democratic system, authorities and communities. First, the campaigns are depicted as instruments for expanding democratic values at the global and domestic levels, but these values are narrated as alien and dangerous for Islam. Second, the campaigns are framed as strategies of Western countries who seek to entrench their imperial control over the Islamic world. An argument is made here that the Indonesian government colluded with Western governments to extend their control. Third, the campaigns are portrayed as sustained by corrupt Muslim intellectuals and religious leaders who seek to gain material wealth and status, even at the expense of the welfare of their fellow Muslims.

1. Undermining Trust in Democracy

To delegitimise the religious moderation campaigns, HTI activists portray the campaigns as strategies of democracy promotion, and then attack democracy and its associated principles as being incompatible with Islamic values. This is the second-most dominant strategy taken by the HTI activists to delegitimise religious moderation campaigns. Of the 88 documents analysed in this study, 65 (74 percent) include statements that criticise the campaigns for advancing democratic principles that deviate from Islamic teachings.

HTI activists link religious moderation campaigns with democracy by claiming that moderate Muslims are often defined as Muslims who espouse democratic norms. Citing a report from RAND Corporation, HTI activists maintain that moderate Muslims are those who "disseminate key dimensions of democratic civilisations", including support for human rights, gender equality, pluralism and non-sectarian laws.[41] HTI activists argue that the connection between

religious moderation campaigns and the promotion of democracy is problematic because, they claim, democracy is deeply incompatible with Islam. At its most fundamental level, democracy places people as the highest source of power, thereby contradicting the principle (held by HTI) that God is the highest source of authority. As democracy forces Muslims to obey man-made laws instead of sharia law, the religious commitment of Muslims is restricted to only the private sphere.[42] In the political domain, the HTI propagandists argue, Muslims would be penalised for trying to express their commitment to Islamic religious teachings, and particularly to the implementation of sharia law and the establishment of the caliphate. In their view, the concept of democracy mutes the political potential of Islamic teachings[43] as it pacifies Muslims, encouraging them to focus only on the private, non-political expression of Islam. In addition to distancing Muslims from the true teachings of Islam,[44] the religious moderation campaigns silently depoliticise Islam, limiting its political power.[45] They conclude that these campaigns (which aim at moderating Muslims) should thus be rejected.

HTI activists also argue that the incompatibility between democracy and Islam runs deeper than this. There are two packages of democratic principles that particularly concern the HTI activists: religious pluralism and gender equality. While the religious moderation campaigns in general aim at promoting democracy among Muslims, the HTI activists appear to believe that the campaigns are especially concerned with the dissemination of these value packages. First, they claim that religious moderation campaigns are vehicles for promoting religious pluralism,[46] which is considered problematic since it encourages Muslims to compromise their theological commitment to Islam.[47] HTI propaganda materials mention interfaith prayers and dialogues, interreligious marriages, and celebrating or paying respects to the holy days of other religions as examples of activities that are promoted by religious moderation campaigns while harming Muslims' theological integrity.[48] They argue that Muslims who engage in these activities implicitly assume that religions are created equally and that mixing the practices of different religions is acceptable, which by extension implies that Islam is not the sole 'true' religion. While Islam indeed allows the practice of toleration in social affairs, HTI propagandists claim that this principle is not applicable to the religious domain. Consequently, they argue, religious moderation campaigns have promoted an 'excessive tolerance' (*toleransi kebablasan*).[49] Expressions of religious tolerance, in turn, are criticised for deviating from the true teachings of Islam, which emphasise the importance of believing that Islam is the one true religion.

HTI propaganda materials also argue that religious moderation campaigns promote excessive toleration by stigmatising Islamic teachings that restrict the space for inter-religious toleration, which are labelled by the campaigners as intolerant, violent, extreme or radical.[50] This stigmatisation, they argue, discourages Muslims from learning the 'true' Islam, as they fear that doing so may expose them to the danger of radicalisation.[51] At the same time, the religious moderation campaigners package their preferred visions of toleration as modern, peaceful, and moderate. Inevitably, according to the HTI activists, Muslims unfamiliar with 'true' Islam would be fascinated with the idea of religious pluralism promoted by the religious moderation campaigns,[52] although this idea contradicts the 'true' interpretations of Islam.

HTI activists also seek to undermine the acceptance of gender equality. They claim that religious moderation campaigns seek to promote this democratic norm, especially among Muslim women

and families,[53] but this contradicts the teachings of Islam regulating the behaviour of women. According to the HTI activists, the idea of gender equality (and freedom for women overall) is claimed to be responsible for dissuading Muslim women from considering the use of hijab as necessary.[54] This idea of freedom for women is also accused of normalising (if not enabling) extra-marital sex, pornography and same-sex relations.[55] Further, HTI activists argue that the promotion of gender equality is yet another systematic and coordinated effort by religious moderation campaigners to stigmatise the teachings of Islam in this area. They claim that religious moderation campaigners portray the true teachings of Islam as rigid and repressive against women,[56] and frame democratic visions of women as modern and liberating[57]—visions that deviate from the true teachings of Islam regarding women.

HTI propaganda in *Al-Wa'ie* and *Kaffah*, therefore, seeks to delegitimise religious moderation campaigns by creating distrust against democracy. HTI activists begin by associating the campaigns with democracy promotion, and then accuse democracy and its associated principles as deviant and dangerous for Islam. The HTI activists also claim that narratives portraying religious pluralism and gender equality as moral serve to conceal the contradiction between these values and the 'true' teachings of Islam, luring Muslims away from the true teachings of Islam.

2. Undermining Trust in Authorities

In addition to creating distrust against democracy, HTI propaganda in *Al-Wa'ie* and *Kaffah* seeks to undermine trust in domestic and foreign authorities. Among 88 documents examined, 70 of them (80 percent) contain statements critical of international and domestic authorities. Among international authorities, the US government receives the highest amount of criticism for promoting moderation (as reflected in 26 documents, or 30 percent). Domestically, Kemenag is the most frequently criticised institution (observed in 20 documents, or 23 percent). In their efforts to delegitimise these authorities, HTI activists claim that these actors deliberately deceive Muslims into practising religious moderation, thereby distancing them from the 'true' teachings of Islam. Since this deception hinders Muslims from actualising the political potential of the so-called 'true' Islam, these authorities are accused of trying to preserve the global imperialism that subjugates Muslims. The US is described as being at the apex of this imperialism, whereas local elites—such as Indonesian government officials—act as co-conspirators who serve the interests of the global imperialists in exchange for power, resources and status. Undermining the legitimacy of international and domestic authorities is the most salient strategy taken by the HTI activists.

The US is depicted in HTI material propaganda as a global imperialist which intends to acquire an ideological ascendancy over Islamic civilisation.[58] In their view, the US invades and occupies the territories of Islamic countries for their geopolitical interests, and once under its imperial control, the US exploits the resources of the countries to enrich itself, resulting in impoverishment for Muslims.[59] However, HTI activists also appear to believe that the US actually fears the political power of Islamic civilisation. This is because the US perceives the Muslim world as a potential contender against its own global hegemony. This potential power, HTI activists suggest, is rooted in the global political vision of Islam which requires Muslims to

build a global caliphate. This vision is dangerous for the US because once the global caliphate is established, the hegemony of the US would be in danger.[60]

The HTI activists maintain that the global promotion of religious moderation should be understood within this context. The US sponsors global campaigns of moderation since it needs to distance Muslims from the true teachings of Islam.[61] If this endeavour is successful, Muslims would not believe in the idea of a global caliphate,[62] and the political potential of Islam would therefore remain unmaterialised.[63] The campaigns of religious moderation also stigmatise the 'true' teachings of Islam as immoderate and make Muslims vulnerable to violent extremism. Subsequently, Muslim communities are fragmented, as they are divided into moderate and immoderate groups.[64] The HTI activists believe this is the current situation in the Muslim world. As global religious moderation campaigns are consolidating a foothold in the Muslim world, Muslims are increasingly pacified and fail to make meaningful challenges against the imperialism of the US.[65]

HTI activists maintain that the Indonesian government is complicit in this global scheme of US imperialism. This is apparent in the fact that the government has extended global campaigns for moderation in Indonesia.[66] The government apparatuses, especially Kemenag, have organised programmes to make Indonesian Muslims more moderate.[67] In particular, they target educational institutions, women, and families.[68] Consequently, they argue, the government in Indonesia significantly contributes to the disempowerment of Muslims. They claim that similar to the US, the government distances Muslims from 'true' Islam, thereby undermining their capacity to organise political movements based on the idea of the caliphate.[69] In Indonesia, they conclude, this lack of power has resulted in the poverty and unemployment of Indonesian Muslims and religious blasphemy targeting Islam.[70] Widespread corruption also consumes resources that can be allocated to improve the welfare of Indonesian Muslims.[71] All of these phenomena, HTI activists argue, occur because Muslims are so powerless that they are unable to protect themselves from injustice.[72]

HTI activists also maintain that Indonesian elites are complicit with the global religious moderation campaigns since the projects serve their interests. In their view, working with the US in the religious moderation campaigns would elevate the international status of the government. It would appear committed to an international coalition against violent extremism, thereby boosting its reputation. Nationally, however, extending the religious moderation campaigns is also beneficial for local elites, as it allows them to pacify the Muslims, preventing them from replacing a nation-state controlled by corrupt oligarchs with a true Islamic caliphate.

HTI propaganda materials in *Al-Wa'ie* and *Kaffah* thus seek to delegitimise international and domestic authorities by framing them as deliberately trying to undermine the power of Islam using campaigns for religious moderation. The HTI activists, in this regard, amplify and extend the narrative that religious moderation campaigns—due to their democratic inclination—are harmful to Islam. Once this claim is established, the HTI activists try to portray actors who promote religious moderation as having malicious intentions against Islam.

3. Undermining Trust in Communities

In addition to attacking democracy and authorities, propaganda materials in *Al-Wa'ie* and *Kaffah* also challenge members of Indonesian Muslim communities. Specifically, HTI activists seek to foster distrust against Islamic religious leaders who support campaigns of religious moderation by depicting them as individuals whose pragmatic interests are served by the campaigns. However, the HTI activists add that these leaders support religious moderation because they are deceived by the campaigns. Attacking members of communities is the least used strategy used by the HTI activists, although it remains significant. Of the 88 documents analysed, 24 (27 percent) contain statements criticising members of local communities. The NU is the most frequently criticised element of civil society (as reflected in 12 documents, or 14 percent). In the majority of cases, however, the NU (or its affiliated organisations) is not mentioned directly. Instead, the HTI activists attack the idea of Archipelagic Islam that has been proposed by the organisation.

For the HTI activists, many Islamic religious leaders are complicit with the domestic and global religious moderation campaigns. They support the campaigns by developing interpretations of Islam that are compatible with the idea of religious moderation. This is achieved by promoting the agenda of the "recontextualisation" of Islamic teachings.[73] These leaders disseminate the idea that traditional Islam has been interpreted in ways that are incompatible with the reality of modern life. Consequently, to ensure that Islam remains relevant to modernity, its teachings should be adjusted. This adjustment, in turn, leads to the stigmatisation of several ideas that the HTI activists consider fundamental, such as jihad and the global caliphate. HTI propaganda materials, therefore, portray these Islamic religious leaders as serving the interests of religious moderation campaigns. By advancing the recontextualisation of Islam, these religious leaders attack elements of Islamic teachings that may activate Muslims' political potential.[74]

The HTI activists believe that Islamic religious leaders' complicity with the religious moderation campaigns is mainly motivated by their desire for wealth and political positions. International and domestic authorities, who are interested in ensuring the success of the campaigns, have provided these religious leaders with funding and political access.[75] These religious leaders also enjoy benefits from the domestic oligarchy. The HTI activists imply that Indonesian resources exploited by the oligarchy also flow to these leaders.[76] In exchange for these rewards, local Islamic religious leaders are expected to use their knowledge to craft interpretations of Islam that legitimise the religious moderation campaigns as well as the dominant political order which impoverishes and marginalises Muslims.[77] The HTI activists, therefore, accuse these Islamic religious leaders to be "enjoying the suffering of the *umma*." While the leaders appear harsh toward Muslims who seek to realise the global vision of a caliphate, they are soft to the global imperialists and the local oligarchy.[78]

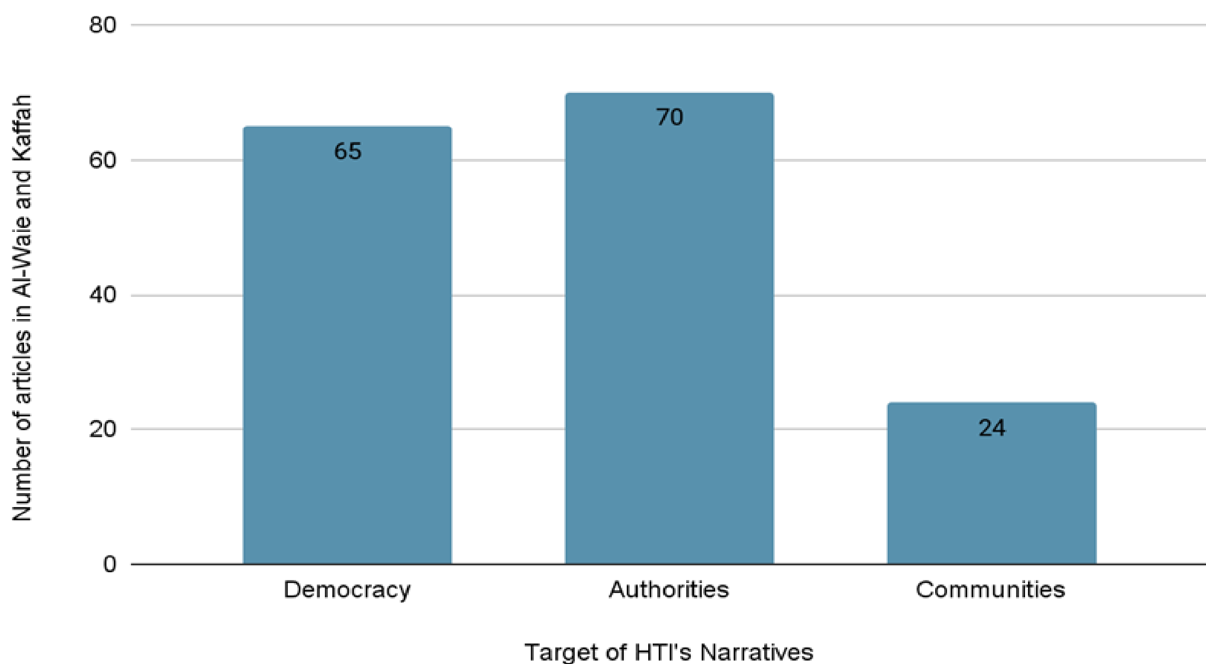
For the HTI activists, another factor that contributes to the complicity of the religious leaders is their lack of competence in understanding Islam. The idea of religious moderation is portrayed by religious moderation campaigners as modern and morally superior, since it reflects values such as democracy, pluralism and gender equality. In turn, the religious leaders become fascinated by the appeal of these ideas, failing to recognise that they actually compromise the integrity of Islamic teachings. Furthermore, they are also unable to identify the dangerous effect

that the concept of religious moderation may bring to the welfare and power of Muslims.[79]

HTI propaganda materials, therefore, encourage Muslims to distrust any members of their communities who promote the idea of religious moderation. These members are described by the HTI activists as collaborating with the imperial US and the local oligarchy. They even enjoy resources that have been unjustly acquired by exploiting the impoverished Muslims of Indonesia. HTI activists also portray religious leaders supportive of the campaigns as incapable of identifying the detrimental impacts of religious moderation on the theological integrity of individual Muslims and their welfare.

Overall, this analysis of the documents reveals how HTI activists have sought to delegitimise the religious moderation campaigns by sowing distrust against democracy, authorities, and communities. The narratives of the HTI activists are underpinned by the notion that religious moderation is harmful to Islam. Subsequently, those who promote the ideas of democracy and moderation should be treated as untrustworthy. This includes authorities and elements of Muslim communities who campaign for religious moderation.

Figure 1 – Frequency of HTI's Strategy



Calling for Action

Attacking the trust of the public in democracy, authorities, and communities is only the first step in the HTI activists' influence operation. Once the distrust is sown, the HTI activists are then able to portray the targets as possibly harmful to the interests of Indonesian Muslims. Based on the propaganda materials in *Al-Wa'ie* and *Kaffah*, this research finds that HTI activists exploit the fear of this harm by encouraging the audiences to perform (at minimum) three actions. First, Muslims need to return to the 'true' Islam. Second, they need to resist authorities and implement Islamic political programmes based on the idea of the caliphate. And third, they should contest the influence of religious leaders campaigning for religious moderation.

The first prescription is for Indonesian Muslims to return to the true teachings of Islam. The previous section of this article illustrated how HTI activists seek to develop distrust against religious moderation by labelling the idea as compromising the theological integrity of Islam. Consequently, the HTI activists strongly advise Indonesian Muslims not only to distance themselves from the idea but also to embrace the correct teachings of the religion. For example, HTI activists emphasise that religious moderation would lead its believers to "hell" and that Muslims should be "critical" against it.[80] Meanwhile, Muslims who wish to be "salvaged" should deepen their understanding of the religion and fully implement the teachings—including in the political domain, where they are required to support the establishment of the caliphate.[81] Meanwhile, ideas such as pluralism, gender equality or democracy are perceived as contaminating Islam. The HTI activists anticipate the reluctance of Muslims to learn true Islam by suggesting that Muslims should not fear the stigmatisation of Islam by powerful actors. Instead, the HTI activists instil the idea that conforming to the desire of these actors would make them "damned" by Allah. Further, the HTI activists maintain that returning to the true teachings of Islam would enable individual Muslims to become parts of the "best umma".[82]

The second prescription follows the first call for action. Once Muslims properly understand the 'true' teachings of Islam, they are expected to understand the danger and injustice that the dominant political system has imposed upon Indonesian Muslims. Consequently, HTI activists encourage Muslims to organise themselves and wage a resistance against so-called "anti-Islam" authorities who have manipulated Muslims into a condition of "backwardness", including through these religious moderation campaigns.[83] The HTI activists again caution that Muslims would remain discriminated against and marginalised if they continue living under these authorities. If they want to stop this injustice and acquire salvation, they argue, Muslims should rejuvenate the power of Islam. This can be achieved by fighting for the complete implementation of Islamic laws in Indonesia.[84] HTI activists reiterate that Muslims should be brave and committed to this struggle, even if the struggle would result in them being labelled as radicals by the authorities. HTI propaganda materials, therefore, urge Indonesian Muslims to grow their "spirit" to "defend" Islam.[85]

The last prescription is for Indonesian Muslims to contest the influence of Islamic religious leaders who support religious moderation campaigns. This prescription is, again, strongly correlated with the first prescription to embrace the 'true' Islam. The HTI activists believe that the religious moderation campaigns, which damage the power of Islam, are promoted by Islamic religious leaders and intellectuals who collude with the local oligarchy and global imperialists. These leaders and intellectuals serve the interests of the elites by instrumentalising their knowledge of Islam to craft interpretations that benefit the elites while disempowering Muslims. Given this situation, these leaders cannot be perceived as reliable actors who would disseminate the 'true' teachings of Islam. Subsequently, the HTI activists encourage Muslims to connect themselves with leaders committed to the 'true' Islam, and to challenge the influence of corrupted leaders and intellectuals. For example, Muslims are urged to study in educational institutions which teach the 'true' Islam and reject the concept of religious moderation.[86] They are encouraged to actively teach Muslim children about the danger of religious moderation, and to train these children to confront friends and teachers who disseminate the concept of moderation.[87] Muslim women should play active roles in this process; instead of being deceived

by religious moderation campaigns, they must help fortify Muslim families to resist the influence of religious moderation.[88]

The HTI propaganda materials, therefore, do not only seek to delegitimise religious moderation campaigns, nor do they only aim at encouraging Muslims to distance themselves from the idea of religious moderation. Instead, HTI activists also encourage their targeted audiences to be committed to the 'true' teachings of Islam, centred on the notion of caliphate and jihad. The HTI activists also urge Muslims to actively contest authorities and a network of intellectuals and religious leaders who promote commitment to moderation. Table 1 summarises key narratives and prescriptions that HTI propaganda materials articulate to weaken trust and to legitimise their preferred visions of political order.

Table 1 – HTI Narratives and Calls for Action Against Religious Moderation Campaigns

Target of Distrust	Key Narratives	Call for actions
Democracy	Democracy is harmful to Islam. Religious moderation, which promotes democracy, is therefore dangerous.	Distrust religious moderation campaigns and embrace the 'true' Islam.
Authority	Since religious moderation is dangerous for Islam, authorities campaigning for religious moderation must have malicious intentions against Islam.	Distrust the authorities and resist them.
Communities	Since religious moderation is dangerous for Islam, members of communities campaigning for religious moderation either have malicious intentions against Islam or are deceived by the idea.	Distrust of mainstream religious leaders and contest their influence.

Conclusion

This study illustrates how non-violent extremist movements such as HTI respond to religious moderation campaigns by inciting resistance. HTI activists apply two simultaneous manoeuvres. First, they weaken the legitimacy of the campaigns by sowing distrust against the concept of religious moderation as well as authorities and members of communities who support the campaigns. The campaigns are deemed harmful to Islam, and authorities promoting them are portrayed as malicious. Religious leaders and intellectuals endorsing moderation are likewise labelled as corrupt or incompetent. Second, HTI activists complement efforts to delegitimise religious moderation campaigns with attempts to legitimise their preferred visions of order. Since the notion of religious moderation deviates from Islamic teachings, the HTI activists maintain that Muslim communities should return to the 'true' teachings of Islam, which demand that they establish a global caliphate. To realise this vision, Muslims are urged to resist the authorities who have discriminated and marginalised them. Muslims are also encouraged to confront their fellow Muslims, including religious leaders and intellectuals, who have endorsed the idea of religious moderation.

This research, therefore, contributes to the scholarly literature on PVE by mapping the possible manoeuvres taken by extremist movements to counter religious moderation campaigns. It also highlights areas that religious moderation campaigners need to reinforce in order to render the manoeuvres ineffective, especially in Indonesia. Given that the HTI activists mostly attack authorities supporting the religious moderation campaigns, it is important for the religious moderation campaigners to either enhance the credibility of authorities or to dissociate the campaigns from authorities. In the latter, the campaigns should be portrayed as organic initiatives, rather than as being organised by authorities. Since members of communities receive fewer attacks compared to authorities, it may be essential for them to spearhead the religious moderation campaigns. However, anticipating the HTI narratives that moderation-promoting community members have been co-opted by authorities, it is important for these members to maintain a critical distance from authorities. To the degree that such community members are able to establish their legitimacy, they can lead the process of demonstrating the strong compatibility between the idea of moderation, democracy and Islamic teachings. This approach will be important for countering the claim articulated by the HTI activists that religious moderation deviates from true Islamic teachings.

However, this study also suffers from limitations. For example, this analysis was unable to examine the extent to which the propaganda materials in *Al-Wa'ie* and *Kaffah* are able to gather support for caliphate ideology and incite challenges against authorities and religious leaders. To assess the impact of HTI's narrative in the future, it may be useful to apply experimental methods where respondents are asked to share their reactions to reading articles in *Al-Wa'ie* and *Kaffah*. It may also be useful to compare responses that come from individuals who have and have not been exposed to religious moderation campaigns. Such a comparison may indicate whether exposure to the campaigns makes individuals more resilient to counter-narratives against religious moderation ideals. The focus on the two HTI publications *Al-Wa'ie* and *Kaffah* —which are mostly intended for relatively educated readers—also limits the ability of this research to capture the HTI activists' strategy to tailor their communication strategies to different audiences. Further research is thus needed to assess the actual effectiveness of non-

violent extremists'' strategies. A greater sensitivity to the diversity of audiences should also be carefully considered

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PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

Research Article

Distinguishing Children From ISIS-Affiliated Families in Iraq and Their Unique Barriers for Rehabilitation and Reintegration

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Abstract: Over 25,000 Iraqis (90 percent of which are women and children) currently reside in al-Hol camp in Northeastern Syria, and the government of Iraq has started to return some of these families back to Iraq via a rehabilitation and reintegration programme. This population is perceived to have an ISIS affiliation, along with thousands of other persons across Iraq. But what exactly does having an 'ISIS affiliation' mean practically for children from these families, and what are the implications of it for their rehabilitation and reintegration? Building off a gap in the literature around children with perceived affiliation to terrorist groups, this article utilises Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems model to help distinguish the current challenges faced by children from ISIS-affiliated families in Iraq. It considers the implications of familial affiliation in areas including family life, education, camp and detention settings, media coverage, returning to their communities, and legal aspects. It also considers which of these features are shared with ISIS-affiliated children outside of Iraq. The aim is to create a stronger and shared baseline for understanding the unique features of such children, and how their healthy development may be negatively or positively impacted on multiple levels when their family is affiliated with a terror group. In turn, this understanding can better shape and target the interventions or support they may receive in response to these.

Keywords: ISIS, Iraq, children, terrorism, rehabilitation, reintegration, Bronfenbrenner

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Introduction

Over a period of several years after announcing their so-called caliphate in 2014, ISIS took over, held, and administered an area the size of Britain across Iraq and Syria, and controlled the lives of 10 million at its peak.[1] In Iraq itself, ISIS held up to 40 percent of the country and there were serious concerns that they would move into the capital Baghdad. The group was territorially defeated in Iraq at the end of 2017, and in Syria in 2019, yet today ISIS remains a security threat in both countries. A 2022 CENTCOM report broke this threat down into three categories: ISIS members still at large; ISIS leaders and fighters in detention (20,000 in Iraq, 10,000 in Syria); and importantly for this article "the potential next generation of ISIS," particularly those children who remain in the al-Hol camp in Northeast Syria (NES).[2] Today over 25,000 Iraqis (90 percent of which are women and children) currently reside in al-Hol camp in NES, amidst a total population of nearly 50,000. The CENTCOM report notes, "These children in the camp are prime targets for ISIS radicalization. The international community must work together to remove these children from this environment by repatriating them to their countries or communities of origin while improving conditions in the camp."[3] Al-Hol camp has also been referred to as a 'ticking time bomb' by the UN[4] and Iraqi stakeholders.[5] There are thus ongoing security concerns of ISIS fighters, those in detention, and a notable focus on children who remain in al-Hol camp who are seen as vulnerable to recruitment into a potential future iteration of ISIS or other armed groups — a concern shared with other children from families with links to ISIS outside of al-Hol.

Yet, for the tens of thousands of Iraqi children which are currently perceived as 'affiliated' with ISIS, to view them all uniformly and exclusively through a risk-oriented security lens is deeply problematic. Perceived affiliation currently takes many forms, though the most common is through a familial connection (e.g., through a parent or sibling who was actively involved with ISIS).[6] Such a threat-dominated approach risks securitising an incredibly diverse and highly vulnerable population who faces a myriad of challenges in their lives that extend well beyond possible recruitment to armed groups.

This article focuses on the current situation of ISIS-affiliated children from Iraq, particularly those affiliated through their familial connections. It lays out their status, describes what is unique about these families, and examines the current barriers to their rehabilitation and reintegration. Some authors have noted that rehabilitation and reintegration as a phrase is often used in criminal justice terms for those exiting prisons and returning to society, but that "these terms have not been clearly defined or operationalized," resulting in a lack of clarity around their ultimate goals, who should provide these, and in which order these should happen. It also means that goals discussed in programs could range from clear support to practical needs (e.g., housing) while others were "viewed as instrumental to ensuring long-term desistance from extremism, but were admittedly aspirational."[7] The term rehabilitation in this context of this article is used in the most basic sense of restoring normal lives for these children while accounting for their needs, while reintegration refers to returning and reintegrating them into local communities in Iraq. Risks in this context are discussed as "characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precede and are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes."[8] This definition highlights the myriad of ways in

which their lives may be negatively impacted, while also not excluding future potential security concerns.

Children who have been affiliated with ISIS have been the focus of a growing body of literature. Yet, a significant portion of this literature has focused on western case studies or contexts such as central Asia, or (often male) child soldiers who were recruited and forced to fight on behalf of the group, with a significant focus on foreign children. Important research has also been conducted on children who have been affected by terrorism and conflict. Yet, children who are perceived and labelled as 'affiliated' with ISIS within Iraq remain an underexplored and undistinguished group in current literature.

This article builds on and extends from current literature in several important ways. First, it examines and distinguishes the broader category of children with a familial affiliation to ISIS. Second, it highlights the case of ISIS-affiliated children in Iraq – a case study largely overlooked in current literature, yet which has the highest number of affected persons out of any country globally along with Syria. Third, it highlights the myriad of coordinated, interlinked, and tailored responses that will be required to meet their needs. Fourth, from a policy perspective, thousands of foreign children from around the world also lived under ISIS and have returned to their home countries, or may do so in the coming years.[9] While their situation is unique for many reasons (most specifically not returning to a country which was occupied or as heavily affected as Iraq, and the much smaller caseloads), there are many shared challenges these children face in their rehabilitation and reintegration as Iraqi children (e.g., missing/dead parents, stigmatisation, disrupted education, etc.). This article can thus help identify and encourage a more comparative global analysis of similarities and distinctions of this group of children from families affiliated to terrorist groups.

The article proceeds as follows: first, it discusses the methodology, and the body of research literature to which this analysis contributes. This is followed by a description of the situation of ISIS-affiliated children in Iraq today. It then outlines key barriers to rehabilitation and reintegration along several thematic areas as informed by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model. Finally, it concludes with a discussion about the implications of this analysis. This article also highlights the value of a multi-disciplinary approach to this problem—which can help to identify the key concerns facing children more clearly today beyond exclusive security concerns—and the complexity of the status and circumstance of 'ISIS-affiliated children' and calls for more nuance and increased research on this topic.

Methodology

This article is informed by nearly nine years of research on this population of ISIS-affiliated families by the author. During this time the author has conducted eight trips to Iraq between 2018 and 2023, for which open-source information is drawn on in this report.[10] A field visit to Iraq specific to this analysis was conducted in 2022 which involved eighteen semi-structured interviews and two additional focus groups which are integrated throughout as primary source materials. Interviews were conducted with practitioners such as case workers and service providers, and with persons from ISIS-affiliated families which included two focus groups

(one with men only, one with women only) and one-on-one interviews in the Jeddah 1 (J1) Rehabilitation Centre, Khazar camp, and Hassan sham U2 and U3 camps with residents (males and females aged 18+).[11]

Interviews were conducted in English or Arabic and interviewees were presented with a list of questions in advance. All interviewees had a chance to review questions, ask follow-up questions, and could refuse to answer any questions they chose. When conducted in Arabic, a translator facilitated the live, recorded interview while a second translator confirmed the transcript via verbatim transcription for accuracy. Information from interviews was triangulated for accuracy from other open-source reports. The author reviewed all transcripts and used structural coding to organise themes discussed in the interviews. The names used in this article are not their real names to protect their identity. A recent EU-funded project led by the author also considers how the life of the child is impacted when a family member is involved in violent extremism, which includes ISIS-affiliated families in Europe.[12] This has helped inform the comparative view of challenges for children in Iraq and other contexts.

Literature Review – Children and Terrorism

There is a notable body of literature on children in relation to terrorist groups, specifically literature on children in ISIS, which has been established since 2014. This article will ultimately contribute to both, as current literature does not sufficiently account for the diverse ways that children are affected when they are *affiliated* with armed groups via their familial links, and how perceived familial affiliation affects their lives, which limits their categorical similarities and distinctions. This contrasts with other fields such as that on child soldiers, or children generally affected by the fight against terrorism, which are more widely examined (though the case study of Iraq is also under-researched). The following literature review is not comprehensive but does highlight the current gaps in this field of research to which this analysis directly contributes.

Children and Armed Groups

Research on children and armed groups have often focused on child soldiers, which can consider their rehabilitation and reintegration. This includes child soldiers involved in conflicts in Africa in countries such as Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Uganda, where children were forcibly recruited, coerced, or in some cases willingly joined.[13] In Sierra Leone, findings from one study noted that child soldiers who had higher levels of war exposure (and thus violence) needed prioritised support over those exposed to less violence, as this 'higher war exposure group' ultimately had more PTSD symptoms, hyperarousal symptoms, and difficulties in emotional regulation.[14] In Bosnia, the private and public narratives around former child soldiers have been highlighted.[15] Special attention has also been paid to the often overlooked roles of girls in armed groups, and implications for their rehabilitation in countries like Colombia,[16] Sierra Leone, and Uganda, amongst others,[17] particularly in cases where they themselves did not conduct violence and were excluded in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Rehabilitation (DDR) and other post-conflict processes. Child soldiers often face educational disruption or cessation as well, alongside issues such as societal or familial rejection or stigmatisation. Research on child soldiers has considered concepts and constructions of child soldiers; agency, capacity, and resilience; legal considerations; and aspects of transitional justice.[18] Children have also

been researched as militants in countries such as Pakistan, where in some cases they have been suicide bombers.[19]

There has also been a body of research which considers the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers, particularly concerned with harms such programs may cause.[20] As Shepler notes in her book on child soldiers in Sierra Leone, children who participated in UN- and NGO-sponsored programmes for child soldiers may have unintended consequences including child soldiers performing (or refusing to perform) as the 'child soldier' to "gain access to the resources available for their reintegration into normal life."[21] This raises important considerations in Iraq around programming targeted at 'ISIS-affiliated families', where access (or lack thereof) to support for them may be contingent on this perceived affiliation (and also to the exclusion of non-ISIS affiliated children, who may nonetheless face similar challenges around trauma, educational disruption, etc.). Concerns have also been raised by scholars about the framing of 'child soldiers' from the global south.[22]

Since ISIS established its caliphate in 2014, the subject of children in relation to the group has been an area of international attention, including scholarly focus. This has focused particularly on the issue of child soldiers, which includes research on how they have been used in propaganda,[23] how they have been recruited and what their roles have been,[24] legal definitions and considerations around their roles,[25] and the impacts and implications of these roles on the well-being of the child.[26] Other research has more quantitatively looked at children from around the world who have been taken to—or born into—the Islamic State (and thus ISIS-affiliation).[27]

Rehabilitation and reintegration of ISIS-affiliated children has been examined in recent years, though much of this literature sits outside of academic journals, and is action-oriented, focusing more on policy and practice considerations around ISIS-affiliated children.[28] These papers discuss aspects such as: supporting children's physical and psychological health; addressing indoctrination and issues such as stigmatisation; gender- and age-appropriate considerations in programming; coordination of activities amongst various stakeholders; legal and human rights considerations; practical advice for practitioners including lessons from adjacent fields; and practical case studies from around the world. One rapid review which is intended to inform rehabilitation and reintegration of ISIS-affiliated children highlights notable crossover in experiences of ISIS-affiliated children and refugee children, war-impacted children, child criminal gang members, child victims of maltreatment, and victims of sex trafficking. Notable shared adversities from these groups included: prior childhood adversity and trauma, family violence, community/political violence, combat involvement, indoctrination, family loss and separation, and displacement and adjustment stressors.[29] Another recent article highlights a "5R approach" to rehabilitating and reintegrating ISIS-affiliated families which addresses repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration, and resilience as key programmatic areas of focus.[30] This body of literature is useful to inform approaches to ISIS-affiliated children, and can be used to inform rehabilitation and reintegration of ISIS-affiliated children in Iraq. Nonetheless, it does not necessarily describe the factors that make children from ISIS-affiliated families distinct, nor looks at practical cases of children from such families in the unique case of Iraq.

Armed Conflict and Childhood Development

The impacts and implications of conflict on child health and development have also been widely researched in the field of health and is a useful adjacent field to help distinguish unique and shared features of ISIS-affiliated children. One systematic review notes that children can be impacted in relation to conflict through "mortality, injuries, illnesses, environmental exposures, limitations in access to health care and education, and the experience of violence, including torture and sexual violence" and "conflict-related social changes affecting child health." Notably this review states, "The geographical coverage of the literature is limited. Data on the effects of conflict on child development are scarce."[31] Children impacted by armed conflict are analysed in Afghanistan, where long-term impacts and implications of armed conflict on children are recorded, including psychological, the loss of a parent to conflict, exposure to extreme violence, and recruitment of children into the Taliban,[32] which mirror many aspects of life for children in Iraq.

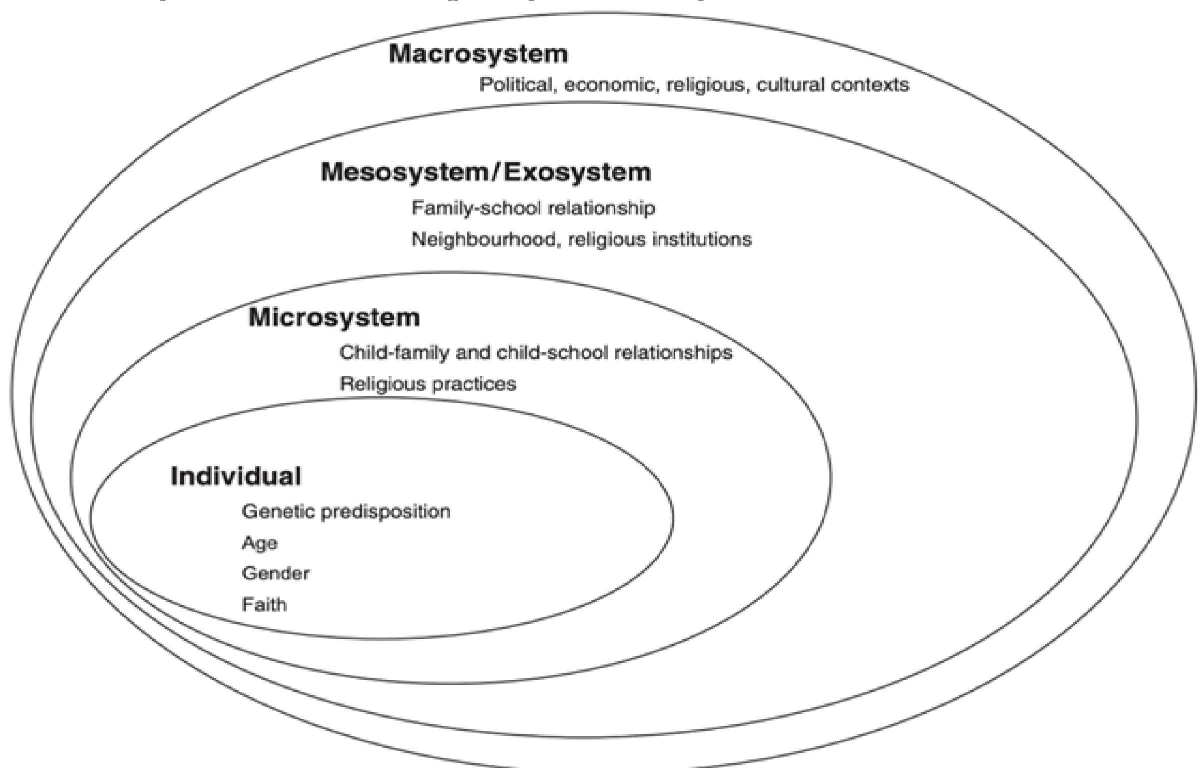
How conflict has affected children in Iraq has been examined in the academic literature to some extent, in part due to the history of conflict facing the country in recent decades. Issues noted have included reduced enrolment in education (especially for boys),[33] and negative impacts on physical development for children including their growth which was particularly pronounced in the most conflict-affected region.[34] In a study by Médecins Sans Frontières of 9,587 Iraqi children they supported in Iraq, mental health problems associated with armed conflict were the most common reason children sought care, with anxiety-related complaints (including PTSD-related symptoms) as the most prominent (38 percent).[35] Other key presentations for armed conflict-related issues included witnessing abuse, injury, or death; intentional psychological violence; abuse in detention; and deprivation and discrimination, all of which were uniquely impacted by the children's age and gender. 37.4 percent of children were assessed to have childhood mental disorders as impacted by war and violence.[36] Domestic discord and violence was also an important and common precipitating event for care.[37] Next door in Syria, a closely comparable region, recent research has also examined the impact of conflict and violent extremism on adolescents in NES. It noted that several topics impacted on youth lives including the 'normalisation' of violence, a worsening economic crisis and disrupted education (which limits options), a lack of trust in government and sense of marginalisation, frayed social cohesion, trauma, and a sense of uncertainty and diminished hope for the future.[38]

This research has been valuable for better understanding children's roles within armed groups and in ISIS in particular (especially the more militant roles they held), practical ongoing efforts to 'rehabilitate and reintegrate' ISIS-affiliated children, and experiences of conflict-affected children more generally. However, there is still a significant gap in research on children who come from ISIS-affiliated families more generally and what distinguishes children from these other categories. Based on the government of Iraq's commitment to return its citizens in ISIS-affiliated families from al-Hol camp, thousands of children will have to undergo some level of rehabilitation and reintegration based on this perceived affiliation. This mirrors a general approach by governments around the world who are also 'rehabilitating and reintegrating' these children from families affiliated with ISIS around the world. This article thus contributes to new knowledge on children affiliated to terrorist groups by further distinguishing this unique population through the case of Iraq.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

This analysis uses Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to guide its analysis of children from ISIS-affiliated families,[39] in part because Bronfenbrenner's model focuses on child development and can help avoid solely security-oriented assessments of children as described in the introduction. Development is defined as "the person's evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his relation to it, as well as the person's growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties."[40] Bronfenbrenner's approach simplistically identifies how a child exists in a "world of relationships, roles, activities, settings, all interconnected" and develops in this system as they grow up.[41] A child's development is viewed through different levels (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chrono-systems), the interrelationships between these levels, and how these interact. It also accounts for biological differences that could include age and gendered considerations, and the specific needs of children (e.g., physical or mental dis/abilities) in terms of how that affects the development of children throughout their lives, and how they interact with the environment around them (and how that environment interacts with them based on those features). This model can thus help assess in a structured manner how a child's life may be impacted at different levels by a family member's involvement in ISIS (see figure 1).

Figure 1 – Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory[42]



As Bronfenbrenner notes, "the ecological environment is conceived as extending far beyond the immediate situation directly affecting the developing person—the objects to which he responds or the people with whom he interacts on a face-to-face basis," that is, the microsystem of actors with which the child most regularly interacts. Of equal importance are "connections between other persons present in the setting, the nature of these links, and their indirect influence on the developing person through their effect on those who deal with him at first hand."[43] The microsystem is described as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal

relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics."[44] The mesosystem and exosystem focus on the interconnectedness between settings, "in which the developing person actually participates and those that he may never enter but in which events occur that affect what happens in the person's immediate environment."[45] Specifically the mesosystem "concerns the interaction of two or more settings of relevance to the developing child – between the child's family and school settings, or among the family system and the child's extended social network." The exosystem is "an extension of the mesosystem and includes societal structures, both formal and informal" which can include "government structures, major societal institutions, both economic and cultural, as well as informal concepts like the neighbourhood."[46] Finally, the macrosystem constitutes "the complex of nested, interconnected systems" and is "viewed as a manifestation of overarching patterns of ideology and organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture."[47] Bronfenbrenner notes,

> *By analyzing and comparing the micro-, meso-, and exosystems characterizing different social classes, ethnic and religious groups, or entire societies, it becomes possible to describe systematically and to distinguish the ecological properties of these larger social contexts as environments for human development.* [48]

This model supports a more systematic mapping and assessment of the environment of the life of a child on multiple levels, in a particular social context, and thus helps us assess how and where the development of a child may be impacted either positively or negatively by that environment. As Betancourt and Khan highlight in their use of this model in relation to children impacted by conflict,

> *War represents a fundamental alteration of the social ecology and infrastructure which supports child development in addition to risk of personal physical endangerment. Restoration of a damaged social ecology is fundamental to improving prevention and rehabilitative interventions for war-affected children.*[49]

Furthermore, the authors note that "Bronfenbrenner's classic ecological model of child development (1979) provides a central framework for analysing the interrelated settings and relationships involved in the psychosocial impact of armed conflict on children," and further "allows us to consider the role or status of children in their ecological context to assess opportunities and limitations inherent in working on their behalf."[50]

For the purposes of this article, the group being examined is comprised of children whose families have a perceived affiliation to ISIS in Iraq. These children are not only impacted by the conflict itself (which would mirror the situation of other war-affected children who experienced the conflict between 2014 and 2017), but they have the additional implications that come with their familial affiliation with ISIS (which shares some of the same features as child soldiers). Bronfenbrenner's model can help better map out this social ecological environment and highlight considerations relevant for their rehabilitation and reintegration both generally as a population, and also on an individual basis. This model is also already being used to assess

how the life of the child is impacted when a family member is involved in violent extremism in Europe,[51] and has also been used to look at youth radicalisation,[52] which encourages further exploration of the model for children in ISIS-affiliated families. It is also inter-disciplinary in its aims to highlight the important bridge between social science research, which focuses on the social and political features of children from ISIS-affiliated families, and research on childhood development, which informs these children's well-being and rehabilitation.

The Situation of ISIS-Affiliated Iraqi Children Today

With the incredibly large population that was forced to live under ISIS, as well as the significant numbers of Iraqis who participated in ISIS,[53] tens of thousands of Iraqis today are seen as affiliated with ISIS. The scale of this population is alarming. At one point immediately after ISIS was pushed out of Iraq, 19,000 persons (largely adult males) accused of links to ISIS and charged with terrorism-related offences were held in Iraqi prisons.[54] 3,000 Iraqis sit amongst prison populations next door in NES today.[55] A notable number of women and youth are in detention in both NES and Iraq on suspicion of terrorism-related offences. Figures from 2022 noted over 1,000 children are detained as ISIS suspects in Iraq.[56] Iraqi children also remain in detention in NES including some who are believed to have been involved in crimes, but who have not been charged with any crimes, and those forcibly removed and separated from their families in al-Hol camp when they reached adolescence.[57] There are also some very young children who are in custody with their imprisoned mothers in Iraq and Syria.[58] ISIS child soldiers are not the main focus of this article, but represent yet another important and linked population, where youth who have been involved in crimes should be addressed via juvenile justice principles which prioritises their rehabilitation and reintegration.[59] The findings from this analysis could be extended to consider their needs more directly, as well as (where applicable) issues related to their families who may today be viewed as ISIS-affiliated.

Some ISIS-members, or those suspected of having been with ISIS, may be in prison currently, or have spent some time in detention, even if they were not ultimately convicted of ISIS-affiliation, and are largely an adult male population. It is their family members who are most widely seen as ISIS-affiliated families. ISIS-affiliated families comprise a significant proportion of women and children and are largely in four positions today. First, they remain in camps in NES primarily al-Hol and al-Roj camps, similar to other non-Iraqis with perceived ISIS affiliation, and are anticipated to largely return to Iraq through Iraqi government-led, and internationally supported processes through the J1 Rehabilitation Centre in Ninewa in federal Iraq, which receives al-Hol returnees exclusively. J1 residents are generally viewed as not having had any active role within the group, nor have they faced any criminal charges if they are involved in formal return processes including rehabilitation and reintegration programs in J1. Regarding this group, between 2014 (when al-Hol camp opened) and 2021 when Iraqis started to be returned from NES, the Iraqi population in al-Hol peaked at 30,000 individual Iraqis. Two-thirds of these were children (20,000). Due to the ongoing dangers within the camp, in 2021 the government of Iraq started a repatriation process, and publicly declared it will bring all its citizen's home from al-Hol to Iraq.[60] Iraqis from al-Hol include those who were displaced prior to 2019,[61] and those who arrived in al-Hol after the battle to liberate Baghouz,[62] the last ISIS stronghold in Syria in 2019. As of August 2023, 5,565 individuals (1,383 households) have been

returned from al-Hol to J1. At J1, all residents – adults and children – undergo some level of 'rehabilitation' which largely focuses on physical and psychosocial support.

Second, ISIS-affiliated families are in other camps (alongside non-ISIS affiliated families) within Iraq which houses internally displaced persons (IDPs) including Khazar, Hassan sham U2 and U3, which are based in the Kurdish region of the country. Hassan sham U2 and U3 camps host 9,034 individual residents, of which 2,668 are females seventeen and under, and 1,695 are males seventeen and under (child total is almost 50 percent).[63] Hassan sham U3 is also unique in that it also has a population of 200 males who are youth (including some former child soldiers) and adults who have been detained and released/served their sentences but are unable to return to their communities for several reasons discussed later. Often, they cannot leave camps either due to a lack of documentation or not having government approval to leaving camps, despite a lack of clear legal basis to hold them in these camps. Jeddah 5 (J5) in federal Iraq previously had 3,953 residents—of which 1,275 were girls seventeen and under, and 1,257 boys were seventeen and under (child total is 64 percent)—but this was hastily closed by the Iraqi government in May 2023.[64]

Third, ISIS-affiliated families have returned to their original communities in Iraq of their own accord (including some who never left their communities), or fourth they have returned to a secondary location in Iraq when they could not return home. For children in the third and fourth categories, rehabilitation may be ongoing, but programming would largely focus on reintegration, though programming here would be less formal or prevalent than for the categories above. These second, third and fourth categories receive less attention and support due to the prioritisation of al-Hol returnees and international efforts to address perceived risks presented by that camp.

It is unclear how many of these ISIS-affiliated families (adults specifically) believe in ISIS ideology or support the group. These families can be understood as representing a spectrum that ranges from adults who are fully ideologically and physically separated from the group (including those who never had any engagement with, or support for, ISIS at all), to a minority who are highly ideologically committed, though who have not been charged with any offences. They also comprise families in different locations which have been affected by ISIS to differing extents, and families at different stages in this reintegration process. Nonetheless, they all share the same label as 'ISIS-affiliated' today.

While children from families associated with armed groups are not new, there are several features of the Iraq case study which make it particularly unique. First, the case load of ISIS affiliates is the largest in the world by a significant number, the majority of which are children.[65] Second, many of these children are returning to Iraq after travel to NES and thus additional legal/screening considerations and procedures are involved (e.g., verification/issuing of legal documentation, birth certificates, etc.). Though informal returns from NES have occurred, this al-Hol population is currently returning through a government-facilitated process and thus state actors have oversight and control over large segments of this work, providing an important opportunity to support children in the most targeted and effective way possible. Third, these children comprise infants and youth up to age eighteen, boys and girls — meaning

that children from all ages and levels of development must be accounted for in rehabilitation and reintegration, not just child soldiers or children affected by war. Fourth, these children and adults do not face criminal charges and have been cleared of any involvement in crimes, but nonetheless are still viewed uniquely by the community, often with suspicion, anger, and fear, or seen as 'risks' in a security sense.

The discussion will now outline some of the general recorded features of the lives of ISIS-affiliated children who have returned to (or are currently in) Iraq at the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-levels. These environmental considerations are specific to their familial affiliation with ISIS, and consider their status in their family life, education, camp and detention settings, media coverage, returning to their communities, and legal aspects. This article identifies the specific concerns raised in each setting which may impact on a child's development. This analysis does not determine the developmental outcomes anticipated by such factors, which are more personal and individualised to each child. However, in working with policy makers and practitioners today it is clear that each of these areas described has the potential to impact negatively on the development of the ISIS-affiliated and should thus be holistically accounted for by practitioners working with these populations in rehabilitation and reintegration work. These examples are not applicable to every child but are indicative of many of the most prominent challenges facing this population today.

Microsystem: Families and Education

While a strong body of literature has identified how a child's personal situation can be affected in conflict, for ISIS-affiliated families additional features can be found that can directly impact the relationships of children to immediate family members, and in their education. In this section the microsystems of family and education are examined.

The Family

Children's family lives are impacted in several ways when an immediate family member is involved with ISIS, including broken and divided families where an immediate male family member (often the father, or older male sibling) is in prison, dead, or missing, or family rejection from extended family (e.g., grandparents, aunts, etc.) due to ISIS affiliation.

Like the experiences of many families exposed to conflict (including those not affiliated with ISIS), ISIS-affiliated families may have experienced general insecurity, bombings and fighting, and a lack of food and water during the battle against ISIS. Children also frequently lacked basic security in home environments in some cases, where wartime stress and factors wreaked havoc in families. However, when an immediate family member was affiliated with ISIS, additional strains could be seen including family separation and the death of a family member (especially if family members were away fighting on behalf of the group).

The general structure of the family was noted to have changed significantly due to absent or missing male family members for both Iraqi and non-Iraqi ISIS-affiliated families. In al-Hol camp, approximately 90 percent of families are now female-headed households – a number much greater than the general population, even accounting for the high number of casualties

experienced in the most recent conflicts. In one camp, a case worker estimated that over half of the children had missing fathers due to their roles within ISIS.[66] As one camp manager noted, these included "widows, divorce cases, separations, and missing husbands" and for many of these women, it was due to their ISIS affiliation that they could not return home from IDP camps within Iraq.[67]

Frequent cases of broken and separated families, including cases of abandonment, were highlighted by case workers and families themselves. One case worker offered some illustrative examples. In one case, the child's father had been in ISIS and the mother divorced the husband and remarried. Yet, upon being remarried, the child could not accompany the mother to the new home and had to stay with grandparents due to the ISIS affiliation of their father. In another example, a father and male child had been involved in ISIS and the mother had returned to her parents' home, leaving other remaining children in the family at the camp. In another, an Iraqi woman had married a foreign man, had children with him, and now he was in prison but she would not pursue a divorce because she still loved him. Cases of children being left behind when mothers remarried were noted by other interviewees as well, which also included cases of children being left in orphanages, or with extended family.[68] One case worker referred to this situation as a loss of "responsibility and motherhood."[69] These children were noted to face significant stigma as the new spouses or other family members may not want to have ISIS-affiliated children in their homes, as they may face harassment or stigma in their communities.[70] Many of these female-headed households were also obliged to move in with relatives, who in many cases could not support them and their kids due to financial or spatial constraints.[71] Extended family members may also not want to care for them based on their family's ISIS affiliation, according to one case worker.[72] Families could also be divided in return processes. For returnees from al-Hol, several women in one focus group discussed having to return to Iraq without their husbands who remained in custody in NES.[73] The thousands of men in Iraqi prisons speak to the scale of this issue of family situation due to imprisonment.

Children in ISIS-affiliated families often faced many other concerns in this period including negligence and violence towards children (by parents), "Most of the different cases were negligence and violence," noted one case worker.[74] Family members involved in ISIS could also directly impact their families. An interviewee named Asma noted that when her husband joined ISIS, he became depressed, "we know this way ends in death or with getting arrested. There's no stability… we were unsafe." The husband's role in ISIS also caused strain with her parents – her dad told her "Don't let him go in that direction!"[75] A family member's affiliation to ISIS thus directly impacted family bonds with that person, including strains in both the immediate and extended family, and could affect all (Iraqi and non-Iraqi) affiliated families. This could also reflect strains faced by families who had family members in prison more generally.

Family dynamics could impact boys and men in particularly gendered ways as well. One case worker discussed that if a father joined ISIS, the sons may also be obliged to do so, "his father joined ISIS, so he automatically joined because he can't not follow his dad's direction/footsteps… this was normal."[76] The case worker further noted in cases where wives also joined, the whole family was more likely to join ISIS. Here, familial involvement with ISIS could mean direct involvement of the family in some cases.

Family separation was also commonly experienced by those who were young men or boys when ISIS came, and who are viewed (either correctly or incorrectly) as having had some role in the group. Hasam was sixteen when ISIS took over Mosul and discussed going to ISIS schools for a year and a half, but then left to escape to the Kurdish region. He was subsequently arrested at a checkpoint and spent two years in prison because they suspected him of being with ISIS. In this period, he was kept with adults, and he could not see his family. Today he is no longer in touch with his family, "they can't defend me… If my [brother] was to call me and someone finds out, they would take him."[77] Suhel also described how "we can't see our families. There is no future." When he joined ISIS as a teenager his family disowned him, and today they are still not in touch for fears of being pushed out of their neighbourhood.[78] This was a similar experience to that of Muhammad from Salah al-Din, who—though still a teenager—also left his region when ISIS came. As the elder male child in the family, he wanted to pursue education and crossed into Kirkuk. He also was arrested, but released without charge, and now he does not communicate with his family. This lack of communication with family was also highlighted in a focus group of men, as for males there was a concern that security forces would harass their families if they were still in contact.[79] Noor also confirmed that in cases where children were forced to join ISIS, "sometimes they would disown their children, or the boy would go and never come back."[80] This highlighted concerns of not only family separation, but rejection or loss of contact with families due to affiliation with ISIS, even in cases where family may help facilitate disengagement from the group or support their reintegration into society. The case of teenage boys also highlights gendered considerations, whereby these boys would have been more likely than girls to leave their family and in some cases were rejected by them or grew up in formative years without family structure or guidance.

Gendered dynamics were also unique to Iraqi women, as many women from ISIS-affiliated families were obliged to undergo *tabriya* – a tribal-based disavowal process by which a female publicly disavows male family members (often husbands) in order to be accepted back into a community and advance legal processes such as getting civil documentation. While this is not legally required and is viewed by many as a form of collective punishment, it is still a prominent practice and could cause severe tensions with extended family who may resent their male family member being labelled as ISIS. In some cases, *tabriya* was required to get a divorce, which may be necessary to obtain other legal documentation for families (e.g., national identification), even if that family member was not affiliated with ISIS.[81] This could cause significant distress for women who were viewed as 'ISIS-affiliated', especially in cases where their husbands may have in fact been killed by ISIS or who had no role with the group, where they would be compelled to accuse them of having been in ISIS in order to obtain a divorce certificate and subsequently gain their own legal documentation. "Sometimes in these cases, the in-laws [husband's parents] would say that she is trying to frame him, that he is part of ISIS", noted a case worker.[82] Such a process could also have significant implications for children who may thus be disavowed from their father publicly, and also identified publicly as belonging to an ISIS-affiliated family. It could also be quite expensive for families with few resources.[83] "I worked for a year and the money I made was all spent on transactions for [*tabriya*]" noted Asma.[84] *Tabriya* was thus another feature largely unique to ISIS-affiliated families and proved to have legal, social, and financial implications for the lives of children.

Education

For children generally across Iraq during the conflict, educational disruption was prevalent due to the presence of ISIS-controlled schools which followed ISIS curriculum, or where children were prevented from attending ISIS-run schools. However, in cases where families were affiliated with ISIS, educational implications could be more pronounced. For example, in some cases families may have intentionally sent their children to ISIS schools where they were taught ISIS curriculum and in some cases received training.[85] Asma noted of schools that ISIS took over, "they kicked girls out, and kept the boys in school" which suggested gendered implications for already poor educational opportunities in the conflict zone.[86] Educational disruption was also impacted if families moved during the conflict and were not able to access education (e.g. getting pushed back in the offensive against ISIS in cases of families travelling with male family members). In many cases, families simply prevented their children from attending ISIS-run schools in order to limit their exposure to the group.

Children from ISIS-affiliated families may also face longer periods of disrupted education. In camp settings in NES such as al-Hol some mothers had prohibited their children from going to school in the camp, which could be seen as *haram* in cases of ideologically committed families or prevented them from attending education for fear of having their family targeted by violent extremists in the camp. Education in camps was also generally viewed as limited. For example, a focus group of women noted in al-Hol "kids do nothing in school."[87] Educational experience could continue to be disrupted for returning Iraqis due to their absent documentation which prevents children from enrolling in schools. Missing documentation is a common issue with many ISIS-affiliated families who are unable to get national documentation, and thus cannot access education. One case worker noted she cannot register some children for school in the camp as "instructions came [from the government] to not let in any student that has a statement or any affiliation with ISIS," such as ISIS-issued birth certificates.[88] For those now above the age of eighteen who were not able to complete their education, they also may need to catch up, which could become more complex if they now had children of their own or could not access schools.[89]

Other children had untreated mental health concerns and were not deemed physically or mentally able to attend school. Asma noted of her children, "my daughters developed a mental condition. They would faint, scream, and I even applied for them to go to school since we got displaced, but the school refused their application because of their mental condition."[90] One case worker noted the following barriers that impacted children's return to, or participation in school, "PTSD, trauma, depression, isolation, behavioural problems, aggression, anger, male discrimination against female children, girls not allowed to finish school and child marriage being encouraged [where girls would drop out]."[91] This experience is similar to other children from conflict zones. As Betancourt and Khan note, "The quality and nature of relationships in more distal settings such as schools and neighbourhoods are also implicated in the mental health and adjustment of war-affected youth."[92] Yet, there were additional barriers due to accessing schools that also affected children from ISIS-affiliated families, including limits around documentation, and ideological principles imposed by the group such as gender inequality.

The issue of stigma was also particularly acute for children from families affiliated with ISIS in school settings. Interviewees noted that this stigmatisation could be faced from other children/their parents in educational settings, or by teachers or community members upset at 'ISIS-affiliated families'. Several interviewees noted that other families would not want their children to go to school with a child from an ISIS-affiliated family. There was a concern about bullying or other stigmatisation for children upon return to school, where children may face discrimination from peers. This may include false accusations being levelled against them, or fear of revenge acts against their families and children.[93]

Regardless of the reason their education was disrupted (often for multiple years), many ISIS-affiliated children had never attended a normal school, particularly if they were in camp settings for prolonged periods.[94] While some of these issues are shared to an extent by other non-ISIS affiliated war affected youth, such as mental health concerns or disrupted education, children from ISIS-affiliated families (including non-Iraqi affiliated families) could be more predisposed to additional concerns such as longer periods where they are deprived of education, longer periods of disrupted education, or stigmatisation and bullying at school by peers and staff due to their familial status. This puts them at a significant disadvantage to their peers. In cases in Iraq where families have no other source of income, children may be encouraged to drop out of education to engage in labour, or become child brides which could be further exacerbated by employment limitations for female-headed households.[95] Limiting children's access to education is one of the most consequential barriers they face today, and thus far there have been no active steps taken by the government of Iraq to address this.

Mesosystem and Exosystem: Camps and Detention, Media Coverage, and Communities Receiving ISIS-Affiliated Families

This section will discuss the broader issues at the level of the meso- and exosystem faced by children from ISIS-affiliated families, specifically camps and detention, media narratives discussing ISIS-affiliated families, and returning to communities.

Camps and Detention

As highlighted above, tens of thousands of ISIS-affiliated families remain in camps, and this environment impacts their lives directly. One of the key concerns relevant to ISIS-affiliated children today is the ongoing lack of physical security and stability faced by many, particularly those who remain in al-Hol camp (including non-Iraqis), which was recently described as "the most dangerous place in the world to be a child."[96] For example, in 2021, there were 85 crime-related deaths in the camp, and 30 attempted murders. In total, 79 children have died in the camp comprising 35 percent of the total deaths.[97] For Iraqi children returning to Iraq via J1, the safety situation greatly improves compared to that in al-Hol, but there are ongoing security concerns for children who return to their communities, including revenge attacks committed against the families.

For those who remain in camp settings in NES, particularly al-Hol, violent extremist ideology and actors are still active and present a direct risk factor to children who are forced to be in these environments. Children are also exposed to extreme violence, and experience malnutrition,

deprivation of education, and general instability.[98] This situation changes for Iraqis who return to Iraq, and particularly J1, where the improved quality of services and level of safety are considerable. One woman in a focus group noted that “J1 was 200 times better than al-Hol,” while another said, “we were so surprised at how the welcome was [to Iraq], it was excellent.” Other camps in the Kurdish region, while more secure than al-Hol, also faced issues related to electrical cuts which were tied to issues such as harassment, rape, and violence. Such camps also noted budgetary constraints and residents faced low living standards. Prolonged presence in camps limits children from returning to normal lives. The standard of the camp and its general security and services thus directly affect the lives of children.

For children seen as affiliated with ISIS in detention centres in NES and Iraq, including those who have not been charged or convicted of crimes, they continue to experience prolonged detention where they are often exposed to adult populations including dangerous criminals and terrorists, and have limited access to education, psycho-social support, and other rehabilitative programming. This detained youth population in particular has been the focus of the UN Special Rapporteur due to the grave situation that they face, and who has referred to these conditions as “abhorrent” and “which meet the threshold for torture and inhuman and degrading treatment under international law.”[99] The impacts on childhood development for this population cannot be understated.

Media Coverage

Generally, the media attention that has discussed ISIS-returnee families has been largely negative,[100] often citing security concerns from deeply impacted communities or references to families as ‘time bombs’.[101] In some cases, media interviews with returnees have also highlighted some returnees’ ongoing commitment and support to ISIS, only validating concerns by survivors of ISIS.[102] However, there has also been notable international praise for the government of Iraq for supporting this work,[103] and more neutral reporting which more generally discusses repatriations from al-Hol. More positive international media campaigns have been conducted by the Global Coalition Against Daesh and other international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme, the International Organisation for Migration, and Human Rights Watch, some of which are also produced in Arabic and accessible to Iraqi audiences.[104] How this media coverage, and strategic communications around ISIS-affiliated families, unfold will directly impact public attitudes towards these populations in Iraq and beyond, but already these children face a media burden based on their familial status which directly impact public perceptions of this population.

Returning to Communities

The process of reintegration and returning to communities that have been impacted by ISIS have direct implications for childhood development. For many ISIS-affiliated families returning to their communities, concerns largely focus on housing, employment opportunities, personal security, stigmatisation, and community acceptance or rejection. In one focus group, women described how “we don’t have houses – what do we do when we leave?” Another noted, “I have no housing to return to. Nobody to ask about me or visit me. My family and community have

rejected me." Another explained that her house is now occupied – how could she move home? Many women echoed the point that "documentation and housing are our biggest concern." For women who would return to their communities without a male family member, several noted they "needed a male protector."[105] Asma echoed this point, "the problem is I have no economic capital [to return to Mosul]."[106] Noor noted that she only wished "stigma would be removed" so that women and children could return to their communities.[107] Many houses were also destroyed in the conflict. For returnees who go through formal return channels, they require local sponsorship, and many noted they were unable to secure local sponsorship and thus had no route to return to their community, including some losing tribal protection due to their family's links to ISIS.

A significant number of returning ISIS-affiliated families are female-headed households due to the large numbers of adult males in prison, missing, or killed in the conflict. For many female-headed households then, how they are received or supported in the community directly impacts the status of the family and children. This was particularly highlighted in relation to access to housing, opportunities for paid employment, and tribal protection. In the context of Iraq, particularly where females had not worked before, the large number of female-headed households have significant implications for the living situation more generally of families where a male guardian could impact their ability to access housing and their return to communities. Skills and employment training are currently available to some women in camps in Iraq, most prominently J1, and in many cases, they have not been in paid employment before.

Concerns about revenge attacks, particularly targeted at male youth, were highlighted where these could be seen in relation to 'the sins of the father' (targeting the male youth in the absence of the father for ISIS-affiliated crimes committed). As Sarah explained, "my son is older, and if I were to return to my area they would take him and say that's revenge because of his father."[108] One case worker noted, "People in the neighbourhood would start talking about how he [the father] was with ISIS, and so they think the child is also with ISIS."[109] Sarah discussed fear of revenge killings if she moved back to Mosul with her children.[110] In local neighbourhoods, children were also noted to be from 'ISIS families', and non-ISIS affiliated families may restrict their children from playing or interacting with them. Male youth face particular hurdles to reintegration based on cultural perceptions of the roles of males and male youth that were seen during the conflict which particularly frame them as security risks.

Community perceptions and acceptance of returnees, including children, are crucial to their rehabilitation and reintegration. In cities that were impacted the most by ISIS and the war against it, public opinions have differed on whether women and minors should be approached as victims or as potential risks. There are also other concerns more generally around limited resources for victims of the conflict, particularly minorities who were targeted in the ISIS genocide and IDPs who still face significant challenges in the country. Here frustrations could be compounded by support for ISIS-affiliated family members of perpetrators if those who suffered at ISIS are not seen to receive sufficient support. An encouraging (though small-scale) UNDP community survey noted that communities are generally more willing to accept back women and children from ISIS-affiliated families, but noted that certain conditions must be met to do so including psychological rehabilitation (75 percent), disavowal of families in courts (68

percent), public apology (59 percent), and community service (22 percent) amongst others.[111] Yet, many ISIS-affiliated families still felt rejected by their communities even after going through these steps. Sarah, whose husband had joined ISIS and died, and who now headed her household with five children, described how "our conditions are hard. Children don't have paperwork and the government wants the divorce paper. And we are ready to divorce our husbands because they got onto that path, but we want a guarantee that if we would go into the centres they wouldn't talk about us or arrest us."[112]

Currently, some community-based programmes include Local Peace Committees which are comprised of local leaders who help facilitate the return and protection of returnees and have been running in Iraq since 2017. Similar Youth and Women's Peace Committees also exist. While such programmes have been viewed in positive terms, some reports have noted that Local Peace Agreements

> *helped communities move away from sweeping perceptions of collective guilt, [but] these security clearances still applied to the family unit, meaning that if the head of household failed the vetting process, his wife and children would similarly be without a clearance. Equally, women whose husbands were missing or imprisoned often struggled to obtain a security clearance.*[113]

How ISIS-affiliated families were generally received at the community level differed region to region and was based on highly individualised and localised factors. Their acceptance to be returned as well was significantly impacted by local perceptions of, and approaches to, ISIS-affiliated families and ultimately the children.[114] Both interviewees and other reports have generally expressed a desire for the Iraqi government to take responsibility for reintegration, with religious actors viewed as having a limited impact.[115] Notably, religious factors including religious leaders or tenets were not actively highlighted or discussed in relation to ISIS-affiliated families in this returns process.

While this article focuses on children from ISIS-affiliated families, this cannot be separated from the broader post-conflict context. Many Iraqis who suffered from the conflict have not been able to return home, and in 2022 Iraq had 1,177,234 internally displaced people and nearly five million IDP returnees.[116] These needs are particularly acute for minority groups who were targeted in a genocidal campaign by ISIS, including Yazidis, Christians, Turkmen, and other groups. Notably, there are also large numbers of female-headed households from non-ISIS-affiliated families in Iraq, and who are also in need of skills training and access to employment.[117] Furthermore, no formal transitional justice processes have been conducted in Iraq, and many war-affected Iraqis have not received compensation offered by the government, which has continued to impact communities who would be receiving ISIS-affiliated families. This return process and many of these features discussed are unique to Iraq, though similar concerns around stigmatisation, access to housing, community rejection, and challenges for female-headed households carry over to ISIS-affiliated families outside of Iraq.

Macrosystem: Political and Cultural Context

The macrosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner, includes customs and laws which do not directly interact with the child, but directly impact the life of the child. Here, the issue of documentation has been highlighted as one of — if not the biggest — barriers to the rehabilitation and reintegration of ISIS-affiliated youth. This is due to key factors including the lack of recognition of ISIS-issued documentation which affects children born under the 'caliphate', and an inability for many ISIS-affiliated families to meet the thresholds of documentation and evidence required to obtain national documentation for children such as birth certificates or national identification cards. This is particularly difficult if male family members are dead, missing, or in prison. This has the ripple effect of preventing children from being enrolled in school or having their families access government support and services including healthcare or pensions which could also have health and financial implications for children. Sarah, whose husband was a member of ISIS noted that, "those children if they grew up and were told that the government doesn't let you have an identification, I swear they will be monsters. What will they be? I swear they will take the same path and we don't want them to take the same path."[118] ISIS-issued documentation is not recognised in Iraq, impacting birth certificates, as well as marriage certificates. The issue of statelessness is also a significant ongoing concern with these children unless citizenship can be conferred. Such cases become more complex when the mothers were minors at the time of birth, where child marriages are not legally recognised, and in cases where women have had multiple children with multiple fathers (e.g., where men died, and women remarried, sometimes multiple times). The sustained government support for this process will also be crucial.

Iraq has also experienced sectarian violence in recent decades including the Iraq War, and under ISIS communities saw Sunnis who had joined ISIS target Shi'as and other minority ethnic groups. While sectarian tensions have reduced in recent years, increased levels of sectarian strain or violence could directly impact groups such as ISIS-affiliated families in the future.

Conclusion

This analysis has drawn on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems model to map out, examine, and describe the situation of children from ISIS-affiliated families in Iraq. Due to spatial constraints, this article could not discuss in detail all features of life for children in ISIS-affiliated families, but it has highlighted several key features that are currently affecting their lives. These features will continue to impact how they can grow up and develop within the country, and thus their future prospects as they become adults.

This article builds on and extends the existing body of relevant literature in several important ways. First, it examined and distinguished the broader category of children with a familial affiliation to ISIS, to child soldiers, or war-affected children. Similar to child soldiers, children from ISIS-affiliated families may have been exposed to ISIS ideology and indoctrination (such as at ISIS-run schools) and be required to participate in government-led interventions (particularly those from al-Hol). They may have also experienced community or political violence, communal or familial rejection, family loss and separation, educational disruption, mental health and physical health concerns, and domestic violence – features also shared with

war-affected children. These points all broadly extend to children from ISIS-affiliated families outside of Iraq as well.

However, children from ISIS-affiliated families in Iraq are distinct from child soldiers and war-affected children in several ways including their legal status, social and tribal status, and the length of time in which they may experience the shared issues discussed in the previous section. Legal barriers include their access to documentation, and issues such as *tabriya* that uniquely affect their female family members thus disavowing them from their male family members. They require sponsorship to return to their communities (often from tribal figures and other community leaders), which can be directly linked to protections afforded to them when they return. They also have limited freedom of movement in cases where they are restricted to camp settings, and an inability to freely return to their communities (though their families have not been charged with crimes) – points also shared with many non-Iraqi ISIS-affiliated families in camps in NES. There are related social considerations which include incredibly high numbers of female-headed households, tribal considerations, and concerns about revenge attacks directed at male youth. Several of the concerns described above could also be exacerbated or experienced for longer periods of time in the case of ISIS-affiliated children including family separation, disrupted education, and limited rehabilitative support for mental and physical health needs (especially the longer they are confined to camps like al-Hol) which can negatively impact child development.

Second, it highlighted the myriad of coordinated and interlinked responses that will be required to be tailored to meet their needs that are directly linked with the points above. This includes support on a personal level to deal with micro-level factors in the immediate life of the child, addressing psycho-social support, family, and educational considerations. They also include meso-, and exo-level considerations, such as those supporting communities receiving these families, reducing stigmatisation, improving housing and employment prospects for ISIS-affiliated families, media coverage, and strategic communications around ISIS-affiliated families. Macro-level considerations account for current legal barriers to documentation, sustained government support for this rehabilitation and reintegration process, and sectarian tensions in the country.

Each of these levels and their relevant considerations will have to be addressed for successful rehabilitation and reintegration of children. For example, a child returned to Iraq who cannot access documentation will not be able to catch up on education, nor integrate with peers in school settings. A child who receives sufficient psycho-social support will still be impacted if their family cannot access housing or employment, or if they face stigmatisation or violence upon returning to their community (especially if those communities themselves are still dealing with effects from the conflict). Thus, coordination and shared understanding of these related issues must be acknowledged and jointly addressed by all parties involved in these processes including government actors, international and domestic NGOs, and community leaders, amongst others. As one case worker, who had a child killed by ISIS, noted:

> *We need to work together, and the government needs to work and see these people as humans. Why should that person be blamed because of his father's or brother's crime, or any other family member? .... We should not let the government think of these people as ticking time bombs – that is the first thing. If these [people] are not treated humanely, have no rights, are treated as threats, they will become 'ticking time bombs.'*[119]

Using the systematic approach above can help inform a more holistic approach to working with affected children, which focuses first on their healthy development, and not their perceived security risk, and addresses their needs at different levels. The developmental risks faced by these children are likely to predispose them to disproportionately negative outcomes in relation to their peers, and directly impede their reintegration. These could be related to, for example, their healthy personal development, and factors that could make them more vulnerable to negative outcomes as they become adults. Opposingly, when these issues discussed are addressed and protective factors in their lives are enhanced, their chances to develop in healthy ways can increase dramatically.

This research also encourages more systematic assessment at each level of these features across families affiliated to terrorist groups internationally by researchers and actors working with this population to identify shared and distinct features on a country-by-country basis and identification of successful practices. Currently, both national and international actors are investing heavily into rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for ISIS-affiliated families around the world. In Iraq, international aid and development agencies are focusing largely on rehabilitation and reintegration support on individual and group levels for ISIS-affiliated families. Iraqi efforts on the national and regional level are commendable, but also differ region to region, and require more integrated coordination. Legal regimes around documentation or post-conflict support to affected communities can only be addressed by national government actors in Iraq, similar to issues such as *tabriya*. Unless the key factors relevant to rehabilitation and reintegration at each level are effectively coordinated and addressed by all actors, the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of ISIS-affiliated children will not be achieved.

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Endnotes

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68 Interview 12, Noor.

69 Interview 9, Nadja.

70 Interview 12, Noor.

71 Interview 13, Rana; Focus group, women.

72 Interview 11, Abu Jassim.

73 Focus group, women.

74 Interview 2, case worker.

75 Interview 1, Asma.

76 Interview 11, Abu Jassim.

77 Interview 4, Hasam. The author could not independently verify that no crimes had been committed by young men who spent time in prison, in which case they would be considered child soldiers. In Hassan sham camp this group of 200 males are largely viewed as having been child soldiers or some role with the group (even if they didn't commit a crime), or otherwise had joined with ISIS and almost all had spent time in prison. However, the vast majority of males had been released from prison, had no outstanding criminal charges against them, though could not return to their communities for fear of re-arrest or targeting if they were to leave the camp.

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80 Interview 12, Noor.

81 Interview 13, Rana.

82 Interview 10, Nadja.

83 Interview 13, Rana.

84 Interview 1, Asma.

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PT PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

Research Note

The War on Terror and the Caribbean

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Abstract: The Caribbean is profoundly under-represented in the prevailing scholarly literature on terrorism and counter-terrorism. Therefore, this research note provides a brief overview of the history of terrorism within the Caribbean context, presents a summary of the existing literature, and then examines the War on Terror's impact in the region. Drawing from a qualitative research study, the analysis concludes that the War on Terror has impacted the region in several ways. For example, countries in the region have implemented new anti-terrorism legislation; made amendments to their immigration systems; implemented counter-terrorism police units; and established a Joint Regional Communication Centre and an Advanced Passenger Information System. Overall, this research note intends to support and encourage more academic discourse regarding the War on Terror and its impact on the Caribbean region.

Keywords: War on Terror, Caribbean, history of terrorism, terrorism financing, anti-terrorism legislation, banking sector, immigration

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Introduction: A Brief History of Terrorism and the Caribbean

Caribbean leaders have long acknowledged that terrorism is a global issue and that no state or region is immune. They have often recognised and drawn attention to the potential threat international terrorism poses to the Caribbean, whether in terms of direct attacks or as a platform to launch attacks in other regions. For example, in her 2001 address to the United Nations General Assembly, Billie Miller—then-Deputy Prime Minister of Barbados—stated that "terrorism is a global phenomenon to which no country can consider itself immune."[1] Likewise, Elvin Nimrod—then-Minister of Foreign Affairs and Corporation of Grenada—stated in 2001 that Grenada had decided to suspend the Economic Citizenship Programme out of concern that terrorists might use the country's passport to engage in international terrorism.[2]

Between the years of 1968 and 2007, 11 percent of all terrorist incidents worldwide occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean.[3] Moreover, the Central American and Caribbean region recorded a total of 237 terrorism-related deaths since 2002, with eleven percent of those deaths occurring in 2019 alone.[4] While significantly higher numbers of terrorist attacks and deaths have occurred in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia, it has become clear that the Caribbean is no less vulnerable to terrorism, and remains especially susceptible to religiously motivated terrorism of Islamic nature. For example, research by Perry Stanislas and Kim Sadique discovered that Trinidad has become a breeding ground for religiously motivated violence and recruitment for ISIS in the Caribbean.[5]

It should also be noted that the Caribbean experienced a major terrorist attack by means of an airplane long before 11 September 2001. In 1972, the governments of Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago established diplomatic relations with Cuba, and these countries entered into a joint air services agreement together (despite America's disapproval, and in defiance of Organisation of American States sanctions).[6] This was met with outrage from anti-Castro forces, and on 6 October 1976, in an act of retaliation—as recounted by Dion Phillips—"a Cubana Airlines civilian jetliner, enroute on a scheduled flight from Guyana to Havana via Trinidad, Barbados, and Jamaica, exploded and crashed in the sea approximately ten minutes after departure from the Grantley Adams International Airport (then called Seawell) in Barbados, a result of bombs planted aboard by two members of the CORU (*Comando de Organizaciones Revolucionarias Unidas*), an anti-Castro terrorist group code-named El Condor."[7] This terrorist attack killed seventy-eight people and introduced the Caribbean nations to the politics of the Cold War.[8]

That same year, during what Peter Kornbluh refers to as "the bloody summer of anti-Castro violence in 1976,"[9] the Guyanese Embassy in Port of Spain, Trinidad was bombed, and the Soviet Union vessel *Dzrordano Bruno* came under attack by gunfire from a small boat while it was anchored just five miles from the Bahamas (luckily, no one was injured, and it was suspected that anti-Castro exiles were responsible for the attack, given that they were also responsible for previous attacks on Soviet ships).[10] In 1980, a separatist group calling themselves the Guadeloupe Liberation Army conducted a series of terrorist attacks, including one that used a twelve-pound time bomb hidden in a baggage locker to destroy the passenger terminal at

Guadeloupe Airport, and another in which gunmen wounded the “only white member of the City Council of Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe’s largest city,” triggering a campaign of violence that year.[11] The group claimed responsibility in a statement, and declared that they were starting a “‘campaign of harassment’ against French colonialism, warning all French living on the seven islands in the Caribbean to ‘pack their bags and leave before 31 December 1980’.”[12]

In 1983, the Haitian government newspaper *Le Nouveau Monde* was struck by a strong explosion, and a few days later an auto agency connected to the then-President Jean-Claude Duvalier family was bombed. No one claimed responsibility, but according to Edward Cody, Haitian officials at the time “added the blasts to a growing list of largely ineffectual attacks that nevertheless indicate new determination among those violently opposed to the government of President-for-Life Jean-Claude Duvalier.”[13] Meanwhile, both Haitian and US officials had attributed nearly a dozen previous acts of violence to two Miami-based exile groups.[14] In the same year, the Revolutionary Military Council’s assassination of Maurice Bishop, the former Grenadian Prime Minister (and leader of the People’s Revolutionary Government), would also be considered an act of repressive terrorism, as defined by Dion Phillips.[15]

In 1987, there were two separate bombings in the Dominican Republic, in commemoration of the 22nd anniversary of the April 1965 US invasion of Santo Domingo. A Mormon Church was bombed on 24 April and a bomb exploded against the perimeter wall of the Peace Corps Office on 20 April.[16] Anonymous telephone calls claimed that the Maximiliano Gomez Revolutionary Brigade was responsible for both attacks.[17] In 1990, Yasin Abu Bakr and a small religious group – Jamaat-al-Muslimeen – sought to overthrow the government of Trinidad and Tobago in a brief attempted coup that began on 27 July, holding the Trinidad government hostage for approximately six days before surrendering.[18] At the time, Yasin Abu Bakr perceived Trinidad to be a sort of dystopian society, an unjust society that was morally corrupted and being led by “evil men”, and thus he felt it was his solemn duty to charter a “new national direction inspired by the will of Allah.”[19]

On 20 June 1995, Trinidad and Tobago “experienced its first political assassination” when Selwyn Richardson, the former Attorney General and Minister of National Security, was shot and killed by unidentified assailants.[20] This has also been described by Dion Phillips as an act of political terrorism in the Caribbean.[21] In 1996, Cuban exiles Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch “claimed responsibility for terrorist actions against Cuba” on live television in Miami, “which at that stage involved the bombing of tourist hotels in Havana.”[22] On 5 September 1997, three hotels were bombed in the Cuban capital, and a young Italian tourist named Favio di Celmo was killed in one of the attacks.[23] On 11 July 2005, a bomb placed in a dustbin exploded on the corner of Frederick and Queen Streets in Port of Spain, Trinidad, injuring fourteen people (two critically).[24] In 2018, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS), with assistance from the US military, thwarted an attack following anti-terror raids on 8 February that resulted in the capture of four “high value targets.”[25] The acting Assistant Superintendent of the Corporate Communications Unit of TTPS Michael Jackman stated that the “police uncovered a threat to disrupt the Carnival activities and detained ‘several persons of interest’.”[26]

In addition to terrorist incidents within the Caribbean, there have also been terrorist attacks

and plots outside the region involving Caribbean nationals. For example, in 2007 a terrorist plot was uncovered in which the co-conspirators in a terrorist plot to blow up aviation fuel tanks at the John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York.[27] Two of those charged in the plot—Abdul Kadir and Adbel Nur—are from Guyana, and had ties to Islamic extremists in South America and the Caribbean, and another—Kareem Ibrahim—was a citizen from Trinidad and Tobago.[28] All three were detained in Trinidad and then extradited to the US in 2008.[29]

And in 2011, Shane Crawford—a well-known extremist who adopted the *nom de guerre* Abu Sa'd at-Trinidadi—was arrested along with several suspects on "suspicion of involvement in an alleged plot to assassinate the prime minister and cabinet ministers,"[30] and later became one of the first Trinidadian citizens who migrated to join the Islamic State in Syria.[31] In a lengthy interview in that group's *Dabiq* magazine, aimed at potential recruits and sympathisers, Crawford called upon Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago to use violence against his fellow citizens and to "terrify the disbelievers in their own homes and make their streets run with their blood."[32] According to at least one report, over 100 citizens from Trinidad and Tobago travelled to the Middle East to join the Islamic State "to fight and die," including Tariq Abdul Haqq, the country's most prominent boxer and a former Commonwealth Games medallist with Olympic aspirations.[33]

These and other examples (see Table 1) illustrate how terrorism has been a persistent threat against countries in the Caribbean region. And in several cases, we have also seen citizens from the region become involved in terrorist activity elsewhere in the world. Further, as noted in a recent Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Counter Terrorism Strategy Report, "the fact that by the start of 2018 more than 200 individuals from CARICOM States have travelled to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq demonstrates how the Region has been caught up in global terrorism."[34] Clearly, while the transnational terrorist networks al-Qaeda and Islamic State remain operational, they will continue to pose a serious threat to the international community, including the Caribbean. As such, efforts to combat these networks — particularly under the rubric of the War on Terrorism — are sure to have some impact on the Caribbean, which is the focus of the remaining sections of this research note.

Table 1: A Representative Sample of Terrorist Incidents and plots in the Caribbean, 1972–2022

Year	Terrorist Incident	Country Involved
1976	Bombing of the Cubana Airline	Barbados
1976	Bombing of the Guyanese Embassy	Trinidad and Tobago
1976	Attack of Soviet Union vessel Dzrordano Bruno	Bahamas
1980	Bombing at Guadeloupe Airport	Guadeloupe
1980	Attempted kidnapping of Jamaica Defence Force Chief of Staff & capture of the country's Prime Minister Michael Manley	Jamaica
1983	Government newspaper Le Nouveau Monde bombed	Haiti
1983	Assassination of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop	Grenada
1987	Bombing of the Mormon Church & Peace Corps Office	Dominican Republic
1990	Jamaat-al-Muslimeen attempted coup d'état	Trinidad
1995	Assassination of Attorney-General & Minister of National Security, Selwyn Richardson	Trinidad
1996	Bombing of tourist hotels	Cuba
2005	Dustbin bomb explosion in Port of Spain	Trinidad
2018	Failed plot Carnival terrorist attack	Trinidad
2015	Cyberterrorist attack on Jamaica Information Service (JIS)	Jamaica

The War on Terror and the Caribbean

Since 2001, the War on Terror has involved government, intelligence and military actions across a broad range of geographic regions, including the Caribbean.[35] Moreover, as research by Dion Phillips reveals, Caribbean countries have over the past two decades adopted numerous UN resolutions endorsing a broad range of recommendations with regard to combating terrorism.[36] They have also drafted and passed anti-terrorism legislation at local and national levels, enacted or updated "other security-related laws and practices on emigration and passports," and sought to tackle the complex links between terrorism, organised crime, drug networks, and illegal arms dealing within the Caribbean context (which some refer to as narco-terrorism).[37] Meanwhile, research by Björnehed describes how after the 11 September 2001 attacks, reports indicated that drug trafficking had increased by some twenty-five percent in the Caribbean, likely because national and international law enforcement had become pre-occupied with "countering potential terrorism threats."[38] Moreover, it was reported that 75 percent of US Coast Guard personnel and boats that had been designated for "drug interdiction were transferred to anti-terrorist patrols."[39]

The War on Terror also had implications for Muslim communities throughout the Caribbean, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago, where some Muslims were placed on a terrorist watchlist. Further, several Caribbean Salafi scholars have been detained around the globe.[40] While some studies have described how the War on Terrorism resulted in amendments to America's immigration policy (and an increase in deportation rates) that disproportionately targeted the Latino community,[41] research by Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo found that the Caribbean country of Jamaica has also been impacted by this post-2001 shift in policy.[42] However, not much has been written from the Caribbean standpoint in terms of amendments to the region's immigration policies within the context of the War on Terror. Moreover, the prevailing literature has not sufficiently examined other areas like the financial sector or the creation of certain

agencies and policy directives that were a direct (and, in some instances, an indirect) result of the War on Terror.

A Case Study of the War on Terror's Impact on the Caribbean

This research seeks to address a central question: In what ways has the Caribbean been impacted by the War on Terrorism? To address this question, a qualitative research case study was organised, with elite interviews as the method of data collection. Elite interviews are a type of focused interview that differs from other methods of interview protocols in several aspects, as they are typically an in-depth method for data collection in which the "elites" tend to offer "very rich data".[43] This is because elite interviews typically involve respondents who are revered in their respective fields and "who hold important social networks, social capital and strategic positions within social structures because they are better able to exert influence."[44] Hence, the elite interviewees were all experts with many years of experience in their respective fields, and exert a certain level of influence within their social structures. Moreover, as Natow has argued, "it is not uncommon to see elite interview studies with relatively small numbers of respondents."[45]

For this case study, a total of five participants were interviewed: Tonya Ayow, Assistant Director of the Caribbean Community Implementing Agency for Crime and Security; Anthony Clayton, a national security expert and Professor at the University of the West Indies, Mona; Professor Suzette Haughton, a regional security expert; Grenville Williams, Assistant Director of the Regional Security System for St Vincent and the Grenadines; and Her Excellency Inga Rhonda King, St Vincent and the Grenadines Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

These interviews revealed that the War on Terror has impacted the region in a several ways. Many of the counter-terrorism measures and policies that were created directly and indirectly as a result of the War on Terror include the Joint Regional Communication Centre created during the 2007 Cricket World Cup that was held in the Caribbean; re-orienting the work of Financial Intelligence Units and establishing a Caribbean Financial Task Force; passing anti-terrorism legislation, and particularly laws focused on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism; and establishing counter-terrorism units in local police forces.

Anti-Terrorism Legislation and the Financial Sector

Initially following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, a major concern that emerged in the Caribbean related to the region's willingness and capacity to combat terrorism effectively. Although the War on Terrorism was focused primarily on countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan for almost a decade, and particularly in response to a surge of terrorist activity in the Middle East (mostly in Syria and Iraq), North and West Africa (particularly Nigeria) and Southeast Asia, the Caribbean region was also expected to implement terrorism-related policies despite not experiencing the same level of terrorist incidents (or influx of counterterrorism resources) as those other regions. These policies included efforts to combat the financing of terrorism; freezing of assets; increased the monitoring of cargo trans-shipments; and implementation of more rigorous checks of passengers before they travelled from the region into the US Caribbean countries were also expected to increase law enforcement and surveillance within the region.

These and other efforts were aimed at enhancing the region's capacity to effectively respond to the real or perceived global terrorism threat.

The various US foreign policy initiatives aimed at combating international terrorism also directly and indirectly impacted the region's financial sector. As Ambassador King observed, "there have been unintended consequences of the War on Terror for Caribbean states, which have been felt in the offshore financial sector and loss of correspondent banking relationships."[46] Further, she noted, it became "mandatory" for Caribbean states to adopt certain standards and pass "anti-terrorism legislation" in order to avoid being blacklisted and have "correspondent banking relationships interrupted."[47] Even small island developing states such as St Vincent and the Grenadines had to put in place certain measures as well as adopt certain international standards to effectively detect and track terrorist financing. The country introduced domestic legislation as well as incorporated international conventions into its domestic laws — including, for example, UN Security Council Resolutions 1373, 2482, 2462, and 2396. As Ambassador King noted, countries also adopted the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, a unique global instrument to enhance national, regional, and international efforts to counter-terrorism, and especially to enhance their local capacity for tracking the financing of terrorism.[48]

The region's local capacity for tracking the financing of terrorism was further aided by the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), which became the "national/centralized agency for the collection, analysis and dissemination of suspicious transaction reports," according to Ambassador King.[49] In addition to the FIU, the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, and the Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) initiative were also established, conducting a variety of assessments on the measures that countries must take towards countering terrorism financing. As of today, the Global Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has outlined over forty recommendations to address the issue of terrorism financing in the Caribbean.

In addition, a sanctions list was created as a result of the War on Terror. As Mr. Williams explained, the sanctions list is published and sent out by a number of different bodies, and it is assessed to see whether any individuals on the list have undertaken any questionable transaction within the region's jurisdiction.[50] This also meant that Caribbean states had to implement anti-terrorism finance laws — such as (for example) the Anti-Terrorist Financing and Proliferation Act 2015, Cap 274 of the Revised Edition of the Laws of St Vincent and the Grenadines, in which section 3 defines terrorism for the purposes of that legislation. The Act first defines terrorism as the use or threat of action designed to influence the government of the state or any other country, international organisation, or to intimidate the public or a section of it, and the use or threat is made with a view to advance a political, racial, religious, or ideological cause. It also categorises terrorist financing offences into four broad categories: organising or directing others to commit a fund-raising offence; use and possession; funding arrangements; and money laundering. Likewise, Trinidad and Tobago's Terrorism Act defines a terrorist as someone who deliberately engages in terrorism-related activities, which includes contributing to terrorist acts, the financing of terrorism or the advancing of it, directly or indirectly.

Shifting of Resources

There was also a shift in resources that the Caribbean region typically receives from the US to assist in combating some of the region's primary security threats like illicit drug trafficking. For example, Professor Haughton candidly observed that, "I think one of the ways in which the war on terror impacted the Caribbean is a shifting of resources. Because less focus was placed on the region as a whole and more focus was placed on Arab countries to try and curb terrorism…. So, whereas you would find a lot of assistance coming into the Caribbean region, it is almost like after September 11, they diverted those assets to elsewhere."[51] Professor Haughton's observation is substantially corroborated by several research studies that have noted a similar shifting of resources in terms of national and international law enforcement (as well as US Coast Guard personnel) in the Caribbean from tackling drug trafficking to countering terrorism-related matters.[52]

Immigration and Border Security

The 11 September attacks, and subsequently the War on Terror, are also linked to certain amendments to the region's immigration and border security policies, including the establishment of sophisticated mechanisms that allowed for the collection of information of travellers to the region, information that was then queried against a national and regional database to detect and thwart any possible terrorist threat to the region. For example, as Mr. Williams observed, during the 2007 Cricket World Cup (which was held in the Caribbean), countries throughout the region saw

> *a lot of security protocols put in place to deal with the influx of persons that were expected. Out of it we have had quite a few benefits, one of those that I think is most beneficial is that we have something called the Joint Regional Communication Centre, and what it does is that it obtains information from all passengers coming into the region before they arrive… You get a very basic profile of the individual. And that is a lasting legacy from the Cricket World Cup, but it was because of concerns as related to terrorism.*[53]

Another mechanism that was put in place following the 11 September attacks was the Advance Passenger Information System that is managed by the Caribbean Community Implementing Agency for Crime and Security (CARICOM IMPACS), which allows for the collection of passenger information that can be checked against national regional databases. During her interview, Ms. Ayow explained how "We [CARICOM IMPACS] manage the Advance Passenger Information System (APIS) for the region. The fifteen member states allow us to collect the information, and when we collect the information, it is automatically sent to the state to whom it belongs. They query against their national databases. We query against regional and international databases where we have the permission to do so…and the region has been doing this since 2006."[54]

Regional Efforts

Furthermore, the Eastern Caribbean security organisation known as the Regional Security System (RSS)—in which most of its members are also Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), with the exception of Barbados and Guyana, who are CARICOM member states along with the OECS members—has also expanded its role to include combating terrorism among other traditional regional security issues, such as the illicit trafficking of drugs, people and

small arms. Ambassador King emphasised the important role of the RSS and its commitment to combating terrorism in the region, noting how that organisation has in its possession two “C26 aircrafts that have been properly reconfigured to collect information,” and that the “intel is shared with partners including the US, Britain, France, and the Netherlands, as all have overseas territories in the Caribbean.”[55] These policies and initiatives were a direct result of the War on Terror broader international efforts to combat terrorism.

Another example of how the War on Terror impacted the region involves the amendments made to the FIU, which was initially set up to deal with money laundering. As Mr. Williams noted, “the FIU now has broader responsibilities for dealing with terrorism regulation.”[56] For instance, the FIU can also act as one of the attorneys general in some cases, with authority to send out a list to financial institutions and other regulated bodies for them to determine whether an individual has engaged in any terrorism-related transactions within the region’s jurisdiction. Moreover, the RSS—which includes six OECS member states of Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia & St Vincent and The Grenadines, Guyana and Barbados—even had to make certain amendments to their organisation’s initial aims, objectives and responsibilities. According to Mr. Williams, “We [RSS] had to put mechanisms in place to identify the properties of those individuals (who engage or support terrorism) and freeze them, so that they cannot have access to them. We’ve had to put in place greater measures as it relates to our ports and point of entries. Terrorism has also now been put on the agenda of the regional security cluster of the organisation.”[57]

The War on Terror also indirectly changed certain policies in the Caribbean because the region had to upgrade its systems, including greater monitoring of its shipping systems and more stringent security measures at airport check-in stations. However, as Mr. Clayton noted, a majority of these security-related policies and measures were never implemented until a decade after the terrorist attack on 11 September 2001. “The policy responses did not happen for over 10 years after 9/11, and I know that because I was involved in drafting some of those policy responses. And until I did it, there was in many cases nothing in place.”[58] However, he could only speak in general terms about some of the policies that were implemented following the events of the 11 September and subsequently the War on Terror due to heightened sensitivity surrounding some of the actual operational measures that have been undertaken thus far. In addition to the many kinds of anti-terrorism legislation that were implemented as either a direct or indirect result of the war on terror, there were also practical implications in terms of the establishment of counter-terrorism units in local police forces in some Caribbean countries, including in the twin-island of Trinidad and Tobago.

Conclusion

Since the turn of the century, the nature of the terrorist threat in this region has shifted significantly, and as reflected in the insights and observations provided in these expert interviews, the War on Terror has impacted the region in several ways. Countries throughout the region have implemented new anti-terrorism legislation, made amendments to their immigration systems, upgraded security measures at their airports, and launched new counter-terrorism police units. They have adopted many recommendations of the FATF, reoriented their Financial Intelligence Units and established a Caribbean Financial Task Force. And the

governments of the Caribbean have collectively established a Joint Regional Communication Centre and an Advanced Passenger Information System that collect and analyse information from all passengers coming into the region before they arrive. These and other developments reflect the far-reaching and extensive impact that the War on Terrorism has had globally, even in countries that are sometimes overlooked when studying terrorism and counterterrorism.

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The Taliban

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Abstract: This bibliography contains journal articles, book chapters, books, edited volumes, theses, grey literature, bibliographies and other resources on the Taliban movement. While focusing on recent publications (up to August 2023) it is not limited to a particular time interval. Despite its length, this bibliography should not be considered as exhaustive. The literature has been retrieved by manually browsing more than 200 core and periphery sources in the field of Terrorism Studies. Additionally, full-text and reference retrieval systems have been employed to broaden the search.

Keywords: Bibliography, resources, literature, Taliban movement, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Quetta Shura, Afghanistan, Pakistan, TTP

NB: All websites were last visited on 20.08.2023. For an inventory of previous bibliographies, see: https://archive.org/details/terrorism-research-bibliographies

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Judith Tinnes has a background in Information Science. Dr Tinnes works for the Leibniz Institute for Psychology (ZPID) in an open-access publishing programme for scholarly journals. In addition, she serves as Information Resources Editor to 'Perspectives on Terrorism'. In her editorial role, she regularly compiles bibliographies and other resources for Terrorism Research and runs the execution monitoring project 'Counting Lives Lost' (CLL).

PT
PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

Book Review

A Woman's Place: US Counterterrorism Since 9/11

Joana Cook

Reviewed by Alex P. Schmid

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Based on the author's doctoral dissertation, this volume is a pioneering and original analysis of the role of women as intelligence agents, partners, and targets in the US war on terrorism. It is the result of a discourse analysis of more than 500, mainly American, open-source policy and strategy documents, as well as nearly 40 primary source interviews the author conducted, including one with General David Petraeus, the former Director of the CIA and commander of the International Security Assistance Force and commander of US Forces – Afghanistan. As the author explains, she sought to "....investigate how, where and why discourses and practices related to women became visible, and what implications these had" (p. 45). It covers the period between 2001 and 2019, and analyses how women were perceived in seven ways, namely as: (1) security practitioners; (2) in their role in conflict prevention, reconciliation, and reconstruction; (3) in terms of female rights, empowerment, and equality; (4) as members of the public; (5) in the private/domestic sphere; (6) in terms of victimhood; and lastly (7) as terrorist actors (p. 23). The perspectives discussed are those of US policy makers and to a lesser extent, those of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, who both had their own interpretations of women's "rights" and "empowerment" (p. 289).

The book has six chapters. In the first, the author reviews the literature on the roles of women in peace and security, including in feminist security studies, and in terrorism studies. The second chapter explores the discourses of the Bush and Obama administrations in relation to women and counter-terrorism. This is followed by three chapters exploring in greater depth the discourses of the US Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the US Agency for International Development. In the concluding chapter, the author looks at the first two years of the Trump administration, with a particular focus on the security situation it encountered (and helped to create) in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan.

As the US military efforts in the post-9/11 Global War on Terror ran into difficulties, calls for a "whole-of-government" (and, later, in some countries, a "whole-of-society") approach to counter-terrorism (CT) opened new spaces for women. However, it also securitised their role in countering terrorism, e.g. in CT's softer version of countering violent extremism (CVE). This relative empowerment of women in CT had, however, as Joana Cook notes, on page 79, its counterpart in the growing role of women as terrorist actors, including in jihadist suicide operations (with some women carrying children with them as they exploded their belts (p. 395). Her discussion of the role of female fighters for the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and IS – while a minor theme of the book – contributes to making this a comprehensive and innovative work. We learn, for instance, that there were "....indications that British women were involved in running brothels for ISIS fighters" (p.351). Another minor, but fascinating theme in Joana Cook's book is the (limited) impact of the United Nations, especially of UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on 'Women, Peace and Security' which had recognised "women and gender as a security issue" (p.5 and p. 280).

As the author describes US counter-terrorism efforts, the reader is continuously made aware of the divergences between declaratory government policies and actual outcomes. Long quotes of good and not-so-good intentions by US policymakers are contrasted with often miserable results, especially under and after President Trump, whose bombastic rhetoric looks even more hollow in the light of the catastrophe which befell Afghanistan in the aftermath of the US

mil-tary withdrawal and which his policies helped to prepare. Since the Taliban took over the country in August 2021, A Woman's Place highlights how the country has been brought back to the pre-9/11 situation, despite various American aid programmes in Afghanistan amounting to US$132 billion (p. 390) (more than the highly successful post-World War II Marshall Plan's aid to Europe!) – which, inter alia, had also aimed at giving women a greater say in society.

Joana Cook's book is meticulously documented and written in an engaging style, filling a void in our knowledge on America's war on terrorism. The author is a Senior Project Manager at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) in the Hague and Co-Editor of the ICCT journal. She is also an Assistant Professor of Terrorism and Political Violence in the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs, Leiden University.

Alex P. Schmid is a Co-Editor of Perspectives on Terrorism.

PT PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

Book Review

La polizia della storia, La fabbrica delle fake news nell'affaire Moro [Policing the Narrative, the Fabrication of Fake News in the Moro Affair]

Paolo Persichetti

Reviewed by Marco Gabbas

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The history of left-wing political violence in Cold War Western Europe has been widely studied. Among West European countries, the Italian case stands out. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Italy saw levels of political violence unparalleled in Continental Europe in terms of length and intensity. The Italian case also stands out because left-wing armed groups did not act out of nationalist grievances, as was the case in Northern Ireland or in the Basque Country. Though left-wing terrorism de facto ended in the 1980s (except for a short-lived comeback in the early 2000s), this traumatic past still affects present-day Italian cultural and political life. The Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse, or BR) were the most long-lived, professional, and dangerous armed group. They are mostly famous because of the 1978 abduction and the killing of Aldo Moro, one of the most important Italian politicians of the time. In recent years, several books on the BR have been published which take advantage of newly declassified sources in state archives and oral histories told by protagonists and witnesses of those events. Apart from Marco Clementi, Elisa Santalena, Matteo Antonio Albanese, Gianremo Armeni, and Vladimiro Satta, Paolo Persichetti has certainly been one of the most prolific and active researchers, also through his blog Insorgenze.net. Persichetti's past, however, has often been the subject of criticism. In fact, Persichetti does not hide that he himself entered the BR in 1986. After fully serving a long prison sentence, Persichetti became a researcher and a historian of the BR.

The views Persichetti expresses in his publications, however, are not appreciated by Italian authorities, who in June 2021 confiscated his digital archive and accused him of belonging to a "subversive association with terroristic goals, active from December 2015" (p. 11). Persichetti wrote this book to tell his version of the facts and to reflect on the numerous conspiracy theories which have always lingered around the Moro case. His monograph is divided into seven chapters. While the first four chapters tell the story of the recent accusations against its author, the last three retell the history of Moro's abduction, add new details, and reflect on the reasons for the persistent conspiratorial views on the topic. The author's sources of evidence are recent secondary literature, the press of the time, sources of law-enforcing agencies and of the judiciary, declassified state archival sources, documents of relevant parliamentary commissions, memoirs, and oral history. This review focuses on the last three chapters.

In chapter five, the author retells the dynamics of Moro's abduction, adding new details. Remarkably, in November 1977 (not long before he was abducted in March 1978), Moro asked for the CIA's help to fight Italian left-wing terrorism. He told the American ambassador in Italy, Richard Gardner, that the Italian armed struggle was "probably supported by the East, possibly by Czechoslovakia." Moreover, he thought that phenomena in Germany and in Italy were "deeply linked" and had one common goal, "to undermine democratic societies" (p. 53). Moro also thought that left-wing armed struggle would indirectly strengthen the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, or PCI). The PCI was opposed to armed struggle, was gaining votes, and had a good chance to enter government precisely because of its stabilising agenda.

In chapters six and seven, Persichetti dissects disinformation about the Moro case. The recurrence of terrorism-related legal actions (even though the era of political violence had ended decades ago) is likely related to the uneasy relationship which a number of Italian institutions, political parties, and a large part of the public opinion have to those so-called years of lead (anni di piombo). Moro's abduction and death have been thoroughly investigated, and all those

responsible were sentenced to long prison terms (some of them are still serving life sentences). It is clear beyond any reasonable doubt that the Moro operation was planned and conducted by the Red Brigades alone. There is no credible evidence that in this or other actions, the BR were inspired, led, or guided by the Italian police or the secret services; by the CIA, or the KGB, or by the Italian mafia; that the BR received military training in Czechoslovakia; or that Moro's death was facilitated by the underground actions of members of Moro's own party, the Christian Democracy (Democrazia Cristiana, or DC). Yet, these and many more conspiracy theories have flourished over the years and show no sign of abating. As the author lucidly explains, conspiracy theories are often a psychological reaction to real traumas which cannot be solved. The obsessive search for external "puppeteers" of the BR (or of other similar organisations) has largely replaced the study of the political, social, and cultural context in which they could emerge and flourish. In fact, an organisation which boasted thousands of members could not come out of the blue. Instead, the BR were born as a hyper-extremist and relatively small wing of the larger waves of political radicalism which had swept Italy since the 1960s.

One myth about the BR and similar organisations is that their members were spoiled children of the Italian bourgeoisie who "played revolution." In reality, Persichetti shows that the BR were born in the large factory towns of Northern Italy, and that many of their members came from the working class. This also explains why, at the beginning, it was very difficult for the Italian state to gauge their activities in Italian factories. Persichetti claims that the BR's activities were facilitated by what the British scholar E.P. Thompson called "workers' opacity", that is, a sort of natural working-class resistance to any outside interference.

While not all readers will agree with Persichetti's interpretation of Italian political violence, his book is important because it poses questions which transcend the Italian national context. Do the powers to be have a monopoly on historical memory and research? Do they have the right to sabotage independent research which is not in line with the official "truth"? Where will this state interference stop? Hopefully, Persichetti's book can foster a scholarly and political debate on such issues.

Marco Gabbas is affiliated with the Central European University (CEU) and the Invisible University for Ukraine (IUfU), which is a section within the CEU, located in Budapest and Vienna.

PT PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

Bookshelf

Counter-Terrorism Bookshelf: Ten Books on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism-Related Subjects

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai*

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Harrison Akins, The Terrorism Trap: How the War on Terror Escalates Violence in America's Partner States (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2023), 360 pp., US$140.00 [Hardcover], US$35.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-2312-0987-8.

Based on his doctoral dissertation, the author argues that the US government's counter-terrorism campaigns overseas since 9/11, totaling some US$6 trillion (p. 2), have failed to stem the tide of terrorist insurgencies against those countries where groups such as al-Qaida, the Taliban, and the Islamic State mainly operate. The author applies statistical analysis from several terrorist incident databases to claim that the US government's counter-terrorism campaigns ended up increasing the rate and impact of terrorism among the partner states where it intervened in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Mali, Egypt, and Yemen. While this claim is valid, the author ends up weakening his argument that this is mainly the US government's fault as he correctly observes that "many of these relatively weak governments [where the US intervened militarily] lacked the capacity to provide widespread government services, withstand internal challenges to their authority, or consolidate broadly recognized internal political legitimacy" (p. 11). As a result, the author concludes, it is necessary "to understand how the actions of America's partner states changed local conflict environments and thereby shaped the motivations, decisions, and actions of various terrorist groups" (p. 207). Although not stated explicitly by the author, one of the lessons derived from his case studies is for the US government to beware of intervening in terrorist conflicts overseas where the local governments are incapable of resolving their internal conflicts, no matter what the US counter-terrorism campaigns attempt to achieve—such as in Afghanistan, when the US' military and civilian personnel were evacuated so precipitously in August 2021 as the Taliban took over the country. The author is a political scientist and writer based in Washington, DC.

Stephen Chan, Spear to the West: Thought and Recruitment in Violent Jihadism (London, England, UK: C. Hurst & Co, Ltd., 2019), 176 pp., US$19.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-7873-8130-8.

An insightful and concise account of the ideological foundations proliferating online that inspire adherents worldwide to join jihadist terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State. The author argues that effective counter-narratives are required to reduce the appeal of the violent jihadi ideologies that serve to recruit alienated Muslim youth to such extremist groups. Such a counter-narrative, the author recommends, "must seek to understand Islam, but it must seek to engage with it in precisely the modern, visual, historically referential but deep manner of the jihadist recruiters" (p. 152). The author was Foundation Dean at SOAS, University of London, England, where he holds the Chair in World Politics.

Matthew Carr, The Infernal Machine: An Alternative History of Terrorism (London, England, UK: C. Hurst & Co, Ltd., 2011), 416 pp., US$27.30 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-8490-0408-8.

Although this book was published more than a decade ago, it still deserves attention for its comprehensive and sweeping account of the history and evolution of modern terrorism, beginning with what is considered the first historical wave of terrorism when the People's

Will assassinated the Russian Tsar Alexander II in 1881. Since then, the author argues—and especially in the aftermath of 9/11—the hard-liners in George W. Bush's administration failed to heed what is considered an effective counter-terrorism strategy: defeating an insurgency by eliminating the armed combatants and reducing or undermining "the political legitimacy and support that enables such movements to thrive" (p. xiii). Instead, the author points out, "the United States repeatedly took actions that seemed to bear out the worst accusations of its enemies, whether it was the invasion of Iraq, the Abu Ghraib interrogations or its unqualified support for most of Israel's counter-terrorism policies (p. xiii). For terrorist adversaries, including al-Qaida, the author argues that such coercive government measures "opened new 'fields of jihad' through which to rally Muslims behind its banner of heroic global violence" (p. xiii). With these and other insights, Mr. Carr's account of the components of effectiveness and ineffectiveness in governments' counter-terrorism campaigns, especially against Islamic terrorist groups and the movements that support them, deserves to be read. The author is a British writer, broadcaster, and journalist who has reported on a number of violent conflicts.

Stephen Coulthart, Michael Landon-Murray, and Damien Van Puyvelde (Eds.), Researching National Security Intelligence: Multidisciplinary Approaches (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 272 pp., US$128.95 [Hardcover], US$42.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-6261-6704-9.

The contributors to this important edited volume utilise multidisciplinary methods and empirical approaches to examine policy-relevant research in intelligence studies. In particular, they use qualitative interviews, behavioural observation, decision science, as well as theories from public administration as well as organisational and, communications studies. Of special interest to the discipline of terrorism and counter-terrorism studies are discussions of the relationship between research on terrorism and intelligence (pp. 11-12, 18), the types of messages that are effective in countering extremist beliefs to reduce violent behaviour (p. 64), the use of evidence-based interrogation techniques against individuals suspected of links to terrorism (pp. 66-67), and the components required for effective counter-terrorism analysis and action. (p. 90). In the concluding chapter, the editors list questions to ponder, such as how intelligence scholars can gather more diverse sources of evidence, how disciplinary perspectives can be integrated into intelligence scholarship, whether intelligence scholarship influences policy and practice, and what the trade-offs are between academic expertise and practical experience (pp. 226-232). Stephen Coulthart is an Assistant Professor of Security Studies at the National Security Studies Institute at the University of Texas at El Paso. Michael Landon-Murray is an Assistant Professor in the School of Public Affairs (SPA) at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. Damien Van Puyvelde is a lecturer in intelligence and international security at University of Glasgow.

Lizzie Dearden, Plotters: The UK Terrorists Who Failed (London, England, UK: Hurst Publishers; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023), 272 pp., US$34.95 [Hardcover], US$34.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-7873-8929-8.

A fascinating and important account of an often-overlooked component in terrorism: the large rate of failed plots by terrorist lone actors, as well as groups for various reasons. With the UK as her case study, the author—a veteran investigative journalist and The Independent's

Home Affairs Editor—discusses how the country's Security Services have attempted to counter an estimated 3,000 violent extremists, including jihadists, far-right extremists, and other ideological types, from carrying out their violent attacks. Among her findings are that from 2017 to 2022, foiled plots accounted for more than twice the number of successful attacks (which are capsule described in the book's appendix). In the conclusion, the author points out that the security services are concerned about "new types of terror attacks, by new groups of plotters…" (p. 189); the future "will be driven by online radicalization" (p. 190); terrorists are "wise to the risk" of being detected by "undercover agents and security monitoring" (p. 190); and gaming platforms are playing "a greater role in future extreme right-wing terrorism" (p. 192). The author also suggests that terrorists "are set to move even further away from involvement with or direct affiliation to groups" (p. 192). The author's discussion of plots that were foiled by the UK security services, and the lessons learned from thwarting them, make this book an indispensable resource for counter-terrorism analysts and action officers.

Tore Hamming, Jihadi Politics: The Global Jihadi Civil War, 2014-2019 (London, England, UK/New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023), 440 pp., US$57.75 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-1976-8556-3.

Building on the author's doctoral dissertation, this is a comprehensive, highly detailed, and authoritative account of a significant period of internecine conflict in the global jihadi movement (2014-2019), which has set the stage for the current state and future evolution of jihadist terrorist groups and their supporting movements around the world. As the author explains, the book "covers the intra-group period leading up to the split between al-Qaida and its Iraqi affiliate (1999-2013), the split itself (2014) and the ensuing period of inter-group contestation and infighting (2014-19)" (p. 3). It is significant, he adds, because "it also involved two episodes of organisational division, an escalation from inter-group contestation to infighting, and movement fragmentation and polarisation" (p. 3). In the insightful conclusion, the author discusses the recommendations by leading jihadi ideologues on the need for the Sunni Jihadi Movement to structurally redefine the jihadi project, with groups such as al-Qaida and the Islamic State becoming "superfluous" and needing to overcome religious rigidity by being "replaced by supra-group institutional networks to manage military [and political – JS] campaigns" (p. 399). The author is Director of Refslund Analytics, and a non-resident fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College London.

Leonie B. Jackson, The Monstrous and the Vulnerable: Framing British Jihadi Brides (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), 322 pp., US$44.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-1976-4733-2.

This is an important and disturbing account of the estimated 150 British women who left the UK around mid-2014 to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. During this period, these women joined more than 700 British men who had joined the Islamic State in the two countries. Known as 'jihadi brides', they heeded the call of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of the Islamic State, for Muslims around the world to migrate there, with the men recruited to fight and the women to serve as brides. As the author explains, drawing on UK newspaper articles, the book "traces the media fascination with 'jihadi brides' by analysing the representation of high-profile women

who left the UK for IS territory" (pp. 5-6). Ten British women are profiled in the author's representative sample (in terms of their age, ethnicity, and diverse background). The profiles of these women are clearly written and fascinating. The author's findings, however, are written in overly academic jargon. In one example, she writes, "In deconstructing the representation of these women, this book has attempted to disentangle some of these binaries [i.e., monstrous/ vulnerable] and the narratives that sustained them" (p. 227). Despite such jargon, this is a valuable contribution to the literature on the roles of women in terrorism. The author is a Senior Lecturer in International Relations at Northumbria University.

Rita Katz, Saints and Soldiers: Inside Internet-Age Terrorism, From Syria to the Capitol Siege (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2022), 368 pp., US$30.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-2312-0350-0.

This is a highly informed account of a new generation of domestic United States terrorist groups and lone actors—whether jihadi, far-right wing extremists, or other types of conspiracists, such as QAnon—who, as the author explains, exist almost entirely on the internet. The significance of the extremist online cultures created by these movements, helps, according to the author, to create the current terrorist environment and influence how they engage in "real world" violent attacks. Although one might argue that significant far-right terrorist groups such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers also operate on the ground (while remaining active in cyberspace), the book contains a wealth of investigatory-type information that the SITE Intelligence Group has compiled as part of its consulting work for government, law enforcement, and corporate clients, making it a valuable resource for academics and other researchers. The author is the founder and executive director of the SITE Intelligence Group.

Jack McDonald, Enemies Known: Targeted Killings in America's Transnational War (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 256 pp., US$ 29.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-1906-8307-8.

This is an interesting and provocative account of whether targeted killings of terrorist adversaries, primarily by the US government, are effective by being "precise, useful and legal" or "excessive, useless and illegal" (p. vii). The discussion also explores "the role that law plays in the constitution of war and the way it is waged" (p. viii). These issues are examined within the overall context of targeted killings, especially via weaponised drones, which require "methods of warfare and capabilities that give decision-makers considerable reach, conducted in secret." But at the same time, the author adds, "how can accountability mechanisms function in this context?" (p. 240). To remedy such dilemmas, the author recommends greater transparency by "publishing policy guidance and the frameworks of legal opinions regarding the right of the executive branch of government to use force" in the form of targeted killings (p. 251). The author is a Research Asociate and Teaching Fellow at the Centre for Science and Security Studies, in the Department of War Studies, King's College London.

Chris Millington, The Invention of Terrorism in France, 1904-1939 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023), 304 pp., US$105.00 [Hardcover], US$35.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-5036-3675-0.

This is an interesting and extensively researched account of an important period of terrorism in French history, during what David Rapoport has conceptualised as the second half of the first historical wave of modern terrorism (1900-1920) and the first half of the second historical wave (1920-1940). What is especially interesting are the roles of a variety of terrorist actors operating in France, ranging from exiled Russian anarchists to French fascists, far-left extremists, and spillovers into France from the Spanish Civil War. As a case study, this book offers an important contribution to understanding how historical antecedents during the French Revolution in the late 18th century laid the foundation for later forms of terrorism in the country. The author is a Reader in Modern European History at Manchester Metropolitan University, England.

Joshua Sinai, is the Book Reviews Editor of Perspectives on Terrorism.

TRI Thesis Award Winner Announcement

Finalists and Winner of the Award Competition of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI) for the Best Doctoral Dissertation on Terrorism- and Counter-Terrorism completed in 2021 or 2022.

The mission of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI) is to "Enhance Security through Collaborative Research". Beginning in 2014, in support of this mission, TRI has organised a competition and award for the 'Best Doctoral Dissertation on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism', meant for young scholars who have recently completed their doctorate at an academic institution.

For this year's competition, a jury of five scholars evaluated doctoral theses completed and successfully defended during the year 2021 or 2022, which were submitted to this competition by either the authors or their academic supervisors. The members of this jury are:

- *Dr Clark McCauley* (Research Professor, Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, USA),
- *Dr Rasmi Singh* (Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations of the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais, Brazil),
- *Dr Anneli Botha* (Extraordinary Professor, North West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa),
- *Dr James J.F. Forest* (Professor, School of Criminology & Justice Studies, University of Massachusetts Lowell, USA) and
- *Dr Alex P. Schmid* (Chairman, TRI Award Jury and Director, Terrorism Research Initiative)

The jury utilised a standard set of criteria to assess the quality of the submissions we received. These included whether or not the thesis under consideration was the product of in-depth research, whether it showed originality in terms of introducing new data, theory or methodology, and whether it showed novelty/uniqueness in its findings.
From the doctoral theses that were submitted and/or defended in 2021 and 2022 at academic institutions, the jury identified, after several rounds of deliberations, the following authors and theses as finalists:

- *Dr Devorah Margolin*. How Do Governing Violent Islamist Organizations Conceptualize the Roles of Women. London: University College, 2022.
- *Dr Levi J. West.* Violent Propaganda: Violence, Communication and Technology – The Strategic Logic of Terrorism. Melbourne: Victoria University, 2022.
- *Dr Bettina Rottweiler.* Risk- and Preventive Factors for Violent Extremist Intentions. London: University College, 2021.
- *Dr Marnie Lloydd.* Persisting Tensions: The Framing of International Debates on Foreign Fighting. Melbourne: Melbourne University, 2021.

While all four finalists produced remarkable theses, the jury concluded in the end that
Dr. Levi J. West (Lecturer Terrorism Studies, Australian Graduate School of Policing, Charles Sturt University) should be the WINNER of the 2023 TRI Thesis Award for the Best Doctoral Dissertation on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism.

His thesis, drawing to a remarkable extent on primary source material for its three paradigmatic case studies, revisited the theoretical approaches of older seminal terrorism studies and developed a generalisable framework for understanding the strategic effects of terrorism.

The chairman and the jury members of the TRI Thesis Award congratulate Dr West for this outstanding achievement.

Dr West will be invited to prepare an article based on his thesis for publication in the December 2023 issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*. In addition, he will receive a monetary award of US $1,000, provided by the Terrorism Research Initiative (Vienna) and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (The Hague).

The chairman and the jury members of the TRI Thesis Award also congratulate the authors of the other three finalists chosen in this competition, who are listed in alphabetical (i.e. unranked) order:

- *Dr Marnie Lloydd* (currently a Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Law at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand);
- *Dr Devorah Margolin* (currently the Blumenstein-Rosenbloom Fellow at The Washington Institute and an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University); and
- *Dr Bettina Rottweiler* (currently a Research Fellow in the Department of Security and Crime Science at University College London, UK).

Their doctoral theses were all outstanding in their own way.

Dr. Lloydd's doctoral thesis is a wide-ranging exploration of international legal regulations (1907-2014) and policy framings of volunteer fighters in foreign conflicts that places the terrorist "foreign fighters" phenomenon in a historical context.

Dr. Margolin's thesis stood out for its remarkable original dataset and the demonstration that gendered beliefs can lay at the heart of violent extremist ideologies.

Dr. Rottweiler's Ph.D. thesis, which looked not only at factors facilitating violent extremism but also at protective factors preventing radicalisation, stood out for its mastery of advanced statistical techniques and use of original large-scale data for Germany and the UK.

These three finalists will be invited to have an Abstract of their doctoral thesis published in the December 2023 issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*. All finalists will receive a Certificate of Achievement, signed by the chairman of the jury of the Terrorism Research Initiative.

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