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Enhancing Security through Collaborative Research

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## Welcome from the Editor

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to announce the release of Volume X, Issue 2 (April 2016) of *Perspectives on Terrorism* at [www.terrorismanalysts.com](http://www.terrorismanalysts.com). Our free online journal is a joint publication of the *Terrorism Research Initiative* (TRI), headquartered in Vienna (Austria), and the *Center for Terrorism and Security Studies* (CTSS), headquartered at the Lowell Campus of the University of Massachusetts (United States).

Now in its tenth year, *Perspectives on Terrorism* has nearly 6,100 regular subscribers and many thousands more occasional readers and website visitors worldwide. The *Articles* of its six annual issues are fully peer-reviewed by external referees while its *Research Notes*, *Policy Notes* and other content are subject to internal editorial review.

This issue begins with a research article by Timothy Holman of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, who explains the critical role of facilitators in the foreign fighters phenomenon. Facilitation, a mechanism, bridges the gap between the local and transnational, helping resolve security problems for both the terrorist group and the potential recruit. Next, in a unique contribution to our journal, pre-eminent scholar of terrorism studies David Rapoport offers his thoughts and observations on the evolution of Islamic State's strategy in the wake of the attacks in Paris and Brussels.

Four contributions follow in an expanded Research Notes section, beginning with a detailed analysis from a team of researchers led by Claire Ellis and Raffaello Pantucci. Their report, the culmination of a European Union funded project (CLAT: Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism) is followed by a policy paper by Jeanine de Roy van Zuidewijn and Edwin Bakker on the personal characteristics of lone-actor terrorists. Next, Caitlin Mastroe of Cornell University highlights the inherently contextual nature of countering violent extremism, focusing specifically on the United Kingdom and its *Prevent* strategic approach. And in the final piece of this section, Stefano Bonino of Northumbria University interviews former undercover agent (and now counterterrorism expert) Mubin Sheikh about his role in disrupting the "Toronto 18" terrorist cell.

The Resources section features an extensive bibliography by Judith Tinnes on terrorism research literature, and 30 short book reviews by Joshua Sinai. Finally, the Editorial Notes section includes an Op-Ed by Hashim al-Rikabi about competing (and perhaps conflicting) strategic approaches to countering ISIS, and a conference announcement/call for proposals is provided from the Terrorism and Political Violence Association.

This issue of the journal was prepared by the co-editor of *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Prof. James Forest at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. The next issue (June 2016) will be prepared in the European offices of the *Terrorism Research Initiative* (TRI) by Prof. em. Alex P. Schmid.

## I. Articles

### ‘Gonna Get Myself Connected’:

### The Role of Facilitation in Foreign Fighter Mobilizations

by Timothy Holman

#### **Abstract**

*How do foreign fighters access the battlefield? Research has found that social networks are important for joining groups involved in violence. Foreign fighters have no such connections to a conflict at its outset and present potential security risks to the insurgent entity. Facilitation, a mechanism, bridges the gap between the local and transnational, helping resolve a potential security dilemma. This article presents four types of evidence to demonstrate the existence of facilitation, including three case studies of French foreign fighters who traveled to fight or train abroad between 1992 and 2014. Facilitation has an emergent quality: it is not, necessarily, present at the beginning of a mobilization, but arises as would-be volunteers seek to connect to the battlefield. The initial connections are contingent and may become more stable over time, but they can be challenged and forced to re-emerge if networks are targeted and neutralized. This article contributes to the existing foreign fighter literature by identifying and explaining the functioning of a mechanism within the foreign fighter mobilization process.<sup>†</sup>*

**Keywords:** Foreign Fighter; Mobilization; Security Dilemma; Facilitator; Facilitation

#### **Introduction**

**I**n March 2003, a journalist interviewed Boubakeur el-Hakim, a French national in Baghdad, Iraq. He yelled, “All my mates in the 19th, you need to come for jihad. I am here. It’s me, Abu Abdallah. I am in Iraq. We are taking part in jihad. All of my brothers who are over there, come to defend Islam...I am ready to fight on the frontline. I am ready to blow myself up: put on the dynamite and BOOM...”[1] During 2004, el-Hakim worked in Syria and Iraq, and helped his brother and their friends from Paris to travel to participate in the insurgency in Iraq as foreign fighters. Three members of the so-called 19th network (see p. 11) died, two were captured by United States (U.S.) military forces in Iraq, and two, including el-Hakim, were expelled by the Syrian authorities to France. The French judiciary tried and imprisoned both men.[2] In January 2005, the French authorities arrested two more members of the group as they were about to fly to Damascus, effectively ending the groups’ involvement in fighting against the U.S.

This case of French foreign fighters traveling to reach the battlefield highlights the fact that not all arrive. Some are arrested before they access the insurgency, either in a transit location or in their country of residence, while others make it into the transit zone but leave because they could not find a way to join or to cross the border into the conflict zone. Why does this occur? Is it not enough to simply make the effort to travel and join? Is this simply a random process where some would-be fighters are lucky and others are not? Underlying these questions is a fundamental issue: how do foreign fighter volunteers make the connection from their local circumstances to an insurgent entity in another country?

This study takes a mobilization approach (instead of radicalization) to address the question of foreign fighters. This research does not seek to understand the ‘why’ of their involvement in this activity but rather the ‘how’ of their participation. If most engagement in political violence is made possible through social networks—peers, kin or activist groups—how are foreign fighter volunteers able to make the connection from their local circumstances to an insurgent entity to whom they have no prior social ties? This question has not been dealt with explicitly in the research to date on foreign fighter mobilizations. Facilitation enables foreign fighters

and travelers to bridge the local and the transnational dimensions of a conflict. A ‘facilitator’ is an individual or entity providing information and services to volunteer foreign fighters, creating opportunities for them to join an insurgency. Facilitators vet, house, and move foreign fighters from their country of origin, through transit zones and into the combat zone. In the absence of facilitation, a foreign fighter departing their country of origin and arriving in a transit location is less likely to cross borders or find and be accepted by an organization operating in a semi-clandestine manner, wary of infiltration by hostile government agents.

This article does not address why foreign fighters travel, their responses to frames or narratives, or the effect of insurgent group propaganda. The researcher makes a loose distinction between foreign fighters and those traveling for training abroad. Foreign travel for training involves a similar, if not identical, process to travel by foreign fighters. Facilitation is not used in this article to make claims about size or variation in foreign fighter mobilizations; while facilitation may play a role, further research and investigation into other mechanisms present in the mobilization process is required. For the purpose of this study ‘mobilize’ is defined as an individual’s attempt to “[o]rganize and encourage (a group of people) to take collective action in pursuit of a particular objective.”[3] This article seeks to establish the presence of facilitation in the foreign fighter mobilization process, its role in aiding travel abroad, and the changes in how it manifests overtime. The central question is not why foreign fighter mobilizations occur, but how foreign fighters make the connection from their local circumstances to become involved in a transnational mobilization?

Process-based reasoning is used to explain foreign fighter mobilizations, seeking to analyze “smaller-scale causal mechanisms that recur in different combinations in different aggregate settings with different aggregate consequences in varying historical settings.”[4] The term ‘mechanism’ is used to refer to a “delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations” and the expression “processes” is used to describe “regular sequences of mechanisms that produce (generally more complex and contingent) transformations of those elements.”[5] This research suggests facilitation is a mechanism operating within the foreign fighter mobilization process.

The literature on recruitment to terrorist organizations finds that social networks are important, although there is some debate about how and why networks contribute.[6] There is consensus that networks—family, peer groups, and activist groups—contribute to joining violent groups.[7] This research has primarily focused on three areas: joining an organization active in the person’s country of residence; transnational participation, primarily through mechanisms for diaspora mobilization; or in the case of jihadist activity, why individuals come to participate in violence.[8] These investigations do not deal explicitly with how foreign fighters join insurgent organizations involved in irregular warfare in other countries.

Individual foreign fighter profiles are not used as a variable to predict participation in foreign fighting. This assumption is based on research conducted on terrorist profiles that finds there is no terrorist profile of mental illness.[9] Socio-demographic indicators[10] or root cause arguments[11] are also not able to suggest the likelihood of engagement in violence. In contrast, studies do point in one way or another to the importance of group dynamics in the process or route to political violence.[12] Sageman is emphatic on this point, speaking of “takfiri” terrorism being about “bunches of guys” who get together and either try to join the jihad overseas or organize a local attack.[13] Horgan and Taylor, among others, now suggest an approach that does not ask why an individual enters into violent activity but how individuals became involved.[14] This process or pathways approach has gained significant traction amongst those involved in terrorism research.[15] This study seeks to build on the conclusions in this literature that personal networks are important when joining organizations engaged in violence. It examines how this occurs in transnational foreign fighter mobilization.

The rest of this article proceeds in the following manner: First, the gap in the existing foreign fighter literature related to the question of facilitation is briefly identified; second, prior research on how the local and transnational connect is examined; third, four types of evidence that support the existence of facilitation in



the foreign fighter mobilization process are described; fourth, three brief case studies are used to show the presence of facilitation across time; finally, the piece concludes by suggesting that the level of contingency in the mobilization process may lead to a mechanism that is based primarily on relational diffusion where the opportunity for participation is limited or it may lead to a scale shift which creates broader opportunities for participation.[16]

### ***The Foreign Fighter Literature***

Academic research on the phenomenon of foreign fighters and foreign fighting is relatively recent, dating back to 2003.[17] It has established the existence of foreign fighters and situated the presence of foreign fighters in conflicts throughout history.[18] The origins of foreign fighting, and the reasons why, where and how they fight have all been scrutinized.[19] Research has examined why foreign fighters participate in conflicts – civil wars or in irregular warfare against invading or occupying forces – in response to frames and narratives that resonate outside of the immediate conflict zone with a wider transnational community.[20] The reasons for fighting are primarily ideational and not material. What foreign fighters do in the conflict zone and how domestic allies view these activities in the insurgency have also been examined.[21] Case studies have provided details of foreign fighter participation in various conflicts.[22] The conflict in Syria generated a renewed interest in foreign fighters and numerous studies on national contingents in Syria have been written.[23] However, with the exception of de Bie et al there has been limited research on how foreign fighters mobilize to participate in a conflict.[24]

### ***Connecting the Local and Transnational***

Research has set the parameters of the foreign fighter domain, but numerous questions remain unresolved or not explicitly addressed, including how foreign fighters get to the battlefield and how they make connections to the insurgents. These questions fall under the rubric of how foreign fighters mobilize. In what ways do they organize in response to frames? Malet argues this leads to mobilizations.[25] What factors allow or permit travel to occur and which ones dissuade or prevent travel? The existing foreign fighter literature acknowledges the existence of a process or factors that influence mobilization. Hegghammer observes that there are two elements required for a large scale foreign fighter mobilization to occur: First, an ideology stressing solidarity within an imagined transnational community, and second, “a strong cadre of transnational activists.”[26] Moore and Tumelty submit that this cadre of transnational activists have roles and explain how “[c]omplex local and global social networks enable and motivate foreign fighters...[with] gatekeepers who facilitate movement.”[27] This is suggestive of a process, and—depending on how this functions—some fighters can travel while others are unable to reach the battlefield. What are the constituent parts or mechanisms involved in the process? Do these mechanisms change between mobilizations or do they stay the same?

The author reviewed literature specifically related to foreign fighters, including material from terrorism studies, diaspora mobilizations, and social movements to see how, if at all, they explained the ways in which people connect to external entities. There is a consensus that a bridging entity is required to connect the local to the transnational. A variety of terms are used to describe this entity: “gatekeeper,” “broker,” “political entrepreneur,” “relational diffusion,” and “facilitator.” Hogan-Harris, Zammit, and de Bie point to facilitation having a role in influencing outcomes, Zammit in relation to the absence of terrorist attacks in Australia, and de Bie in influencing the ability of would-be foreign fighters to join a conflict.[28]

To establish the existence of a facilitation mechanism and understand how it might function, accounts of conflicts with foreign fighter involvement, including Spain, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria were examined. This included scholarly research of the conflicts, press material, court documents, captured terrorist documents,

and autobiographies of foreign fighters. The material on the various conflicts suggest that for a mobilization to occur, would-be fighters need to engage with the frame and, if they are receptive, they then need to act on this frame to travel; thus, they need to access networks linked to the conflict. Admittance to these networks is provided by a facilitator (an individual, a more formal structure like a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), or a social media platform) who aids the incoming fighter by providing information and resources to be able to travel and join the insurgency.

### *Origins of the Term Facilitator*

The term 'facilitator' did not come from the academic literature, but rather, it originated with government entities. The earliest use in press sources is a reference to one of the 1998 US embassy bombers, "Wadih el Hage...was accused of being a key 'facilitator' for both bomb teams." [29] 'Facilitator' is first used in relation to foreign fighters during the conflict in Iraq and appears in a January 2004 Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) briefing to explain a High Value Target's activities. [30] U.S. officials used the term frequently to describe foreign fighters and individuals involved with foreign fighters in Iraq. The term is present in many of the previously secret assessments of Guantanamo Bay detainees. [31] A reading of the material where the term is employed suggests that 'facilitator' is understood as a role. The idea of a facilitator as an individual connecting local volunteers to foreign insurgencies is seen in the account of the activities of an individual named "Sheik." He is described as someone with "... extensive connections throughout the Middle East to include Yemen, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Syria. From those countries, his connections recruited and financed foreign fighters who were later smuggled into Iraq, usually through Syria..." [32] Governments understand facilitators as entities providing information and resources to create opportunities to connect the local to the transnational.

### *Theorizing on Connecting the Local and the Transnational*

Writing about transnational networks of suicide bombers, Hafez argued "collective action requires pre-existing ties and organizational settings from which to draw recruits, resources and leaders" but, in the case of foreign fighters, how these ties are established within a transnational context requires explanation. [33] Moore and Tumelty suggested the presence of "gatekeepers who facilitate the movement of volunteers, who link terrorism and conflict..." [34] Sageman, in his earlier study of transnational jihadist networks, asked how volunteers connected to al-Qaeda. He used the terms "strength of weak bonds" and "brokers" to describe this process. [35] He argued that "brokers" provide a bridge to jihad between local cliques and the al-Qaeda organization. [36] In parallel to Sageman, Neumann et al. use the term "broker" to describe the activities of "middle managers," individuals connecting al-Qaeda with persons outside of Afghanistan and Pakistan. [37] They argue that "middle managers" are "critical to forging linkages as well as facilitating the flow of information, resources, skills, and strategic direction between the top and the bottom of the organization." [38]

Explanations of transnational diaspora mobilizations also refer to brokerage. [39] Adamson argues that the "mechanism of transnational brokerage" is useful in explaining how diaspora networks become connected to what she terms "conflict networks," i.e. those engaged in violence in the home state. [40] In the Kurdish case, this occurred as "transnational brokers," connected elements of the Kurdish migrant community in Germany with entities in southeastern Turkey. [41] They set up political and cultural associations that were used to mobilize community support for the conflict in southeastern Turkey. She terms these transnational brokers "political entrepreneurs" who build organizational entities in order to "command political loyalties and mobilize resources." [42]



Thus, the underlying idea of facilitation is equivalent to the notion of a “weak tie” as conceptualized by Granovetter.[43] He sees ‘weak ties’ as “an important resource in making possible mobility opportunity.”[44] In his view, “weak ties” are more likely to link members of different small groups.”[45] Further, “[w]eak ties provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle...”[46] Other scholars term this ‘brokerage,’ “whereby an actor acts as an intermediary between two actors not directly linked, thus creating a new line of communication and exchange.”[47] The role played by a facilitator is similar to that of a brokerage, the “linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites.”[48] A facilitator grants access to trust networks, “ramified interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties, within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes or failures of others.”[49]

Studies suggest that facilitation not only links or connects disparate entities but that it influences outcomes. Sageman contended that when “brokers” could not be found, individuals seeking to join the jihad were unable to do so.[50] He argued that the “process of cliques joining the jihad has strong implications for its rate of growth—degree of ambient hostility or tolerance affects its rate of growth...”[51] Zammit describes how the position of facilitators in the Australian context was essential in aiding travel and joining overseas groups. He stated that these foreign connections enabled plotting in Australia and without access to facilitators plots decreased.[52] De Bie et al., in their study of foreign fighters in the Netherlands, concluded, that “the lack of instrumental brokers and fixers obstructs the accessibility of a conflict area.”[53] Facilitation is not only about connecting, it shapes opportunities for joining the local and the transnational.

### *Defining Facilitation*

The extant literature, both on how the local and transnational intersect as well as historical accounts of mobilizations demonstrates there is a need for a mechanism to connect the local to the transnational. This is variously termed “brokerage,” “political entrepreneur,” “middle manager,” “gatekeeper,” or “facilitator,” depending on the literature involved. This study uses the term facilitator and argues that facilitators occupy an enabling function between foreign fighter volunteers and the insurgent organizations they are seeking to join. Facilitators connect disparate entities: the volunteer and the insurgent entity. In many cases, the absence of a facilitator means that the volunteers are unable to connect to the battlefield.

The researcher differentiates between two types of facilitation: ideologically aligned and ideologically neutral (see Table 1). “Ideologically aligned” refers to facilitators who are a part of the insurgent organization. They are more likely to have other roles, to be trusted, have greater access to information, and perform services, due to belief and commitment to the insurgent group.[54] These facilitators are potentially more useful to the organization but are a point of vulnerability due to them being embedded *within* the organization. An “ideologically neutral” facilitator provides limited on demand services, such as the movement of foreign fighters between cities, or across borders.[55] This type of facilitator is more akin to a smuggler or criminal. They have less access to information and are less likely to be trusted, performing services primarily for money. They are used to circumvent shortcomings in the insurgent groups’ capacity—for example, knowledge of smuggling routes into and out of a conflict zone.

The facilitation mechanism is, therefore, the cumulative activity of facilitators between countries of origin and the battlefield. There are two types of facilitation mechanisms: a covert mechanism that relies heavily on relational ties – friends and kinship – for access, and a mechanism that is overt and relies on organizational ties that are open and accessible to large numbers of would-be foreign fighters. The different expressions of the mechanism are not, necessarily, mutually exclusive. Foreign fighters of one nationality may access an overt facilitation point, while others may need to gain access through covert networks. Simply put,

facilitation bridges the gap in a transnational mobilization between a would-be foreign fighter in their country of origin or residence and the insurgent group in the destination country.

Table 1: Facilitator types, expressions and spaces

Type	Expression	Spaces	Consequences	Conflict Presence
Ideologically-aligned	Overt (Access is open)	Government support, NGOs, public meetings, established offices, religious or language schools, social media platforms	Scale shift (often temporary at beginning of conflict) widespread availability of information and resources	Afghanistan I*, Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq (early to mid 2003), Somalia, Yemen, Syria
Ideologically-aligned	Covert (Access is limited)	Family, friendship, prison and activist networks	Relational diffusion of information and resources	Afghanistan II & III*, Chechnya, Iraq (post mid to late 2003 onwards), Yemen, Syria
Ideologically-neutral	Covert (Access is limited)	Criminals, smugglers, corrupt officials	Relational diffusion of information and resources	Bosnia, Afghanistan II & III, Iraq, Syria

\* Afghanistan I refers to the period up until the Soviet withdrawal; Afghanistan II, the period following the withdrawal until the fall of the Taliban; and Afghanistan III refers to the period after the fall of the Taliban regime.

The conditions under which the mechanism manifests as overt or covert are not entirely clear. Factors that may play a role include the structure of the conflict, whether it is a civil war or an invasion. Alternatively, the attitudes and actions of states involved with or interested in the conflict and its outcome may influence how facilitation establishes itself. In the first Afghanistan conflict, the mechanism was relatively overt due to widespread sympathy for the Afghan insurgents as well as material support through both state and private channels.[56] The Saudis did not identify, at this time, a threat from the travel of their nationals to the region and thus did not seek to disrupt the facilitation mechanism.[57] The activities of these groups were not targeted until governments in North Africa, perceiving a threat, started to pressure the Pakistani authorities in the early to mid-1990s.[58] In contrast, the U.S. in Iraq was relatively quick to identify and act against the foreign fighter issue limiting the development of an overt mechanism.[59] The conflict in Syria initially attracted sympathy for the rebel movements and calls for Assad to step down.[60] This ambivalence created an environment, where many early foreign fighters from Libya and Tunisia traveled with relative ease, and it was in Tunisia that French nationals first sought to connect to the conflict in Syria.[61]

### The Dual Function of Facilitation

Facilitation fills two functions. First, it makes available information and resources related to the logistics of traveling, such as which routes to take, how to dress and behave, and what kind of material (clothes and so forth) to bring.[62] Second, it helps resolve the risk of accepting volunteers, who are in fact government agents or assets, and mitigates the risk of infiltration by hostile entities. Ideologically aligned facilitators deal with both these aspects, while ideologically neutral facilitators provide services related to travel and border crossing.

This second function of facilitation resolves, in part, the signaling dilemma identified by Hegghammer.[63] Recruitment is not without risk, even more so with foreign volunteers. The insurgent group needs to ensure that it does not accept agents of foreign governments. Facilitation allows the group to vet incoming recruits. The vetting process is referred to as *tazkiyah* in Arabic.[64] It consists of an incoming volunteer providing the name or, more often, the *kunya* (pseudonym) of the person recommending them to the insurgent group.[65] Without the ability to provide the *tazkiyah*, an incoming volunteer may either be rejected or asked to wait until they can find someone to recommend them.[66] The signaling aspect of facilitation is present across all of the mobilizations, although with differing degrees of strictness in its application.

Al-Qaeda was stricter because the costs of allowing in an enemy agent or asset were high – the killing or capture of senior leaders or compromise of ongoing attack plans.[67] On the other hand, the Islamic State (IS) seems to have accepted some fighters without recommendations but still vetted them, and these fighters, in turn, recommended their friends.[68] The looser application was due to the group's territorial control and, for a time, lower interest in external operations. IS had time to “evaluate,” “probe,” and perform “costly induction” in the absence of a *tazkiyah*. [69] Thomson writes that French volunteers trying to obtain recommendations were defrauded by Tunisians selling fake ones.[70] IS initially had the confidence that its internal security service would be able to identify spies or agents and deal with them accordingly. As the Syria conflict has progressed, IS has become more concerned about infiltration and recommendations are now sought from would-be fighters.[71]

### *Evidence for Facilitation*

This study looks for four types of evidence to confirm the presence of facilitation as the mechanism that bridges the circumstances of local volunteers to the overseas insurgency. The first three types are primarily illustrative, while the fourth evidence category provides greater detail in the form of basic process tracing to examine the presence of facilitation amongst French foreign fighters and travelers. First, the author examined biographic accounts of travelers and how they say they traveled for mention of facilitators or bridging entities; second, he looked for trace evidence, specifically, documents or mentions of documents that pointed to facilitation in an insurgent organization; third, he examined whether governments or other entities took action against facilitation or make mention of this activity in their responses to foreign fighter mobilizations; finally, he drew on three case studies, spanning a 20-year period, from an observation set of French foreign fighters and travelers. The choice of case studies is partially purposive, as the author wanted cases from the earliest period of foreign fighters and travelers, towards the middle of this period, and then a relatively recent case. The selection is partially based on data availability; cases were selected where there was sufficient information to make a determination about how individuals traveled. In these case studies, the researcher first looked for the absence of prior ties to a conflict and then tried to determine how they bridged this gap to participate (or not) in the conflict.

### ***Accounts of Foreign Fighters and Travelers***

The researcher first reviewed biographic accounts by former foreign fighters or travelers as well as one account by a former intelligence asset.[72] In the case of two travelers, the researcher compared their accounts with those available in the Guantanamo Docket.[73] He did not look at interpretations as to why they traveled or what they had done after arriving but only at how they had made the connection to Afghanistan. In the case of two of the French travelers, there is little difference between their account and the documents in the Guantanamo Docket. The two travelers from Lyon left France in late June 2001, and were facilitated by the brother of one of the travelers. They traveled to London where they were given further help from an established Algerian facilitator, Rabah Kadre (Toufik).[74] They described the use of false passports, calling from phone boxes in London to make contact with the person they knew only as Toufik, who housed

them, bought them tickets, and gave instructions. His help enabled them to travel onwards to Pakistan, where they were aided by another facilitator, “Mohammed.”[75] This person vetted them, housed them, and arranged for them to go to Afghanistan. They took pseudonyms and did not use their real names while in Afghanistan.[76] While there, they spent time at the Algerian guesthouse in Jalalabad before entering the training camps. Following the 9/11 attacks and the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, both were taken into custody and transferred to Guantanamo Bay before their eventual release back to France.

Omar Nasiri, a former French intelligence asset, traveled to Pakistan in 1995, to try and access the camps in Afghanistan to provide information to the French external intelligence service. It took him some time to locate a person who could facilitate his entry, and because he had arrived without the recommendation of a Europe-based facilitator, he was asked, “did someone send you here?”[77] His previous participation in a *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA) logistics network in Belgium and the fact the members of that network had previously been in Afghanistan, appear to have weighed in his favor. He was allowed to travel into Afghanistan.[78] The accounts of former travelers refer to the presence of facilitators and their role in enabling travel and subsequent access to Afghanistan. Connecting to the facilitator was permitted by friendship and kinship networks, and in the case of Nasiri, his former role in a militant network that contained members who had previously been in Afghanistan.[79]

### *Documentary Evidence*

A second source of evidence is documents or material produced by insurgent groups that mention foreign fighters. A review of the various conflicts found material suggestive of facilitation for Afghanistan (circa 1992-2001),[80] Iraq (2003-10),[81] and Syria (2011-onwards).[82] In Afghanistan, U.S. forces recovered administrative forms that contain reference to facilitation, “the person who recommended you.”[83] For Iraq, a Belgian trial referred to details from a foreign fighter list, and a French trial report mentioned another list that contained the names and other details of 258 persons.[84] During this trial in France, one of the foreign fighters described filling in the form that was used to compile this list.[85] The best known documentation is the Sinjar material captured in September 2007, containing detailed records of some 700 foreign fighters. The documents, similar to the al-Qaeda ones from Afghanistan, contain references to facilitators.[86]

Since 2012, documents similar to the Sinjar ones have been recovered, likely in Mosul and made available to German journalists; another listing with references to foreign fighters was found by a French journalist in Syria.[87] In January 2016, *Zaman al Wasl* reported it had obtained documents containing the names and details of 1,736 foreign fighters. The documents belonged to the IS border administration department, and are similar to the Sinjar documents from 2007.[88] Other documents recovered during a raid in 2014, which killed the IS military chief-of-staff, contained leadership roles and positions in the IS. One of the roles was for the person in charge of the guesthouses for the foreign fighters. This person reported directly to the leader of IS.[89] Other types of evidence include a 50-page book produced by foreign fighters associated with IS that provides detailed information and contact details for persons wishing to travel to Syria.[90]

Another example of the documenting of facilitation and associated activities is seen in a letter recovered amongst the Sinjar documents.[91] The letter is from “Husayn” to two persons in Iraq. Over the course of six pages, it discusses in detail al-Qaeda in Iraq’s (AQI) facilitation activities in Syria. There is mention of French foreign fighters and French nationals active in Syria. Other topics range from the status of safe-houses, training in the production of forged identity documents, whether or not one of the individuals they are working with is being run by a Syrian intelligence service and how to reorganize communications with Europe, following the arrest and expulsion of French fighters responsible for Europe. The letter makes reference on two occasions to “Abu Qasurah,” a *kunya* for the Swedish-Moroccan foreign fighter, Mohammed Moumou, who had risen to a leadership role with AQI in Mosul.[92] One of the French fighters was working for Moumou in Syria. The letter provides insight into facilitation activities as well as concerns about

avoiding Syrian intelligence penetration. The documents and organizational roles point to the existence of management and record-keeping relating to foreign fighters, including direct mention of facilitators in some of the documents. They suggest that facilitation plays a role in ensuring the security of the insurgent entity.

### *State Responses*

Another way to infer whether facilitation plays a role in foreign fighter mobilizations is to examine the actions of states when dealing with foreign fighters. If states target facilitation albeit using different terminology, it would suggest that they understand it as a mechanism that aids mobilization and permits volunteers to enter the battlefield. During the conflict in Iraq, U.S. military briefers frequently referred to facilitation and emphasized action against facilitators as important. A U.S. military intelligence officer briefing on the insurgency in Iraq was asked, “[f]rom an intelligence standpoint, wouldn’t these be the people that you should be targeting?” To which the officer replied, “[a]nd we are. We go after them as much we can.”[93] The level of risk the U.S. military was willing to assume when dealing with facilitators suggests the importance of the mechanism. In 2008, U.S. Special Forces crossed into Syria to kill or capture an important Syria-based facilitator, risking problems with the Syrian government in doing so.[94] More recently, Europol,[95] Interpol,[96] and the United Nations,[97] mention facilitation as an activity to be targeted to disrupt foreign fighter flows. The term appears in trials—for example, in a December 2015 trial of a cluster of foreign fighters from the Val-de-Marne in France, a non-traveler tried to minimize his role by stating he was an “intermediary.” The President of the court asked if the person meant, “a facilitator.” The individual replied, “yes but not all the time,” to which the President responded, “we did not say it was a full time job.”[98] There is a widespread recognition not only of the existence of facilitation within the mobilization process, but that it is a mechanism that, if disabled, would limit the ability of volunteers to connect with overseas insurgencies.

### ***Facilitation in France: Three Case Studies***

The working of facilitation and changes over time are seen in the three brief case studies that follow. The first case deals with the Marrakech group and points to the one of the origins of facilitation in France and its initial manifestation as relational, with access to facilitation provided by outsiders. The second case looks at the so-called 19th network who traveled to Iraq. Again, the mechanism is relational, but this time instead of the mechanism coming from outside of France, the French fighters traveled abroad to interact. The third case looks at travel to Syria by a cluster from Lunel in southern France. This case suggests that while facilitation is still relational, the creation of relationships can now occur through virtual channels – the contingent nature of facilitation of ‘being in the right place at the right time’ has to a certain extent altered with access moving from physical spaces to virtual ones.

#### *‘Rachid’, ‘Nasser’ and ‘Said’: Early facilitators in France, 1992 to 1994*

Some of the earliest foreign travelers and fighters from France appear to be the Marrakech Group. This network was involved in a series of attacks in 1994 in Morocco.[99] The group formed around two Moroccan nationals, Abdelilah Ziyad (Rachid) and Mohamed Zinedine (Said), residing in France who began organizing and recruiting from the late-1980s. Both were previously active in Morocco with the Moroccan Islamic Youth Movement, an opposition group that became clandestine and resorted to violence as Hassan II’s government repressed it.[100] They left Morocco and eventually came to France. In France, they established a clandestine network, comprised of two clusters: one from the suburbs outside of Paris and another from Orléans. The separation of the clusters was due to Ziyad living and working in the vicinity of Paris, while Zinedine was based in Orléans. The two groups were composed of males mostly in their mid to late-20s at the time of their initial engagement. The groups were a mix of friends and one set of two brothers. The two primary



facilitators were a decade older than those they sent to Afghanistan for training. The participants included a student, others in menial jobs, while others had backgrounds in petty crime.[101]

From 1992, they organized travel to Afghanistan for training for approximately 16 members of the group. [102] The group members agreed to the training in Afghanistan as a means of being able to then fight in Bosnia.[103] One person from this group did fight in Sarajevo, Bosnia.[104] Another trained in Algeria with the *Mouvement Islamique Armé* (MIA) in February 1994.[105] According to Bruguière, the French authorities did not become aware of the foreign travel until their investigations following the attacks in Morocco.[106] The researcher identified twelve of the sixteen travelers from a review of press reporting; eleven traveled to Afghanistan, one to Afghanistan and then to Bosnia, and one to Algeria. The travel to Afghanistan was organized by the two Moroccans, one of them had spent time in Algeria and appears to have spent a short period in Afghanistan in 1986.[107] They used two individuals, a Tunisian based in Germany with contacts in Afghanistan and Bosnia, and a Moroccan based in Peshawar, Abdelkrim Afkir (Nasser). [108] One of the travelers recounted being accompanied by one of the Moroccans.[109] Some traveled alone and others traveled in groups.[110] Even with access to a facilitator, there was no guarantee that an individual would travel; one of the Marrakech group stated that he was asked to travel to Afghanistan but he refused. [111]

One of the travelers linked to the Marrakech group recounted the trip to Afghanistan to the French police. [112] He stated that they took an airplane from Roissy in June 1993 and once in Pakistan, went to a house in Peshawar. At the house, they were greeted by a dozen other residents. Their passports were taken from them, in what the individual described as a ‘security measure.’ They took *kunyas*, at which time this person became “Ali” and another of his fellow travelers, “Saïd.” Prior to the trip into Afghanistan, they bought local clothes. He stated that once he had arrived, he wanted to leave, as he was sick. Back in Peshawar, they requested their passports, but were told that the passports were lost. The group was obliged to declare the loss of the passport at the Embassy to obtain temporary travel papers to return to France.

The origins of facilitation in France came through contact between foreign militants seeking refuge in France, recruiting French nationals and residents, often (but not exclusively) with family links to the same countries as the facilitators. These original militants had contacts, most probably with Algerians, connected to the initial foreign fighter mobilization in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union.[113] These types of connections enabled the Marrakech group to organize travel to Afghanistan. The nature of facilitation was clandestine and based on relational diffusion. There does not appear to be spontaneous travel during this period. The mechanism at this point was highly dependent on knowing the right person. Without access to a social network with links to facilitators, travel to Afghanistan at this time was not possible. The contingent nature of the mechanism in this case is seen when the police arrested members of the network. There is then no further travel from this cluster. It was effectively disrupted because the relational linkages have been removed.

#### *“Abu Turab” and “Tarek” get their friends into Fallujah: the 19th in Iraq 2003 to 2004*

The 19th or Buttes-Chaumont group traveled to Iraq between 2003 and 2004. The travel network was dismantled by the French authorities in 2005 and the members tried in court in 2008 and 2011. The group was one of the first post-9/11 networks without significant connections to prior jihadi travel networks to travel overseas to fight.[114] The group grew from friendship and family ties formed in schools in and around the 19th district of Paris. Through their interest in religion and opposition to the Iraq war, they formed an informal study circle around a young charismatic self-styled religious figure, Farid Benyettou. [115]

Prior to the outbreak of the war in Iraq, two members of the group, Boubakeur el-Hakim and Tarek Ouinis, were students in Syria, while others who would become foreign fighters were studying or working in France.



[116] The wider group is estimated to have included about 50 persons, but the number who actually were involved in foreign fighter related activities was much smaller—about eleven.[117] The group was exclusively male, mostly in their late teens and early 20s, connected through friendships as well as family links. The majority of the group were unmarried at the time of becoming involved in foreign fighting.

Prior contacts with the militant milieu in France were limited to Benyettou's relationship with his brother-in-law, an Algerian with ties to Algerian militant groups and travel networks, and his contact with Mohamed Karimi, a Moroccan national, involved with a number of persons connected to a late 1990s Afghanistan travel network.[118] Karimi was expelled from France in 2000 and while present on two militant websites — *Assabyle* and *al-Mourabitoun* — did not play a role in connecting the group to foreign fighter facilitators.[119] Similarly, Benyettou's brother-in-law does not appear to have aided the group having been expelled from France in 2004.[120] Prior to the U.S.'s invasion, none of the network had connections to Iraq.

Boubakeur el-Hakim had previously traveled to Syria in 2002 to study and from there went to Iraq in March 2003, following an appeal by the Saddam Hussein regime for foreign volunteers to defend Iraq against the impending United States invasion.[121] He returned to France after being detained on the Syrian border without travel documents. El-Hakim then worked in a local market and married but by March 2004 he was back in Syria, working as a facilitator, moving between Syria and Iraq with a period in Fallujah.[122] In September 2004, he was again arrested by Syrian authorities and imprisoned for a year. In this six-month period, along with Tarek Ouinis, he helped organize the travel of six of the group, from France to Syria and then into Iraq. A seventh traveler made one trip into Syria in 2004 but could not find his friends and returned to France.[123]

Some traveled directly from Paris to Damascus, while others traveled via Cairo, Egypt. They traveled in pairs or alone and at different periods to Syria and then in small groups to Iraq. The majority of those who participated in foreign fighting in Iraq traveled to Syria in the period May to July 2004.[124] Benyettou, with the aid of those in France, collected money from members of the group and other sympathizers to pay for tickets, smugglers and weapons. In January 2005, the French authorities seized some 8,000 euros that was to be taken to Syria by Thamer Bouchnak and Chérif Kouachi.[125]

In July 2004, Peter Chérif, Mohamed el-Ayouni and Ouinis traveled from Syria into Iraq.[126] They were met on the border by a smuggler who left them in a safe house on the Iraqi side, from where they were moved to Fallujah or Baghdad.[127] In Fallujah they were put in a guesthouse with fighters from Europe, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.[128] They were asked to provide their name, nationality, and a telephone number to call in case they were killed or injured. They were given a *kunya*, with el-Ayouni taking the name, *Abu Walid*, and after a quick course in the use of weapons, they were dispatched to different units.[129] El-Ayouni's passport was taken from him similar to the experience of earlier travelers to Afghanistan.[130] This information would form the basis of a 258 name list recovered from a safe house in Iraq and provided to the French authorities.[131] In the safe houses, the fighters were triaged and assigned roles.[132] Younes Loukili, a Belgian foreign fighter, stated in court that he was in the same group in Fallujah as two French fighters in the late summer of 2004—possibly Chérif and Ouinis.[133]

The group used relationships formed by its own members to facilitate their travel. El-Hakim used a flat rented in Damascus to house his friends. He provided information about how to cross into Iraq, including the prices and names of smugglers.[134] Telephone analysis by the French authorities led them to conclude that el-Hakim was not only involved with facilitating his friends but was linked to most of those involved in other foreign fighter networks in France.[135] El-Hakim may have facilitated three or four other French residents not part of the 19th cluster.[136] The facilitation network put in place by the 19th network in Damascus revolved around two of the earliest travelers to Syria—Ouinis and el-Hakim.[137] Ouinis worked for a network in Damascus run by an Algerian, Abu Ubayda al-Jaziri.[138] He ran this network using two Iraq-based facilitators, Abu Hanach al-Suri and Abu Asil al-Jaziri. El-Hakim was involved on the border

moving fighters from Syria into Iraq.[139] Abu Ubayda al-Jaziri helped hundreds of foreign fighters to cross into Iraq up until his arrest in June 2005.[140] He facilitated not only the French fighters crossing into Iraq but with Ouinis transferred two Belgians in the summer of 2004.[141] In total Ouinis was involved with the transfer of 16 foreign fighters including three of his friends, el-Ayouni, Chérif and Abdelhalim Badjoudj. He was responsible for looking after Tunisians from France.[142] Prior to Ouinis himself traveling into Iraq in September 2004, he passed the details of his contacts in France, Belgium and Tunisia to another Tunisian facilitator.[143]

Following el-Hakim's September 2004 arrest and imprisonment in Syria, and Ouinis traveling to Iraq, a 15-year-old Malian from Paris replaced him as the individual dealing with the incoming volunteers from Paris.[144] However, by late 2004, the group in France planned to replace the 15-year-old as they could not access him via telephone and intended to send Chérif Kouachi to replace him.[145] Kouachi was arrested before he could travel to Syria in January, 2005.[146]

The travelers from the 19th accessed the facilitation networks in Syria through friends who happened to have been first in Syria and then Iraq. Their ability to access the facilitation mechanism was contingent on having a friend being in the right place at the right time. In the absence of Ouinis or el-Hakim's connections and information, it is possible that none of the travelers would have traveled to Iraq. The groups in Iraq they joined were dependent on who the facilitator was connected to. Those who arrived in Fallujah in the summer of 2004, for example, joined the Army of Mohamed.[147] Even though they arrived as a group of three, they were split and assigned different roles; el-Ayouni to one unit and Chérif and Ouinis to another.

Much later, when Rany Arnaud went to Damascus, with the intention of traveling into Iraq, and even with the possible support of Peter Chérif, he was not able to access the facilitation networks which had undergone significant changes due to the arrests or killings of those involved in 2004.[148] Rany's experience is similar to three travelers from Tours who arrived in October 2006. Unable to find a facilitator and due to their behavior they were promptly arrested by the Syrian security services and expelled to France.[149] The only successful French traveler to Iraq post-2004 used facilitation networks provided by a Saudi Arabia-based Algerian, who had met one of his friends at a school in Medina.[150]

### *To Syria via Skype: Facilitation Moves to the Web, 2013 to 2014*

The third case study draws on a foreign fighter cluster from Lunel in southern France. A group of approximately 20 persons traveled to Syria, originally joining Jaysh Mohamed in the area around Azaz before moving on to join the IS, with some living in Raqqa and others in Deir ez-Zor.[151]

The accounts of the group's activities suggest no prior engagement in political violence or militant activity. A number of the cluster participated in an informal religious study group run by an individual arrested in January 2015; they were involved with local non-governmental organizations.[152] They organized "jihad nights" to watch films and videos about the conflict in Syria.[153] The cluster is comprised of a core group of friends who met in high school as well as family, including brothers and wives.[154] The group ranges in age from 18 to 44, and includes at least one convert as well as a former member of the French military; some had jobs, small businesses, or were in tertiary education, while others were unemployed.[155] The micro-network has seen eight die, one in a suicide attack, and at least two returned to France where they were arrested.[156] The group financed their own trips through taking out consumer credit loans and leasing a BMW which was sold in Syria.[157] There is no information that suggests the travelers had prior ties to individuals involved in the Syrian conflict before leaving France.

The earliest travelers left for Syria in October, 2013, and were joined by others in the summer of 2014.[158] The last traveler may have left as late as May 2015, although other reports suggest it was December 2014.[159] Once the first travelers had arrived, the next travelers left in January 2014 to join the original three in

Azaz, Syria. There were no further travelers for a number of months. This is possibly linked to the in-fighting between the various groups. One of the travelers switched allegiances from from Jaysh Mohamed to IS.[160] He was involved in exfiltrating the remaining Lunel cluster to IS territory prior to an attack by IS on Jaysh Mohamed.[161] Travel resumed in the summer of 2014, with three groups of travelers leaving France and going to Syria. These travelers joined IS where one of their group had become the leader of an IS *katibat* (brigade).[162] In January 2015, French police arrested five persons alleged to have been involved in aiding the group. Two of those arrested were recently returned from Syria, and a third, acting as the facilitator, was the brother of two others, who had traveled to Syria and are believed to be dead.

It is possible that the first three travelers left France without knowing that they needed help getting into Syria.[163] It appears that it was one of their friends still in Lunel who used Facebook to make contact with individuals already in Syria.[164] One of these persons was Mourad Fares. Fares, a French national, was linked to many of the late 2013 and early 2014 departures from France including two minors from Toulouse, a female minor from Avignon, a cluster from Strasbourg and a group from Lyon and Switzerland.[165] Fares eventually handed himself over to the Turkish authorities and was deported to France.[166] Fares was active on Facebook and gave a number of interviews to the media. He was, at this time, not difficult to locate through social media channels. Fares was not exclusively active on social media, as members of the Strasbourg cluster traveled to meet him in Lyon prior to his departure for Syria and remained in contact with Fares helping to facilitate their travel to Syria.[167] Through this contact, the first three travelers joined Jaysh Mohamed in Azaz.[168] The travelers that followed joined their friends with IS. Once the initial facilitator had been used, it seems the group in Syria then provided advice and information to the next travelers, frequently using Skype as well as other communication platforms.[169] The gaps between the travelers' departure dates, possibly due to the inter-group conflict, suggests that facilitation provides information not only on how to arrive, but also on when it is appropriate to travel.

In this case, one of the individuals who played the facilitation role was not in the conflict zone but had remained in France, although two of his brothers had traveled to Syria. He provided information about travel routes including on how to avoid detection in France by flying from Barcelona, Spain, and organized money transfers for airplane tickets, including wire transfers of funds.[170] Information was collected about the situation in Syria and rivalries between groups. He phoned members of the group in Syria to warn them of the IS attack in April 2014.[171] Some members of the group in Syria played the role of facilitators helping travelers come across the Turkish-Syrian border.[172] Finally, it appears that information about the activities of the group in Syria were available on Facebook, with pictures being distributed and photographs or announcements about the deaths of the travelers circulating.[173]

The activity of facilitators influenced the initial choice of group that the first travelers joined. Later, they were able to change groups due to one of their friends having moved to IS. Because of the presence of this friend, from April 2014 onwards, the remaining travelers joined IS.[174] Since May 2015, no further reported departures have been made public. It is unclear whether this is because there are no more would-be travelers from Lunel, whether the facilitation connection was removed with the arrests in early 2015, or whether the well-publicized deaths have acted as a deterrent.[175] In this case, the travelers were able to overcome the initial absence of relational networks to locate a facilitator by turning to virtual networks, from which they were able to bridge their local circumstances and connect to the Syrian theatre.

### ***Analysis of the Cases***

The three case studies point to the role of facilitators in connecting recruits and volunteers with foreign insurgent entities. The Marrakech case suggests that there is not always a clear distinction between recruiter and facilitator. Some individuals may occupy or combine both roles. While all of the facilitators in these cases were military age males, this demographic profile is changing with the increasing interest of young female

travelers. There are now cases where women are known to have acted as facilitators.[176] The facilitators have two primary characteristics: contacts either direct or indirect with insurgent organizations and the ability to vouch or provide bona fides for in-coming fighters. The question of how facilitators came to have these contacts and to be seen as trustworthy is difficult to answer with certainty in all cases. The Marrakech and 19th network facilitators seem to have acquired contacts and trust by meeting individuals connected to militant or insurgent organizations in their overseas travels. One of the Moroccans was in Algeria and later Afghanistan. El-Hakim was in Syria and Iraq at the beginning of the US invasion. The case of Fares is less clear: he does not seem to have been in Syria or Iraq prior to his involvement in facilitation, nor does he appear to have had links to the older jihadist networks in France. Fares may have found his contacts through social media but how he obtained the capacity to vouch for fighters is not clear. The issue of how trust is acquired and then used requires further research, but the available evidence suggests that previous dealings with militancy and/or travel to conflict zones or neighboring countries are factors. More recently, the use of virtual networks may be altering the previous requirement for physical and geographical proximity.

The three cases suggest that facilitation can be observed in the clustering of volunteers and in what the head of the Belgian intelligence has termed the “bandwagon” effect, where an initial traveler or travelers make their way to a conflict zone followed by more persons from the wider social network.[177] Maher and Taub, in separate accounts of Syria-bound foreign fighters, find similar processes at work in relation to the bandwagoning and clustering of fighters from Plymouth in the United Kingdom and Antwerp, Belgium.[178]

The three case studies contain accounts where access to a facilitator enables travel and joining an insurgency. This not always the case: on occasion, even if a facilitator is located, the traveler is still unable to reach the combat zone. Ibrahim Ouattara, a would-be French foreign fighter, attempted four times to access a conflict zone (Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Mali) but was unsuccessful. Even when he had managed to find a potential facilitator—a Belgian in Peshawar, Pakistan—he was eventually asked to leave on the basis that he was black and did not respect the security rules.[179] It is thus not enough to locate the facilitator; other factors may also influence access to the combat zone.

The first case study suggests that the consequences of interacting with a facilitator are not always the ones that were sought by the would-be traveler. These individuals agreed to travel to Afghanistan to enable participation in combat in Bosnia. They did not initially expect to participate in a terrorist attack in Morocco. Similarly, individuals involved with the German “Sauerland” network were interested in fighting in Chechnya or Iraq, but their meeting in Damascus with militants from Azerbaijan led to them traveling instead to Afghanistan, where they trained with the Islamic Jihad Union.[180] This chance encounter through a friend would lead to the opening of a facilitation channel for German militants into Afghanistan that lasted for almost five years, involving some one hundred travelers (successful or unsuccessful).[181]

The cases also point to the interaction between facilitation and state activities. In the first two cases, the removal of the facilitator (through arrest) stopped or hindered travel by would-be fighters. Following the dismantling of the Marrakech group, no further travel was reported from this cluster. In the case of the 19th network, when the French authorities arrested the last two travelers and the Syrians detained el-Hakim, there were no more travelers from this cluster to Iraq. The Lunel case suggests other aspects may play a role in ending travel. The arrest of a France-based facilitator and the deportation of Fares from Turkey to France may have helped end travel from the cluster, but it is equally possible that there were no more willing travelers. The potential pool of travelers was exhausted and the intervention against the facilitators came too late.

The case studies point to the ambiguous role of the intervention by states against facilitators: the efficacy of their activity is not entirely clear. States intervene in different ways with differing ends. The geographical position of a state in relation to conflict is important—is it the state of origin, a transit state or the destination state? The proximity to the conflict influences how a state may choose to behave. The type of organization dealing with facilitation also impacts on how states organize to counter this activity. An intelligence service



is more likely to want to infiltrate the network to acquire information about who is involved. In contrast, a police agency will want to dismantle it for prosecution, but only after it has had the time to collect sufficient evidence for a court case. In both cases, in the short-run, states may allow facilitators to function until they are satisfied that there is no more intelligence or evidence to be obtained. Facilitation may also function due to the fact that many states historically privileged domestic security over the security of a far-off country. [182] Finally, with the rising use of social media, it is not certain that infiltration or arrests will be entirely effective against facilitation. If the removal of a person through arrest or death was previously effective, the removal of a webpage or social media account has only a temporary impact measured in minutes.

### **Conclusion**

Facilitation emerges at the outset of a conflict through the creation of relationships leading to new social networks. These relationships may be entirely new or they may be repurposed. The initiator of these relationships can be appeals for help—for example, Afghan militia leaders traveling abroad, the Bosnians seeking aid through the organization of a conference, the Hussein regime's appeal for fighters, or the support of Libyan nationals to the Syrian protest movement. The Afghan leaders appeal led to early travelers to Afghanistan, who then used their networks to bring in aid including fighters.[183] In Bosnia, fighters accompanied aid from the Arab world, and it was the screening of films in universities that mobilized some of the eventual foreign fighters from the United Kingdom.[184] The Hussein regime's appeal was responded to by, among others, foreign students in Damascus.[185] The travel of Libyans to Syria to aid the nascent armed factions appears to have been accepted because of their recent experience in helping bring about the downfall of Gaddafi.[186]

The initiation of relationships and expansion of social networks can come from those in the conflict zone traveling abroad or from early travelers going into the conflict zone, not necessarily to fight but to bring aid or simply to observe. Later networks may form through repression and state intervention. In one case, Tunisians imprisoned in Damascus in 2004 returned to facilitation in Belgium, and, in a second case, in Turkey.[187] This relationship was later used to organize the travel of the first European female convert into Iraq. Facilitation makes use of social spaces—for example, students of Arabic in Damascus from numerous countries meet in schools or mosques and relationships are formed; eventually, their social networks expand to include persons with connections to the battlefield.

Thus facilitation has an emergent quality, and is not necessarily present at the beginning of a mobilization. It arises as would-be volunteers seek to connect to the battlefield. The initial connections are contingent and may become more stable over time, but they can be challenged and forced to re-emerge if networks are targeted and neutralized. It is rare, if not impossible, that the mechanism will involve the same facilitators at the beginning and at the end of a mobilization. Some facilitators may participate in multiple conflicts. Often, their participation is curtailed by arrests and prison time before they reappear in another conflict zone. Facilitation is emergent and volatile due to its being contested by states.

The level of overtness influences the degree of contingency in the facilitation mechanism, the more overt the mechanism the less contingent. An overt mechanism—for example, a fixed structure like an office—is more easily accessible when compared to a covert mechanism that must be discovered, like clandestine relationships. Technology has influenced facilitation, enabling it to be more readily discoverable and making it more resistant to interference from security forces. In the past, taking down a facilitation network would reduce the flow of travelers, as the relationships needed to travel were no longer present. With multiple social networking platforms – Twitter, Facebook, Ask.fm, Instagram, or Telegram – would-be travelers have new channels to sources of information and persons that can facilitate travel.

This article makes a number of contributions to the existing literature on foreign fighters. It responds to John Horgan's call to examine the "how" of involvement in political violence.[188] In doing so, it suggests that taking a mobilization as opposed to a radicalization approach to foreign fighters allows for mechanisms to be identified and explored. Facilitation is one such mechanism in the mobilization process. The evidence in the article suggests that facilitation influences access to the battlefield. It has also evolved over time, the implication being that state responses to facilitation will also need to evolve and adapt to negate or mitigate these changes.

The introduction of facilitators and facilitation into the process of how foreign fighters join insurgent organizations provides an expanded research agenda. There are three broad sets of questions to further explore. First, there are issues linked to who becomes a facilitator and why. Is it a conscious decision to choose this role or is it based on contingent circumstances? Second, how do organizations come to use and trust facilitators? Linked to this, how do they manage facilitators and eventual differences in managing different types of facilitators? The use of facilitation as an independent variable could explore probabilities of volunteer access as well as impacts on their choice of groups. Finally, a third set of questions using facilitation as a dependent variable could measure the impact of repressive state activities on facilitators. For example, this approach could examine how states infiltrate, monitor, and disrupt their activities. Which of these strategies best negates the role of facilitation and in what ways? How should these strategies evolve in the face of increased use of social media as a facilitation tool? Answers to these questions would allow for a more sophisticated and comprehensive understanding of how foreign fighters and insurgent organizations interact due to the mediating role of facilitation. Further, the policy implications of such research are likely to be relevant to issues of immediate as well as on-going concern.

Facilitation is a mechanism used by foreign fighters and travelers to bridge their local networks to conflict networks abroad. The mechanism is present across conflicts from Afghanistan onwards. Facilitation is not to be confused with recruitment which is persuading someone to join a conflict, although some recruiters may act as facilitators. Facilitation does not always manifest itself in the same manner, as it is sometimes overt but is more frequently covert. Some facilitators operate based on ideological affinity with the networks and groups with which they are interacting, while others—particularly when clandestine movement is required—operate for money. Facilitation emerged as accessible primarily through relational networks of kin, friends and activist groupings. More recently, while still maintaining a relational requirement, it has embedded itself in virtual social networks, no longer requiring physical presence but becoming amenable to new kinds of interactions. Despite this shift, facilitation continues to provide information and resources, creating opportunities for fighters to connect to conflicts.

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## II. Special Correspondence to *Perspectives on Terrorism*

### Why Has The Islamic State Changed its Strategy and Mounted the Paris-Brussels Attacks?

by David C. Rapoport

#### **Abstract**

*Initially, the main efforts of the Islamic State in the Syrian civil war aimed to gain territories in Syria and Iraq for the establishment of the Caliphate, but after very striking early successes which attracted enormous numbers of foreign fighters, it lost a significant portion of the conquered territory. Instead of focusing on efforts to keep and regain the lands lost, it launched a series of attacks abroad in Paris and Brussels which intensified Western involvement in the Syrian Civil War. This change at first seems unreasonable. However, if one considers the nature of the Islamic State's apocalyptic commitment the decision makes more sense. A difference between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State on the timing of the apocalypse helped break up their relationship and has produced several violent battles between them, resulting in many casualties.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic State; Al-Qaeda; Al-Nusra Front; Syrian Civil War; Caliphate; Paris; Brussels; Apocalypse*

When the Paris attacks happened on November 13, 2015 few observers asked why they occurred and/or why they happened when they did.[1] The assumption was that since the Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL and Daesh) was originally an al-Qaeda affiliate, it believed that the West had to be eliminated and would therefore strike the devil whenever it was able to do so. But ironically, one reason the attacks occurred was that hostility between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda weakened the Islamic State during the Syrian Civil War.

Before discussing that relationship, we should examine the explanation the Islamic State provided for the Paris outrage. *Dabiq*, the Islamic State's English magazine, justified the strikes as retaliation for French air strikes made nearly a year earlier:

*France haughtily began executing airstrikes against the Caliphate. It was blinded by hubris, thinking that its geographical distance from the Caliphate's lands would protect it from the justice of the jihadists. It also did not grasp that its mockery of the Prophet would be avenged. Thus, the Islamic State dispatched its brave knights to wage war in the homelands of the wicked crusaders, leaving Paris and its residents shocked and awed. The eight knights brought Paris down on its knees, after years of French conceit in the face of Islam.[2]*

But *Dabiq's* reason for striking France does not help us understand the timing of the attack or what the Islamic State thinks the response will be. To understand these matters, one must consider the organization's recent history. When the Islamic State came to Syria in January 2012, some thought that its principal concern was to help Syrian Sunni rebels overthrow their Alawite dictator Bashar al-Assad. However, it had specified another more important purpose in a plan devised three years earlier to capture the territories of northern Syria and northern Iraq, territories one Islamic religious tradition had identified as necessary for creating the Caliphate.

Obviously, Assad's regime had to be weakened and the Islamic State's forces needed more training, equipment and recruits; both concerns were fulfilled by 2014, and then the Islamic State's true purpose became increasingly clear when it turned its attention toward gaining the territory necessary for the Caliphate. Most

of the land still needed was in Iraq, the country in which the Islamic State was born but left to join the Syrian rebels. The Assad regime then avoided targeting the organization to focus on other groups.

A week after the campaign against Iraq began in June 2014, Mosul—Iraq's 2nd largest city—was captured by the Islamic State and the Caliphate was immediately established. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced that he would now be known as “Caliph Ibrahim.” In the battle for Mosul, over 30,000 Iraqi soldiers were quickly defeated by a tiny force of 1,500 Islamic State fighters. The Iraqis fled without fighting, abandoning large supplies of sophisticated equipment the U.S. had given Iraq. As the Islamic State advanced it hung soldiers, set them on fire and crucified some, practices that made many Iraqi soldiers abandon their uniforms before fleeing in the hope they could survive as civilians.[3]

These spectacular achievements shocked the world, inducing many Muslims to think that only divine intervention could have produced such an astonishing victory, and that meant “paradise” was in the offing, a belief that attracted Sunni recruits from over 100 countries.[4] Indeed, the Caliphate insisted that all Muslims were obliged to immigrate to its territory and all other oaths of allegiance were no longer binding. When the Caliphate came into existence, the Islamic State had around 6,300 fighters. During the next six months over 15,000 foreigners arrived, and a year later, around 10,000 more arrived (according to UN and CIA estimates) which meant the Islamic State had over 31,600 members.[5] Most men came to be fighters, and most women accompanied husbands to live in “paradise” or marry “heroes” and have children. Foreigners also came to fight for the Assad regime but the numbers were smaller and they came from only a few states.[6] By 2015, the Islamic State governed around 8 million people in a territory larger than the United Kingdom. Seizing gas and oil resources enabled it to meet its charitable obligation *zakat*, the third pillar of Islam, by providing food and various social services. Each member of its armed forces received at least \$1,000 a month, an income higher than the average in the Caliphate's territories.

In August 2014, the Islamic State captured Dabiq, a Syrian village near the Turkish border—a very crucial conquest because the *Hadith*, a collection of sayings from Prophet Mohammed, designated it as the place where the beginning of the final world battle would be fought and the apocalypse would begin.[7] After that capture the Islamic State began publishing a monthly English digital magazine named *Dabiq*; articles in each issue highlight the looming doomsday battle. Amaq, a nearby village, also slated to play a role in the apocalypse was captured and *Amaq* became the name of the Islamic State's semi-official news agency. Dabiq's importance was emphasized by various videos taken there after its capture. In October 2014, one was released showing some *jihadists* from Europe sitting on a hilltop in Dabiq daring the West to intervene. “We are waiting for you to come and will kill every single soldier.” A month later, another video taken in Dabiq showed “*Jihadi* John” speaking with an English accent standing over the very bloody severed head of the American aid worker Peter Kassig announcing, “Here we are, burying the *first* American Crusader eagerly waiting for the remainder of your armies to arrive. Ultimately the armies of Rome will mass to meet the armies of Islam in northern Syria. After that battle, eternal life in paradise will begin.” (Emphasis added) The video also displays acts designed to demonstrate how the Islamic State imagined the sequence of events in the offing. *Jihadi* John orders his men to behead 21 Syrian pilots and as they are cutting the heads off, he addresses President Obama, “To Obama, the dog of Rome, today we are slaughtering the soldiers of Bashar al Assad and tomorrow, we will be slaughtering your soldiers and soon we will be slaughtering your people on your streets.”[8] Obviously the claim here is that their ultimate goal is defeating the U.S., which will happen after Americans send troops there.

The apocalypse, one should remember, is a theme in all three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—and is frequently associated with terrorism.[9] The Islamic State refers to Westerners as Crusaders, a description al-Qaeda used first. Ironically, the Crusades (which lasted two centuries) were driven by an apocalyptic dimension, and Crusaders committed many atrocities including cannibalism, when a starving army ate Muslims. Philippe Buc describes how this cannibalism had two effects: it struck “divine

fear in the Muslims... and purged the Christian army of lukewarm elements... cowardly men useless for war.”[10]

To make sure that only pious Muslims lived in the Caliphate, the Islamic State committed many gruesome atrocities. After Mosul was taken, major massacres took place in Iraqi villages occupied by the Shabak population (a Shiite offshoot). Hundreds were killed and more than 3,000 fled. Over 125,000 Christians were forced to flee the land that had been their home for nearly 2,000 years. Christian children were beheaded for refusing to convert. The most conspicuous victims were the Yazidis, a Kurdish Islamic offshoot some Muslims regard as devil worshippers. Between 2,000 and 5,000 males who refused to convert were killed. Women and children were abducted and sold as “sex slaves”. Around 50,000 Yazidis were trapped in the Sinjar Mountains, and the U.S. began an air strike campaign in September 2014 that was later joined by eight Arab and Western states in order to prevent a potential genocide. Three months later, Kurdish forces entered the fray against the Islamic State enabling most Yazidis to escape.

Atrocities were committed against many Muslims too. Because Shiites and Alawites “pervert” the Koran, those living in the Caliphate must be killed. The Islamic State emphasizes that common Shiite practices—e.g., worshipping at the graves of imams, and public self-flagellation—have no basis in the Koran. Heads of state in every Muslim country who elevate man-made law above sharia (Islamic law) will meet the same fate. The Islamic State killed Sunni Muslims who committed certain offenses, including those who sold alcohol or drugs, wore Western clothes, shaved their beards, voted in an election, or were lax about denouncing people who were apostates. A UN report estimated that nearly 15,000 civilians were killed in Iraq in 16 months starting in January 2014, and the Islamic State was deemed responsible for the overwhelming majority.

Anjem Choudary, an Islamic leader in Great Britain, described these atrocities as policies of mercy rather than of brutality. The Islamic State is obliged to terrorize its enemies with beheadings, crucifixions and enslavement of women and children, because doing so hastens victory and avoids prolonged conflict.[11] But Muslim leaders everywhere condemned the Islamic State’s obsession with eliminating all “impious” Muslims and insisted that Islam provided no justification for its definitions and actions.

The apocalypse was also crucial to al-Qaeda’s vision, but al-Qaeda insisted that the Caliphate could only emerge after the U.S. withdrew from the Muslim world and that trying to institute sharia immediately when one controlled appropriate territories would alienate people everywhere.[12] A gradual approach preparing Muslims to accept the Caliphate was necessary before the more provocative aspects of sharia could be implemented (like throwing gays off buildings, chopping limbs off and public stoning practices).[13] Indeed, the campaign of the Al-Nusra Front (al-Qaeda’s franchise in Syria) contrasts vividly with that of its rival’s even though the ultimate objective is the same, a difference that a *New York Times* journalist contended may give al-Nusra a significant long-term advantage in its battle against the Islamic State.[14]

In early 2015 when al-Nusra had a strength of 15-20,000,[15] al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri instructed the group to pursue five goals: integrate the movement in the Syrian revolution and its people, coordinate more closely with all Islamic groups, help establish a sharia court system, use strategic areas of the country to build a sustainable al-Qaeda power base and cease any activity linked to attacking the West.[16] The last restraint was a real surprise, since al-Qaeda had always designated the West as its principal enemy. But clearly al-Qaeda became revitalized by the Syrian conflict after years of dissipation, and became committed to gaining territory for a home base, a goal that could not be achieved if Western troops became involved.

Although the sudden, dramatic and amazing scope of the Islamic State victories against the Iraqi army made many Muslims think that Allah was involved, the Iraqi army had never developed real battlefield capacities because it was always an instrument of domestic politics. The U.S. tried to create an appropriate military force, but when it left the Iraqi tradition was revived—only this time, a Shia rather than a Sunni government was involved, and it made Shia loyalty more important than military competence. Sunnis were confined to

the lower ranks, which intensified their reluctance to fight other Sunnis for a Shia government; indeed, many deserted to join the Islamic State.

After its initial dramatic victories, the Islamic State quickly encountered enormous difficulties. It got within 60 miles of Baghdad before Iraqi Shia militias—responding to Iraqi Shiite Grand Ayatollah's call—stopped them. Then thousands of Iranian Shia trained by Iran's Revolutionary Guard joined the Iraqi Shia. Kurdish forces played a significant role as well, when they took the city of Kirkuk (after the Islamic State compelled Iraqi forces to abandon their posts), expanding the Kurdish zone of control in Northern Iraq, an area outside of the control of both the Islamic State and the Iraqi government.

Enormous difficulties emerged by 2015 after it became clear that the Islamic State no longer could expand its territory. Turkey tightened border controls; previously, 60% of the foreign fighters had come through Turkey.[17] Many foreigners left the Islamic State, and over a 100 foreign fighters attempting to desert were beheaded.[18] Many foreign women returned home, upset by how the Caliphate regulated marriages. The United States bombed the Caliphate's oil sites, reducing revenue for services and also resulting in a reduction in the pay of its fighters by one half. Kurdish forces cut principal supply lines and regained some territory lost, including the important city of Kobani in January. Iraqi military forces then recaptured Tikrit in March.

Al-Qaeda, which had included the precursor elements of the Islamic State since its birth in 2004, became deeply offended by its indiscriminate anti-Muslim tactics, for reasons al-Qaeda's history demonstrates. Its important campaign in the 1990s against the "Near Enemy", Arab governments in the Middle East and Africa, failed largely because government tenacity everywhere made the rebels act too indiscriminate, turning Arab populations everywhere against them.[19] Al-Zawahiri had been particularly devastated by his own indiscriminate practices when he led Egyptian Islamic Jihad before he joined al-Qaeda, and he was determined not to repeat it.[20] He denounced the Islamic state as "seditious" and pushed it out of al-Qaeda. Then the leader of al-Qaeda's Syrian franchise said, "They assault Muslims, and their ideology completely drifted from the Sunni ideology that we follow, so we have to fight them." [21]

In 2014 the al-Nusra Front initiated many violent attacks near Aleppo, forcing the Islamic State to withdraw from Syria's eastern province. It successfully cast itself as a moderate alternative to the Islamic State, and after crushing the Western-backed Syrian rebel group Harakat Hazm it forged a coalition of Islamist groups to conquer the Syrian city Idlib in March 2015 but did not impose sharia. Estimates suggest that the battles between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State produced over 3,000 casualties. Ironically, these battles led some Western analysts—including former CIA head David Petraeus—to suggest that the United States and "moderate" al-Qaeda groups could sometimes cooperate.[22]

The Islamic State ignored the West while incorporating sacred territory for the Caliphate. But in September 2014, after the U.S. organized its airstrikes, the Islamic State's chief spokesman "called on Muslims in Western countries ... to find an infidel and 'smash his head with a rock', poison him, run him over with a car or 'destroy his crops.'" [23] Two months later a video released in French contained virtually the same message, and a series of strange "lone wolf" attacks followed on three consecutive days, the perpetrators declaring "God is Great" in Arabic. Three policemen were stabbed in Joué-lès-Tours, and vehicles were used to run over eleven pedestrians in Dijon and ten in Nantes.[24] But the only person killed in these attacks was a perpetrator and the other two were imprisoned.

Fourteen months later, after the Islamic State lost about 40% of its territories, it changed its strategy towards the West and launched the Paris attacks, the worst France experienced since World War II. On November 13, 2015, nine coordinated strikes with bombs and assault rifles were carried out against sites (a football stadium, concert hall and several restaurants) where many congregated to enjoy themselves, sites that enabled the Islamic State to kill as many as possible and also to attack a style of life they considered reprehensible. These indiscriminate Islamic State attacks—which killed 130 and wounded 367—contrasted dramatically with an



earlier one in January of that year by al-Qaeda members who killed 12 persons and injured 11, all of whom were associated with the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. A spokesman for al-Qaeda later claimed the attack was retribution for the magazine's offensive descriptions of the Prophet Mohammed. Comparing the two events, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said the January 2015 attack had a "particularized focus and... rationale that you could attach yourself to somehow and say, 'Okay, they're really angry'"[25] One could understand why satirizing Prophet Mohammed infuriates virtually all Muslims and why many non-Muslims also find such ridicule inappropriate.

Normally one would expect that when situations at home grow more difficult, one would not want to involve hostile powers more deeply. Four possible explanations can be offered for this apparently counter-intuitive 'decision'. First, the Islamic State may have believed that these attacks were not going to inspire the West to intensify its efforts, and therefore the special benefits the attacks create would not be lost. It is even conceivable that the Islamic State thought that the attacks would induce the West to withdraw completely. It is hard to believe that either explanation makes sense, although it should be noted that four months after the attacks President Obama said the Islamic State's growing weakness made its leaders think the attacks "would weaken our collective resolve." [26] The belief that a deeper Western commitment would happen is more probable, and there was good reason to think that would devastate the invaders. The 2003 Iraq invasion aroused the Muslim world and produced the Islamic State's predecessor. Now since Islamic State had much more capacity to resist, it would be victorious. The fourth explanation is that since apocalyptic visions are so prominent in the Islamic State's announcements, publications and brutal videos challenging the West to intervene, this seems to have been the real driving force. The change in strategy may stem from both the third and fourth beliefs. In any case, one should be aware of the rationale for the Islamic State's decision before responding.[27]

Dreadful over-reactions to terrorism occur often. World War I, Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 were all catastrophic reactions to terrorist activity that we should learn from. Fortunately, because the senseless invasion of Iraq occurred so recently, we are less likely to repeat that mistake now. Still, the 2016 Republican presidential primary debates suggest that many politicians either fail to understand the dangers of over-reaction or that the present policy towards the Islamic State is in fact working. The U.S. should continue its air bombing support, supplying equipment and advisors to Sunni rebel forces and make much more effort to cope with the refugee problem too.

Despite its enormous loss of territory, and the reality that its forces are "at its lowest level in two years,"[28] the Islamic State is still strong and continues to launch strikes in Syria and Iraq. In January 2016, the group abducted around 400 Sunni civilians (including women and children) from the Syrian city of Deir-ez-Zor in an assault which left around 135 dead.[29] It made and used chemical weapons in February, 2016.[30] In April it abducted over 170 workers in a cement factory near Damascus.[31]

However, it seems unable to recapture lost territory and continues to lose more. Dissent within the group persists. In early March 2016, nearly 100 men left the Islamic State to join another rebel group in northern Aleppo, claiming they had been mistreated, repeatedly accused of treason and threatened with execution. Residents of Raqqa—the Islamic State's capital—rebelled on March 7, 2016, and about 200 Islamic State members sided with them.[32] Other similar incidents have diverted elements of Islamic State's forces needed desperately in the areas where they are facing armies.

The cease-fire which began February 27, 2016 enabled various government and rebel forces for the first time to concentrate and even cooperate in efforts to destroy both the Islamic State and the al-Nusra Front. In northern Syria, Assad's army, supported by Russia and Iran, launched two significant offensives against the Islamic State, and the Syrian Kurds are pursuing an additional one close to Raqqa. On March 27, 2016 the Syrian army retook the ancient famous Roman city of Palmyra. Iraqi security forces have created a 2nd front in the east by expanding operations in Anbar province, seizing Ramadi, and preparing to retake Mosul, a

crucially difficult undertaking requiring an army of tens of thousands. While the Iraqi army has improved since its disgraceful early flight from Mosul, it still has very serious problems as a military force. A third front is opening up in the south as the New Syrian Army (a rebel coalition, backed by the United States and the Gulf Cooperation Council) is launching operations from bases in Jordan to drive the Islamic State from southern Syria. So far, al-Qaeda's franchise seems to have coped better with the cease-fire problem.[33]

One obvious question this discussion leads to is the following: if the Islamic State intends to compel the West to send troops to Syria, why hasn't the U.S. been attacked, given that it has been the West's leader in launching the airstrikes that France later joined? It seems clear that France was chosen because European fighters—especially from Belgium and France—joined the Islamic State in far greater numbers than those from America, making it easier for the Islamic State to use them to organize an attack on France.

If the Islamic State is interested in provoking serious reactions why did it take four months for the second major attack to occur on March 22, 2016? It takes time to organize strikes of this sort from a distance. The Brussels attacks, like the Paris ones, aimed to kill a large number of people indiscriminately by striking places where they congregate (i.e. public transportation sites). But they were a smaller effort than the Paris ones, killing 32 and injuring over 300. The Islamic State said it made its "blessed" bombings in Brussels because Belgium was a partner in the Western coalition.[34] But in fact, Belgium had stopped its few air attacks nine months earlier.[35] Further, after two weeks of interrogation, the terrorists involved in the Brussels plot revealed that their original intention was to attack Paris again, but after the French apprehended one member of the group the others became afraid that he might reveal the plot, so Brussels was chosen at the last minute. [36]

So far, the two attacks have not yet provoked European states to demand a ground invasion. But they have invested more in the air campaign and expanded the targets to be attacked. Belgium resumed the air attack role it had abandoned nine months before the Brussels attack. The UK, which was initially reluctant to join the air coalition, did so immediately after the Paris strikes. France intensified its campaign.

Will the U.S. experience similar attacks? No one knows, but I think they are unlikely to happen and if adherents of the Islamic State attempt to do so, they will not be successful. There are three primary reasons for this optimism. First, very few Americans have joined the Islamic State. Over 200 tried and most were stopped before getting to Syria.[37] Second, the American Muslim population, unlike the European, is fairly well integrated into mainstream society. And finally, U.S. police forces and intelligence services are extremely alert to the issue *because* of the Paris and Brussels attacks.

Remember too that after the much more devastating 9/11 attacks, al-Qaeda did not conduct any more major attacks on American soil. The 9/11 attacks were successful largely because hijacking had diminished so much after the 1980s that security precautions for planes were greatly reduced. But after 9/11, no big attack occurred because the U.S. mobilized its resources. According to the Congressional Research Service, 38 "lone-wolf" attacks were attempted in the U.S., but 31 did not produce casualties; the most violent was Major Nidal Hasan's gruesome massacre of 13 fellow soldiers at Ft. Hood, Texas in 2009.[38] Another reason no more devastating attacks were experienced was that there was no terrorist network in the country. Obviously there was no network in the country before 9/11 either, but the attackers all came from abroad at a time when such matters were not seriously investigated. The situation became very different after 9/11.[39]

The U.S. homeland so far has experienced only one strike that the Islamic State claimed to have had some role, in San Bernardino, CA on December 2, 2015, where a father and mother killed 14 people at a holiday party, the most deadly terrorist attack the U.S. experienced since 9/11.[40] But as with other "lone-wolf" operations, the terrorists were not part of a network and organized this attack themselves.[41]

The Islamic State has reportedly trained and sent back home at least some 400 jihadists, a majority of whom are European citizens or legal residents.[42] The Islamic population there is much larger and less integrated



than its American counterpart, so more attacks will probably occur and the pressure to send many troops to Syria may grow immensely.[43] Europe's difficulties with Islam, including the enormous recent refugee problem, has also stimulated important right-wing movements which may create a very difficult situation. That political change could break up the European Union and/or provoke a new wave of modern terror.

Finally, let's conclude with a brief note on our second theme—the relationship between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Despite the fact that al-Qaeda has always considered the West its primary enemy, its franchise in Syria was told to concentrate on winning Sunni support and not hit targets in the West because that could provoke Western states to send troops and demolish the territorial base al-Qaeda had been establishing. It is not surprising, therefore, that al-Zawahiri needed three weeks to comment on the Paris strikes. Ultimately, he had to endorse them but he repeated his warning that Muslims should not be major victims, making it clear that differences between the two groups remained.

If the cease-fire holds and permits the Assad regime and the rebel coalition to keep attacking both groups, it is possible (though unlikely) the targeted groups might work together again. If both are forced to leave the Syrian scene, their differences are likely to remain conspicuous. The Syrian struggle induced al-Qaeda to produce the “General Guidelines for Jihad” for its franchises. While it emphasizes that the U.S. must withdraw to “its own shell like the former Soviet Union,” it focuses on how to restrain the struggle in the Muslim world. Wherever possible, al-Qaeda adherents must:

*... pacify conflicts with local rulers so we can incite believers, recruitment, and fund raising. . . Avoid fighting deviant Islamic sects like the Shia. If they attack us, our response must be restricted to those . . . directly engaged in the fight. They should not be targeted in their homes, places of worship, their religious festivals and religious gatherings. . . Avoid meddling with Christian and Hindu communities living in Muslim lands. . . Refrain from killing and fighting against non-combatant women and children, even if they are families of those who are fighting against us. . . We shall provide support to the victims of oppression, whether Muslims or non-Muslims.”[44]*

If al-Qaeda follows its guidelines, will the Islamic State's indiscriminate attacks give the Islamic State an advantage? It is hard to tell because the available evidence is conflicting. Islamic State franchises are usually composed of deserters from al-Qaeda franchises, but the al-Qaeda franchises are still powerful. It is more likely that the two groups will still employ violence against each other. But if the Islamic State's territories are recaptured, its apocalyptic appeal will evaporate and it will lose its ability to maintain and recruit members. Also, if al-Qaeda has to leave Syria, the growing weakness it had been displaying for years before will continue. But we should remember that the Arab Spring unexpectedly produced sectarian violence throughout the Muslim world, which gave al-Qaeda a chance to rejuvenate itself. Sectarian violence may continue and provide it with more opportunities.

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## Notes

[1] The initial version of this piece can be found at <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/islamic-state-wants-west-over-react-and-hasten-apocalypse>. A subsequent version was delivered at the UCLA Center for Middle East Development March 2, 2016, “Why did the Islamic State Strike the Western World?”

[2] <http://heavy.com/news/2015/11/official-isis-announcement-state-on-paris-attacks-shootings-attack-paris-france-petit-cambodge-restaurant-stade-de-france>. Accessed Jan 12, 2016

- [3] "Iraq army capitulates to Isis militants in four cities," *The Guardian*. June 11 2014. Accessed August 15, 2014.
- [4] A.P. Schmid and J. Tinnes, "Foreign Terrorist Fighters with ISIS: A European Perspective." *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*. The Hague 6, no. 8 (2015). <http://www.icct.nl> (p.3). The Schmid and Tinnes study is extremely comprehensive and interesting.
- [5] United Nations. Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED). Background Note to Special meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee with Member States and relevant international and regional organizations on "Stemming the flow of foreign terrorist fighters." Madrid: Club de Madrid, 27-28 July 2015, p. 1.
- [6] Fighters came from four states to support Assad, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq and Russia. Most were sent by governments and were members of military forces. The number were probably around 24,000. See Schmid (Foreign) note 2, p. 14.
- [7] For a very interesting study of the apocalyptic vision in the Islamic State, see William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: 2015, St. Martin's Press).
- [8] <http://sisstudygroup.com/?p=2799>
- [9] The Crusades are the most conspicuous Christian example which lasted two centuries and produced over six million casualties. See Philippe Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom and Terror: Christianity, Violence and the West, ca 70 C.E. to the Iraq War* (Philadelphia: 2015 Univ. Pennsylvania Press). The Jewish Zealot and Sicarii movement is discussed in my "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," *American Political Science Review*, 78, 3 (September 1984) 658-77. Norman Cohn's *Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: 1957, Oxford Univ. Press) analyzes other Christian apocalyptic movements in the late medieval period. Muslim experiences with the doctrine are analyzed in Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam* (Berkeley: 2012, Univ. of California Press).
- [10] Buc, *Ibid.*, p. 283 Schmid (Foreign) note 4, p44 briefly compares the Crusaders and Islamic State practices.
- [11] Graeme Wood interviews Choudary and describes his views this way but does not cite them as quotations. See his fascinating "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic* March 2015, p.23
- [12] Frances L. Flannery examines the differences between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State's apocalyptic views, *Understanding Apocalyptic Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2016) Chapters 4 and 5
- [13] Thomas Joscelyn, "Al-Qaeda appears 'moderate' compared to Islamic State, veteran jihadist says," *Long War Journal*. October 25, 2015
- [14] Ben Hubbard, "Al-Qaeda Tries a New Tactic to Keep Power: Sharing It." *New York Times*. June 9, 2015.
- [15] <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/02/jund-al-aqsa-leaders-join-al-nusra-front.php> Accessed January 10, 2015
- [16] Charles Lister, "An Internal Struggle: Al-Qaeda's Syrian Affiliate Is Grappling With Its Identity". *Huffington Post*, May 31 2015. Accessed September 2 2015
- [17] Schmid (Foreign) note 2, p 45.
- [18] Anne Speckhard and Ahmed S. Yayla, "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Islamic State Defectors: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit" *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. IX, No. 6 (2015).
- [19] The belief that American support made the Arab governments so tenacious was the basic reason for al-Qaeda's decision for the 9/11 attack. The belief was that the U.S. would pull out of the Arab world.
- [20] Zawahiri implemented a number of indiscriminate attacks. The one that apparently bothered him most occurred in 1993 when the *Islamic Jihad in Egypt* attacked the Prime Minister from a girl's school in Cairo. 23 people were hurt and one very young schoolgirl killed. An outraged population took to the streets carrying the child's coffin and crying, "Terrorism is enemy of God". Zawahiri was so upset he offered to pay the girl's family "blood money".
- [21] <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/04/world/middleeast/syria.html> Accessed November 15, 2015
- [22] <https://www.rt.com/usa/314034-petraeus-nusra-front-isis/> Accessed November 10, 015
- [23] Wood (What) note 8 p.5
- [24] Paul Cruickshank, "Drumbeat of terror precedes slaughter that shocks France and the world" November 16, 2015 CNN. Accessed March 11, 2016
- [25] <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/11/john-kerry-paris-attacks-charlie-hebdo-215992> Accessed January 26, 2016
- [26] "Gains Made in the Struggle Against ISIS," *New York Times*, April 14, 2016
- [27] On Oct 31, two weeks before the Paris attacks, an Islamic State franchise in Egypt brought down a Russian passenger plane killing all 224 passengers which provoked the Russians to get more directly involved in the Syrian conflict. Although the Islamic State claimed credit for the attack, the franchise apparently acted on its own. It does not seem that the Islamic State wanted to get the Russians more deeply involved unlike its attacks on France and Belgium.
- [28] This is the U.S. government estimate, see "Gains" (note 26)
- [29] "ISIS fighters abduct up to 400 civilians in major attack on Deir ez-Zor," *Guardian* January 17, 2016 Accessed March 20, 2016.
- [30] <https://www.rt.com/usa/332300-brennan-isis-chemical-weapons/> While chemical weapons induce enormous fears they really do not generate great destruction. See my "Terrorism and Weapons of the Apocalypse," *National Security Studies Quarterly* V, I (Summer 1999) 49-67 Reprinted in Henry Sokolski and James Ludes eds. *Twenty-First Century Weapons Proliferation* (London:2001, Frank Cass) pp.14-32
- [31] "ISIS Abducts Workers From Cement Factory in Syria," *New York Times*, April 7, 2016
- [32] <https://www.oximity.com/article/Reports-Anti-ISIS-revolt-in-Raqqa-terr-1>. Accessed March 25, 2016
- [33] <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/al-nusra-front-arrests-backed-fighters-syria-160314075333200.html>. Accessed March 23, 2016.
- [34] <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/chatter/dabiq-magazine-issue-14-murtadd-brotherhood>
- [35] <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/belgium-confirms-it-will-resume-f-16-airstrikes-isis-wake-brussels-attacks-1551595>. Accessed March 25, 2016.
- [36] <http://www.wsj.com/articles/terror-cell-planned-fresh-attack-in-france-say-belgian-authorities-1460278593> Accessed April 12, 2016.
- [37] These numbers were announced on July 9, 2015. See <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-over-200-americans-have-gone-or-tried-to-go-to-syria-to-fight-fbi-2015-7> Accessed November 20, 2015.
- [38] Jerome P. Bjelopera "American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat" November 15, 2011 Congressional Research Service 7-5700 [www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/r41416.pdf](http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/r41416.pdf) The Report lists 53 plots but 16 were efforts to go abroad and join various Jihad groups, and we have excluded them to focus on attacks in the U.S. and on those by Americans on Americans abroad. Beyond that, one plot has occurred since the Report was issued (See Goldstein "City Bomb Plot") Four of the 16 efforts to go abroad overseas occurred before May 2009 and 12 after that date.

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- [39] In several presentations at conferences and at government agencies from 2003-7, I argued we would have no more big attacks, but no one seemed to believe me.
- [40] The Sandy Hook shootings in 2012 killed 26 but this was a mass murder not a terrorist act.
- [41] The wife Malik affirmed their allegiance to the leader of the *Islamic State* in an online post immediately after the attack before she and her husband were killed. See Richard Winton, "San Bernardino shooters praised by Islamic State magazine," *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 2016.
- [42] <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2016-03-23/isis-sends-400-specially-trained-fighters-unleash-wave-bloodshed-europe>. Accessed March 20, 2016.
- [43] For an interesting discussion of the European network organized by the Islamic State, see "Long Before Brussels, ISIS Sent Terrorist Operatives to Europe," *New York Times*, March 29, 2016. Also see <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-adopts-a-new-approach-in-europe-a-1084489.html> Retrieved March 4, 2016.
- [44] <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/.../dr-ayman-al-e1ba93awc481hirc4ab>-by SA al Zawahiri. Accessed March 3, 2016.

### III. Research Notes

#### **Analysing the Processes of Lone-Actor Terrorism: Research Findings**

by Clare Ellis, Raffaello Pantucci, Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, Edwin Bakker, Melanie Smith, Benoît Gomis and Simon Palombi

##### **Abstract**

*This Research Note presents the outcome of an investigation into the processes of lone-actor terrorism which was part of the Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism (CLAT) Project.[1] The research is based on a database of both plots and attacks across the twenty-eight EU member states, plus Norway and Switzerland, in the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2014. The database covers more than 70 variables and includes information relating to 120 individuals. This Research Note outlines some of the key findings of the CLAT project pertaining to 1) attack methodology and logistics; 2) political engagement and online activity and 3) leakage and interactions with authorities. The results relating to the personal characteristics of lone-actor terrorists are presented in a different Research Note in this issue of Perspectives on Terrorism.[2]*

**Keywords:** *Lone Actor Terrorism; Lone Wolf; Violent Extremism; Right-Wing Extremism; Islamist Extremism; Counter-Terrorism*

##### **Introduction**

**T**his Research Note presents the outcome of an investigation into the processes of lone-actor terrorism which was part of the Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism (CLAT) project. The project aimed to improve understanding of, and responses to, the phenomenon of lone-actor terrorism based on an analysis of cases from across Europe. The research team created a database covering more than 70 variables and including information relating to 120 individuals. Variables were chosen on the basis of a literature review and consultations with the project's advisory board.[3] The working definition of lone-actor terrorism utilized for this project was: 'The threat or use of violence by a single perpetrator (or small cell), not acting out of purely personal-material reasons, with the aim of influencing a wider audience, and who acts without any direct support in the planning, preparation and execution of the attack, and whose decision to act is not directed by any group or other individuals (although possibly inspired by others)'.[4]

Given the extensive nature of the enquiries conducted, the results for every variable are not recorded here; instead this Research Note offers a comprehensive outline of the most interesting findings related to the processes of lone-actor terrorism. It focuses on three sets of variables: attack methodology and logistics; political engagement and online activity, and; leakage and interactions with authorities.

##### **Limitations**

The CLAT database was constructed using open source information, and therefore, despite extensive effort by the research team, it does not contain every lone-actor terrorism plot during the period studied. First, not all plots are in the public domain, especially where they have been abandoned or disrupted by the authorities at an early stage. Second, there are variations across Europe in the way incidents are perceived and reported; for example, some incidents may be reported as a 'hate crime', but meet the criteria for inclusion in the CLAT database. The research team took steps to compensate; however, some cases will undoubtedly have been missed.

There are also some important limitations to the data collected. First, complete information is not always publically available, leading to a number of variables featuring high levels of 'unknown' entries. For some variables, this unavoidably limited the analysis that could be conducted and the strength of the conclusions that could be drawn. Second, there is an inevitable element of reporting bias: whether information is publicly available may depend on whether it was interesting to the journalists investigating the story.

### ***Analysis of the Database***

Due to the limitations of the data, it did not support detailed and sophisticated quantitative analysis. Instead, a more limited quantitative analysis was used to explore the data and highlight key trends; these were subsequently explored in greater detail through examination of case information. Various techniques were employed: in some cases, it was necessary to find the right benchmarks for comparison with the broader population; in other cases the most useful findings were uncovered through analysis of sub-categories, while correlations between variables also produced valuable insights.

### ***Process Variables: Attack Methodology and Logistics***

Ninety-eight lone-actor terrorist plots were identified for the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2014. They involved seventy-nine led by individuals, twelve by dyads and seven by triads. Among the 98 plots identified, 72 were successfully launched attacks. Of these 60 were perpetrated by individuals acting alone, 6 by dyads and another six by triads. Most plots and attacks took place in Great Britain (38) and France (11). In ten of the thirty countries studied, no lone-actor terrorist plot could be identified across the entire period of fifteen years. On the other hand, four countries had at least five plots, and two had more than five. In other words, lone-actor terrorism in Europe is rare. However, longitudinal analysis suggests an overall increase in lone-actor terrorism in the period under consideration. It is important to keep in mind that information on recent plots is more detailed and more readily available thanks to the rise in digital archives of news reports; however, even acknowledging this potential bias in the data collection, the overall trend nevertheless appears clear.

On average, lone-actor terrorist plots resulted in 1.99 fatalities and 4.58 injuries, with large standard deviations of 8.30 and 24.60, respectively. However, these figures are partly skewed by the attacks perpetrated by Anders Breivik on 22 July 2011.[5] 77 people were killed and 242 injured on that day alone, illustrating the harm a single individual can cause. Therefore, excluding Breivik as an outlier, lone-actor terrorist plots resulted in an average of 1.22 fatalities and 2.13 injuries, with standard deviations of 3.23 and 4.28, respectively. Even after the Breivik massacre in Utøya and Oslo is excluded as an outlier, the standard deviations remain relatively high, illustrating the degree of variation across the data-set. Of the lone-actor plots, 76 per cent failed to cause any fatalities, while 58 per cent caused not even injuries. These findings underline that while a few lone-actor terrorist attacks can be devastating, a high proportion of plots fail to cause major human loss. Casualty rates were also examined within ideological sub-groups: including the attack by Breivik, it was found that right-wing attacks caused 260 injuries and ninety-four fatalities[6], while religiously inspired attacks killed 16 people and injured 65 more. These results mirror findings across the West more broadly, where 80 per cent of deaths from lone-actor terrorism have been attributed to right-wing extremists, nationalists, anti-government elements or other forms of political extremism, rather than religiously inspired terrorism.[7]

Civilians are the most common target of plots in the data-set (35 per cent) –many of them are from specific ethnic and religious minorities, are asylum seekers and immigrants. A large majority of religious targets were Muslim. More than one third of lone-actors who targeted civilians were religiously inspired (37 per cent), followed by right-wing perpetrators (25 per cent) and school shooters (20 per cent).



The most frequent types of weapons used by perpetrators were firearms (31 per cent), various types of weapons (21 per cent), explosives (17 per cent) and bladed weapons (such as a knife, machete or axe – 12 per cent). While 92 per cent of bladed-weapons plots and 100 per cent of identified firearms plots led to actual attacks, this was not the case for explosives plots (45 per cent successful). These findings perhaps illustrate the difficulties of acquiring and producing explosives without detection. On the other hand, plots utilizing only firearms or bladed weapons require less planning and present fewer opportunities for law enforcement to intervene.

Moreover, even in those cases where explosives plots lead to detonations, their lethality is low, perhaps due, in part, to the difficulties in successfully producing an effective explosive. The lethality of explosives was found to be 0.57 fatalities per attack, in contrast to 6.65 for firearms attacks.[8] Across the database, explosives account for only 4 per cent of fatalities, in stark contrast to the 89 per cent caused by firearms. Interestingly, bladed weapons also had a low lethality at 0.36, accounting for only 2 per cent of deaths, illustrating that although such lone-actor terrorist attacks may be difficult to detect and disrupt, they do not often result in major casualties figures.

An analysis of weapons used across the ideological spectrum found that there were no substantial differences; however, there were clear differences between countries. While lone-actor terrorist plots in Great Britain led to 2 fatalities and 17 injuries, none of these were caused by firearms. In contrast, four attacks using firearms in France caused nineteen fatalities and thirty-two injured, accounting for 95 per cent of fatalities and 53 per cent of injuries in that country. In Germany, all five lone-actor terrorist attacks were carried out with firearms. It is interesting to note that firearms attacks were more prominent in countries with higher rates of legal gun ownership; the UK (Great Britain and Northern Ireland) has only 6.5 legally held firearms per 100,000 inhabitants, compared with approximately 30 per 100,000 people in France and Germany.[9]

Overall, our findings suggest that lone-actor terrorist attacks using firearms are more likely to occur in countries with higher rates of legal gun ownership. These also cause more fatalities than attacks using explosives or bladed weapons. Interestingly, across the data-set, 38 per cent of the firearms used in attacks were legally owned.

The CLAT literature review highlighted findings from previous research, a number of which were explored through the database. One such finding was that the level of military experience among lone-actor terrorists is higher than might be expected within the general population.[10] It was also hypothesised that individuals with military training or combat experience may be more 'effective' in conducting their attack, causing greater numbers of fatalities. This is supported by other studies of terrorism.[11] Within the CLAT database, the lethality of perpetrators with military training was 2.29 fatalities per individual, markedly higher than their counterparts without such experience at 1.47; if Breivik is removed as an outlier, the lethality of non-military perpetrators drops further to just 0.68.

This raises an important issue: the most lethal lone-actor terrorist in the database, Breivik, had no military training; the absence of military experience can therefore not be considered a conclusive indicator that a perpetrator is less dangerous. Therefore, while these findings do offer some support for the hypothesis that, on average, military training or experience increases the lethality of lone-actor terrorists, it is clear that other factors must also be taken into account.

We found that attacks planned by those with military training or experience were prevented in only 18 per cent of cases, a substantially lower proportion than the 36 per cent of perpetrators who had no comparable training or experience. While it is not possible to establish causality, one plausible interpretation could be that such experience may also have increased their ability to avoid detection during the planning and development stages.

**Process Variables: Political Engagement and Online Activity**

The suspected ideology of the perpetrators was determined by reports from media coverage or from information that emerged during court proceedings. 86 out of the 120 perpetrators in the database were either religiously inspired (38 per cent) or right-wing extremists (33 per cent), together they accounted for almost three out of four lone-actor terrorists during this time period. Given the intense public preoccupation with religiously inspired terrorism, the finding that right-wing extremists account for an almost similar proportion of perpetrators within the database is remarkable.

In 73 per cent of cases, perpetrators had offered oral or written justifications for their actions[12]; however, the format of these expressions differed substantially. Only sixteen perpetrators (13 per cent) wrote and published a detailed manifesto, either online or written on paper. While such documents can potentially offer detailed insights into the perpetrator's radicalisation, the development of attack plans and preparatory actions, such testimonies are comparatively rare. The pre-attack publication of a manifesto is therefore likely to offer opportunities for intervention in only a limited number of lone-actor plots. In other cases, perpetrators either harnessed the immediacy and reach of social media to publish media files or text documents just a few hours prior to their attacks, or alternatively made significant oral statements just before the attack or during arrest.

Unsurprisingly, the motivations expressed vary greatly across the ideologies represented in the data-set. Perpetrators appeared to harbour a broad range of disgruntlements with sectors of the public, governments or social movements, or they manifested anger over specific events (either personal or political) for which they were seeking retribution.

Among the right-wing perpetrators in the data-set, there was a strong emphasis on immigration issues, a wish to inspire patriotism and to defend their country from alleged 'Islamisation'. This reflects a shift within the broader right-wing extremism, with many groups and individuals denouncing National Socialism, Fascism and anti-Semitism; instead, they define their cause as defence against a perceived threat from Islam. [13] However, there remains a significant portion of lone-actor terrorists in the database who appear to have been preoccupied solely with neo-Nazi symbolism and the idolisation of far-right figureheads. Examining the influence of specific events, in Great Britain, there are indications that following the murder of Lee Rigby, 47 per cent of right-wing perpetrators were in part motivated by that attack. These cases of revenge include arson attacks and bombings of Islamic centres.

Within the religiously inspired cohort, there are numerous references to taking revenge for political action, such as Western Europe's foreign policy in the Middle East in the aftermath of 9/11, the national government's support for Israel, the treatment of terror suspects imprisoned in Abu Ghraib or retribution for cartoons that depicted the Prophet Muhammad. These references are complemented by attempts to justify their intentions on the basis of the alleged religious obligation to wage a violent *jihad*.

The majority of lone-actor terrorists in the data-set (58 per cent) did not appear to be previously politically active.[14] Of those that were politically engaged, 43 per cent had attended meetings and rallies, while 47 per cent had conducted their relationship with their reference group solely through literature and online materials. However, it should be noted that this latter form of engagement is likely to have grown in recent years in line with the rise of social media and the availability of extremist materials in downloadable multimedia format on personal computers. Indeed, 50 per cent of perpetrators conducted at least part of their engagement in a virtual online setting. In some of these cases this involved the downloading of videos, images and literature as well as online interaction on official forums and web pages.

Within ideological categories, right-wing lone-actor terrorists were more likely to be politically active (62.5 per cent) than their religiously inspired counterparts (44.3 per cent). Approximately two-thirds of the perpetrators (67 per cent) had never before been active in an extremist group. Where connections had been

established, 65 per cent of links (or 22 per cent of the overall database) were with extremist groups known to advocate or at least condone violence to advance their cause. These would typically be groups with a known history of involvement in violent attacks, groups which are illegal in the country in which they operate. Moreover, 69 per cent of these links to violent groups (or 15 per cent of the overall database) were of recent date at the time of the attack. While the overall level of engagement with extremist groups is low, these findings suggest there is perhaps a need for greater surveillance of groups which advocate violence as well as those who interact with them. Although religiously inspired lone actors were more likely to have a link to an extremist group, the range of organisations linked to right-wing perpetrators was greater.

Within the database, examples of online activity included using the Internet to form relationships with others, to gain the inspiration for the attack or to acquire technical know-how. In recent years, the role of the internet and social media have been particularly prominent in public discourses around lone-actor terrorism. [15] Chronological analysis of the CLAT database shows a steady increase in the use of mainstream social media platforms in plots. This took off from around 2004 onwards, as platforms became established, grew in popularity and diversified in capabilities.

Prior to the popularisation of mainstream social media, password-protected forums and themed blogs were the most prevalent form of communication for the perpetrators. Many of the small cells (dyads or triads) met on such platforms, where they created their own space to discuss and solidify their attack plans.

Where perpetrators have primarily engaged through social media platforms, the information gathered overwhelmingly indicates a one-way relationship – reading and sharing relevant news, and expressing opinions, rather than utilising these platforms to form connections with other people.

The Internet was used for tactical knowledge acquisition in just under one third of all cases (33 per cent), in the form of downloading manuals, watching training videos, or undertaking basic reconnaissance such as researching the floorplan of a building, finding addresses or searching for lists of individuals in order to identify potential targets. Twenty-one out of the thirty-nine perpetrators who used the Internet to prepare their attack downloaded training manuals (54 per cent), including *The Anarchist's Cookbook* (referenced in six cases), *The Jolly Roger Cookbook* and *The Complete Improvised Kitchen*, which provide instructions for the construction and detonation of explosives. Of these twenty-one cases, only ten successfully launched attacks using explosives; most of the remainder were thwarted by the authorities. Of these ten bombings, only one directly caused fatalities – Anders Breivik's bombing in downtown Oslo which killed 8 people. This outcome raises some questions over the accuracy of training manuals for bomb-making at home.

The proportion of perpetrators who watched training videos appears relatively small (only 5 cases). However, this is likely to become more significant over time given the centrality of training and propaganda videos for some extremist organisations.

### ***Process Variables: Leakage and Interactions with Authorities***

Changes in behaviour can be crucial indicators that an individual is becoming more extreme in his or her views or is considering acts of violence in the near future. The CLAT database was therefore designed to also capture this type of information. Variables recorded whether open source information indicated a change in the perpetrator's behaviour in the period leading up to the (planned) attack, along with any available details regarding both the nature of the lone actor's behaviour and the context in which it was noted.

Overall, 34 per cent of lone-actor terrorists exhibited a change in behaviour. Moreover, these changes were more prevalent among religiously inspired lone-actor terrorists: 50 per cent of perpetrators in this category exhibited behavioral changes, as opposed to only 15 per cent of right-wing terrorist plotters. Examples of

such behaviour include becoming increasingly distant from family members, manifesting sudden and drastic changes in attitude, as well as more specific ones like changing from one social groups to another.

The term 'leakage' was used in the CLAT project to denote situations where the perpetrator has given one or more indications of extreme views or an expressed his intention to act to a third party; such indicators could be intentional or shown unwittingly. Leakage may be limited to behavioural changes but can also be much broader: in some extreme cases it involved outright declarations of an intention to commit a terrorist act.

Variables captured whether or not leakage occurred, its nature and the audience. Overall, 46 per cent of perpetrators exhibited leakage; this level of leakage was consistent for both religiously inspired and right-wing actors, with no significant variation. Leakage took various forms: in 35 per cent of cases it gave an indication of the perpetrator's extremist ideology, but nothing further—for example, in the form of expressing extreme views to friends and family, or being seen to access extremist websites.

In 44 per cent of cases the perpetrator went further and 'leaked' some indication of an intention to act. In some examples this was deliberate, posting online that he or she planned to become a martyr, telling colleagues or sending information to the media. In other cases this was done unwittingly; those around one perpetrator realised he was experimenting with explosives when he was seen with suspicious injuries, while another failed to dispose of receipts for chemicals which were subsequently found by family members.

In 21 per cent of cases the perpetrator shared at least some details of the planned attack with others. In one example the lone actor told his ex-girlfriend and showed her the weapons in his bag; in another case he informed his parents, while a third lone actor leaked attack details to a third party whom the individual was trying to recruit.

There were striking differences between ideological groups with regard to the audience of the leakage. Religiously inspired lone-actor terrorists were most likely to leak information to friends or family (45 per cent), expressing extreme views to those in their immediate vicinity. In contrast, only 18 per cent of leakage by right-wing extremists was to this audience.

Right-wing lone-actor terrorists were more likely to post telling indicators online; it was on the internet, where 41 per cent of their leakage occurred. Examples include a perpetrator who left a message on the internet forum of a known far-right group, Combat 18: 'Watch TV on Sunday, I will be the star. Death to ZOG! 88!' [16] Another lone actor had joined a number of far-right groups on Facebook including Bloc Identitaire (formerly Unité Radicale), Maison Commune and Belle et Rebelle.

The research team originally thought that younger perpetrators might be more careless in revealing their extremist beliefs or attack plans. However, analysis suggested no such correlation between young age and leakage. Similarly, there was no correlation with mental-health issues: where there was an indication of mental-health issues those perpetrators were no more likely to exhibit leakage.

The timeframe in which leakage occurred was also investigated, in order to ascertain any patterns and to determine whether leakage allowed sufficient time for detection and intervention. Unfortunately, this type of information was either unavailable or unclear in too many cases. Nevertheless, the database provides useful insights into the prevalence of leakage, its nature and, crucially, the audiences that are most likely to encounter be informed in one way or the other.

Variables were also designed to capture whether the perpetrator had been known previously to public authorities such as mental-health practitioners, social-welfare services or law-enforcement bodies. Separate variables recorded whether the engagement (or investigation) was current at the time of the attack or intervention.

Convictions offer clear evidence of interaction with law enforcement; moreover, the project's literature review highlighted findings from previous studies that showed an elevated level of previous convictions among lone-actor terrorists.[17] These findings were reinforced by data from the CLAT database. It contained evidence to the effect that 33 per cent of perpetrators had a previous criminal sanction; among right-wing extremists, this figure rose to 40 per cent. These figures are notably higher than those for the general population (e.g. in the UK it is estimated that 20 per cent of all adults have a criminal conviction).[18] Although certainly an interesting finding, without examining the nature of any previous convictions and whether these overlap with—or far predate—the perpetrator's terrorist activity, it is not possible to determine whether they offer an opportunity to identify and disrupt plots. Unfortunately, more detailed information regarding interaction with authorities was often unavailable or inconclusive.

Such data limitations also precluded extensive quantitative analysis across the database; however, some trends were nevertheless apparent. Overall, 75 per cent of religiously inspired plots led to an attack, in contrast to 55 per cent of right-wing plots. This disparity could indicate that religiously inspired perpetrators are more effective than their right-wing counterparts. Alternatively, it could indicate that law enforcement efforts are more successful in identifying right-wing extremists; however, further examination appears to preclude this. Excluding cases where a perpetrator was identified during (or immediately following) an incident, it was established that 40 per cent of right-wing extremists were caught by chance, either as part of an investigation into other offences or because the perpetrator accidentally detonated a device, thereby drawing attention to his or her activities.

One perpetrator sustained serious injuries while testing a device and was airlifted to hospital; the nature of his injuries roused suspicions and a search of his home revealed the presence of additional explosive devices. The bomb-making activities of another perpetrator were discovered when his home was searched as part of an investigation into the possession of child pornography. In a third case, a perpetrator's terrorist activity was uncovered following his arrest for public-order offences—he had urinated on a train platform. These examples stand in stark contrast to religiously inspired cases. Although chance discovery was also evident in some cases—with one perpetrator being identified following a routine traffic stop and another having accidentally detonated a device—overall 88 per cent of interventions were intelligence-led.[19] This disparity suggests that intelligence machinery may be more finely attuned to detecting religiously inspired lone-actor terrorists in comparison to their right-wing counterparts.

## **Conclusion**

Analysis of the CLAT database reaffirms a key finding from the literature review: there is no single and consistent profile of a lone-actor terrorist. However, systematic analysis of cases from across Europe has provided valuable insights into the scale of the threat, the ways in which it is most likely to manifest itself, and the activities of lone-actor terrorists in the period leading up to the attack. The policy implications of these findings have been explored in detail in some other reports in the CLAT series.[20]

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## Notes

- [1] See also Clare Ellis et al., "Analysis Paper", *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 4* (Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2016), [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201602\\_clat\\_analysis\\_paper.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201602_clat_analysis_paper.pdf).
- [2] Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn and Edwin Bakker, "Analysing Personal Characteristics of Lone-Actor Terrorists: Research Findings and Recommendations", *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol. 10. No. 2 (2016).
- [3] Raffaello Pantucci, Clare Ellis and Lorien Chaplais, "Literature Review" *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 1* (Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2015), [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201512\\_clat\\_literature\\_review\\_0.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201512_clat_literature_review_0.pdf). The authors are grateful to the advisory board for their input, in particular to Dr Paul Gill who shared insights from his on-going research at the CLAT project kick-off meeting in London, September 2014.
- [4] For further discussion regarding this definition and how it was established, see Edwin Bakker and Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, "Lone-Actor Terrorism. Definitional Workshop", *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 2* (Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2015), [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201512\\_clat\\_definitional\\_workshop.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201512_clat_definitional_workshop.pdf).
- [5] Entries in the Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism (CLAT) database were made against perpetrators rather than attacks; as a result, the bombings of government buildings in the centre of Oslo and the shootings on the island of Utøya by Anders Breivik in 2011 were recorded in a single entry.
- [6] Right-wing plots resulted in eighteen injuries and seventeen fatalities if the Breivik case is excluded as an outlier.
- [7] Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2015* (Sydney, New York, NY and Mexico: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015).
- [8] To be as comprehensive as possible, in calculating lethality rates the fatalities from 'multiple- weapon' attacks have been included where it was possible to definitively attribute casualties.
- [9] European Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Firearms and the Internal Security of the EU: Protecting Citizens and Disrupting Illegal Trafficking', COM(2013) 716, 21 October 2013.
- [10] Pantucci, Ellis and Chaplais, 'Lone-Actor Terrorism: Literature Review'.
- [11] See Brian Michael Jenkins, 'We include extremist groups.'
- [12] In the 28 per cent of cases where such explicit justification was not present, motivations were often brought to light during trials with the discovery of evidence or material possessions – hence these cases still warranted inclusion in the data-set.
- [13] Toby Archer, 'Breivik's Mindset: The Counterjihad and the New Transatlantic Anti-Muslim Right'; in: Max Taylor, P M Currie and Donald Holbrook (Eds), *Extreme Right-Wing Political Violence and Terrorism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 169–86.
- [14] The variable of political engagement takes into account the perpetrator's involvement in, or membership of, both mainstream political parties and informal political movements. This can also include extremist groups.
- [15] See Anne Aly, 'The Terrorists' Audience: A Model of Internet Radicalisation', *Journal of Australian Professional Intelligence Officers* Vol. 171 (2009), pp. 3–19; Ines von Behr et al., 'Radicalisation in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism', RAND Corporation, 2013.
- [16] ZOG is an abbreviation for Zionist Occupation Government, while "88 is used to represent 'Heil Hitler', as 'H' is the eighth letter of the alphabet.
- [17] Pantucci, Ellis and Chaplais, "Lone-Actor Terrorism: "CLAT Literature Review".
- [18] Stephen Howard, "'Ban the Box' Campaign Asks Employers to Give Ex-Offenders a Chance", *The Guardian*, 17 October 2013.
- [19] Excluding cases where a perpetrator was identified during (or immediately following) an incident.
- [20] See Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn and Edwin Bakker in this issue of Perspectives on Terrorism; see also Simon Palombi and Benoît Gomis, "Policy Paper 2: Attack Methodology and Logistics", *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 6* (Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2016), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-02-29-lone-actor-terrorism-attack-methodology-logistics-palombi-gomis-final.pdf>; Melanie Smith, Sabine Barton and Jonathan Birdwell, "Policy Paper 3: Motivations, Political Engagement and Online Activity", *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 7* (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2016), <http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CLAT-Policy-Paper-3-ISD.pdf>; Clare Ellis and Raffaello Pantucci, "Policy Paper 4: 'Leakage' and Interaction with Authorities", *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 8* (Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2016), [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201602\\_clat\\_policy\\_paper\\_4.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201602_clat_policy_paper_4.pdf).

# Analysing Personal Characteristics of Lone-Actor Terrorists: Research Findings and Recommendations

by Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn and Edwin Bakker

## Abstract

*This Research Note presents the outcome of a project that looked at the personal characteristics of lone-actor terrorists. It is part of the larger Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism (CLAT) project. The project described here aimed to improve understanding of, and responses to, the phenomenon of (potentially) violent lone-actors based on an analysis of 120 cases from across Europe. The Research Note focuses on the personal characteristics of lone-actor terrorists.[1] First of all, it presents the main findings of the general analysis of the study into personal variables of lone-actor terrorists. Subsequently, the authors outline a set of recommendations based on the key findings. In the beginning, we present the main research questions of the CLAT project and the working definition of lone-actor terrorism.*

**Keywords:** Lone actor; lone wolf; personal variables; terrorist profile

## Research Questions and Definition

What drives an individual to commit acts of violent extremism? Is the process of radicalisation towards violent extremism and terrorism for a lone-actor different from group-based radicalisation? Can we identify indicators that signal whether an individual is going down the path of violent extremism, and, if so, how can we prevent and counter lone-actor terrorism? So-called “lone wolves” have become an increasing concern for governments across Europe, certainly since the massacre caused by Anders B. Breivik in Norway in 2011. Concern has risen in the light of foreign fighters returning to their home countries. The Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism (CLAT) project aimed to answer these questions through analysis of data pertaining to attempted plots and successful cases of European solo terrorists.

For this project, lone-actor terrorism was defined as

*‘The threat or use of violence by a single perpetrator (or small cell), not acting out of purely personal-material reasons, with the aim of influencing a wider audience, and who acts without any direct support in the planning, preparation and execution of the attack, and whose decision to act is not directed by any group or other individuals (although possibly inspired by others).’[2]*

Examples of individuals who fall under this definition are “classical” terrorists such as jihadists or right-wing extremists. In some cases, school shooters were also included, but only in those cases when they had a broader societal goal, and aimed to influence a wider audience.

The research involved the construction of a database on perpetrators of lone-actor terrorism within the European Union for the years between 2000 and 2014. To that end, a codebook was developed, establishing how incidents should be categorised and recorded in the database. Data were collected from open sources (court proceedings, media reports).[3] This resulted in the identification of 120 perpetrators of lone-actor terrorism; they were involved in 98 plots and 72 actual attacks. These were coded on a wide range of variables. These cases were studied from four particular angles: attack planning and preparation, law enforcement, online and political engagement and personal characteristics. In this Research Note, we will report on personal characteristics found[4] and briefly present the main findings as also outlined in the analysis paper.[5]

### ***Personal Characteristics of Lone-Actor Terrorists***

Prior to this project, a few scholars have conducted some exploratory research into this area[6] but due to a lack of reliable empirical data, no clear answer about the personal characteristics of perpetrators could be given. Nevertheless a number of unproven assumptions and claims about a presumed “lone-actor terrorist personality” have circulated in the public domain. The media’s favourite term “lone wolves” invokes the idea of a single actor who is a recluse, detached from society, hungry for action and willing and able to strike out of the dark at any moment. Another often-mentioned personality trait of the lone-actor is that he (less frequently: she) is supposed to have serious mental health problems – these being the key triggers for violent, irrational and immoral acts. A number of questions raised address differences between “group” and “lone-actor” terrorists. Is the lone-actor preferring a strategy of solitary action, or is he forced to do so after failing to be accepted by a terrorist network (perhaps as a result of certain personality or behavioural traits that are deemed to be a risk for the group’s security)? Alternatively: are terrorist organisations deliberately employing them as part of a strategy of “acting alone” – in a framework of “leaderless jihad” – so as to minimise the risk of detection by authorities?

In order to answer such questions, we have collected data on biographical variables that allow us to confirm or falsify various claims. We have looked at the following variables incorporated in our codebook: age, gender, education and school drop-out, employment, relationship status, having children, indication of successful sibling, indication of social isolation, previous criminal sanction, indication of previous physical violence, evidence of drug use, indication of a mental health disorder[7], diagnosis and treatment, indication of a noteworthy life event.[8]

### ***Analysis***

#### ***Age and Ideological Profiles***

The average age of the 120 perpetrators was found to be 29.7 years at the time of attack or arrest, with the youngest perpetrator being fifteen and the oldest seventy-four. The standard deviation was 9.9, indicating a large variance between the different perpetrators. Age was also contrasted with ideology. Not surprisingly, school shooters were found to be younger (20.5) than the overall average in the database. It is also notable that religiously inspired perpetrators are on average almost five years younger (27.3) than those driven by a right-wing ideology (32.3). Moreover, there is less variation among this religiously inspired group, with a standard deviation of 7.69 in contrast to 11.88 for right-wing extremists.

These disparities were investigated further. Religiously inspired and right-wing perpetrators comprised more than 70 per cent of cases in the database; however, despite a comparable number of cases (46 and 40 respectively), these ideologies resulted in very different age profiles. Among the youngest group aged less than twenty-five years, it was found that almost half of the perpetrators were religiously inspired (47 per cent); in contrast, among the perpetrators aged forty years or older, only 21 per cent were religiously inspired while 47 per cent were right-wing extremists.

Variations between age groups were also evident in relation to social isolation and mental-health disorders. The youngest group (younger than twenty-five years old) showed the highest percentage of social isolation at 36 per cent; fewer perpetrators aged 25–39 years old exhibited similar signs (25 per cent); while those aged at least forty years old presented the lowest figure at 11 per cent. In line with this, the youngest age group (younger than twenty-five years old) manifested, with 40 per cent, the highest percentage of suggested mental-health disorder.

Similarly, ideological categories presented strikingly different results in relation to social isolation. Across the entire database 29 per cent of perpetrators were in some way socially isolated; this rose slightly to 33 per

cent for right-wing extremists, but dropped drastically to only 9 per cent for religiously inspired lone-actor terrorists. As indicated earlier, the highest figure could be found among school shooters at 75 per cent.

The prevalence of “noteworthy life events” also varied substantially between different ideological groups. While such events were noted in 43 per cent of cases across the data-set, the figure was higher within the single-issue subset at 67 per cent, and among the school shooters at 88 per cent. Upon examining the latter group, it was established that in many cases the event related to bullying. In contrast to these elevated figures, only 37 per cent of religiously inspired perpetrators and 28 per cent of right-wing cases suggested the prior occurrence of a noteworthy life event. These findings suggest that a noteworthy life event should not be considered a consistent trigger leading to a process of radicalisation and mobilisation towards violence.

### *Mental-Health Disorders*

In 35 per cent of cases there was an indication of a mental-health disorder based on news media reporting. However, in order to interpret the significance of this result, it is crucial to have a benchmark. In examining the EU, Norway, Iceland and Switzerland, the World Health Organization (WHO) found that ‘27 per cent of the adult population (18–65) had experienced at least one of a series of mental disorders in the past year (this included problems arising from substance abuse, psychoses, depression, anxiety and eating disorders)’.[9] Although the WHO uses a broad definition, this offers an appropriate comparator, given the low threshold used by the corresponding CLAT variable that records any “indication of” mental disorder. The finding of a potential mental-health disorder in 35 per cent of lone-actor terrorists therefore does not suggest a substantial deviation from the broader population. Moreover, the WHO also states that “[about] two-thirds of people suffering mental disorders will never seek help because of discrimination and the stigma attached to such conditions” indicating that the general population figure may even be higher than indicated.[10]

Indications of mental-health disorders were also examined within ideological sub-groups. The most striking finding comes from school shooters where there was an indication of mental-health disorder in 63 per cent of all cases. Interestingly, the mental health percentage was lowest among religiously inspired lone-actor terrorists where it stood at 24 per cent. Some caution must be required in interpreting these findings. Reporting bias may influence whether or not journalists investigate and/or report the possibility of mental-health disorders; for example, questions regarding the psychological state of a perpetrator are perhaps more prominent in the case of school shooters. Some communities are also reluctant to speak with journalists, some cultural backgrounds also make people unwilling to openly discuss mental-health issues. Nevertheless, the finding that 63 per cent of school shooters exhibited some form of mental-health disorder should be a clear warning signal for those in charge of prevention.

In cases where there was an indication of a mental-health disorder, 50 per cent of perpetrators were also socially isolated, in contrast to only 17 per cent where there were no suggestions of mental health problems. Similarly, examination of socially isolated perpetrators found that in 62 per cent of cases there was an indication of mental-health disorder. These findings suggest a clear link between these two variables.

Finally, where legally owned firearms were the weapon of choice for an attack (fifteen cases), there was an indication of mental-health disorder for 53 per cent of all perpetrators.

All in all, these findings demonstrate the importance of looking at different sub-groups. Overall, the data do not suggest support for any stereotype of lone-actor terrorists or a “lone-actor terrorist profile”. There simply is no typical lone-actor terrorist. However, combining results on different variables and looking at subgroups can offer directions for preventive measures and policy-recommendations.



***Policy Recommendations: Sub-Groups and Benchmarking***

Our database contains information of 120 perpetrators from different EU countries, who have very different backgrounds and often act out of very different motivations. While it is useful to start from the aggregate data, we feel the most relevant conclusions can be drawn when comparing our data to benchmarks.

***Mental health disorder***

As indicated earlier, we found that in 35% of the cases, some reference was made to a mental health disorder. It must be noted that this does not mean that the perpetrators were officially diagnosed by authorised medical authorities. In some of these cases, it meant that the direct environment of the perpetrator – family, friends, colleagues – indicated that the perpetrator was allegedly receiving some kind of treatment for a mental health disorder. In other cases, it meant that the direct environment reported that they were aware of the fact that the perpetrator had been suffering from mental health disorders. Thus, this should not be interpreted as an official diagnosis of a mental health disorder; rather it indicates whether or not the direct environment of the perpetrator had (retrospectively) received signals about a mental health disorder.

How should we interpret this figure of 35%? This particular number can be interpreted in different ways. Some might claim that this finding reflects the simple fact that in 35% of 120 cases we have found evidence pointing at a mental health disorder while in the other 65% of all cases we were unable to find such evidence. However, whereas it is conceivable that the real percentage is higher, the opposite statement could also be made: the real rate might have been lower. To some extent it could also be comforting or logical for relatives or acquaintances of the perpetrator to say that they “knew it all along” that “something was seriously wrong” with this particular person. Thus, the figure of 35% cannot be taken as a hard fact, but it can be taken as an estimate reflecting that about one third of all lone-actor terrorists might have mental health problems.

What then, does a percentage of 35 tell us about the population of lone-actor terrorists: are they more confronted with these kind of problems than others, or not? As already explained, there is a need for an accurate benchmark to compare to our findings. The data most appropriate for a comparison is compiled by the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO stated that ‘27% of the adult population (18-65) had experienced at least one of a series of mental disorders in the past year (this included problems arising from substance abuse, psychoses, depression, anxiety, and eating disorders)’.[11] This includes a wide range of disorders. It must be noted that not all of them can be linked to violence. The Institute of Medicine notes that ‘[m]ost patients with stable mental illness do not present an increased risk of violence’. It also adds that ‘[m]ental illness may increase the likelihood of committing violence in some individuals, but only a small part of the violence in society can be ascribed to mental health patients’.[12] Therefore, we should refrain from making any causal claims about a direct relation between mental health disorders and violence. Clinicians have also noted that we should not adopt ‘the simplistic notion that (...) mental illness could act as a marker for potential assassins, when psychotic illnesses affect nearly 1% of the population (i.e. are relatively common [in medical terms]) and assassins are extraordinarily rare’.[13] Whereas there might be a few exceptional cases where mental health disorders might have indeed contributed to the violent act, the above-mentioned statements clearly warn us not to approach the question of lone-actor terrorism from a mental health perspective. To put it simply, we should not regard those who are seeking mental help as a “pool” of potential lone-actor terrorists. Similarly, it would also be rather absurd to start identifying potential lone-actor terrorists by screening or paying close attention to the entire male population within the European Union (as 96% of the lone-actor terrorists are male). Focusing simply on those who are seeking mental help would not only be inaccurate and probably yield little results, but it could also have serious social ramifications. It could stigmatize those being in therapy and deter people who need help from seeking it, which could have serious consequences for the individual and his or her environment. To sum up: the benchmark of the WHO does enable us to judge the correlation between mental health disorders and lone-actors in comparison to the general population. When comparing our figure of 35% with the 27% provided by the WHO, we do not see

a large difference. Another finding is that there are wide differences between the ideological groups – right-wing extremist, left-wing and anarchist, single issue, religiously-inspired, and other. This raises the following two questions:

- What is the difference between “mental health cultures” in the different countries in our database?
- What is the difference in “mental health cultures” between the different sub-groups in our database?

These are just two particular questions that we think should be asked by those interpreting the results with the aim of formulating certain policies or strategies to deal with the issues. We can already point to the previously quoted figure from the WHO that ‘[a]bout two-thirds of people suffering mental disorders will never seek help because of discrimination and the stigma attached to such conditions.’[14] This last point is particularly relevant when looking at the data within particular sub-groups. We found, for instance, that the percentage of mental health disorders within the religiously-inspired group (24%) is even a bit lower than the figure presented by WHO.

### *Other variables*

Some other areas also showed interesting results when focusing on particular sub-groups instead of the aggregated data. The average age of all perpetrators was 29.7 years old. This effectively refutes the idea that perpetrators of lone-actor violence are very young and can often still be found in (high) schools. When focusing more closely on sub-groups within the database, we find some interesting results. For instance, the combination of certain age groups and ideologies showed a clear pattern: the older perpetrators (40+) in our database were in almost half of the cases (47%) motivated by a right-wing ideology whereas the younger perpetrators were in almost half of the cases (47%) religiously-inspired.

In sum, in order to be able to accurately interpret and work with the data, it is important to have appropriate benchmarks and also to identify relevant sub-groups where results might be more specific and thus relevant for policy measures.

### ***Policy Recommendations: Trust and Embeddedness***

In the previous section we outlined why we need benchmarks to compare to our data. Our data on mental health disorders, combined with the observations by the WHO, and some comments received by mental health practitioners during the workshops of this project, helped us to identify the area of trust and transparency. When looking at the sub-groups, we found a large difference between the ideological groups and the score on the indication of a mental health disorder. For all clearly defined ideologies (religiously-inspired, right-wing and single issue) we found scores below the overall average (respectively 24%, 28% and 33%). The score that highly deviated from the average was found in the group “other”, where we found a figure of 70%. The group “other” is inherently different from the other ideologies listed: it is the group with the least well-defined ideology, with perpetrators who often “cut and paste” their worldview from different sources to form their own particular subset of ideological influences. As indicated before, 63% of the school shooters within this group were reportedly suffering from a mental health disorder. Based on this one might reach several different conclusions. It could be argued that those with a more vague ideology (or a mix of different ideologies) are perhaps more often motivated by personal frustrations. To some extent, this shows similarities to what researchers from the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre called a ‘highly personalised quest for justice.’[15] Secondly, it could also be said that these differences are perhaps not really reflecting differences within the actual prevalence of mental health disorders within different sub-groups, but rather reflect different “mental health cultures”. For instance, it is widely known that within certain communities, there is a taboo on openly speaking about mental health problems. Especially in some religious communities as well as many extremist scenes, this is simply seen as “not done”. This is not surprising, given the fact that the World Health Organization reported that two-thirds of those with a mental health disorder never seek

help, which could also mean that people are less prone to speak about mental health problems to their friends and family. Also, national differences should be taken into account here as well.

### *Social Isolation and Lower Barriers to Mental Health Services*

It is interesting to look at this also in light of the figures on social isolation. Contrary to some of the widespread notions about “lone-actors”, such as that they are lonely, reclusive, and living detached from society, we found that the majority is far from being isolated. In the religiously-inspired group, we saw that the percentage of those socially isolated was very low (9%). Especially when these perpetrators were part of a religious community, they often have strong ties to their fellow believers. It is then also this group that is most likely to notice any change in behaviour, or mental health problems. It is thus not only desirable from an ethical point of view to lower barriers to mental health services. The existence of mental health services that are culturally and religiously sensitive is an important step towards building trust and lowering the threshold for troubled persons to seek help. This should first and foremost be a goal in itself, as improving the accessibility of mental health clinics for those in need is a noble effort and much needed as the WHO noted. This does not mean, however, that it could not also be beneficial in light of countering lone-actor violence. Removing taboos on certain issues such as mental health problems also increases the chances of “suspicious” cases being noticed or notified, although it must again be stressed that this should not be the starting point to approach the issue. This could both mean that mental health practitioners have the opportunity to help those who would normally not have crossed their way. It could also result in families and relatives feeling safe to speak out if they pick up signs of potentially violent behaviour. In some cases, those acquaintances might have had been able to alert mental health services.

Although focusing on removing taboos and encouraging openness and transparency about mental health problems is one of the areas where progress could be made, we should keep in mind that the figures we have found do not seem to point at an unusually high prevalence of mental health disorders among lone-actors. Ultimately, the most important and best equipped “detectors” are not mental health practitioners or local police officers, but family, friends, and colleagues who can judge whether or not a person is “at risk”. Against this backdrop, it is also relevant to briefly highlight the role that social care and social workers could play. They could also serve as sensors in communities to detect where individuals might cross the line into any type of violent behaviour. It must be noted here that there are also clear limits to what can be expected in this regard since many lone-actors are not known to either social care or mental health services.

### ***Policy Recommendations: Multi-Agency Approach for Preventing and Identifying Potential Lone-Actors***

An often-mentioned recommendation in many domains of counterterrorism policy is the need for a multi-agency approach. Few would doubt that this is an important step but it is rarely specified what this exactly means and how this should be attained. Recording and exchanging every piece of information about every individual within certain services would probably do more harm than good: it would be an unfeasible approach and it raises ethical questions about the right to privacy of individuals. Still, some areas can be identified where perhaps more effort should be focused on improving these information-exchange procedures. A striking observation in our dataset was that out of the fifteen perpetrators who legally possessed fire-arms, eight of these 15 individuals were also said to have suffered from a mental health disorder. Two different conclusions can be drawn from this. The first is that these eight perpetrators who were positively identified as having suffered from a mental health disorder might not all have been known to mental health services. This again reaffirms the plea made for more openness and trust within certain communities, which could have resulted in those perpetrators being noticed. Secondly, for those who were known to mental health services: this raises questions about the effectiveness of information-exchange between those responsible for issuing legal gun permits and those within the mental health sector. Rather than having a broad approach of focusing on everyone within the mental health sector, specifically focusing

on those with a known history of mental health issues who also aim to obtain a gun permit is perhaps more beneficial. It is precisely in such areas where we might have the highest chance of detecting and preventing lone-actor terrorism.

Some agencies and services in a number of countries could serve as a good example or best practice of designing such a multi-agency approach. The earlier mentioned Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (FTAC) in the UK brings together police and social and mental health practitioners, e.g. psychiatric nurses who work on both separate and shared servers to both guarantee privacy as well as information-sharing. The “Team Threat Management” (Team Dreigingsmanagement) of the Dutch National Police also seeks to bring together these different kinds of expertise in order to accurately assess the risk of certain individuals. It must be noted that both examples relate to a multi-agency approach of agencies involved in cases of individuals who are already seen as posing a potential threat.

### **Conclusion**

In this Research Note, we have formulated some overall recommendations relating to our data on personal variables derived from 120 perpetrators of lone-actor terrorism. We feel it is more appropriate for the professionals working in the different sectors, such as the mental health sector, to design and evaluate concrete policies. Nevertheless we hope to have been able to pinpoint some areas where improvements can be made, or areas that should be taken into account when trying to interpret data. We have specifically outlined the importance of benchmarking and of focusing on at different sub-groups. We also stressed that trust and openness is important as is a multi-agency cooperation approach.

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*Recent publications include: [The Hofstadgroup Revisited](#). In: *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27 (5), 2015; [EU Counter-radicalization Policies: A Comprehensive and Consistent Approach?](#) In: *Intelligence and National Security* 30 (2-3), 281-305, 2015; [Reintegrating jihadist extremists: evaluating a Dutch initiative, 2013–2014](#). In *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 1-20, 2015; [Terrorism and Counterterrorism Studies. Comparing Theory and Practice](#). Leiden University Press, 2015.*

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## Notes

- [1] The second Research Note in this issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* presents the results on the processes of lone-actor terrorism, see Clare Ellis et al, "Analysing the Processes of Lone-Actor Terrorism: Research Findings", *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol. 10, No. 2 (2016).
- [2] Edwin Bakker and Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, "Lone-Actor Terrorism. Definitional Workshop", *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series* No. 2 (Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2015), [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201512\\_clat\\_definitional\\_workshop.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201512_clat_definitional_workshop.pdf).
- [3] For more information about the data collection process, see Sebastien Feve and Kelsey Bjornsgaard, "Lone-Actor Terrorism: Database Workshop", *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series* No. 3 (Royal United Nations Service Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2015), [http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Database\\_Workshop.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Database_Workshop.pdf).
- [4] For the other three focus areas, see Simon Palombi and Benoît Gomis, "Policy Paper 2: Attack Methodology and Logistics", *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series* No. 6 (Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2016); <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-02-29-lone-actor-terrorism-attack-methodology-logistics-palombi-gomis-final.pdf>; Melanie Smith, Sabine Barton and Jonathan Birdwell, "Policy Paper 3: Motivations, Political Engagement and Online Activity", *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series* No. 7 (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2016); <http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CLAT-Policy-Paper-3-ISD.pdf>; Clare Ellis and Raffaello Pantucci, "Policy Paper 4: 'Leakage' and Interaction with Authorities", *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series* No. 8 (Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2016), [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201602\\_clat\\_policy\\_paper\\_4.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201602_clat_policy_paper_4.pdf).
- [5] Ellis et al., "Analysis Paper", *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series* No. 4 (Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2016), [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201602\\_clat\\_analysis\\_paper.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201602_clat_analysis_paper.pdf).
- [6] For an overview of the body of literature on lone actor terrorism, see, Raffaello Pantucci, Clare Ellis and Lorien Chaplais, "Literature Review" *Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series* No. 1 (Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2015), [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201512\\_clat\\_literature\\_review\\_0.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201512_clat_literature_review_0.pdf).
- [7] According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a mental illness or mental health disorder can be defined as "... a condition that impacts a person's thinking, feeling or mood and may affect his or her ability to relate to others and function on a daily basis". This can include a variety of different disorders, such as ADHD, anxiety disorders, autism, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, depression, dissociative disorders, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, schizoaffective disorder and schizophrenia; see <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions#sthash.aG8AULXP.dpuf>, accessed on February 4, 2016.
- [8] A 'noteworthy life event' is defined as an event so significant – either positive or negative – that it was cited as altering the life of the perpetrator: for example, the loss of parents at a young age.
- [9] World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe, 'Data and Statistics', 2016, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/mental-health/data-and-statistics>, accessed 22 February 2016.
- [10] Ibid.
- [11] World Health Organization, *Data and Statistics*, accessed on December 4, 2015, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/mental-health/data-and-statistics>.
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- [13] It should be kept in mind that this statement was made in the context of those who threaten dignitaries in the United Kingdom. See: James, D.V., Farnham, F.R. & Wilson, S.P. "The Fixated Threat Assessment Centre: Implementing a joint policing and psychiatric approach to risk assessment and management in public figure threat cases". In: J. Reid Meloy & J Hoffman (Eds.) *International Handbook of Threat Assessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.9.
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## Evaluating CVE: Understanding the Recent Changes to the United Kingdom's Implementation of *Prevent*

by Caitlin Mastroe

### Abstract

*Given the infancy of countering violent extremism (CVE) initiatives, within the CVE literature there has been a push towards understanding the effectiveness of these initiatives. CVE scholars and practitioners have attempted to construct metrics and frameworks that can be used in the field for evaluation purposes. This Research Note highlights the changes to the United Kingdom's Prevent Strategy under the 2011 Prevent Strategy and the recent passage of the Counterterrorism and Security Act of 2015 that were made partly to promote the monitoring and evaluation of Prevent. Although the search for metrics and frameworks to use for evaluation has been ongoing, this Research Note emphasizes the potential drawbacks that can arise from the push towards the standardization of CVE programs. Using insights from interviews, this Research Note outlines these changes, explores the possible reasons behind the changes, and analyzes the potential implications for the communities where Prevent is implemented. This research is part of a broader dissertation project that examines the implementation of CVE programs and public perception surrounding these programs within the United Kingdom and United States.*

**Keywords:** Counterterrorism; evaluation; implementation; Prevent; United Kingdom

### Introduction

The travel of foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria has placed a renewed interest on counterterrorism tactics that governments can use to prevent individuals from joining terrorist groups or supporting such groups. In a recent panel on ISIS in America, terrorism scholar Lorenzo Vidino echoed what law enforcement and prosecutors have come to realize, “we cannot arrest our way out of this problem.”[1] In reaction to this realization, countering violent extremism (CVE) initiatives have continued to emerge within the counterterrorism strategies of various states. CVE initiatives utilize nonviolent tactics as a means of reducing the threat of terrorism. These efforts are relatively new for the majority of countries, but the conflicts in Syria and Iraq have pushed these efforts to the forefront of counterterrorism initiatives.

Due to the infancy of these types of initiatives, CVE scholars and practitioners often lack a solid understanding of what types of initiatives are effective. Although some progress has been made in terms of evaluation [2], multiple calls have been made by policymakers and scholars alike for evaluations of these types of initiatives.[3] Responding to this call, scholars such as John Horgan and Kurt Braddock [4] have proposed possible frameworks that can be used for evaluation purposes [5], and several colloquiums centered on evaluation methods have taken place such as the “Colloquium on Measuring Effectiveness in Counterterrorism Programming” held in Ottawa, Canada in 2012 held by the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation.[6]

This Research Note reviews the efforts taken by one country, the United Kingdom, to promote the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of its CVE programs, articulated in strategy documents under the title *Prevent*. In doing so, I examine the challenges that CVE scholars have identified with evaluating CVE programs and the subsequent response of the UK, analyzing the recent changes to *Prevent* since 2011 and the unintended consequences of these changes. With CVE scholars and practitioners looking for possible evaluation frameworks and metrics to use, the experience of the United Kingdom brings to light the negative consequences that can arise from decisions made in pursuit of evaluation. The discussion concludes with academic and policy implications.

### *Evaluating CVE*

One of the main criticisms of CVE is the lack of empirical data on the effectiveness of these programs. The purpose of CVE is to reduce the threat of violent extremism, but how do we know if a CVE program is actually achieving that objective? Several challenges emerge when attempting to evaluate these initiatives. In this Research Note, a few of these challenges will be discussed which include: identifying the outcome variable; availability of data to analyze; identifying the timeframe of the analysis; and cross-case comparison of evaluation results.

#### *Outcome variable*

How should success be measured? There is much debate within the literature over what qualifies as success or the outcome variable for an evaluation.[7] Much of the literature thus far has concentrated principally on the outputs of CVE programs, meaning what activities are implemented, how many individuals participate, etc. Scholars have found it more difficult to analyze the impact-related outcomes of these initiatives, namely the decreased threat of terrorism. Part of the problem is that the ideal outcome variable requires proof of a counter-factual, such as observing the individuals that did not radicalize (as a direct result of the CVE initiatives), but would have radicalized otherwise, which is an impossible task. As an alternative, scholars have used other proxies to measure success, such as the number of terrorism incidents and recidivism rates of participants in prison-based CVE programs and other indicators that have been highly criticized.[8]

#### *Timeframe*

Another challenge facing the evaluation of CVE programs involves the timeframe of CVE strategies. As stated by President Obama, CVE “is a long-term campaign.”[9] Terrorism will not be prevented overnight; rather, CVE strategies are developed as long-term strategies to reduce the threat of terrorism. That said, this long-term timeframe makes evaluation difficult. Of the evaluations of CVE programs that do exist, CVE scholars have only evaluated the short-term implications of programs with long-term objectives, due to resource constraints. For instance, Johns et al.’s evaluation of a CVE sports program in Australia used a survey method to measure the change in participants’ attitudes towards different cultures. The survey was distributed directly after the participants completed the program, thus, the long-term impact of this program on these individuals is unknown.[10]

#### *Data availability*

Data availability is another problem impacting the evaluation of CVE programs. CVE programs are often conducted by governments, and some governments fail to make the data available to researchers. Simply put, limited data on CVE programs makes evaluations of these programs difficult and in some cases impossible. [11]

#### *Cross-case comparison*

Developing an effective counterterrorism strategy is similar to putting together a complex puzzle. There are many different pieces involved and all these pieces need to fit together to create a product. Due to the complexity of terrorism and the process of radicalization, CVE is an extremely broad field and incorporates a variety of programs. This complexity coupled with the involvement of multiple actors (including the government and non-governmental organizations or individuals) often results in CVE programs that address different parts of the puzzle. Some programs may focus on improving the economic situation of individuals in order to reduce the threat of terrorism amongst vulnerable individuals, while others may attempt to

increase the religious knowledge of vulnerable individuals. The variety of programs makes the cross-case comparison of CVE programs difficult, because these programs are approaching the objective of reducing terrorism in different ways. This is problematic from an evaluation standpoint because evaluations should ideally be comparable.[12]

The challenges listed above are only a glimpse of the many challenges of evaluating CVE initiatives. Given these challenges, this Research Note outlines the steps taken by one country in its attempts to overcome some of these challenges. In the next few sections, after I briefly outline the nature of the interviews conducted, I provide an overview of the United Kingdom's CVE strategy and the subsequent changes that were made to that strategy, many of which were made for evaluation purposes.

### ***Interview Protocols and Sample Description (n=20)***

This Research Note is based on interviews with individuals in the United Kingdom who either implement the UK's CVE strategy or experience the ramifications of the implementation process. Interviewees were chosen both strategically and through the snowball sampling method. Interviews were conducted with individuals from Muslim civic associations, the UK Home Office, non-governmental organizations, commissioned organizations that conducted interventions for the UK government, think-tanks, and academic scholars.

The voluntary interviews took place in January 2016 in the Greater London Area and are part of a larger dissertation project that examines the implementation of CVE initiatives within the US and UK. Interviewees were given the choice as to whether or not they wanted to remain anonymous. Generally speaking, UK government employee interviews were conducted anonymously to protect the identities of those individuals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the author to allow the author to ask follow-up questions and questions that arose from the conversation with the respondent.

In this Research Note, only some statements from the 20 interviews were chosen to discuss. A more systematic analysis of the interviews will be completed in the author's dissertation.

### ***Overview of Prevent***

The United Kingdom's counterterrorism strategy, known as CONTEST, dates back to 2003, although it was not until the Blair government when the strategy was first published in 2006.[13] CONTEST encompasses four components: *Pursue*, *Prevent*, *Protect*, and *Prepare*. [14] *Pursue* aims to stop terrorist attacks. *Protect* involves actions that strengthen the UK's defenses to help protect against a terrorist attack, while *Prepare* focuses on mitigating the impact of an attack if one occurs. Finally, *Prevent* attempts to stop individuals from either becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. [15]

Since 2003, the strategy has undergone several iterations first started by the Brown Government in 2009,[16] followed by the Coalitional government in 2011 [17] and the most recent changes in regards to its implementation in 2015.[18] Although each iteration of CONTEST included these four components, much has changed over time, especially in regards to *Prevent*, the focus of this Research Note. According to the 2011 strategy, *Prevent* "responds to the ideological challenge we face from terrorism and aspects of extremism, and the threat we face from those who promote these views; provides practical help to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure they are given appropriate advice and support; works with a wide range of sectors (including education, criminal justice, faith, charities, online and health) where there are risks of radicalisation that we need to deal with." [19]

The CONTEST strategy document addresses all forms of terrorism, ranging from radical Islamic terrorist groups to far-right extremists group. *Prevent* encompasses a wide range of measures to prevent individuals from engaging in terrorism. These measures, often called *Prevent* projects, vary from supporting community

based projects to the Channel program, which is a multiagency intervention program that offers potential at-risk individuals a tailored support system within the pre-criminal space.[20]

*Prevent* projects are implemented at the level of local authorities within the UK.[21] Local authority areas are categorized into priority, supported, and non-priority areas. Prior to the changes in 2011, areas identified to receive funding for *Prevent* projects—named priority areas—were identified based on population statistics of Muslims living within the UK. However, this changed after 2011 when priority areas were instead identified based on the threat of extremism faced within that local authority. A process largely shrouded in mystery, intelligence services use some type of measures to evaluate the threat level within an area. After such evaluation, priority areas are determined. Typically, a priority area will implement 3-5 projects per year with variation across authorities.[22] In 2014, there were 30 *Prevent* “priority” areas and an additional 14 “supported areas.”[23] Funding is disseminated directly from the Office of Security and Counterterrorism (OSCT) within the Home Office on a yearly basis. Although both priority and supported areas are eligible to receive funding for *Prevent* projects, the priority area is also assigned a *Prevent* coordinator.[24]

Generally speaking, there are two types of *Prevent* coordinators. The first type is an individual from the Home Office who assists the local authority in formulating an action plan for an area and implementing that plan according to the risks within the area. As one individual explained, “I am the conduit between the Home Office and the local authority with regard to *Prevent*. I am tasked with understanding the risk in the local area, so I have a full understanding of that risk. I bring together relevant partners, communicate risk to them, and develop a plan to mitigate that risk.”[25] The second type is an individual that assists higher education institutions. These individuals are “responsible for engaging with universities and further education providers on *Prevent* and helping them implement policies as well as doing direct training of staff and doing engagement work with students.”[26]

### ***Evaluating Prevent and the Subsequent Changes***

In this section, I overview the previous efforts made by the UK government to evaluate *Prevent* projects and the changes to the *Prevent* strategy which were made as a response to these evaluations.

#### ***Government Evaluations***

The first formal government evaluation of the CONTEST strategy came in 2010, but this was not the first evaluation of *Prevent*. Prior to the formal government evaluation, the M&E of *Prevent* began in 2007 when the central government began using a framework named the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and National Indicator Set to monitor and evaluate how government funds were being used within local authorities. The LAA is essentially an action plan that dictates what the government expects its fund recipient to accomplish. The 2008 version of the National Indicator Set identifies 188 items, but the one that relates most directly to this discussion is NI35, “building resilience to violent extremism.”[27] The set of indicators act as target goals for local authorities and when goals are met, local authorities receive additional funding outside the constraints of LAAs. Regarding *Prevent*, local authorities were assessed based on four indicators: community engagement, knowledge and understanding of violent extremism; development of a *Prevent* action plan; and effective oversight, implementation and evaluation of the action plan.[28]

Besides using the NI35 for M&E purposes, the central government conducted a formal evaluation of the entire CONTEST strategy in 2010. Several recommendations were made based on concerns that were raised within the evaluation. The evaluators raised concerns that *Prevent* initiatives were stigmatizing the Muslim community and leading to the misperceptions that *Prevent*, particularly the Channel program, was being used for intelligence gathering purposes. A series of recommendations were made by the evaluation team, who noted that the association of community cohesion work with a counter-terrorism *Prevent* agenda

undermined the positive work being done in regards to cohesion and capacity building work.[29] The result of the evaluation was a reconfiguration and reconceptualization of *Prevent* under the new government.

### *2011 Changes to the Prevent Strategy*

After the evaluation and the change in government, several alterations were made to the strategy, starting with the overall focus of the strategy itself. With the revised 2011 *Prevent* strategy, the government began to target both non-violent and violent forms of extremism.[30] This controversial move, which will be discussed later, expanded the scope of *Prevent* and—as many have argued—increased opposition against the strategy.

Another major change that took place within the 2011 strategy was the relationship between *Prevent* and community cohesion initiatives. In previous versions of *Prevent*, funding was distributed to community cohesion initiatives as part of a component of *Prevent*. However, since evaluators raised concerns about the association of community cohesion work with the *Prevent* agenda, the two areas were separated. [31] This issue has apparently come full circle with more recent discussion of a possible reunification of the two.[32] However, as some will argue, although community cohesion initiatives formerly fell under the jurisdiction of the Department of Communication and Local Government (DCLG), the two spheres in practice were difficult to separate.[33]

Although the strategy changes implemented in 2011 were not made directly for evaluation purposes, they paved the way for further changes regarding the implementation of *Prevent* in 2015, which were made largely for evaluation purposes.

## ***The 2015 Counterterrorism and Security Act***

### *Background*

*Prevent* underwent another major change more recently in 2015 with the passage of the Counterterrorism and Security Act. The Act was first passed on 12 February 2015 and was put into effect on 1 July 2015. The Act places a statutory responsibility on all local authorities in England and Wales. Besides local authorities, the Act also applies to a variety of public institutions including educational institutions, childcare and health services, prisons and probation and the police.[34]

Prior to the passage of this Act, there was no requirement for local authorities to assess the risk of radicalization within their area and to take appropriate action. Authorities are now required to practice “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.”[35] In accordance with the Act, the responsibilities of these authorities are encompassed in three broad areas: leadership, working in partnership, and capabilities. Authorities are required to: either establish or use a preexisting local multi-agency group to coordinate *Prevent* activity; assess the risk of individuals being drawn into terrorism; work with *Prevent* coordinators and other authorities as part of the risk assessment procedures; mainstream *Prevent* into the policies and procedures of the authority; train staff to understand *Prevent* and recognize potential vulnerabilities; and, if a risk is determined, then develop a *Prevent* action plan.[36] The local authority is also required to construct and chair a joint local authority/police panel, commonly referred to as the Channel program, to assess vulnerable individuals and provide an individualized plan for those individuals who voluntarily participate in the program.



### *Additional Implementation Changes*

Although the strategy itself has not changed in terms of the content of the 2011 strategy, besides the 2015 Act itself, around April of that year the Home Office made additional changes to the implementation and evaluation of *Prevent*. First, changes were made regarding the funding of *Prevent* projects. British authorities from the Home Office noted the *Prevent* projects that were found to be the most successful in the past 2 or 3 years and created a catalogue. The local authorities can now bid for funding to do one of these projects that best fits the needs of the area.[37] Prior to this, local authorities developed their own projects and then bid for funding. Based on interviews with British Home Office employees, it does still seem that in some rare cases there is an opportunity for adjustments to be made from the pre-set list in order to cater to the needs of the local community. In addition, there are some indications that other funding directly to projects rather than through the local authority still occurs.

The M&E of *Prevent* has also changed. The Home Office commissioned the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) to conduct evaluations based on empirical research drawn from the behavioral sciences literature. The idea is to use statistics to challenge and change policy and bring in a degree of conformity in terms of how policy is analyzed.[38] Besides the evaluations completed by BIT, the Home Office also monitors and assesses *Prevent* delivery to ensure compliance with the new statutory duties.

Given the changes listed above, common questions that arise include why these changes were made and what the consequences of these changes are for society writ large. The next sections will address these questions.

### ***Why These Changes?***

#### *Increasing Standardization*

The 2015 Act and accompanying changes in regards to implementation and M&E may be attributed to various reasons, the first being the push towards standardization. In the past 5 years, and arguably more, the UK has undergone a period of austerity. Budget cuts across the board have made it difficult for local authorities to engage in *Prevent* related projects, especially for non-priority areas that do not receive *Prevent* funding. As stated by one Home Office employee, “in some ways I can understand why they have done it, because they have managed to protect this area of focus from being cut with the intense budget cuts in local authorities in the past 5 years, and it brings a degree of conformity to *Prevent*.”[39]

Subsequently, these changes seem to be in place to create standardization across priority and non-priority areas. The statutory duty forces authorities, especially non-priority local authorities to at least assess risk, something that may not have happened prior. In fact, others agree that these new measures were more aimed for non-priority areas, since as one Home Office employee stated “...much of the new duty is not too significant because it is things priority areas have been doing for a while, but for non-priority areas this is new.”[40] From an M&E perspective, the standardization of *Prevent* increases the possibility for cross-case comparison across local authority areas, whereas previously this was limited.[41]

#### *Increasing the Centralization of Prevent*

Moreover, these measures bring local authority efforts further under the monitoring of the Home Office. There has been a clear shift towards increased centralization in the past few years, and for M&E purposes this shift makes sense. In particular in reference to the catalogue of programs now available for authorities to choose a project from, this move also increases the ability for cross-comparison analysis of the effectiveness of these efforts. Since authorities will now be theoretically implementing similar projects, evaluations of effectiveness can be compared across authorities. Additionally, these changes will potentially lead to more

data on the various initiatives that are implemented, since the Home Office will monitor the efforts of local authorities and other agencies to ensure compliance with the statutory duties. In a field struggling to produce evaluations of these types of programs partly due to cross-case comparison challenges and data limitations, only time will tell whether the benefits for M&E outweigh the costs associated with implementing the *Prevent* strategy in this way.

### *Increasing Compliance with Prevent*

Besides the benefits for M&E, the changes also assist *Prevent* coordinators in conducting their jobs. As one Home Office employee stated, "...it [the Act] gives *Prevent* coordinators backup, whereas previously it has been difficult to get *Prevent* mainstreamed into Council policies and procedures." [42] With these statutory duties in place, now institutions, statutory agencies, and local authorities no longer have a choice to not comply with *Prevent*. Due to the use of the internet and other methods used for recruitment, the threat of terrorism is far-reaching. Increased measures to reduce the threat of terrorism across the UK may assist authorities with countering this boundless threat.

### *Unintended Consequences*

#### *Marginalization*

Despite the reasons listed above, the changes have given rise to continuing concerns regarding *Prevent*. A recurring theme amongst interviewees was in regards to the expansion of the term extremism to include both non-violent and violent extremism and the increased implementation of *Prevent*. CVE practitioners, scholars, non-governmental organizations, and Muslim Associations all expressed concern for the potential marginalization of different interpretations of Islam. As stated by the President of the Muslim Association of Britain, Dr. Omer El-Hamdoon, "we are moving into a realm where people are policing ideas and if you practice certain things then you may be labeled as an extremist... It has made Muslims more cautious about how people are viewing them and it also marginalizes them." [43] The notion of marginalization is not new to the world of CVE. Other scholars have presented the argument that Muslim communities are being treated as suspect communities. [44] This is not to say that *Prevent* only targets the Muslim community, [45] although the projects that target far-right extremism in the UK are less discussed.

#### *Lack of Community Buy-in*

One of the consequences of standardization and centralization is that it often comes at the expense of community buy-in. Prior to the changes in the implementation of *Prevent*, community organizations had more ability to develop projects within their communities that best fit the needs of their communities. Interviewees recognized the importance of community support; as one Home Office employee stated, "*Prevent* needs to have community buy-in, but this is difficult to accomplish." [46] The difficulty in engaging with communities on projects that are standardized at the expense of community buy-in is echoed by another employee who stated, "generally speaking they have all worked out [*Prevent* projects] in some way, but have we always received the number of attendees that we have wanted and have the attendees been the ones that probably would most benefit? Probably not, but that's not to say that the people who went didn't benefit." [47]

Even though the move towards standardization is understandable from an M&E perspective, others suggest it reflects the Home Office's lack of trust of the communities to take action. Beyond the previous ability for communities to have more say in what projects were implemented within their communities, prior to 2011 *Prevent* efforts had benefits for communities beyond the security implications. With the

previous incorporation of community cohesion initiatives with *Prevent* work, communities received *Prevent* funding that promoted activities such as community dialogue and outreach efforts. However, in this new system, there is a lack of *Prevent* funding for these projects and an overall lack of mechanisms in place for communities to share their inputs and insights. Increased opportunities for community involvement may benefit the strategy, since as one Home Office employee stated, “at the moment *Prevent* is a hard sell amongst certain communities, especially those most affected. As a result, there is not a whole lot of community engagement.”[48]

### *Negative Public Perception of Prevent*

The perceived marginalization and the centralized nature of *Prevent* have given rise to indications that community members negatively perceive these projects, which may have broader implications for their effectiveness. In discussing the implications of these changes on the Channel program, one Home Office employee stated, “because the national rhetoric around this type of work has changed so dramatically in the last 2 years, it has created a really bad sentiment amongst communities and some communities have expressed a reluctance to make referrals.”[49]. Even though *Prevent* projects exist and referrals to Channel are made, for *Prevent* to be effective it must reach the individuals that are most at risk of engaging in terrorism. Otherwise, *Prevent* may be doing more harm than good.

### *Over Reporting*

Although some communities have been reluctant to make referrals, the new statutory duties have also increased concerns of over-reporting issues and undertraining, especially in schools. One teacher expressed concerns that the new duties were creating fear amongst teachers.[50] This sentiment is echoed by Program Associate Charlotte Kathe at the Institute of Strategic Dialogue, who noted that teachers “are concerned... especially because of the theological aspects of it [radicalization], they feel overwhelmed... and now we are at the stage of over-reporting because they just don’t understand this.”[51] Between June and August 2015 alone, about 8 people per day were referred to the Channel program. Of those referrals, only about a fifth of the individuals were recommended to attend de-radicalization sessions.[52] These statistics are more than likely the result of the new requirement for all schools and statutory agencies to have a system in place and to be cognizant of potential signs of vulnerability. The broader implications of this for schools in particular include not only emerging concerns from teachers, but it could also potentially lead to the further alienation of individuals and in this case, the youth. Moreover, the increased referrals are surely placing a strain on already stretched resources within local authorities to carry out evaluations of the referrals.

### ***Academic and Policy Implications***

The changes that first took place in 2011, and the new 2015 statutory duties put in place by the Counterterrorism and Security Act, substantially changed the implementation of *Prevent* within the United Kingdom. Increased centralization and standardization enables a more systematic review of *Prevent* projects, but several unintended consequences of these changes have emerged.

Although the UK offers a possible solution to the evaluation difficulties that have arisen within the CVE field—especially in reference to cross-case comparisons—scholars developing evaluation frameworks and metrics should be cognizant of the potential pitfalls that follow increased standardization. Although projects that are similar in content are easier to compare in cross-case comparisons, a set list of projects may not address all the needs of the local communities. This highlights the need to take into consideration the ethical and moral implications of decisions that can be justified from an evaluation standpoint. Going forward,

additional research is needed surrounding both the potential negative and beneficial consequences of the recent changes in the UK.

In terms of policy implications, other countries are struggling to develop CVE strategies, and the UK's experience has a great deal to offer others. However, in order to do so, increased transparency surrounding *Prevent* is needed in order to both evaluate *Prevent* and learn from these efforts. Consequently, future CVE strategies would strongly benefit from increased transparency regarding funding, actors involved, projects available in local communities, and evaluations on those projects. Not only will scholars and practitioners learn from transparent and accessible CVE evaluations and determine best practices, but increased transparency may help ease some of the concerns held by communities and in the case of the UK, help untaint the *Prevent* brand. Increased transparency will act as a dual mechanism to both hold CVE practitioners accountable and mitigate the misperceptions surrounding these initiatives. Various projects exist and some do have the ability to offer viable alternatives to other counterterrorism efforts, but the negative perceptions of *Prevent* may have larger implications for these projects' ability to reach the individuals that need the support the most.

Despite the benefits for M&E, policymakers should also be cognizant of the unintended consequences of the push towards standardization. As stated by one Home Office employee, "*Prevent* done badly is worse than *Prevent* not done at all." [53] The standardization of *Prevent* across local authorities misses the local contextualized nature of violent extremism. Not every local authority faces the same threat; some areas may experience direct recruiting to join groups such as ISIS, while others face a threat from far-right extremists, which means that a set project may not always meet the needs of a local authority. Rather, tailored individualized projects may offer a viable solution to this problem.

Finally, CVE is also in need of a reconceptualization. These initiatives should not be sectioned off as solely a security issue; rather CVE needs to be treated more as a safeguarding issue similar to other issues such as domestic abuse and mental health issues. In doing so, a clear distinction can be made from the objectives of initiatives such as *Prevent* and intelligence-driven counterterrorism efforts. Many CVE projects, namely prevention projects, are put into place to operate solely within the pre-criminal space, but creating this securitization environment surrounding the CVE brand develops misperceptions that CVE is an intelligence-driven initiative. In any policy area, branding is critical, and CVE initiatives are no different.

In the hunt for effective CVE initiatives, evaluations of these strategies are critical. However, as displayed in the case of the UK, decisions that can be justified from a M&E perspective may not be the most optimal means to implement CVE strategies.

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## In Conversation with Mubin Shaikh:

### From Salafi Jihadist to Undercover Agent inside the “Toronto 18” Terrorist Group

Interview by Stefano Bonino

*This interview with former undercover agent Mubin Shaikh can help academics and security practitioners understand the key role played and the challenges faced by covert human intelligence sources within domestic terrorist groups. The interview highlights the identity crisis, the personal factors, and the allure of jihadi militancy that initially drove Mubin Shaikh to join a Salafi jihadist group. It investigates Shaikh's process of disengagement from the Salafi jihadist belief system and his rediscovery of a moderate, inclusive, and benevolent form of Islam. It explores his work as an undercover agent for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the Integrated National Security Enforcement Team responsible for disrupting domestic terrorist groups. The “Toronto 18” terrorist cell, the key role played by undercover agents in preventing terrorist action, and the challenges posed by entrapment are also discussed.*

#### About Mubin Shaikh

**M**ubin Shaikh was born in Toronto, Canada, on 29 September 1975. He was raised in a conservative family, but he experienced a very Western life, serving in the Royal Canadian Army Cadets, attending public school, and drinking alcohol. An identity crisis led Shaikh to join the Tablighi Jamaat, an orthodox revivalist Sunni Islam movement, and later to travel to India and Pakistan. In Quetta, Pakistan, 19-year-old Shaikh met the Taliban – an encounter that changed his life. He quickly adopted the jihadist belief system. Back in Canada, Shaikh joined a Salafi jihadist group, recruited others to the jihadi cause, and carried out militant activities. The attacks on the United States in 2001 proved to be another turning point in his life. Shaikh reconsidered his worldview and decided to enhance his understanding of religion in Syria. He spent two years (2002-2004) in the country, studying Arabic, Islamic theology, and Sufi spirituality. During this period, Shaikh underwent a theological reprogramming and a cognitive reframing that led him to abandon the jihadist cause. In 2004, he started working as an undercover agent for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), collecting intelligence within jihadist groups. The details of these activities remain classified for reasons of national security. In late 2005, Shaikh moved to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET) in order to penetrate the “Toronto 18” group, an al-Qaeda-inspired homegrown terrorist cell. Shaikh's undercover work helped authorities to prevent the 2006 Ontario terrorism plot, a series of planned attacks against the Canadian Parliament, the CSIS, the Canadian Broadcasting Centre, and former Prime Minister Stephen Harper. After members of the “Toronto 18” group were arrested in June that same year, Shaikh revealed himself to the public as the undercover agent inside the group. In 2010, a total of eleven members of the “Toronto 18” group were found guilty of participating in the terrorism plot. In the same year, Shaikh obtained a Masters of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism at Macquarie University, Australia. Today, Shaikh is an internationally renowned subject expert on terrorism and radicalization. He has advised numerous Western security-related bodies, including: U.S. Department of State, U.S. Special Operations Command, UN Center for Counter Terrorism, NATO, Interpol, Europol, FBI, and many others.

**Stefano Bonino (SB):** *Can you please tell me about the identity crisis that led you to embrace a more orthodox form of Islam?*

**Mubin Shaikh (MS):** My first stage of identity construction takes place when I was in Canada. This includes the cultural and religious aspects of my identity that was formed in the Koranic school. As I was growing up, I used to go with my father to the weekly sessions of the Tablighi Jamaat at the Farouq Mosque. Those

sessions started forming the background of my experience. When I turned 18, I went to India and Pakistan with the Tablighi Jamaat. A key reason why I even felt it necessary to go is because I had a house party, got caught by my relatives, and was ashamed and guilty for that. The experience put in my head the idea that the only way to fix myself was to become religious. A reason why I became religious through the Tablighi Jamaat is that it was the only experience that I had in my background. It is the group with which I grew up as a kid. It is basic psychology. A person goes back to his formative years and that is what I was exposed to. At that time, I had no strong exposure to Salafism or anything similar. I was first introduced to Salafism and started hearing people speaking about it when I was 14 or 15. But it was still very new to me and happened later on in my formative years, so I was not enlaced to it right away. The experience with the Tablighi Jamaat was in the early periods of my life and I laced onto it more readily. So I went to India and Pakistan – I went to Quetta, in Pakistan, at the border with Afghanistan. In Quetta, I had my first dealings with the Taliban.

**SB:** *How exactly did you end up meeting the Taliban?*

**MS:** My encounter with the Taliban was a chance. One of the things that the Tablighi Jamaat does is *jaulah*. It entails walking around the local area, talking to people and spreading the Tablighi Jamaat's message. It was an afternoon. I was in a remote area. I was walking and I walked up to Taliban. It was a chance encounter. I did not know anything about the politics of the region before I had gone there. Even while growing up in my home, I never heard any political conversation, for example issues around Pakistan, India, or Kashmir. Before going there, I had no idea who the Taliban were. I met them prior to their rise to power in Afghanistan in 1995. When I met them, they did not say: 'we are Taliban.' They were just normal people to me. When I went to talk to them about the Tablighi Jamaat's doctrine, they immediately responded with their own doctrine. I realized that these people were not average people, particularly when I saw their rifles. Then, they told me about their worldview: jihad is at the center of it. That really caught my attention. In the Tablighi Jamaat, we talked about *khuruj fi sabilillah*, which means going about in the path of God. In the Quran, this refers to going out to fight in the way of God or it could mean anything that you could do for God, for example suffering for the sake of God for good reasons. If you are in the mosque and you worship and encourage other people to worship, you are also in the path of God. For these people, *khuruj fi sabilillah* is jihad. This is what it means for them. That was the occasion when I was first introduced to this concept. This is at the core of their worldview. This is why they are called jihadists because jihad, as they see it, is the core element of their identity. Their identity revolves around participation in the jihad, acceptance of the jihad and so on. I could see that the local guy who was with me was very uncomfortable. The Taliban asked at what mosque we were staying and, afterwards, they came to visit us. There, we had more conversations. But the initial meeting was enough to attract me to their worldview.

**SB:** *Why do you think that you were so fascinated by the Taliban?*

**MS:** Imagine a young kid who comes from the West, has an identity crisis, has military experience, has a lot of energy and so on. A kid with an identity crisis, who feels shame and guilt and has some military background [*details below*], shows up in a remote area in Pakistan, close to Afghanistan, and suddenly meets these people who were, to me, the embodiment of everything that I was seeking: militant, religious, and accepted by the people. There you go. This is what really struck me. We tend to cling on to ideas that resonate with our own personal experiences. For me, the proverbial stars had aligned. I had gone all the way there after a personal and psychological turmoil and, then, found myself standing in front of these people, who were exactly who I was supposed to be.

**SB:** *What happened when you returned to Canada after that experience?*

**MS:** When I returned back to Canada in September 1995, there was a short period when I tried to figure out whether I wanted to remain in the Tablighi Jamaat or not. In the same period, I came across Salafism again. I had a new incarnation. I wanted to hear them out. Once the door had opened with the Taliban, I had a

cognitive opening which made me more receptive to the Salafi experience, one for which I was not so ready for earlier on. I had to experience the Tablighi Jamaat before embracing Salafism.

**SB:** *Did you see your experience with the Tablighi Jamaat as a natural step toward embracing the Salafi doctrine?*

**MS:** I know the 'conveyor belt' theory according to which groups such as the Tablighi Jamaat open the doors to violent extremism. I think that this is only partially true. It really depends on one's background, previous position, and perspective. Let's say that a person already comes from an austere and hyper-conservative life, and then he goes into the Tablighi Jamaat, which is apolitical but largely separationist in worldview and conservative in theology. He must also be politically minded to embrace violence. The problem is that, with so many geopolitical grievances mentioned by various communities, it is easier for some people to embrace that narrative. From that line, the trajectory toward violent extremism is easier. On the other hand, if this person did not come from such a background and was just conservative, one trajectory is that he would simply remain conservative without embracing violent extremism. Some people just remain in the Tablighi Jamaat. Millions of Muslims are in the Tablighi Jamaat but do not become terrorists: look at India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. So, the Tablighi Jamaat is not, for the most part, a conveyor belt to violent extremism. But in some cases, depending on the person's experiences, it could very well be. For me, it was, although not because I came from a hyper-conservative lifestyle. My parents were conservative but I grew up in a very Western society. The identity conflict that I grew up with in my pre-pubesence period is what made me go beyond the Tablighi Jamaat. Around age 19, I wanted something more. I went through that period and started to listen more to the Salafis. This is where the trajectory was steeper. I was not very interested in learning the nuances of the theology. I was more interested in the militant identity. The militant identity was there due to a series of reasons. There was a sense of power, in a world where Muslims feel that they are powerless. There was a sense of pride, in a world where Muslims feel humiliation.

**SB:** *Did theology play no role at all?*

**MS:** Theology became a cover. I was more interested in the persona, the costume, and the appearance. The identity was at the core, while the theology was at the surface. I was in a new group of more violent peers. I had grown up learning martial arts and had studied it for many years. I had spent time in the Royal Canadian Army Cadets. The identity of militancy had actually been introduced to me outside of religion, as a sort of 'extra-curricular activity' between the ages of 13 and 19. In many ways, my inclination towards militancy did not come from religion but from the Army Cadets. I had made my body and mind used to violence. The Army Cadets and martial arts had taught me that there must be a just cause for violence. That had already been programmed inside me. Only after those experiences, I needed the Taliban. And after the Taliban, I needed the Salafi jihadists. This new identity offered me the ability to show some of my physical skills, even though I never really used them. One of the things that the Salafi jihadists exposed me to was the idea of just violence or violence in the name of God. It was the idea of violence against anyone who prevents you from fighting jihad or bringing people into jihad. In the Salafi jihadist worldview, it is legitimate to act violently. This is what I started to convince myself – that to use violence is fine because it is for a good reason. The good reason was that various governments were trying to stop jihad, and we had to fight against that. In 1996, there was the Russian invasion of Chechnya, so the Chechnya War was our call to the jihadi cause. In 1998, there was Bin Laden's *fatwa* [to kill Americans and Jews because of American support for Israel and the stationing of troops in the Arabian Peninsula] so we started to discuss that in our group. The argument started to form and the enemy became everyone. Until 1998, these were the conversations and identity crises that were occurring.

**SB:** *What sort of activities were you doing after returning to Canada?*

**MS:** I returned to Canada as a jihadist and felt a sense of belonging because now I was talking about religion. Around me, I saw very religiously literate people, even though they were not. We were doing a lot of peer grouping. We spent a lot of time together reading or discussing theology, politics, and so on, in small groups at somebody's house or in a mosque. There were also smaller groups of people to whom I was closer. We used to go around together and comment on society. This is extremely common in Salafi groups. They look down on people. So we would go, let's say, to the mall and comment on people. For example, we would say 'look at the prostitutes here', referring to white women. We used to look down on them and comment on how bad their lives and lifestyles were. We used to say how good it was that we were Salafi and we were following the true path. We used to see Muslims and criticize them as 'fake Muslims.' We really looked down on other Muslims too. We could even bring it down to the individual level. In a Salafi group, I looked down on members of non-Muslim society, then on members of Muslim society, and then on members of my own family. I used to argue with members of my own family about theology, how wrong they were about it, how it is apostasy to believe this, how it is heresy to believe that and so on.

**SB:** *Is there a trajectory from being a member of a highly conservative and separationist group that looks down on society to becoming a person who embraces truly extremist views?*

**MS:** It is a fine line. For some people there is a linear progressive journey. But it is not always a progressive one for everyone. Just because somebody is conservative, it does not mean that he is extremist. But all it takes are a few cognitive steps. A conservative believes that he must abide by a course of conduct. But the conservative who turns *takfiri* believes that everyone should abide by his course of conduct and, if people do not, they are not good enough Muslims. The next step is *takfir*, so one thinks: 'you are not following this way; you are not a real Muslim.' This is the most extreme position. These are really just two steps. They are two cognitive steps.

**SB:** *And then I presume that some people will become ideologues and inspirers, while others will carry out operations on the ground?*

**MS:** Yes, people will find their place. They will find their role. I was mostly an ideologue. It is in my personality. I speak well and I am fairly well educated. By the time that I was in this group, I had gone to school, learnt, studied, and had an intellectual approach. But I could also fight.

**SB:** *How did you disengage from the Salafi jihadist worldview?*

**MS:** In 1998, I got married and that was a major cognitive opening. It reminded me that I needed to have a life and I could not just preach all the time. I had previously thought: 'why should I go to study at a *kafir* university?' So I had not obtained any university qualification. But, at that point, I started thinking: 'what kind of life do I have? What kind of job am I going to get if I have no university qualification?' I soon started realizing that one needs qualifications. This is just the reality of the world in which we are living. After I got married I went on a trip to Jerusalem. It was another spiritual opening. It made me think. I had a very positive experience in Jerusalem. It was pre-9/11. I am not an Arab and I did not see the Palestinian conflict as a grievance. I visited Jerusalem unbiased. I had a positive spiritual experience and I thought that maybe I should open up a bit more to the world. These were just ideas at that time. Then, the 9/11 attacks happened. They were the real push for me to think that I really needed to study religion. It was inconceivable to me that people in my group really believed that the attacks were okay. I had learnt violence from martial arts but I could not accept that it was legitimate to fly planes into buildings. I could not get it into my narrative, no matter how much I believed that jihad against the enemy and fighting enemy soldiers and police was justified. I could not understand 9/11.



**SB:** *Did you draw a line between violence against institutional targets and violence against civilians?*

**MS:** At that time, for me, targeting institutions was fine. But civilians were a big question. You cannot do that. This is something that was well defined even in the early jihadist mindset. It is only later on, after Bin Laden's *fatwa*, that this approach changed.

**SB:** *You mentioned in other occasions that you had initially celebrated 9/11. Is it true?*

**MS:** That is right. I celebrated it. When the first plane hit, I celebrated it. But when the second plane hit, I realized that it was done on purpose. That is the fine line. For somebody who is within that worldview, it is an ongoing process. Later, when I went to see my friends, they were very happy. It was a terrorist attack and they were happy with it. There was something in me that kept saying: 'it is not right, it is not right.' I felt that I needed to study Islam properly. I soon decided that I needed to go somewhere to study and it took me a few months to find the right place. I went to Syria in April 2002 and stayed there for about two years. One of the reasons why I ended up in Syria was because I wanted to be there when the great jihad happened. I thank God that it did not happen when I was there. I thank God that I returned before everything went downhill. The idea of righteous jihad was still in my mind.

**SB:** *Do you think that, with hindsight, you would have later joined the Islamic State?*

**MS:** I do not think so. When I was there in 2003, the Iraq War started. The Syrian government was facilitating the travel of religiously minded youngsters to go and fight in Iraq. I was invited to Iraq but I did not go. I had just spent a year in Syria and I was interested in studying religion.

**SB:** *How was your experience in Syria?*

**MS:** Spending time in Syria opened my mind: I was exposed to the correct knowledge and spirituality of Islam. I had a theological reprogramming and reframing. Spending time with a Sufi scholar was the most influential experience that I had at the time. He went through every verse of the Quran that the jihadists use and taught me how to interpret those verses. This was an opportunity to have formal Islamic training. The formal training helped me to reinterpret and revisit the way I had previously thought. Exposure to spirituality was also crucial. This is something that you will not find in 99.99% of Salafis, if I can make such a claim. 99.99% of Salafis have no spirituality in the heart. This is why they become very private. This is why they are prone to experiencing a 'Salafi burnout' and some of them disengage from Islam. There is a spectrum among those who leave Salafism: some become moderates, other become Sufi and the more extreme ones leave religion. I can understand why some people, especially converts, go through this latter process. I have seen converts who originate from a non-religious background, then are introduced to this religious ideology due to peer grouping and jump into it 110%. Later, they realize that it is an incorrect ideology and just leave religion completely. To me, Sufism provided an alternative identity. When you realize that the life that you were leading is a complete lie, how do you deal with it? It is spiritual magic, psychologically, to realize that you were wrong the whole time. What do you do with this feeling? I was lucky that, during the time that I spent in Syria, I gained new knowledge and I was given a new narrative. Spirituality gave me a new perspective that I had not experienced before: the idea of love, the idea of positivity, the idea of looking at people with mercy and so on. These are all ideas that I was not accustomed to. These ideas reframe your paradigm. It is a cognitive reframing: basically, you change the parameters that you use to look at the world. I had a very positive experience with religion and spirituality. But there was also the reality that the Muslim world was not the utopia that I had thought it would be. Syria was a real police state. Bashar al-Assad was in power and many people told me how bad he was. I was being discriminated against because I wore a big beard and a robe and looked like a Taliban. People started calling me Taliban in Syria. I was being called Taliban more in Syria than in Canada! Syrian schools discriminated against me. They were very secular and could not imagine someone like me with a full beard and a full robe in their schools. It was the American school that ended up hiring me because they saw that I was Canadian, had an English accent, and realized

that I could teach Arab students. So I thought: 'the Americans are not so bad!' I realized that I had more freedom as a Muslim in the West than I had as a Muslim in the East. I got fed up and decided to go back home. In 2003, a couple of British students went and blew up themselves in Tel Aviv. That incident also put pressure on me and later made me want to return back home.

**SB:** *How did you end up working with the CSIS after returning to Canada?*

**MS:** In late March 2004, shortly after returning to Canada, the first Canadian was arrested on terror charges: his name was Momin Khawaja. Khawaja used to sit besides me at the Koran school when I was a kid. I knew his family. I decided to contact the CSIS. I opened the phone book, called them and said: 'there must be a mistake. This kid is a good kid and he comes from a good family.' I could not believe that he had been arrested on terror charges. The CSIS told me that it was true: Momin Khawaja was in court and the matter was out of their hands. But the fact that I had called about him prompted the CSIS to want to have a conversation with me. Within a couple of hours of making the phone call I was in a donut shop near my house, having a conversation with a CSIS officer. I explained to him my life story. He ended the conversation by saying: 'why don't you work for us? Why don't you tell us who you think is a good guy and who you think is a bad guy?'

**SB:** *Were you recruited straight away?*

**MS:** Yes, straight away. I became what is called in the spycraft terminology a 'walk-in.' A walk-in is someone who comes on his own accord and puts forward his skills. This is very important because a lot of disinformation was published about my role in both the CSIS and the case. Some people say that I worked for government because I had been caught as an extremist and the CSIS had told me: 'you'd better work for us.' This is not true. I voluntarily started working for them. I had no charges, I was not in trouble and I had not broken the law. I worked for them as an undercover agent for two years. I was tested, put on a lie detector test, and vetted. I was sent to work with people with whom I had no prior history. I was a higher category operative. There were two contexts for my operations: one was direct, on-the-ground infiltration and the other one was online activity. The direct, on-the-ground infiltration entails typical infiltration operations: inserting yourself into a human network. In my case, I was tasked with infiltrating particular groups and particular individuals. I cannot mention their names but they were within the Islamist context. It was not bikers or mafia groups. I was given files at meetings with my intelligence handler. He would show me the individuals that were under investigation and would ask me to tell them whatever I could find about them. They would not tell me what they had on those people because I was supposed to be independent, unbiased, and objective. I was not given any information about their activities. I was supposed to go undercover and find those activities on my own.

**SB:** *Did you simply receive a list of names and were tasked with finding out whatever you could on these people?*

**MS:** Yes, I was told: 'here is the person, tell me what you think about him.' I was supposed to use my skills and find out whether that person was a threat to the security of Canadians. In late 2005, I was given a list, was shown a number of pictures of young individuals, and was asked to find out what they were up to. Later, they became publicly known as the members of the "Toronto 18" group. There was an event that was taking place at a community center at a banquet hall. It was an event about Muslims who were imprisoned and how we have a duty to help them. So I went to this event, sat at the table, and ate by myself. Someone came across the room and sat beside me. He had a scarf covering his face. He removed the scarf to uncover his face and at that point I discovered that he was Zakaria Amara, one of the people with whom I was supposed to make contact. In an amazing stroke of luck, he came and sat right beside me. He told me that he was waiting for his friend. I thought: 'ok, I hope that his friends are all people on the list.' Later on, the rest of his friends arrived and sat at the table. We were all together at the table. After the event, we went outside and there was a conversation about jihad and the fact that we should do jihad. This is where the actual infiltration occurred.

There were a number of instances when I was able to use my knowledge and personality to make them feel like I was somebody whom they could trust. More importantly, they felt that they could trust me enough to invite me to a training camp that they had planned to have in an area just outside of the city of Toronto. Some people say that I entrapped them but these are excuses.

**SB:** *Why do you think that these are excuses?*

**MS:** When you are dealing with people who are committing criminal offences and who hide information from their closest friends and family, the only way you can obtain the necessary evidence is through covert collection means. If I am an undercover agent within the group, I am going to do the exact same things that the members of that group are going to do. These people had already decided both to have the camp and the location of this camp. They had also already invited all the people to the camp. These things had all been done before the night that I met them. It is impossible that there was any entrapment involved. One of the problems of people who subscribe to the entrapment position is that they assume that the mere presence of an undercover agent constitutes entrapment. They use the term entrapment as a lazy excuse to dismiss charges that are brought against someone. Anyway, I informed my intelligence handler that these people were having a training camp to do a series of activities. Then, I went to train them.

**SB:** *Were you still working with the CSIS at this point?*

**MS:** Here is where the investigation split. In the Canadian context, the CSIS collect information. Once they receive information that an individual or more individuals are about to commit a criminal offence, the investigation moves over to the federal police, the RCMP, and the INSET. I travelled over to the RCMP. From then onwards, I was collecting evidence and began to offer 'source debriefing notes.' Any day that I was operational, I would go to a safe house, meet up with the police officers and do the debriefing that would form part of the source debriefing report. Essentially, I created the evidence that would then become part of the reports. The source debriefing reports became the bulk of the evidence that would later be used in court. I worked with the police for about six months, until June 2006, when I was taken out of town and taken to a safe house, while in Toronto the members of the cell were being arrested on terror charges.

**SB:** *How did you feel about having prevented a major terrorist attack?*

**MS:** I started realizing that I was involved in something much greater than myself. I realized that my own views about Islam or how the police should go about dealing with these people were irrelevant. This is when my identity issues started developing again. I started asking myself: 'what is the Muslim community going to think when this becomes public?' At the very beginning of the trial, I had to decide whether I wanted to work with the police or not. If I had wanted to work with the police, then my identity would have become public and I would have had to spend time—I did not know long—in court giving testimony in a public setting. This made me very nervous. I did not know what the community would think. No one could anticipate the stress that this trial would put on me. It was the biggest terrorism case in Canada, so there was a lot of focus and media coverage. And there, I found myself at the center of it. In July 2006, a month after the arrests, I gave a public interview on TV saying that I was the undercover agent involved in the case. I did it to put everything on the table. I did not want to hide anything. I wanted to be open and upfront about who I was and what I had done. However, this triggered a huge backlash in the community. The Muslim community thought that I had entrapped the young kids. Again, entrapment is a lazy excuse that is used by people who wish to deflect responsibility. It is an excuse. People started saying: 'this is an example of the government inventing terror plots and then prosecuting people to justify national security budget.' These are common arguments that are used in many national security cases in the West. Entrapment is used as a defense. It is very common. But it is just an excuse. There is a huge misunderstanding about the role of undercover agents. They are not there to actively entrap people.

**SB:** *So what should an undercover agent do to entrap someone?*

**MS:** Entrapment is when you make people do something that they would not normally do. Take drug offences as an example. If I were an undercover agent, I would approach somebody on a street corner and would tell him: 'go to that drug house over there and buy me some drugs.' If that person were a drug user, a drug buyer or a drug seller, he would go and buy the drugs. If he were not, he would say: 'sorry, I do not do drugs and this is not something that I do.' Then, I would say to him: 'you'd better do it, or else I will tell the police or beat you up' or use some kind of force. This is real entrapment.

**SB:** *What about the context of actual or potential terrorist groups?*

**MS:** Imagine an undercover agent who goes around the community and starts finding people whom he thinks might be jihadist. The agent goes to a random person in a mosque and says: 'hey, I am with al-Qaeda and I think we should attack the police station down the road.' If that person is a jihadi, he will respond: 'that is a good idea, let's do it.' He might also say: 'I do not have a gun.' So the undercover agent can respond: 'I can get you the gun.' This is not entrapment. This is someone who wants to do these activities anyway.[1] If you talk to someone whom you think is an al-Qaeda member, you get *caught* – you are not *set up*. You are caught. I tried to invite two people to the training camp and they said: 'no, we do not do this stuff. We are just here to study and we do not want to do any training or shooting.' This told me that those people were not violently minded so I left them alone. Pushing them to join the camp, when they did not want to or had no intention to, would be entrapment.

**SB:** *Were you told whom to recruit by your handlers?*

**MS:** My handlers told me to try and recruit certain people and see how they responded. It was also a way to verify or rejects claims that others had made. I do not know why they would tell me to go to some particular people. Maybe they had other informants who were not so reliable.

**SB:** *What happened in the end with the accusation of entrapment?*

**MS:** The accusation that, by taking members of the "Toronto 18" to the camp and training them on how to use guns, the government was essentially training these people on how to use the guns is false. The defense argued that I was the bad guy who had put these bad ideas in their head. I was part of the group and the group leader told me: 'we are going to have a training camp and part of that training is going to be target practice. I want you to train these people on how to shoot a gun.' What I am going to say to him: 'no, that is illegal!' Obviously, I am not going to blow my cover, so I have to do what the leader tells me to do. When I gave the first interview in July 2006, there were claims that it had been my fault and that there was no truth in the offences. I spent the next four years attending courts. Between 2006 and 2010, I gave testimony in five legal hearings at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. All of the evidence started to emerge. The public realized that there was a lot of evidence on these people. These people were being watched since at least March 2005 and possibly even earlier. It has been demonstrated that, by the time that I became involved, their activities had been well underway.

**SB:** *How much operational independence did you have while working undercover?*

**MS:** When I was working with the CSIS, I was given a lot of operational latitude. I was expressly prohibited from committing criminal offences outside of the investigation. Undercover work with the CSIS was not a police investigation, so I was not in a criminal context. But I was allowed to do whatever the members of the cell did. I was allowed to mirror and imitate them. When I moved over to the police, I was given immunity from being incriminated for participating in a terrorist group, which is normally a criminal offence. So, I was allowed to break the law. What I mean here is that I was in a terrorist organization, I was participating



in terrorist activities and training, but it was being done on behalf of the police. Committing crime does not mean that I could go and stab somebody or rob a store. I could not do those things, of course!

**SB:** *Were you given very specific instructions as to what activities you were supposed to do while working undercover?*

**MS:** The instructions were not too specific. They were general instructions to find out what these people were up to. This entails socializing with them and spending my time with them. When working with the CSIS, it was about collecting information. When working with the police, it was about collecting evidence.

**SB:** *What are the main challenges of undercover activities?*

**MS:** The psychological stability of undercover agents is important. The trouble is that authorities dealing with serious criminals are not going to use a boy scout as an undercover agent. They often need to use people who are unsavory – they have a bad attitude, they have a bad background, they are not always good people and they could be motivated by money, revenge, or ideology. They need to look at all these things together. One of the downsides is that, when dealing with criminal elements, there is often cooperation with other criminal elements. This causes problems in court. When authorities have somebody who, let's say, became an informant because he was already in the group, the group was under investigation, and he came forward to the police saying 'I want these people to be arrested', authorities do not know his motivations. He might do it because he feels that what his friends are doing is not good. He might do it because someone took away his girlfriend. He might do it because someone disrespected him and he now wants to take revenge on him. There are many reasons. When authorities put him on a stand in a court, it is going to be a problem, because it shows that his motivations are suspect. In my case, it was very different. I came forward because I felt that I had a duty as a Muslim. I did not tell the authorities: 'I know these people and they are terrorists, let's investigate them.' I did not say: 'I want to be a spy, give me hundreds of thousands of dollars, otherwise I am not going to work with you.' I never did any of these things. This is what surprised many people. A reason why I was so good at my undercover job is that I just did it for religious reasons. It was my duty as a Muslim and as a Canadian. I just wanted to help. I was being paid \$1,000 a month to work with the CSIS. That is nothing. It is a very low amount of money but I never told them: 'give me more money.' Even when I moved over to the police, it was police officers who flagged up the issue of money. This is why the judge said that I had been motivated by a sense of duty and a sense of service. But it is different when authorities are dealing with the vast majority of informants who come from less respected backgrounds. Using somebody, whom authorities know is not the best kind of person, is a real challenge. They know that they are going to have problems with that person. There are going to be psychological and emotional issues. But undercover agents remain essential to criminal investigations: they are used in drug cases, organized crime, prostitution, child sexual abuse and so on.

**SB:** *What about informants or agents who feel 'used-and-discarded' by authorities?*

**MS:** Sometimes in the national security apparatus, an informant or an agent – somebody who is working undercover – does not understand that he has a shelf life. He has a very specific utilitarian purpose. Handlers are not his friends and he is not an expert. He has a very specific utilitarian role to gather intelligence. At some point, they have to end the relationship. This is the context in which a lot of people feel that they were used or disrespected. I did go through a period in which I felt that the police only wanted me for my evidence and did not care about me or about my safety. They care about their case. At the beginning I thought: 'why are they doing this to me? Why are they treating me like this?' I had another identity crisis. But then I studied the topic and realized the reasons. Studying the topic academically helped me to make sense of my personal situation at the time.



**SB:** *How was your experience as a key witness in the trial?*

**MS:** I had an identity conflict during those years in court, because I became the bad guy for the Muslim community. There is no way I could anticipate the level of scrutiny and stress. One day I was a good person: I was praised, considered knowledgeable and dispensed religion. Suddenly, I became the person who was making Muslims look bad. I was distraught because I could not understand why the community made me be the bad guy. But I understood it later. I understood that this community was under siege and they were already too much under a microscope. So they felt that that anybody who brings even more attention to the community contributes to the siege. It is a false association. But the reality is that what they thought about me and what I thought about myself began to change. I became very depressed, I doubted myself. I questioned the faith: 'If Islam teaches against terrorism, why is the community against me?' This is what happened in July 2006 after the TV interview and lasted for about eight months. What happened is that the more often I went to court, the more I realized that I was doing very well. The judge declared me a truthful and honest witness. Some of the accused people continued to lie even when we were waiting for the trial. They pretended that they did not know why they had been charged with terror offences. The problem is that there is all sort of evidence. There are video and audio intercepts. Cameras were watching them. Their phones were tapped. They were recorded while talking about their plans. Zakaria Amara was making a bomb detonator – a detonating cell phone. One of his supporters said that it was a school project! But this is fairly easy to verify. You just call the school and ask: 'hey, do you teach your kids to make bomb detonators?' They lied and thought that people were stupid. What happened in the end is that I reached back to my religious supporters. They came to me and told me: 'we know that you are right. Do not worry about it. Just stick to it. Have faith in God and things will be fine.' Then some members of the terrorist cell began pleading guilty. They realized that the evidence was being upheld. Some other members were found guilty. In 2010, I was freed of my legal obligations.

**SB:** *Were you being opposed by a large section of the Muslim community?*

**MS:** It was a minority within the community. But because a lot of Muslims feel that they are under siege, they are suspicious of government. I think that the majority was suspicious of the government's claims but a vocal minority was really against me. Now the majority of Muslims is not against me but there remain some people who are opposed to me because I am associated with the national security apparatus.

**SB:** *How did the community backlash affect your family? I know that your father is very involved in the Muslim community in Toronto.*

**MS:** My father has been very involved in the Muslim community since the 1970s. Of course, he did not know that I was working for government and I could not tell him. But his credibility was so good that, even if his son had done something bad, it would not affect him. There were a couple of people who told him: 'what your son did was not good.' But that was it. No one did anything to him, stopped working with him or boycotted him. In fact, it was easier for me to reintegrate into the community because they recognized that my father had a strong credibility. However, because everything that I had said ended up being true, people in the community realized that there was something going on with those people. This also made it easier for people to get over it. Now, it is much better. People do not boycott me. They do not say that they were wrong but it is fine. I do understand it; it is difficult for them to do it. I think that I was able to reintegrate back into the community in a positive way, also because I was proven truthful. What changed is also that there were domestic terrorism cases popping up and suspects were being arrested. I was always in the media in Canada and in the US. People like the way that I speak. I am not anti-Muslim. I am very pro-Muslim but I am very anti-terrorism. Having an academic approach to the topic helps too. When people hear or see me on TV, they think: 'I like the ways this person speaks. He is not bad after all.'

**SB:** *Tell me about your more recent public involvement as a terrorism expert – how did it happen and how did it affect your life?*

**MS:** When the court made a decision and I was freed of my obligations in 2010, I became a public figure. I started giving talks to academic conferences and connecting with known academics, being hosted on TV and so on. I became known internationally as an expert on the topic. In 2011 I was awarded a Masters in Policing, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism from Macquarie University in Sidney, Australia. I had realized that I was contributing to something greater than myself and obtaining a degree was a way to make sense of the place I found myself in. I also decided that I needed a new identity. So, I took off my robe and cut off my giant beard. I became what I would call ‘a normal looking Muslim.’ I joined people back on Earth because I had been living on a cloud in the sky as a heavy ideologue. I had been living in the past of the first generation of Islam, as many people still do today. It is a past. It is a romanticized past. It is no wonder that some of these people do not function well in modern society, because they try to replicate a society that existed 1,400 years ago. It was not even meant to be that way. This is the claim made by the Salafis, who want to live like the Prophet did. But the reality is that you cannot do it. You need to live according to the ways society is in your time, not in the past. A lot of these people have no future because they live in the past. Taking off my robe and cutting off my beard was a way to retire my old identity and come forward with a new identity. But it was still very Islamic. The ideas that I had remained the same but it did not help when I still looked like a Salafi. It is not really a new identity, but a new uniform in a new wardrobe. This is what kept me still very Muslim. I had more and more training in religion. I got an education. I had a newly found sense of purpose. I was someone with experience, a good grasp of religion and an education, so I thought: ‘what I could do to move things forward?’ I became public, I started attending academic conferences and people realized that I am a primary source. A lot of academics were writing about other people and here I am: I am the ‘other people.’ Let me add to the academic discussion. Let me learn from the academics who study the topic.

**SB:** *I was surprised to read that you ended up in a US watch-list in 2011. Can you tell me more about it?*

**MS:** That was a mistake! Intelligence agencies keep their own lists of people and what happened is that, when the case was over, the CSIS did not update their list. On that list were the members of the “Toronto 18” under investigation, including myself. This is because, if there is a spy who is able to access the CSIS’s records and can see that my name is not there, it will be obvious that I am an undercover agent. So their list had to have my name on it. But they must have forgotten or must have not paid attention, and they submitted that list to the Americans saying: ‘these are the “Toronto 18” terrorists: make sure that they do not enter the country.’ I was sitting in the same spot where I am sitting now, when Neil Macdonald, a Canadian news personality, phoned me up and said: ‘hey, you are on a U.S. watch list.’ I did not tell him at the time that I had been at the CSIS’s headquarters teaching a new group of intelligence officers one week before that phone call. I knew that it was a mistake. By that time, I had already made contact with the U.S. Department of State, independently from the Canadian government. I was helping them with counter messaging and other activities. The Department of State contacted me and told me not to worry and that I would be removed from the list. Three months later, I wanted to see if I was off the list, so I drove down to the border. I was arrested and detained at the border. The FBI came. They knew me and thought: ‘what is going on?’ I was not allowed to enter the U.S. but, eventually, I received a call from my contact at the Department of State saying that I was taken off the list. Since then, I have traveled to the U.S. regularly. I am going to see the FBI in Florida soon. Recently, I was in Germany, in Washington DC, at the President Jimmy Carter Center and in many other places. I never get stopped.

**SB:** *Tell me more about your recent work with governments, law enforcement agencies, and other security-related organizations.*

**MS:** I am an expert consultant for the United Nations Center for Counter Terrorism. I have helped U.S. Special Operations Command, the Canadian Special Operation Forces, and many other agencies. I

am extremely involved, much more than I ever was in other times in my life. But, to clarify: I am an independent subject matter expert. I am not a spy. I am not a soldier. I am not a law enforcement agent. I am an independent expert who knows the topic of terrorism. When my court duties were over and I started speaking at conferences, I also started going online: I went on Facebook, I went on Twitter, and I started to argue with extremists. I used my own identity. I was open about my identity. When ISIS started to rise, I was online debating these people and trying to talk them out of it. Throughout 2013 and 2014, I debated with people who had gone to Iraq and Syria. Some of those people ended up being killed. I was deeply involved in the conversations that were happening on Facebook and Twitter. I gathered a lot of screenshots from my interaction with these people: the arguments that I was using and the counter-arguments that they were using, the role of women, the role of social media and so on. When all these agencies started knowing more about these extremist groups, I had a lot of data. I had PowerPoint presentations showing ISIS's ideology, grievance narratives, and so on. This increased my credibility because, already back in 2014 and 2015, I was able to show people: 'this is ISIS.' Here we are in 2016 and, now, everybody is talking about countering violent extremism, countering terrorism, countering messages, and so on. I was already ahead of the curve. I was already doing all of those things in real life. Now, my involvement with police, academics, NGOs, and so on, is a result of my activities after my time as an undercover agent. That is why I was approached by the United Nations and other international agencies.

**SB:** *Mubin, thank you very much for this interview.*

**About the interviewer:** **Stefano Bonino** is Lecturer in Criminology at Northumbria University and Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

### ***Acknowledgements***

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### ***Interviewer's Note***

This interview formed part of a Northumbria University approved project entitled: 'Disrupting Terrorist Groups: An Agent's Perspective.' The telephone interview with Mubin Shaikh was conducted in March 2016.

The interviewer and author of this text, Stefano Bonino, was not in a position to establish contact with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the Integrated National Security Enforcement Team to verify the claims made in this interview. However, the book *Undercover Jihadi: Inside the Toronto 18 – Al Qaeda Inspired, Homegrown Terrorism in the West*, which Mubin Shaikh co-authored with Anne Speckhard for Advances Press in 2014, and many public revelations, which emerged from the "Toronto 18" trial, provide evidence for several of Shaikh's claims. Readers wishing to explore some episodes referred to in this interview in more detail are advised to consult the book.

### ***Note***

[1] For a quick and basic explanation of 'entrapment', see: <http://www.lectlaw.com/def/e024.htm>

## IV. Resources

### Bibliography: Terrorism Research Literature (Part 2)

Compiled and selected by Judith Tinnes

[Bibliographic Series of Perspectives on Terrorism - BSPT-JT-2016-2]

#### Abstract

*This bibliography contains journal articles, book chapters, books, edited volumes, theses, grey literature, bibliographies and other resources on the field of Terrorism Research, its sub-disciplines (such as Critical Terrorism Studies), and related disciplines (such as Security Studies), central approaches, theories, methods, and research topics. More recent publications have been prioritized during the selection process. 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 expand the search.*

**Keywords:** *bibliography; resources; literature; terrorism research; terrorism studies; approaches; theories; methods; research topics*

NB: All websites were last visited on 13.03.2016. This subject bibliography was preceded by an earlier part ([Part I](#)). To avoid duplication, this compilation only includes literature not contained in the previous part. However, meta-resources, such as bibliographies, were included in both parts.–See also *Note for the Reader* at the end of this literature list.

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## Note

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## V. Book Reviews

### Counterterrorism Bookshelf:

### 30 Books on Terrorism & Counter-Terrorism-Related Subjects

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai

*This column consists of capsule reviews of recent books from various publishers.*

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2016* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 504 pp., US \$618.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-85743-835-2.

The annually published *The Military Balance*, which is published by the London-based The International Institute for Strategic Studies, is considered the most authoritative, comprehensive and detailed assessment of the military capabilities and defense economics of 171 countries. It is widely used as an unclassified reference resource by governments' military and intelligence agencies, as well as public policy research institutes, around the world. The volume is divided into two parts: Part One, "Capabilities, Trends and Economics," and Part Two, "Reference." Attesting to the significance of the terrorist threat facing much of the global community, the editor's introduction, entitled "Modernising Military Capabilities; Familiar Security Challenges," begins with an overview of the terrorist threat, as he writes that "A surge in high-profile terrorist attacks at the end of 2015 added to the increasing crises, conflicts and sense of uncertainty preoccupying the planning staffs of defense ministries worldwide." (p. 5) Given "the reality that combating terrorism was a global, not just a regional issue," the editor adds that terrorist groups such as ISIS "cannot be eradicated solely by military means. Tackling these groups will require multinational attention and the concerted and long-term application of policies and tools blending political, military, security, information and development capabilities, and agreement on ends as well as means: [with] the track record on such cooperation...mixed at best." (p. 5) With the volume's chapters focusing on the military capabilities of global regions and their countries, of particular interest to the counterterrorism community is their detailing of countries' combating terrorism forces. Thus, for example, it details that the United States' Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) consists of 63,150 active forces and 6,550 civilians (p. 48), France has 3 Special Forces groups (p. 98), that Norway's Army has 2 Special Forces groups and one Naval Special Forces group (p. 126), the United Kingdom has a large contingent of Royal Navy, Army and RAF Special Forces regiments and squadrons (p. 155), Russia has 489,000 Paramilitary forces, 10,000-30,000 Federal Protection Services forces, and 170,000 Interior Troops, India has 1,403,700 Paramilitary forces and 7,350 National Security Guards (p. 255), and that Israel has 3 Army Special Forces battalions and 1 Special Operations brigade, 300 Naval Commandos, and 8,000 Border Police forces (pp. 333- 335). The appendices include a listing of estimated forces and equipment by selected terrorist groups such as the Lebanese Hizballah, ISIS, and Boko Haram.

Nick Catrantzos, *Managing the Insider Threat: No Dark Corners* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2012), 363 pp., US \$76.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-4398-7292-5.

This is an authoritative textbook on the manifestations of the insider threat and the methods required to mitigate the challenges presented by the threat. It is divided into three parts: Part I, "Diagnostics" (defining the nature of the threat and the danger posed by such individuals who possess "legitimate access and occupies a position of trust" in an organization that is ultimately betrayed, and various analytical approaches employed to assess this threat); Part II, "Key Players" (the types of 'insiders' ranging from those who wage cyber sabotage or breaches on behalf of foreign governments or political causes, those who seek financial gain, to those who engage in workplace violence); and Part III, "Making a Difference" (the role of background



investigations in vetting employees who might present an ‘insider’ threat, how to recognize deception by potential insiders, and the components of a preventative program to mitigate such threats to an organization). As a textbook, each chapter includes a summary conclusion, questions for classroom discussion, exercises for group projects, and endnotes. The appendices include additional questions and issues for further discussion. This textbook is ideal for university courses and as a practical handbook for security departments that focus on countering the insider threat. What is especially noteworthy about this textbook is that it was published prior to the insider attacks by Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden – but had its insights and preventative guidelines and protocols been employed at the time could have aided in preventing such costly breaches into the U.S. government’s national security classified information systems. The author, a veteran security director, teaches homeland security and emergency management at the School of Management, University of Alaska.

Daniel Cunningham, Sean Everton, and Philip Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks: A Strategic Framework for the Use of Social Network Analysis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 388 pp., US \$98.00 [Hardcover], US \$55.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-442-24944-8.

This is a comprehensive and detailed account about how social network analysis (SNA) is employed to map and understand what are termed “dark networks” in order to formulate strategies to counter, disrupt, and defeat them. Such “dark networks” are generally covert and illegal in nature. The groups within these networks range from terrorists, criminal gangs, drug traffickers, criminal organizations, to white collar conspiracies. The volume is divided into four sections. The first part presents an overview of SNA, its strategic uses to disrupt dark networks, and how data about such networks is collected, coded, and manipulated, for example, to formulate disruption strategies; the second part explores the nature of the dark networks in terms of their topographical nature, how to detect subgroups and central actors within such networks, and how to identify the roles of different actors within such networks; the third part explains the use of hypotheses to “dig deeper” into such networks, as well as how longitudinal analysis is used “to identify the causes and consequences of network change...” (p. 267) The book’s concluding fourth part presents a series of lessons learned, such as the important observation that “Analysts should not forget that the actors in dark networks are dynamic entities and not static or one-dimensional” and that “Something as extreme as the removal of one of their neighbors will cause them to suddenly change their behavior, and a series of removals will likely cause the network to look completely different from what the initial investigation revealed.” (p. 297) The appendices include a description of the data and coding used in the discussion and their application to case studies such as the Afghan tribal network, a glossary of terms, analytic software used in SNA, and reference sources. The authors are affiliated with the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

Jolle Demmers, *Theories of Violent Conflict: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 158 pp., US \$54.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-415-55534-0.

This book’s objective is to employ a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates a range of theoretical frameworks to “explain and understand how and why (groups of) people resort to violent action against other (groups of) combatants, civilians, organizations or the state.” (p. 2) After defining the field of conflict, including civil war, and mapping the interactions of the primary and secondary parties, including their external environment, the discussion focuses on the actors’ social identity (such as their ethnicity) and how it affects their mobilization to engage in collective violent action, such as inter-group violence. Another chapter discusses the application of rational choice theory to explain the costs and benefits of engaging in conflict, driven by the assumption that “Basically, rational choice theories of conflict start from the proposition that individuals will conduct civil war if the perceived benefits outweigh the costs of rebellion.” (p. 101) Some of the analysis is overly jargon-laden and difficult to understand, such as his observation that “In his quest to find the ‘true motivation for rebellion,’ [Paul] Collier takes an explanatory epistemological stance. That is, he studies social action from without and infers motivation from patterns of observed behavior. In this

view, interpretation, meaning or sense-making are merely seen as distortions.” (p. 102) In another example of academic jargon, the author writes that “Social theorists referred to the riots as acts of ‘defective consumers’, as a manifestation of a consumerist desire violently enacted when unable to realize itself the proper way: by shopping” (Bauman 2011); or highlighted how the UK has become a *securitocracy* (Gilroy 2011).” (p. 139) In an overly long concluding paragraph on “What to do with theory,” the author writes that “Theoretical literacy is thus different from fluency: the end goal is not to have you ‘speak’ the language of constructivist instrumentalism, social identity theory or critical discourse analysis without a flaw. Rather, it is about using these ideas and vocabularies, acknowledging their underlying affinities and tensions, and finding your own voice.” (p. 142) A revised and updated edition of this book is scheduled to be published in 2017, so hopefully its analysis will be written in clear language. The author is a professor at Utrecht University, The Netherlands.

Frances L. Flannery, *Understanding Apocalyptic Terrorism: Countering the Radical Mindset* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 272 pages, pp., US \$155.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-138-77954-9.

This is a highly interesting and authoritative examination of the phenomenon of what the author terms “radical apocalyptic terrorism” – with apocalypticism defined as “an orientation to reality that maintains that the divine (or ‘transcendent’) realm has sent a revelation to a select few persons, the righteous, disclosing the divine view through a transformative or meaningful experience. This revelation affirms that evil forces rule the mundane realm that the righteous now inhabit, but someday there will be divine intervention that will dramatically change the operation of the cosmos by overcoming this evil, allowing the righteous to partake more fully of the divine reality.” (pp. 2-3) Following a general discussion of the parameters and characteristics of apocalypticism as illustrated in the Book of Revelation, two chapters then explore key changes in how it was interpreted in the Middle Ages, with its largely pacifist ideology transformed into a militant one, which the author then applies to an examination of the case study of a Christian group, the Covenant, Sword and the Arm of the Lord. The succeeding chapters apply the notion of apocalypticism to contemporary terrorist groups such as al Qaida, the Islamic State (also known as ISIS), as well as lone actors such as Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, and other American domestic groups. Other terrorist groups and lone actors that fall under this category are also examined, such as James Lee, an eco-terrorist, the Unabomber, and new religious movements, such as the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo. The concluding chapter proposes an approach to countering such apocalyptic terrorist groups. Based on long-term multi-targeted efforts to improve governance of marginalized populations where such radical movements proliferate, this approach is driven by counter-messaging campaigns in social media “that come from members of larger, peaceful communities with which a terrorist seeks to identify,” and a “fact-based, informational approach that publicizes an extremist group’s ‘sins’ within its own theological context.” (p. 250) Such campaigns would involve not only government agencies but non-governmental, grass-roots and faith-based organizations, as well as academic experts. The author is a Professor of Religion and Director of the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Terrorism and Peace (CISTP), James Madison University, Virginia.

Priya Dixit and Jacob L. Stump, editors, *Critical Methods in Terrorism Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge 2016), 216 pp., US \$155.00 [Hardcover], US \$44.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-138-01872-3.

The contributors to this edited volume are part of the sub-discipline of what is termed Critical Terrorism Studies, a dissident literature in the field of terrorism and counterterrorism studies. In its dissidence, it attempts to replace the predominant and entrenched modes of knowledge-production of ‘regimes of truth’ about terrorism and counterterrorism with its own epistemologies that “illustrate historical materialism’s emphasis on class antagonism and dialectics, discursive epistemologies that focus on the construction of meaning and its interaction with social processes and institutions, experiential knowledge of postcolonial and nationalistic politics and social processes, feminist standpoint epistemology of the marginalized, de-colonial knowledge of subjugated populations, and filmically depicted stories of ordinary people.” (p. 14) To achieve

these stated objectives, the volume's authors discuss issues such as Foucauldian and realist approaches to terrorism discourse, applying Marxism's historical materialism to critical terrorism studies, viewing terrorists as co-participants, ecologizing terrorism through ethnographic fieldwork, applying metaphor analysis to study terrorism, using a reflexive postcolonial methodology to study Palestinian resistance in the West Bank, applying marginality as a feminist research method in terrorism and counter-terrorism studies, analyzing the testimony of ex-militants, and an analysis of the visualization through films of the 'war on terror.' In the concluding chapter, the co-editors are out-of-date when they repeat an assertion, published in 2008 (which they do not cite), that "Books on terrorism are produced at the rate of one every six hours." (191) In this case, since their sub-discipline aims to engage in empirically-driven scholarship, shouldn't they rely on more current estimates? With the co-editors concluding that the objective of their sub-discipline is to dismantle "existing modes of thinking, writing, representing, and communicating terrorism which mainly privileges a 'Western' masculinized view of the world," (p. 198) while there is much ground to criticize mainstream terrorism and counterterrorism studies, this volume, in this reviewer's judgment, merely presents its own problematic and jargon-laden theoretical approach.

James J.F. Forest, *The Terrorism Lectures: A Comprehensive Collection for Students of Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and National Security* [2<sup>nd</sup> Edition] (Santa Ana, CA: Nortia Current/An Imprint of Nortia Press, 2015), 390 pp., US \$24.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-9400503-06-6.

In this comprehensive and well-written textbook, the author's aim is "to simulate the experience of a semester-long university course on terrorism. Each chapter represents what is meant to be a 35-40 minute classroom lecture." (p. xiii). This is accomplished through the book's five parts. The first part, "Definitions and Historical Frameworks," discusses how terrorism is defined, its general objectives, David Rapoport's famous formulation of the four historical waves of modern terrorism, and how terrorist groups, as "learning organizations," learn from each other's modus operandi and weaponry. The second part, "Underlying Contexts That Motivate and Facilitate Terrorism," examines the underlying grievances that drive terrorism, how individuals are radicalized and recruited into terrorism, the exploitation of the media and the Internet by terrorists, the economic dimensions of terrorism (e.g., economic conditions as grievances and facilitators, and the economic impact of terrorism on their targeted societies), the financial and criminal dimensions of terrorism (e.g., the nexus between terrorist groups and criminal organizations and engagement by terrorist groups in criminal activities), and the political dimensions of terrorism, ranging from state support of terrorist groups to the competition over control of weak and failed states between terrorist group insurgents and their weak governments. The third part, "Terrorist Group Ideologies and Strategies," discusses the ideological types of terrorist groups, ranging from ethnonationalist/separatist, left-wing, right-wing, to religious. The fourth part, "Contemporary Challenges," analyzes the latest challenges posed by terrorism in the form of al Qaida [which also applies to its parallel variation, ISIS], lone actor terrorism, the use by terrorist groups of the tactic of suicide bombings, and the threats presented by the potential use by terrorists of weapons of mass destruction. The fifth's part, "Concluding Thoughts," presents the author's take on the future trajectory of terrorism in terms of possible new trends in their organizational formations, ideology, weaponry, areas of operation, and warfare scenarios. As a textbook, each chapter includes a summary, questions for discussion, recommended readings, and endnotes. The comprehensive and authoritative treatment of these subjects makes this an ideal primary textbook for courses on terrorism and counterterrorism. The author is Professor and Director of the Security Studies program at the University of Massachusetts Lowell and the co-editor of *Perspectives on Terrorism*.

Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism* [Fifth Edition] (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 478 pp., US \$250.00 [Hardcover], US \$85.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-138-19014-6.

This is the fifth edition of this comprehensive and detailed textbook, which was first published in 2005. Following an introductory overview, the volume is divided into three parts. The first part, "Terrorism," covers topics such as how to define terrorism; the terrorist threat in America and the global context; the nature of religious terrorism; the underlying causes of terrorism, including the processes of radicalization into terrorism, the roles of leaders and followers in terrorist groups, and terrorists' motivations and agendas; how terrorists' use women and children in their warfare; terrorists' objectives, tactics, and targeting, including the types of weapons employed in their warfare, and future trends in warfare, such as the use of weapons of mass destruction; and how terrorist groups are organized and engage in funding activities. The second part, "Counterterrorism," discusses issues such as the nature of America's post-9/11 countering terrorism campaign; the effectiveness of "hard" and "soft" measures in counterterrorism; the issues involved in balancing the need for security and civil liberties and human rights; and, with a special focus on the United States, the roles of prevention and preparedness in managing a homeland security program. The third part, "Terrorism and Counterterrorism in News Media and Internet," discusses how the news media covers terrorist events and how terrorists exploit cyberspace for their propaganda and radicalization objectives. While the analysis throughout the textbook is sound and well-written, this reviewer does not agree with the author's conclusion that "an overblown, expensive bureaucracy has not necessarily enhanced [America's] ability to prevent further terrorist attacks, and to effectively respond if terrorists manage to strike," (p. 425) or that the magnitude of the terrorist threat is overblown. Nevertheless, this volume is recommended as a primary textbook for courses on terrorism and counterterrorism studies. The author is a veteran academic in terrorism studies and serves as adjunct professor of political science at Columbia University, in New York.

Joshua D. Freilich and Gary LaFree, editors, *Criminology Theory and Terrorism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 220 pp., US \$160.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-138-85826-8.

This edited volume was originally published as a special issue of the quarterly journal "Terrorism and Political Violence," which focused on criminological approaches to the study of terrorism. Such a disciplinary approach is especially pertinent given the fact that terrorism falls within the domain of criminology since its activities involve, as the editors' note, "the breaking of laws and reactions to the breaking of laws." (p. 1) Interestingly, while terrorist and criminal incidents involve breaking a country's laws, the editors' note that collecting terrorist incident data is much more difficult in terms of "official" data collected by police, "victimization" data collected from the population of victims, and "self-report" data collected from offenders because terrorist acts "often cut across several more common types of criminal categories," as well as the fact that victimization surveys are little used in the study of terrorism. (p. 4) Another reason, although not mentioned by the editors, may be the fact that as a national security threat, intelligence agencies that are tasked with countering terrorism operate in a covert environment, where such data is considered classified.

Following the editors overview of criminology theory and terrorism, the volume's chapters discuss issues such as the application of subcultural theory to analyzing Jihadi and right-wing radicalization in Germany, the use of "rational choice rewards" in studying Jihadist suicide bombers, the influence on the rate of terrorist attacks on country-level social disorganization caused by their operations, applying a criminological approach to analyzing right-wing, left-wing, and al Qaida-inspired extremists in the United States, analyzing the impact of a counter-terrorism campaign's deterrence and backlash effects on the Spanish ETA group, and an empirical comparison of the victims of ideologically- and non-ideologically- motivated homicides committed by American far-rightist extremists. Joshua Freilich is affiliated with the Doctoral Program in Criminal Justice and the Department of Criminal Justice, John Jay College, City University of New York, and Gary LaFree is affiliated with the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, and the National



Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

David Lowe, *Policing Terrorism: Research Studies into Police Counterterrorism Investigations* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2016), 203 pp., US \$80.96 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-4822-2683-6.

This is an authoritative, practitioner-based socio-legal study by a former veteran UK counterterrorism detective of significant issues involved in terrorism investigations. The volume is divided into two parts. The first part, “The Law Governing Terrorism Investigations,” covers topics such as the legal definition of terrorism, defining and ascertaining evidence that confirms when a religiously extremist activity can be associated with terrorism, statutory preventative measures against terrorism, legal justifications for engaging in surveillance of suspects, and countering the funding of terrorism. The second part, “Investigating Terrorism,” discusses the legal guidelines in conducting intelligence gathering operations by police forces, understanding the signs and activities that accompany radicalization into terrorism (based on a case study from Northern Ireland), police recruitment of informants in counterterrorism investigations, and the laws and policies governing the handling of such informants, including managing their court testimony, immunity from prosecution or reduction in their sentencing. The author is a principal lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University Law School in the UK.

Lindsay A. Harvell and Gwendelyn W. Nisbett, editors, *Denying Death: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Terror Management Theory* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 224 pp., US \$160.00 [Hardcover], US \$54.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-138-84314-1.

The contributors to this conceptually innovative edited volume apply Ernest Becker’s Terror Management Theory – a psychological means of self-esteem to provide existential protection to individuals who fear death – to a variety of fields such as political worldviews, civic engagement, public health, crime and law, marketing, suicide prevention, the way emergency first responders communicate, and airport security. With the co-editors receiving their doctorates in social influence and political communication from the University of Oklahoma, Dr. Harvell is an assistant professor at James Madison University, Virginia, and Dr. Nisbett is an assistant professor at the University of North Texas.

Willem Koomen and Joop Van Der Pligt, *The Psychology of Radicalization and Terrorism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 284 pp., US \$155.00 [Hardcover], US \$52.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-848-72442-6.

This is an interesting and innovative conceptual framework for analyzing the primary determinants and backgrounds of different types of radicalization pathways into terrorism. It is based on the authors’ initial research for the Dutch Ministry of Justice, which they have broadened to provide a more international context. In examining the psychology of radicalization into terrorism, the religious, ideological, nationalist/separatist components are also discussed, including its ‘Islamic’ manifestations, since they represent the most lethal current threats. Radicalization is focused upon because it “almost always” precedes terrorism, and “is a phase in which much can be done to preempt that possibility...” (p. 4) The book’s chapter’s discuss topics such as the root causes of terrorism (e.g., a sense of socio-economic deprivation and discrimination); the impact of perceived threats on the radicalization process; the roles of individual factors, such as personality (such as an abnormal personality trait or an authoritarian personality type, demographics, including socioeconomic or marital status), on radicalization into violent extremism; the roles of social identity in the form of ideology and religion, in driving polarization and collective action; the role of small group processes and community support in driving extremism into violence; and pathways into terrorism, as well as the processes involved in de-radicalization and disengagement from terrorism – and the factors that cause the termination of terrorist groups, whether through coercive or conciliatory means. There is much to commend

in this book, particularly its comprehensive examination of leading academic theories and approaches and how they apply to actual cases. Also especially valuable is the inclusion of flowchart figures to illustrate and synthesize each chapter's discussion, such as Figure 9.2 on the "Rise and decline of violent extremism" (p. 235). The authors' finding that "there is absolutely no evidence to support [the] idea" that extremists and terrorists "have abnormal personalities" may be challenged, since many of those who become terrorists, such as those with a criminal background, would not be described as "normal." (p. 111) Also, their finding that "the belief in human inequality that characterizes people with a strong social dominance orientation may also drive them towards the extreme right," (p. 111) is correct – although they should have added that it also drives such individuals into extremist right-wing "religious groups," such as the Jihadists, as well. The volume is highly recommended as a textbook for courses on terrorism and counterterrorism. Dr. Koomen is affiliated with the Department of Social Psychology of the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, where Dr. van der Pligt, who died in 2015, had also served as Professor.

Max Taylor, Jason Roach, and Ken Pease, editors, *Evolutionary Psychology and Terrorism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 202 pp., US \$155.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-138-77458-2.

The contributors to this theoretically innovative edited volume apply the evolutionary psychology (EP) approach to psychology to explain the psychology of terrorism and the impact of terrorism on its targeted society. EP is selected as the volume's conceptual framework because, as explained by the editors, it "offers the best potential for an integrative approach, embracing biological, behavioural and social perspectives operating within a sense of a complex and dynamic system." (p. 6) What is EP? As explained by Max Taylor, in his chapter on "Evolutionary Psychology, Terrorism, and Terrorist Behaviour," it places "explanations of behaviour and psychological phenomena as *functional products* of adaptation and natural selection within their environments." (p. 19) Following the editors' introductory overview, the volume's chapters discuss issues such as the nature of EP and how it applies to terrorism; how EP can be used to explain how certain individuals decide to engage in terrorism (e.g., "the human propensity for altruism and punishment" (p. 14); the spectrum of psychological and behavioural responses to terrorist attacks that explain why terrorism is so "terrifying"; and "how different distances from acts of terrorism produce varying levels of fear/terror." (p. 14) The editors are prominent United Kingdom-based forensic psychologists and academics.

Michael Fredholm, editor, *Understanding Lone Actor Terrorism: Past Experience, Future Outlook, and Response Strategies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 312 pp., US \$145.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-138-10051-0.

This edited volume is the result of an international seminar organized by the editor in Stockholm, Sweden, for the National Center for Terrorist Threat Assessment (NCT), a working group of the Swedish Security Service, Military Intelligence and Security Directorate, and National Defence Radio Establishment. This was followed as an academic project on lone actor terrorism, with follow-on discussions by the participants. One of the unique aspects of this project is that most of the volume's contributors are European experts – with the exception of this reviewer, who contributed two chapters on profiling the mindsets and activities of different types of lone actors: active shooters and those who become insider threats to their organizations. This reviewer was also added to the project following the holding of these workshops. Aside from this reviewer's chapters, the contributors to this volume examine the relationship between the lone actor (also known as "lone wolf") and terrorism, historical lessons drawn from early anarchist lone actors, whether left-wing or right-wing, environmental and animal rights extremists operating in the current period, lone actors inspired by al Qaida and the Islamic State (also known as ISIS), female lone actors, lone actors who conduct school shootings, lone actor terrorism and CBRN weapons, the mindsets of lone actors, lone actors' online activities, the components of effective countermeasures against lone terrorist actors, and future trends in lone

actor terrorism. The volume's editor is affiliated with the Stockholm International Program for Central Asian Studies (SIPCAS), Sweden.

Cato Hemmingby and Tore Bjorgo, *The Dynamics of a Terrorist Targeting Process: Anders B. Breivik and the 22 July Attacks in Norway* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), X, 131 pp., US \$69.99 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-137-57996-6.

This is a conceptually innovative examination of terrorists' targeting decision-making processes, using Anders Breivik's July 22, 2011 attacks in Norway as a case study. In conducting their research, the authors (both prominent Norwegian criminologists) were provided unique access to source material about the investigation of Breivik's attacks and the subsequent trial, making the case study highly revealing and authoritative. Although the authors focus on a "solo" terrorist as opposed to a larger organized terrorist group, many of their findings apply to all terrorists, as they write that "this case demonstrates how terrorists – single actors as well as group-based – may have to change their [targeting] plans as things often do not develop as they had intended and expected." (p. 6) Terrorists' target selection, therefore, is a "highly dynamic process," involving factors "such as time, capacity and funding..." (pp. 6-7) To examine their thesis, the book's chapters discuss topics such as theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches to targeting decision-making (e.g., the relationship between ideology and strategy, and the internal and external factors that influence a perpetrator's tactics); a taxonomy of the types of targets and target categories that serve as a "menu" to terrorists from which to choose in their attacks; the ideology and strategy that drove Breivik to select his targets (e.g., in his case, the strategy of a "massive 'shock-attack'"); selecting his weaponry in the form of bombs and guns for his intended maximum effect attacks; conducting pre-incident surveillance as well as selecting a farm to conduct his training; and finalizing his attack plan. The remaining chapters reconstruct the attacks and analyze its consequences in terms of the effectiveness of the police response, present an overview of the trial, the results of Breivik's psychiatric examinations, his sentencing; and examine the differences and similarities between Breivik and other lone terrorists in the West in terms of their strategies and tactics, including the constraints facing security services in detecting potential lone actors as opposed to larger terrorist groups. The authors conclude that "in a holistic perspective, solo terrorism cannot be characterized as the gravest threat we face, but it is certainly a serious threat that cannot be neglected." (p. 114) The authors are affiliated with the Norwegian Police University College, where Dr. Bjorgo is a Professor of Police Science, and Mr. Hemmingby, a research fellow, also serves as a senior advisor in the Norwegian Government Security and Service Organization.

Unni Turrettini, *The Mystery of the Lone Wolf Killer: Anders Behring Breivik and the Threat of Terror in Plain Sight* (New York, NY: Pegasus Books, 2015), 272 pp., US \$27.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-60598-910-5.

In this highly interesting and insightful account of Anders Breivik as an archetypical lone wolf terrorist, the author, a Norwegian attorney and author, set out to write a sociological study on "how Norway facilitated the personality disorders that led to Breivik's killing spree," but ended up adding leading psychological approaches to profiling such a mass murderer and his environment. (pp. xx-xxi). In this effort, the author was greatly helped by Dr. Kathleen M. Puckett, a former FBI behavioral analyst, who had earlier co-authored a book on Timothy McVeigh, one of America's most notorious lone wolf terrorists. Dr. Puckett also wrote the book's Foreword. Beginning with an account of Breivik's troubled childhood in which he had trouble connecting with his peers, the author shows how an individual such as Breivik, as a potential lone wolf, "cannot connect with others – nor even in 'extremist' groups—these individuals connect with just the ideology of the group, as Breivik ultimately did" in his adulthood—in his case, in the form of his 1,516 page manifesto which presented him as the leader of the struggle, which paved the way for his murderous rampage. Subsequent chapters describe Breivik's extensive and meticulous planning for his attacks and the early warning signs that were missed by the Norwegian security services. Of particular interest is the author's

profile of lone wolf killers, which she distinguishes from serial killers. Some of the characteristics of lone wolf killers include attachment difficulties, feeling bullied or suffering an injustice, rage, narcissism, a need for release for their rage, and a desire to kill on a societal level, in order “to be seen, to matter.” (p. 183) Also making this account especially valuable is the author’s linking Breivik’s mindset and activities to other lone wolf terrorists, such as Timothy McVeigh and Theodore Kaczynski, who are discussed throughout the book. Citing the work of Dr. Puckett, the author concludes that one of the most effective ways to preempt lone wolf terrorists (and active shooters) is to mobilize those who come into contact with such individuals in their communities to alert authorities about their troublesome personalities, especially when it appears they might turn to violence to redress their perceived sense of grievance and injustice.

Terry D. Turchie and Kathleen M. Puckett, *Hunting the American Terrorist: The FBI’s War on Homegrown Terror* (Palisades NY: History Publishing Company, 2007), 294 pp., US \$24.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-933909-34-9.

This is a fascinating inside account by two FBI special agents of their Bureau’s investigation that led to the capture of Theodor Kaczynski (known as “The Unabomber”), one of America’s most notorious lone wolf terrorists, who evaded capture between 1978 and 1995 while killing and maiming his victims in his extremist crusade to halt technological advances in society. By the time Mr. Turchie had assembled his team, which included Dr. Puckett, it took them some 24 months to put together a psychological profile of Kaczynski that ultimately succeeded in apprehending him (with his brother’s assistance). While the story of Kaczynski and his terrorist activities are well known (with extensive inside information provided in this book), what makes this account especially pertinent to the current period is Dr. Puckett’s profiling of the characteristics of a lone wolf, which predated the proliferation of such profiling following the proliferation of lone wolf terrorist attacks in the aftermath of 9/11. Drawing on the characteristics of Kaczynski and other American lone wolf terrorists, such as Timothy McVeigh, Eric Rudolph, and others, Dr. Puckett writes that “The Lone Wolf operates outside the observable structure of a group, not because he wants to but because his peculiar psychology makes it impossible for him to fit in anywhere. He adopts a hate-filled ideology as a life companion instead of other people, and he becomes its deadly advocate. Although he has no connection to his victims – has never even met them – he sees them as representing a threat to him and his ideology.” (pp. 275-276) Interestingly, the Lone Wolf, according to Dr. Puckett, will rarely commit suicide at the conclusion of his murderous rampage, because the aftermath in the form of a trial and imprisonment will enable him to continue his extremist ideological struggle. (p. 241)

Ronald J. Kendall, Steven M. Presley, and Seshadri S. Ramkumar, editors, *New Developments in Biological and Chemical Terrorism Countermeasures* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2016), 185 pp., US \$152.96 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-4987-4756-1.

The contributors to this authoritative science-based textbook examine the threat of chemical and biological terrorism and the countermeasures that are required in response. The volume’s chapters discuss topics such as the state of the science, challenges in predicting the risk of vector-borne diseases, the pathogenic and toxic threats, effects and vulnerabilities associated with biological agents, the threats posed by ricin and palliative responses, countermeasures against cholera toxin, and conclusions and an agenda for future research. As a textbook, each chapter consists of a table of contents, an introduction, numbered sections, suggestions for additional research, and a listing of references.



Barak Mendelsohn, *The Al-Qaeda Franchise: The Expansion of al-Qaeda and Its Consequences* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp., US \$99.00 [Hardcover], US \$27.95-[Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-19-020561-4.

This is a largely theoretical account of the impact and consequences of al Qaida' organizational strategy to expand through branching out, absorption of other like-minded groups, unification of multiple groups under its rubric, or serving as an umbrella group to oversee the operations of its like-minded counterparts. One of the problems this reviewer encountered in reading this book is the author's tendency to confuse a reader with pretentious sentences such as the following: "With this book, I seek to elevate the discussion about the al-Qaeda threat through problematizing the group's expansion. A first step is to acknowledge that the organization's branching out is a puzzling development..." (p. 3) In this case, isn't it an academic writer's duty to "explain" rather than to "problematize" an issue? Moreover, is the decision-making behind al Qaida "Central's" branching out strategy really that "puzzling" to any veteran al-Qaida observer? In an example of how this book is more "academic" than "practitioner" based, the author writes that "The organization's inflated self-image required it to stay in the news and prove its relevance; when aggressive counterterrorism measures hindered its ability to operate, organizational expansion became an attractive alternative." (p. 17) Firstly, don't all terrorist groups engage in "inflated self-image", and secondly, what does the author imply by "aggressive counterterrorism?" Wouldn't a clearer description be "effective counterterrorism"? In any case, if "aggressive counterterrorism" had been truly successful, then al Qaida would not have been able to expand to other regions beyond its safe haven in Pakistan in the first place. In another questionable and dubious assertion, the author writes that al Qaida "has also benefited from ISIS's extremism, which has made al-Qaeda appear moderate and almost reasonable in comparison." (p. 212) In conclusion, this is an interesting and important topic for a study, but readers will benefit from other books that are more clearly written and are the products of better analysis. The author is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Haverford College, in Pennsylvania.

Benoit Gomis, *Counter Terrorism: Reassessing the Policy Response* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2016), 241 pp., US \$69.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-4822-3715-3.

This book is an argument for a reform of current counterterrorism policies to make them "more proportionate, evidence-based, and accountable responses, not only from governments but also from the media and analysts." (p. xviii) Although the author explains that counterterrorism policies differ from one country to another, he finds that Western countries, in particular, tend to engage in "threat inflation and overreaction." (p. xx) As part of its corrective prescription, the book is divided into three sections: defining what the authors considers to be the actual threat of terrorism, pointing out the "dangers of overreaction" to the risk of terrorism and its negative consequences, and "rethinking the policy response" towards a "more measured and comprehensive response." (p. xx) To accomplish these objectives, the book's chapters cover topics such as the legal and academic definitions of terrorism; why the terrorist threat matters (including overviews of terrorist groups such as al Qaida, the Islamic State, and lone wolves); terrorism as a multifaceted problem since it has narco-trafficking and cyber warfare components; how the terrorist threat has been "overestimated" in the cases of the United Kingdom and France; how the overreaction to terrorism in cases such as China, Russia, and the Arab Spring has led to negative consequences by exacerbating the threat; how the terrorist threat has been used by government officials as a "political veil" for other purposes, including infringing on citizens' privacy; and the components of a more effective policy response. The book is well-organized and well-written, but at times the author tends to make blanket claims that do not stand the test of time. For example, in his discussion of the threat presented by the return of Western foreign fighters in Syria to their home countries, Mr. Gomis downplays the prospect that "these individuals would launch terrorist attacks in their home countries – is not only the most alarming one but also the least likely" (p. 133) – an assertion belied by recent major attacks and thwarted plots by such returnees in Paris and Brussels.

He also dismisses the possibility of cyber terrorism as “a very marginal threat.” (p. 104) On other issues, the author is correct, such as his observation that “most terrorist attacks occur in countries with poor governance, authoritarian regimes, few opportunities for political engagement, high levels of discrimination, a struggling economy, and social inequalities.” (p. 187) Finally, while some of Mr. Gomis’ arguments can be considered one-sided, he still raises important issues that need to be discussed in the formulation of effective counterterrorism campaigns. The author is an associate fellow at Chatham House and at the time this book was written he was a Visiting Scholar at the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security and Society (TSAS), based at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, Canada.

John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts: The Policing of Terrorism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 408 pp., US \$29.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-19-023731-8.

This is an account of the effectiveness of the U.S. government’s counterterrorism policies and activities since 9/11, as implemented by agencies such as the FBI, the National Security Agency (NSA), the Department of Homeland Security, and local policing agencies, such as the New York Police Department (NYPD). The author’s central argument is that the U.S. government’s counterterrorism efforts boil down to “ghost-chasing,” which has become “an expensive, exhausting bewildering, chaotic, and...paranoia-inducing process,” (p. 2) particularly given what they claim is a much reduced terrorist threat level facing the United States. While one may disagree with their diagnosis of the threat level – their manuscript was completed prior to the December 2015 San Bernardino, California, murderous rampage by the ISIS-inspired husband-and-wife terrorists and the recent ISIS-related attacks in Paris and Brussels – readers will find the authors’ analytical approach highly useful. To answer the question of “How much terrorist destruction must these [governmental] expenditures have waylaid in order to justify the outlays?” (p. 134), the authors present a cost-benefit and risk-analytic methodology based on “the cost per saved life, acceptable risk, and cost-benefit analysis” (p. 134) which they apply to assess the effectiveness of the U.S. government’s counterterrorism departments and agencies, including, at the local level, law enforcement bodies such as the NYPD. Dr. Mueller is a political scientist at Ohio State University, and Dr. Stewart is professor of civil engineering at The University of Newcastle, Australia.

Edgar B. Tembo, *US – UK Counter-Terrorism After 9/11* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 168 pp., US \$155.00 [Hardcover], US \$48.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-138-94022-2.

This volume applies a qualitative analysis to assess the nature and effectiveness of the post-9/11 counterterrorism strategies undertaken by the United Kingdom and the United States along three policy instruments: intelligence, law enforcement and the use of military force. With the author’s timeframe the period from 2001 to 2011, this account misses the escalation in the terrorist threats facing the two countries – along with their Canadian and European allies – particularly in the 2015-early 2016 period, so its findings, for instance, that “there has not been a major terrorist attack” against both countries (p. 124), are not up-to-date, but the methodology employed provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding the policy instruments that need to be assessed in evaluating the effectiveness of these countries’ counter-terrorism campaigns. The author is a Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, UK.

Robert Mandel, *Coercing Compliance: State-Initiated Brute Force in Today’s World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Security Studies/Stanford University Press, 2015), 320 pp., US \$95.00 [Hardcover], US \$29.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-8047-9398-8.

This is a well-analyzed account of state-initiated internal and external application of the use of “brute force” to coerce compliance against a threatening adversary. The author defines brute force as the “direct application of physical strength – in contentious confrontations, not the use of coercive diplomacy, threats

and ultimatums, economic sanctions, or shows of force.” (p. 4) Moreover, this analysis “emphasizes the broad strategic context for force use, not specific tactics or training and morale methods.” (p. 4) Following an introductory conceptual framework, the author discusses some of the conundrums involved in a democratic government’s use of brute force, such as a potential clash with democratic values in the case of targeted assassinations. The author then applies his conceptual framework to a series of case studies, with external uses of brute force including the American drone campaign in Pakistan and Yemen, the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the targeted assassination of Usama bin Laden, the French intervention of Mali, and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Cases of state internal use of brute force include repressions of dissidents by the governments in Bahrain, China, Egypt, Greece, India (in the Kashmir region), Myanmar, and Sudan, Syria and Thailand. In the chapter on “Brute Force Security Impact Patterns,” the author identifies the conditions for measuring their effectiveness, including the risks of possible negative military, political, economic, and social consequences from “state overreliance or underreliance on brute force.” (p. 178) The concluding chapter presents the author’s policy recommendations for effective use of brute force, based on a calculus “involving the right combination of force initiator and force target attributes giving brute force precisely the kind of unique comparative advantage to accomplish the designated mission – often in combination with other policy tools – under appropriate circumstances.” (p. 232) The author is Chair and Professor in the International Affairs Department of Lewis & Clark College, in Portland, Oregon.

Nicholas Ryder, *The Financial War on Terrorism: A Review of Counter-Terrorist Financing Strategies Since 2001* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 210 pp., US \$145.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-415-64038-1.

This is an authoritative comparative legal examination of the nature and effectiveness of the measures implemented globally within the context of the ‘Financial War on Terrorism’ since the attacks of 9/11. Specifically, the volume’s chapters discuss the measures introduced by multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (including the U.N. sanctions against terrorists and the operations of its anti-terrorist sanctions committee), the European Union and the Council of Europe, as well as the governments of the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Also discussed is a working definition of the ‘Financial War on Terrorism,’ and how the ‘Financial War on Terrorism’ has addressed the new threats presented by jihadist terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, Islamic State, and al Qaida. The author concludes that “it has proven extremely difficult for the international community and nation states to limit the sources of funding available to terrorists” because they “are able to manipulate an increasing array of sources of financing through a vast amount of legitimate and illicit financial channels.” (p. 182) The author is a professor of Financial Crime at the University of West England, Bristol, UK.

Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* [Third Edition] (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 286 pp., US \$90.00 [Hardcover], US \$35.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-4422-4761-1.

This is an in-depth account of how terrorists exploit a country’s mass media to generate attention for their cause through their violent attacks, as well as how they use social media to communicate directly with their targeted audiences for propaganda, radicalization, and recruitment purposes. Following a discussion of how to define terrorism (whether as state terror or non-state terrorism), and the nature of terrorism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the author proceeds to define mass-mediated terrorism which “conveys the centrality of communication via all kinds of mass media in the calculus of terrorism on the one hand and media gatekeepers’ preference for shocking violence on the other hand. The idea here is that most terrorists calculate the consequences of their carefully planned strikes and assume that they are very likely to gain access to what I call the triangle of political communication.” (pp. 31-32) What makes this textbook especially useful is the author’s application of these concepts to actual cases, such as how the news media reported the 9/11 terrorist attacks and following anthrax letter attacks (with numerous recent attacks also discussed), as

well as how the news media reports on a country's counterterrorism (CT) campaign, and the impact of media reporting of such events and response measures in shaping a country's public opinion about the magnitude of the terrorism threat. Also valuable is the author's discussion of a blueprint for effective public information and media relations during terrorist crises. The author is a veteran academic in terrorism studies and serves as adjunct professor of political science at Columbia University, in New York.

Peter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press/London, UK: Hurst Publishers, 2016), 288 pp., US \$29.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-19-026402-4.

This is an authoritative and interesting account of the history of jihadi terrorism in Europe from the Air France airliner hijacking by the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in December 1994 to the attacks by IS adherents against the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015. As the author explains, the book "aims to explain why these terrorist plots happened when they did and where they did, and to shed light on what goes on inside European jihadi networks more generally." (p. 1) It also seeks "to demonstrate how jihadi terrorism in Europe emerged through an intricate interplay between foreign and European factors, between top-down and bottom-up processes of radicalization, and between social and ideological motivations." (p. 1) One of the book's innovations is the author's formulation of a typology of jihadi terrorists in Europe, which he distinguishes between "the entrepreneur," "the protégé," "the misfit," and "the drifter." Such a typology is important, the author explains, because "Each type radicalizes and joins cells differently and plays different roles; they fulfill different functions and influence the behavior of cells in different ways." (p. 12) This conceptual framework is then applied to the book's chapters, which cover different phases in the evolution of jihadi terrorism in Europe from what the author terms the "Algerian Factor" (1994-2000); the "Global Jihad in Europe" (2000-2004), which had dual ties to al Qaida and Afghanistan and terrorist groups in the Middle East and North Africa; the "Iraq Effect" (2003-2005), which were expressed by the March 2004 Madrid attacks; the "Pakistan Axis" (2004-2006), as expressed by the London transport bombings in July 2005; the "Northern Front" (2005-2008), in which the jihadi terrorist cells increasingly targeted the UK and Scandinavia; "Decentralization" (2008-2010), in which, due to increasing pressure on al Qaida "Central," lone actor terrorism became prevalent; and the final phase, the "Heterogeneous Threat" (2011-2015), which resulted from the cascading effects of the Arab Spring and the rise of the Islamic State. In conclusion, one may disagree with the author's finding that "the European jihadi phenomenon is driven forward by tight-knit networks of individuals motivated mostly by wars in the Muslim world," with "societal explanations [having] less impact," (p. 295) since many of these jihadi terrorists have trouble integrating into and succeeding in Western societies, which forms a crucial component in their radicalization process. The author, however, is insightful when he points out that "cells rarely emerge in the absence of entrepreneurs" which is significant for counterterrorism because altogether "Extremists need to be monitored very closely to spot suspicious constellations of entrepreneurs, proteges, misfits, and drifters that could be a cell in the making." (p. 295) The author is a senior research fellow with the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), in Oslo, Norway.

Peter J. Phillips, *The Economics of Terrorism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 196 pp., US \$160.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-138-12191-1.

This is an application of economic analysis to explain the 'brutal purposefulness' of terrorists' behaviors, choices and strategies. The volume's chapters apply economic analysis in the form of expected utility theory, which is "complemented by 'behavioral' approaches to the determination of preference orderings for risky prospects" (p. 3) to examine terrorism perpetrated by individuals, the emergence of the Islamic State (IS), financing terrorism, how terrorists' select their attack methods, the geographical locations and timeframes for terrorist attacks, and the role of females in terrorism. One of the author's conclusions is that "A terrorist group cannot survive without terrorism. It is logical, I think, to expect those groups that survive the longest



to be those that have maintained or increased their share of inflicted brutality during their lifetimes.” (p. 185) Interestingly, the author adds that “When brutality is very high, a terrorist group must be more brutal in order to survive. When brutality is low, a terrorist group may be less brutal yet still survive as a terrorist group.” (p. 185). The author is Associate Professor (Finance) at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia.

Paul Shemella, editor, *Global Responses to Maritime Violence: Cooperation and Collective Action* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Security Studies/An Imprint of Stanford University Press, 2016), 344 pp., US \$90.00 [Hardcover], US \$27.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-8047-9841-9.

The contributors to this edited volume examine the components of maritime security such as terrorism, piracy, armed robbery at sea, illegal maritime trafficking, illegal fishing and other types of maritime crimes. Following the editor’s introductory overview, the volume is divided into three parts. The first part, “Examining Maritime Violence,” discusses maritime terrorism as an evolving threat, terrorist targeting in the maritime environment, and the armed groups that engage in maritime crime. The second part, “Riding the Storm,” presents the components of port security, strategies to counter maritime violence, assessing the components of a security regime, including its legal framework, and the measures involved in managing violent maritime incidents. The third part, “Case Studies,” examines maritime violence, whether terrorism or piracy, in the cases of Sri Lanka (in countering the LTTE), the Strait of Malacca, the Sulu Sea, the Gulf of Guinea, and Yemen. In the concluding chapter, the volume’s editor writes that because “economic insecurity is a common root cause of most maritime violence” an effective security regime is based on upgrading the two pillars of “governance and capacity.” (pp. 298-299)

Brian Glyn Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: From Soviet Genocide to Putin’s Conquest* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press/London, UK: Hurst Publishers, 2016), 240 pp., US \$34.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-019-049470-4.

This is a comprehensive and sweeping account of the origins and evolution of the Crimean Tatars changing relationship with their *Vatan* (homeland), leading up to their current conflict with Vladimir Putin’s Russia. This account is of particular interest to terrorism studies because, as the author explains, it is a “case study in the durability of the political phenomenon of mass-based ethno-nationalism. Such an analysis can also provide considerable insight into the ways in which diasporic national movements can unify and politically mobilize even small, fragmented ethnic groups.” (p. 118) The author is Professor of Islamic History at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth.

Brian Glyn Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya: The Russian-Chechen Wars, the Al Qaeda Myth, and the Boston Marathon Bombings* (Lebanon, NH: ForeEdge/An Imprint of University Press of New England, 2015), pp., US \$29.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-61168-737-8.

In this comprehensive account of the history and current developments in Chechnya, the author, a prominent expert on Chechnya, begins with the tsarist conquest of Chechnya and concludes with the major Russian-Chechen wars which were fought in the 1990s, which resulted in the rise of the Chechen terror campaign against Russia – one of Europe’s most lethal homegrown terrorist network. The book’s last two chapters are of particular interest as they discuss the author’s findings about the links between the Chechen terrorist network and al Qaida’s forces in Afghanistan, especially in the aftermath of 9/11 – which he describes as basically nonexistent (p. 221), as well as the presence of Chechen Jihadi fighters in Syria – which he estimates as around 200 (based on BBC claims), with around half coming from the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia and “many others coming from the refugee diaspora of as many as 190,000 Chechens found in Europe, and of course some from Chechnya itself.” (p. 229) The concluding chapter, “The Strange Saga of the Boston Marathon

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Bombers,” discusses the radicalization of the Tsarnaev brothers into becoming Jihadi terrorists, as well as whether Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the elder brother, had been radicalized and recruited into becoming a terrorist during his 6-month visit to Dagestan in 2012, with the author finding that it likely had not occurred during that period, with Tamerlan already becoming radicalized prior to the visit, with his terrorist bombing of the Boston Marathon in mid-April 2013 an example of a “vicarious” connection to al Qaida “via the Internet (and via a fellow radicalized American named Anwar al-Awlaki).” (p. 256) The author is Professor of Islamic History at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, where the younger Tsarnaev brother, Dzhokhar, was enrolled as an undergraduate student.

*About the Reviewer: Dr. Joshua Sinai is the Book Reviews Editor of ‘Perspectives on Terrorism’. He can be reached at: [Joshua.sinai@comcast.net](mailto:Joshua.sinai@comcast.net).*

## VI. Notes from the Editor

### Op-Ed: Competing Perspectives on Countering ISIS

by Hashim Al-Ribaki

Even though the existing counter-ISIS strategy has achieved some recent successes, such as the liberation of Anbar province, scholars have suggested several counter-ISIS strategies. They could be classified into three categories: containment, political reconciliation, and an offensive military campaign. It is not possible to discuss in detail all the suggested strategies here, but I will discuss each category from the view of one scholar who represents that school of thought (while recognizing that all scholars whose policy arguments fall within a particular category do not share identical views).

1. *Containment*: Stephen Walt has suggested a containment strategy based on “local actors... with the United States staying far in the background.”[1] According to him, this strategy should prevent the expansion of ISIS, encourage better integration of Muslims in Europe, have a minimal role for the US, and promote improved governance throughout the Middle East.[2] Therefore, from this perspective America should adopt a “hands-off approach” in their counter-ISIS strategy. However, while this strategy offers some crucial long-term objectives, it does not constitute an effective strategy to counter ISIS. The ISIS leadership incorporates former members of Saddam’s regime. These members were able to pursue their policies for 24 years without being “normalized” despite international pressure, economic crises, and demolished legitimacy after two costly wars against Iran and Kuwait. Further, due to their lack of domestic capabilities, anti-ISIS groups would rely on regional powers that have conflicting interests, exacerbating the situation even further.
2. *Political Reconciliation*: Lina Khatib has emphasized political reconciliation as the best strategy for dealing with ISIS. She suggests adopting comprehensive measures to win the trust of the local Sunni populations, and most importantly to reach political reconciliation in both Iraq and Syria.[3] But political reconciliation seems an unrealistic goal. Concerning Syria, one crucial obstacle is the absence of representatives for moderate Sunnis who are potentially capable of implementing any comprehensive deal that may be reached on behalf of Sunnis with the Assad regime. Furthermore, Assad does not show a willingness to make any meaningful concessions that could attract the Sunni community. Talking about political reconciliation in Iraq only serves ISIS rhetoric, which stresses the perceived marginalization of Sunnis, whereas Sunnis are currently represented in the Iraqi government and have an important role in the fight against ISIS.
3. *Offensive Military Campaign*: Kim Kagan, Fred Kagan, and Jessica Lewis have suggested an offensive military campaign as the best strategy to destroy ISIS. Their strategy is based on “challenging the ISIS military campaign plan” because political efforts “are necessary but not sufficient conditions.”[4] The literature on terrorism supports this strategy, where there are four methods by which terrorist groups end: victory, political settlement, policing, and military campaign.[5] Political settlement is not a workable option with ISIS, and ISIS would never achieve victory because of its broad goals. Given the limitation of police access to the territories under ISIS control, policing is not effective enough to destroy ISIS. Furthermore, Seth Jones and Martin Libicki have emphasized the effectiveness of offensive military actions in destroying powerful terrorist groups.[6] This strategy in principle would be the optimal way to destroy ISIS, especially at the time of its rise. ISIS is self-financed because it controls oil-rich territories. Thus, ousting them from these territories would lead to their financial breakdown, limiting their ability to launch massive attacks or run their organization. It also would falsify its slogan “lasting and expanding”, undermining its cause in the eyes of its supporters by

indicating that it is no longer able to achieve their political objectives. Deployment of troops would be seen as legitimate because of the lack of domestic capabilities and ISIS's sweeping advances (in contrast to the current situation, where any deployment would be understood as too late and done for expanding U.S. interests). Such perceptions may radicalize some moderate groups, replicating the chaotic dynamics that followed the invasion of Iraq. Therefore, a lack of domestic capabilities combined with President Obama's commitment not to deploy combat troops made this strategy unlikely, and the current advances make it ineffective.

These strategies should not be viewed as dichotomies. By most assessments, ISIS can only be defeated militarily. Afterwards, a comprehensive political reconciliation can work on preventing the rise of new terrorist groups and achieving containment's long-term objectives. However, a continuation of the existing strategy, with significant tactical changes, seems more foreseeable and effective, to include defeating ISIS militarily by building domestic capabilities. Since the Syrian situation is so chaotic, adopting a strategy that centers its operation in Iraq would be influential. The U.S. should intensify training and equipping the Iraqi armed forces until they become capable of securing territories, protecting civilians, and launching offensive campaigns against terrorist groups, while also facilitating a defensive role for popular mobilization forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga. These efforts should be accompanied by offensive airstrikes that target ISIS leadership and their war capabilities.

Sunni fighters should be trained and equipped on a larger scale to enable them to defend their cities after their liberation. Those fighters should be recruited from tribes known for their aversion to ISIS, in order to make sure that they will never sympathize with any jihadist extremist groups. Also, the U.S. should recognize the importance of popular mobilization forces. Pressuring the Iraqi government to distance itself from them is not a wise decision, given their decisive role in the fight against ISIS. The U.S. should not increase the offensive capabilities of Kurds and Sunnis, because having greater capabilities would pose a real threat to Iraq's sovereign integrity by motivating these groups to refuse the prospect of any strong central government and preferring a partitioned Iraq. Concerning Syria, the battle for Aleppo following the announcement of a "cessation of hostilities" highlights some of the shortcomings of this initial step, but no one can deny that levels of violence have been reduced with the Assad regime being more focused on targeting ISIS.[7] Therefore, it is necessary to intensify efforts to remove ISIS and pursue a diplomatic path that pressures all the warring parties to adopt a democratic solution that protects minorities' rights as well as avoiding the partitioning of Syria, which might destabilize the region further, since the majority of countries here already suffer from deep societal divisions.

**About the Author:** Hashim Al-Rikabi is a Graduate student at Western Illinois University. The author is an Iraqi citizen who is sponsored by the Higher Committee of Education Development in Iraq. He holds a bachelors degree from the Department of Political Science at Baghdad University.

## Notes

[1] Stephen M. Walt, "ISIS as Revolutionary State", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 94, Issue 6, November 2015.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Lina Khatib, "The Islamic State's Strategy: Lasting and Expanding", Carnegie Middle East Center, June 29, 2015. Accessed on April 1, 2016: <http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/06/29/islamic-state-s-strategy-lasting-and-expanding/ib5x>

[4] Kimberly Kagan, Frederick W. Kagan, and Jessica D. Lewis, "A Strategy to Defeat the Islamic State", Institute for the Study of War, September 2014. Accessed on April 1, 2016: <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/strategy-defeat-islamic-state>.

[5] Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, "How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons For Countering Al-Qaida", Rand Corporation, 2008. Accessed on April 1, 2016: [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND\\_MG741-1.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG741-1.pdf)

[6] Ibid.

[7] Genevieve Casagrande, "Russian Airstrikes in Syria: February 29–March 15, 2016", Institute for the Study of War, March 17, 2016. Accessed on April 1, 2016: <http://understandingwar.org/map/russian-airstrikes-syria-february-29-march-15-2016>



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## Conference Announcement and Call for Proposals

### Radicalisation and Violent Extremism: Society, Identity and Security' Workshop

22-23rd July, 2016

University of Leeds

The Terrorism and Political Violence Association (TAPVA) invite you to participate in its workshop to engage with societal approaches to understanding and engaging with radicalisation and violent extremism. While counter-radicalisation and violent extremist policies reflect a general societal shift in responding to terrorism, its manifestation academically and at the policy level has been marked by contestation, controversy and counter-productive outcomes. The workshop will bring together expertise and experience to reflect on the key debates on radicalisation and extremism. The call for papers is aimed at both *academic and practitioners*, therefore paper proposals from policy makers/public sector, community groups and others with relevant experience are particularly encouraged.

The workshop invites papers on three themes:

The first area focuses on **social movement theories and social movement approaches**, such as network analysis and framing analysis.

- Such approaches provide insight into such debates on the causal role of non-violent radical ideology (conveyor belt or firewall)
- How violent extremist movements become de-radicalised?
- How can community groups and other social networks produce counter-narratives/framings to challenge violent extremism which resonate successfully?
- Reflecting on those who have travelled to join Daesh, what insight can social movement theories provide on 'why British Muslims rebel'?

The second area engages with **public opinion, attitudes and (counter) narratives**, also potentially drawing on survey and opinion poll data to ascertain public attitudes.

- How can we identify violent extremism and what relationship does it have, or not have, with attitudes within what has been referred to as the 'radical milieu'?
- What are the narratives of radicalisation and counter-radicalisation?

The third area of research focuses on the local, such as **policy and community experiences**.

- What impact have counter-radicalisation and violent-extremism policies had at the community level and how have communities responded?
- How have sectors such as in education and family law been impacted by and adapted to the expansion of the statutory responsibility to engage in Prevent?
- To what extent does Prevent and counter-extremism construct 'suspect communities'?
- Is 'muscular liberalism' counter-extremism effective or counter-productive; how do people perceive the 'British values' underpinning it?

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We are looking for academics and non-academics to present papers related to these themes or to participate in discussions. Abstracts of 300 words outlining the proposed talk and short bio are invited, **to be submitted by 15th April**. Paper proposals should be submitted to [ipitapva@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ipitapva@leeds.ac.uk). Accepted participants will be required to pay a registration fee of £40.

### ***Confirmed Participants***

Alex Schmid, Terrorism Research Initiative

Lorenzo Bosi, Scuola Normale Superiore

Sarah Marsden, University of Lancaster

Paul Bagguley, University of Leeds

Yasmin Hussain, University of Leeds

Stefan Malthaner, European University Institute

## About *Perspectives on Terrorism*

*Perspectives on Terrorism* (PT) is a joint publication of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), headquartered in Vienna, Austria, and the Center for Terrorism and Security Studies (CTSS), headquartered at the Lowell Campus of the University of Massachusetts, United States of America.

PT is published six times per year as a free peer-reviewed online journal available at [www.terrorismanalysts.com](http://www.terrorismanalysts.com). It seeks to provide a platform for established scholars as well as academics and professionals entering the interdisciplinary fields of Terrorism, Political Violence and Conflict Studies. The editors invite readers to:

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

*Perspectives on Terrorism* has sometimes been characterised as ‘nontraditional’ in that it dispenses with some of the traditional rigidities associated with commercial print journals. Topical articles can be published at short notice and reach, through the Internet, a much larger audience than subscription-fee based paper journals. Our free on-line journal also offers contributors a higher degree of flexibility in terms of content, style and length of articles – but without compromising professional scholarly standards.

The journal’s articles are peer-reviewed by members of the Editorial Board as well as outside experts. While aiming to be policy-relevant, PT does not support any partisan policies regarding (counter-) terrorism and conflict-waging. Impartiality, objectivity and accuracy are guiding principles that we require contributors to adhere to.

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