

ICCT JOURNAL SPECIAL EDITION

EVOLUTIONS IN COUNTER-TERRORISM

VOLUME II: CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS



International Centre for
Counter-Terrorism - The Hague

Evolutions in Counter-Terrorism

Volume II: Contemporary Developments

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Counter-Terrorism - The Hague**

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Foreword

Predicting the future is highly overrated. Many people like to know about the weather forecast, the predictions of trends in the stock markets and the projected outcomes of the elections. Looking at forecasts is a common habit and they are all signs of the wish to reduce uncertainty and to gain control over what is uncontrollable. Even though it is overrated, in a world full of uncertainty it is understandable behaviour.

Terrorism is often rooted in a similar, but more far-fetching, prediction of the future. Extremists often theorize about the end of time, the end of history, the end of a culture and try to accelerate actions to be ready for the future. Even though this may seem contradictory, the fact that their actions contribute to chaos, fear and confusion is often seen as an advantage. They often try to help the predicted future to come true, as if they help in fulfilling the apocalyptic prophecies. A terrorist takes the future in their own hands and acts upon their impulses, driven by fear. Often with deadly consequences.

If we want to predict the future of terrorism, we should try to answer two questions. First, will fear and apocalyptic thinking reduce or increase in the coming years? Second, will the number of extremist activists increase or decrease? My guess is they will both increase.

Yet, the future is only marginally influenced by predictions. Also, history is not a straight line. It happens in shocks, triggered by sudden, mostly unpredicted, events. For example, the events of 9/11 in New York and Washington, the banking crisis of 2008, the Arab Spring, the COVID-19 pandemic were not effectively predicted. Yet, they all changed the course of world history. But still no one saw these events coming, or at least, if there were early warning signals, there was very little early preventative action. Let me explain why I think that both fear and extremist activism will increase, and how this relates to the evolution of counterterrorism to come.

‘Modernity’ and its changes

‘Modernity’ as it emerged from the renaissance is defined by its belief in science, individualism, secularism and market systems. That format of ‘modernity’ is spreading rapidly across the globe - we call it globalisation and development.

The downside of this proliferation of ‘modernity’ is the risk that individualism, market, consumerism and competition replace sets of historically rooted value systems – ones which often extend from religious belief systems. That may lead to uncertainty about value systems, about what is right and wrong. The resulting search for moral guidance bring some people back to very strict interpretations of religion. On top of that is the fact that individualism and competition are a lottery - there are some winners and many losers. Being a loser can be bearable under the promise of heaven and salvation after life in the case of religious terrorism.

There is little reason to expect that ‘modernity’ will go away any time soon. On the contrary, it is spreading its wings. While many will benefit from modernity, some will turn their fear and their loss into opposition. Some will be attracted to charismatic and strong leaders

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with apparent scapegoats and easy answers, while others will fall for the anchors found in fundamentalist interpretations of religion.

Global expansion and interconnection

The world is increasingly interconnected. From Mali to Taiwan, people know instantly about the current events and state of affairs in New York and Brazil via 24/7 social media and newsfeeds. Fake news and alternative facts brew mistrust, and some may suspect that there are powers that manipulate events. The average citizen increasingly distrusts facts. They start to see things hidden behind the facts. Many of the comments online are filled with anger, fear, aggression and loneliness. And in the interconnected world the social fabric is suffering. Online activity and offline isolation may lead to more instances of lone actors perpetrating violence.

The rise of populism and nationalism

The world has fought and won the battle against Marxism and communism. The young generation doesn't even know about the wall in Berlin, the iron curtain, or the Cuban missile crisis. When the Berlin wall fell, somebody wrote: "the fact that communism has failed doesn't mean that capitalism is a success." Very true. There are cracks and other disappointments, worries and concerns about the nature of the victorious system. More recently 'populism', driven by fear and anti-elitist sentiments, has popped up as a counter culture. In the absence of a political arena that effectively settles disputes the chances of other forms of extreme political activism are evident.

The challenges identified above are of concern, and will no doubt impact the field of counterterrorism for years to come. We are likely to see rises in both fear, and extremist activities which may feed off these themes.

Yet, recognizing these also allows us the foresight to consider how these concerns can more constructively and directly be reflected in both preventative and countering violent extremism work (P/CVE), and direct counterterrorism work going forward, as well as the wider political and societal responses required. Combinations of diverse actors conducting social, political and other community-based approaches within a human rights and rule of law-based approach will be required to respond to this continuously changing world, to provide both new and familiar solutions and approaches. I have no doubt that ICCT will continue to be at the forefront of these discussions.

Peter Knoope

A Note from the Editors

This Special Edition journal series is a celebration of the ten-year anniversary of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT). Volume I is a collection of key work of the last ten years in counter-terrorism research curated by the five directors that ICCT has had since its founding in 2010. In Volume II, our editorial team have curated five unique pieces that we believe encompass the diversity and breadth of key contemporary issues in counter-terrorism research.

Earlier this year ICCT had an open call for submissions based on what our contributors viewed as some of the most topical issues in counter-terrorism. The five pieces here were chosen because the authors demonstrated what we believe to be valuable insights into some of the most unique and challenging issues in the field of counter-terrorism as faced by practitioners and researchers alike.

The articles not only reflect on the state of the art in broader terrorism research, but also provide a forward-looking perspective to challenges that will continue to be faced in the field of counter-terrorism. We hope you enjoy them.

The Editors
International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT)

Incel Radical Milieu and External Locus of Control

Sara Brzuszkiewicz

Abstract

In the last few years, incel violence has been the subject of many excellent journalistic accounts, but — with few notable exceptions, whose insights will be acknowledged and valued throughout this research paper — there has not been much scholarly output addressing the phenomenon. Individuals who self-identify as involuntary celibates are being radicalised into believing that the world is dominated by women and attractive men, and their marginalisation depends on this domination within what incels often term the mating market. After a number of violent attacks in which the perpetrators were linked in various ways to the inceldom — the status of involuntary celibacy — researchers have started to debate whether incel violence should be considered terrorism or not.

This paper examines the pillars of incel ideology through an analysis of incels' own vocabulary and narratives. Based on this analysis, it introduces two distinct research hypotheses. First, it argues that, while consensus is being gradually reached on considering incel violence as terrorism, scholars do not possess an effective analytical framework for studying the broader incel communities and, in order to partly fill this gap, a proper notion is that of a radical milieu, i.e. a community where radicalisation occurs. The second research hypothesis suggests that the radicalisation power of this milieu lies in the external locus of control that most incels adopt and take to the extreme in their perception of themselves and of inter-sex relations.

Keywords: incels, inceldom, violence, radicalisation, radical milieu, locus of control, misogyny

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Introduction

Incels is the portmanteau of “involuntary celibates” and designates individuals who describe themselves as unable to find women who are willing to engage in romantic relations with them. Their status is described as *inceldom*. The first documented usage of the term incel dates back to 1993, when a Canadian university student, known on the internet as Alana, launched the website Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project, to discuss thoughts and experiences related to the condition of involuntarily not having love and sexual relationships.¹ A few years later, in 1997, Alana created a mailing list on the same topics that used the abbreviation INVCEL, later shortened to *incel*, but stopped her activity on the website around 2000.

According to the individuals who identify as involuntary celibates, being an incel is not a unitary ideology *per se* or a unitary social movement. Rather, it is a state of being that applies to a diverse array of people. Nonetheless, incels are gathering in increasingly violent online communities that do reveal multiple ideological commonalities. Therefore, given the recurrent ideological tropes and the homogeneity of incel narratives

that can be identified in their discourse, it is appropriate to look at *inceldom* as a social movement, albeit one that is not completely unitary and structured.

Manoel Horta Ribeiro and other scholars, who analysed the main contemporary trends within the modern online *manosphere*,² identified four different categories:³ Pick Up Artists (PUAs); Men’s Right Activists (MRAs); Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW); and Involuntary Celibates (Incels).⁴

From a historical perspective, the first online incel forums were used to create a sense of community and to fill emotional needs.⁵ Today, however, older and less violent groups are not as relevant as before and membership in the more aggressive groups is becoming increasingly prevalent.⁶ In a recent groundbreaking paper on incel violence, Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware, and Ezra Shapiro highlight that, until less than a decade ago, two distinct types of digital forums appear to have existed within the incel galaxy. The first type, which can be identified mainly with the forum IncelSupport, emphasised support for those unable to find romantic connections, while another forum, LoveShy, was becoming increasingly militant and hostile to women.⁷ The website LoveShy was founded in 2003

1 Ashifa Kassam, “Woman behind ‘incel’ says angry men hijacked her word ‘as a weapon of war,’” *The Guardian*, 26 April 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/25/woman-who-invented-incel-movement-interview-toronto-attack>, accessed 12 November 2020.

2 Zack Beauchamp defines the *manosphere* as a loose group of websites united by their belief in various male-dominant ideologies. See Zack Beauchamp, “Our incel problem,” *Vox*, 23 April 2019. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/4/16/18287446/incel-definition-reddit>, accessed 12 November 2020.

3 Even though scrutinising the characteristics of the other three categories of the *manosphere* falls outside the scope of the present research paper on Incels, a number of features need to be highlighted.

Pick Up Artists attempt to coax women into having sex with them through a mixture of flattery and psychological manipulation and coercion. Therefore, they do not believe, as incels do, that there is nothing that can be done to convince women to have a sexual relationship with men unless men are physically attractive, charismatic, or rich.

Men’s Right Activists are groups in the *manosphere* that centre their discourse on issues such as bias in family courts or sexual abuse suffered by men. However, the online activities often move in disturbing and highly misogynistic directions and blame women for being too independent or sexually promiscuous.

Men Going Their Own Way have three main principles: no cohabitating, no marriage, and no children. According to men who embrace this solution, this is an individual lifestyle choice that implies walking away from the current sexual marketplace, which is unjust and unbalanced in favour of women and attractive men.

4 Manoel Horta Ribeiro, Jeremy Blackburn, Barry Bradlyn, Emiliano De Cristofaro, Gianluca Stringhini, Summer Long, Stephanie Greenberg and Savvas Zannettou, “From Pick-Up Artists to Incels: A Data Driven Sketch of the Manosphere,” *arXiv*, 21 January 2020. Available at: <https://deepai.org/publication/from-pick-up-artists-to-incels-a-data-driven-sketch-of-the-manosphere>, accessed 12 November 2020.

5 Sylvia Jaki, Tom De Smedt, Maja Gwóździ, Rudresh Panchal, Alexander Rossa and Guy De Pauw, “Online Hatred of Women in the Incels.me Forum: Linguistic Analysis and Automatic Detection,” *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2019), pp. 240-268.

6 Tanya Basu, “The ‘manosphere’ is getting more toxic as angry men join the incels,” *MIT Technology Review*, 7 February 2020. Available at: <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/02/07/349052/the-manosphere-is-getting-more-toxic-as-angry-men-join-the-incels/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

7 Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware and Ezra Shapiro, “Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol 43, No. 7 (April 2020), p. 566. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1751459>, accessed 12 November 2020

and the more extreme elements of this virtual community moved their messaging there due to the less stringent moderation policies. In more recent years, increasingly radical content started to appear on online platforms such as 4chan and Reddit, where by 2016 the incel community had 40,000 users; the current numbers are probably double that.⁸ From the following year, Reddit started banning incel subreddits for violent incitements and more heavily-moderated versions of the former subreddits began to emerge, such as *r/braincels*, though this was also banned in 2019. Today, while radical incel subreddits continue to regularly surface they are banned relatively quickly, and incel forums have largely migrated to online gaming and to dedicated websites like *Incels.co* and *Incels.net*.

Within the online communities, there are multiple status markers, mostly based on the level of interaction with women or lack thereof. Therefore, the most authentic incels are *kissless*, *touchless*, *hugless*, *handholdless*, *friendless*, and *virgin*, a status description that is usually shortened to KTHHFV. Over the last five years *incels* have been attracting increasing amounts of public attention — particularly because of the involvement of self-described *incels* in a number of terrorist incidents, which will be analysed later — but this community remains largely unknown to the world.

In the realm of terrorism studies, not much research has been produced about the incel phenomenon, its violent messaging, and its radicalisation patterns and dynamics. Based on these premises, this paper is divided into three sections. The first one analyses incel core ideological components through incels' own narratives, terminology, and keywords. The second section aims at verifying the research hypothesis according to which the notion of radical milieu has a strong explanatory power for addressing incel communities and

enriching the debate on whether or not incel violence should be considered terrorism.⁹ The third part of the present research paper — deeply intertwined with the former — argues that radicalisation within incel radical milieu is triggered and fostered mainly by incels' external locus of control. Locus of control is the degree to which people believe that they, as opposed to external forces beyond their influence, have control over the outcome of events in their lives. The hypothesis is that not only does external locus of control dominate incel communities, but it is also a foundational incel perspective about themselves and the world.

Methodology

Methodologically, this paper is based on a months-long monitoring of communicative exchanges and interactions among European users of incel forums and social media platforms in English, Italian, and French. Monitoring European incel forums proved to be particularly interesting, as most of the prior research has focused on North American incels.

Among these primary sources, a major role was played by incel subreddits, *Incels.co* — arguably one of the most important incel forums currently active on the internet after it replaced the now shut down *incels.me*¹⁰ — and the Facebook page *Incel Liberation Army*.¹¹ As far as the material in French is concerned, the Facebook page *Code d'Incels*¹² [Incels' Code] and the forum *Virginité Tardive* [Late-in-life Virginity] have proved to be particularly relevant.¹³ Finally, the most popular incel platform in Italian is *Il Forum degli Incels*¹⁴ [Incels' Forum], which is divided into public and private chatrooms.

According to Jan Blommaert, within the predominantly male incel galaxy messages

8 Ibid., p. 567

9 Stefan Malthaner, "The Radical Milieu," Institut für interdisziplinäre Konflikt und Gewaltforschung (IKG) (Bielefeld, November 2010), p. 1; Stefan Malthaner and Peter Waldmann, eds., "Radikale Milieus. Das soziale Umfeld terroristischer Gruppen," (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2012).

10 *Incels.co*. Available at: <https://incels.co/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

11 *Incel Liberation Army*, Facebook page. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/IncelLiberationArmy/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

12 *Code d'Incels*, Facebook page. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/CodeIncels/?ref=page_internal, accessed 12 November 2020.

13 *Virginité Tardive*. Available at: <https://forum.virginite-tardive.fr/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

14 *Il Forum degli Incels*. Available at: <https://ilforumdegliincel.forumfree.it/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

that spread misogyny or incite crime help a user to cement his reputation as an “alpha” user.¹⁵ As a result, incels’ forums are creating a sort of subcultural language, partly composed of in-group terminology for much-discussed topics, and partly composed of youth language in general.¹⁶ Scrutinising its language use is crucial to analysing the distinctive features of any radical milieu. In a recent work on incels’ discourse, — analysed through the lenses of narratology — Renske van der Veer states that, in order to understand the perpetrators of incel violence, we should overcome (legitimate) resistance to their own personal narratives and accounts, and closely read them.¹⁷ The same author notes that, when studying ego-documents of people who committed acts of violence based on a belief system built on gender stereotyping, it is useful to apply the methods and insights available from gender studies, for instance those used to study female autobiographies. Female autobiographies often contain elements that lament the marginalised position of their writers as women and, similarly, perpetrators of incel violence feel marginalised and illegitimate. This sense of marginalisation and lack of legitimacy, combined with witnessing the eclipse of many socio-cultural male privileges and the redefinition of women’s social roles can create, for some, a situation of inner conflict.¹⁸

In incels’ personal accounts, inner conflict and marginalisation are common tropes:

“We all seemed to notice a genuine change in women’s mating preferences, but we still weren’t exactly sure of the standards needed to be met. In other words, both our social and romantic roles, as men, were lined with confusion. Centuries ago, a man’s primary role was to provide and protect. Now? We weren’t quite sure. Our roles were no longer defined and none of us could agree upon a clear model of what

it meant to be considered ‘an attractive man’.”¹⁹

For these reasons, listening to what incels say is crucial to any informative research on the *inceldom* and the radicalisation of the *manosphere*.

Words matter: incelism ideology in its own words

Incel ideological milestones, grievances, and narratives represent an extremely complex puzzle that is only partly known and understood. Consolidated recurrent patterns are constantly integrated with new trends and obsessions, thus making the incel prism increasingly multifaceted. Trying to summarise the ideology of a young and animated online community could be problematic and misleading. The topics, narratives, and discursive features that dominate *inceldom*, however, do allow us to highlight a few key ideological pillars that undergird this phenomenon. Therefore, the most accurate way to acquire a deeper understanding of *inceldom* is disclosing its ideological contents through the words of its own members.

This is particularly true because the incel vocabulary is characterised by high levels of dynamism and prolificacy: new terms, nicknames, acronyms, and abbreviations are constantly created and then adopted by online communities worldwide, in the effort to categorise every component of their worldview. As with political science and communications literature, gender studies have tended to more or less ignore the *manosphere*, thus missing the point made by Mimi Schippers who highlights that, instead of ‘possessing’ masculinity, individuals move through and produce masculinity by engaging

¹⁵ Jan Blommaert, “Online-offline modes of identity and community: Elliot Rodger’s twisted world of masculine victimhood,” Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies, Tilburg University, 2017.

¹⁶ Sylvia Jaki et al., “Online Hatred of Women in the Incels.me Forum: Linguistic Analysis and Automatic Detection,” *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (November 2019), pp. 240-268. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334306160_Online_hatred_of_women_in_the_Incelsme_Forum_Linguistic_analysis_and_automatic_detection, accessed 12 November 2020.

¹⁷ Renske van der Veer, “Analysing personal accounts of perpetrators of incel violence: what do they want and who do they target?,” *The International Centre for Counter- Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT)*, (June 2020). Available at: <https://icct.nl/publication/analysing-personal-accounts-of-perpetrators-of-incel-violence-what-do-they-want-and-who-do-they-target/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Dr. Castle (pseudonym), “The Blackpill Theory: Why Incels are Right & You are Wrong,” independently published, 2019, p. 26.

in masculine practices.²⁰ For these reasons, listening to what incels have to say is crucial and, arguably, listening to *how* they say it is equally fundamental.

Three ideological pillars

The incel galaxy is an ever-evolving system of narratives and identity markers, yet, in spite of these rapid changes and the growth of users, a few ideological pillars that characterise incel discourse remain constant and can be identified. They are centred on: 1) incels' self-perception and identity; 2) on their view of gender relations and misogyny; and 3) on their belief in the uselessness of being kind to women.

As far as their self-perception is concerned, incels are unable to have romantic relationships because they perceive that they are systematically rejected by women. When it comes to the discourse of *inceldom* on gender relations, virtually all women are portrayed as unreliable, highly promiscuous, and attracted to a small number of males who dominate the romantic market.

We are thus presented with a unique form of misogynistic perspective. The standard form of misogyny is based on the misogynist's support for a power dynamic between men and women where women are in the inferior position. With incels, instead of hating women from a position of alleged superiority, hatred derives from a position of perceived inferiority, since they believe that all levers of sexuality are controlled by women.²¹ Obviously, there are some continuities between incel misogyny and older variants of antifeminist discourse, mainly because both look towards the past and express nostalgia for older models of family with traditional gender inequalities.²² However, the *manosphere* in general — and incels in particular — have been complicating the orthodox alignment of power

and dominance with hegemonic masculinity by operationalising their tropes of victimhood.²³ Incel communities display a unique form of hybrid masculinity, in which involuntary celibates distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity while simultaneously reproducing it through their nostalgia narratives of a utopian pre-feminist past and their derogatory, violent rhetoric against women and non-incel men.²⁴ These new tropes of victimhood are deeply intertwined with the notion of incels' external locus of control, which is one of the strongest radicalisation factors within incels' communities and will be addressed in the last section of the paper.

The third ideological pillar — which stems from the first two and is arguably the one with the highest radicalising power — implies that there is no point in being kind to women and respecting them, since they will ultimately choose alpha-males, no matter how rude or untrustworthy they might be. For the majority of individuals describing themselves as incels, women are promiscuous and suggestible creatures who are fascinated by social status, handsomeness, money, and charisma and are unwilling to appreciate kindness and sensibility. Believing that kindness, sensibility and respect towards women are pointless potentially has a strong radicalising power on incels, as these values are systematically rejected as useless. What replaces them is the institutionalisation of disparaging, offensive and verbally violent attitudes that characterise most incel forums and platforms. In other words, hostility towards women is legitimised to the point of becoming the most distinctive feature of these environments.

These concepts represent the theoretical basis of *inceldom*, and relate to the fact that incels consider sex as a commodity, rather than an agreement between two individuals.

In a post found on the most important Italian

20 Mimi Schippers, "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 36 (2007), p. 86. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4501776?seq=1>, accessed 12 November 2020.

21 Dr. Castle, "The Blackpill Theory," 2019, p. 56.

22 Mary Lily, "'The World is Not a Safe Place for Men': The Representational Politics of the Manosphere," MA Dissertation, University of Ottawa, 2011, p. 16. Available at: <https://ruor.uottawa.ca/handle/10393/35055>, accessed 12 November 2020.

23 Debbie Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere," *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2019), p. 638. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1097184X17706401>, accessed 12 November 2020.

24 Ibid.

incel forum, a user complains:

“All women look at the LMS (Look, Money, Status) of a man, even intelligent and good girls (this is the most demanding type) and, if you are below their standards, forget about sexual and love life. Saying that not all of them look at money is pointless, because even if this was the case (but I strongly doubt that you would consider [dating] a beggar), you will look at the physical appearance and the status.

So a man must necessarily share his physical attractiveness, his bank account, and his reputation to get sex and love from a woman. There is no relation, not even in casual intercourses, in which an ‘exchange’ is not implied.”²⁵

Considering sex as a commodity creates a worldview where couples are formed through mercenary considerations within an evolutionary competition where attractiveness-utility maximisation is the aim. In this framework, according to incel ideology, women hold the selection advantage for a wide spectrum of reasons, ranging from feminism to being able to use make-up for improving their appearance.²⁶

From redpilling to blackpilling

Incels communities are located within the realm of so-called *redpilling*. “Pills” started as a prominent feature in online chat rooms and forums of the alt-right and then they became crucial within inceldom. The term *redpilling* is derived from a popular scene of the movie *The Matrix* (1999) in which the protagonist Neo is offered one of two pills: the blue pill would allow him to continue to live in a sort of happy ignorance, while the red pill would show him the world as it really is. By choosing the blue pill, individuals opt for reassuring blindness, whereas by choosing the red pill they are willing to know unpleasant truths. *Redpilling*, accepting the truth as bad as it is, represents a core philosophy for incels, and one of the biggest incel internet communities on Reddit,

The Red Pill, was named after this notion, although it was never an incel-only forum. On the contrary, it was a site for many of the online misogynist manosphere groups and alt-right users who engage in “Red Pill” culture.

The forum — now quarantined — was based on the beliefs that: women’s lives are easier than men’s; feminism is a harmful ideology; and society is now plainly anti-male.

After rejecting the blue pill, incels have two options in gender relations. First, they can recognise that the world favours women over men and attractive men over the unattractive ones and try to do something to change this — mainly becoming alpha males. Most likely, they will end up being *gymcels*, i.e. incels who go to the gym trying to improve their bodies. The second option is acknowledging that there is no solution to this systemic condition. By making this choice, they take a further step, and swallow the so-called *blackpill*, bitterer than the red one.

Some of the incels’ heroes metaphorically took the black pill and are celebrated for that, most notably Santa Barbara mass murderer Elliot Rodger, who “martyred” himself to the incel cause and whose profile will be addressed along with those of other incel and incel-inspired terrorist offenders in the next sections of the paper. Inevitably, once a man takes the black pill, *it’s over*, a very common incel sentence, often followed by *it never began*. These few words summarise the victimhood narratives of the incel galaxy, according to which if you are ugly and not rich, you have absolutely no chance of ever being happy in intersexual relations.

This sort of physical determinism is the primary connotation of thousands of incel posts on the internet and it is closely linked to the notion of external locus of control: people’s attractiveness depends exclusively on how genetically gifted they are and this is not in their hands. Dr Castle, a self-proclaimed scholar who wrote about incels under this pseudonym and

²⁵ Author’s translation.

²⁶ Alexandra Scaggs, “‘Sex redistribution’ and the means of reproduction,” Financial Times Alphaville, 8 May 2018. Available at: <https://ftalphaville.ft.com/2018/05/08/1525779677000/-Sex-redistribution--and-the-means-of-reproduction/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

strongly sympathises with their grievances,²⁷ explains:

“Some readers will be in great appreciation of the blackpill. For them the dots will connect very predictably, creating a logical final picture. For others, it will not be as easily digested. Consuming this information can be life changing. It can also be soul-crushing.”²⁸

The *blackpill* represents a road to the abyss and leads individuals to believe things will never get better: “Some locks just do not have a key.”²⁹

If the red pill and the black pill play the most crucial roles in incel ideology and online interactions, they are not the only ones within the broader incel-dom pilling theory.³⁰ The purple pill is the incel version of centrism. It rejects both redpill and bluepill philosophies and could be described as the most moderate pill. On the opposite side of the spectrum we find the so-called rape pill, a term used within a small subset of incel forums whose members identify as “rapeceles.” They believe sexual interactions between men and women can only be coercive,³¹ and so for two reasons. First, because women are not capable of making rational decisions, so it is men’s right and duty to decide for them. Secondly, because sexual relations should be based on a power mechanism, according to which the male is dominant and the woman is submissive.

Incels’ categorising obsession

Incel communities display a sort of categorisation obsession in their quest to quantify and rank individuals based on attractiveness and success in relationships. Sometimes these markers are ethnic: incels can be *currycel* if they are of Indian or similar descent, and *ricecel* if they are of East Asian

origin. The most important category by far, however, is *Chad*, the anti-incel par excellence, against whom incels worldwide gather online to express their frustration.

A *Chad* is a man that women are attracted to. He is sexually successful, charismatic, and sociable: contrary to the incels, *Chads* won a sort of genetic and social lottery and everything is easy for them. Obviously, *Chads* can be of different ethnicities as well, thus being called Tyrone (black Chad), Chang (East Asian Chad), Chadpreet (Indian), and Chaddam (Arabic).³² Between incels and the *Chad* image there is a dual relationship made up of envy and appreciation: incels tend to hate *Chads* while simultaneously looking up to them and their successes. Involuntary celibates’ feelings are less mixed when it comes to *Stacy*. Stacy is the incel-chosen name denoting a woman who allegedly has sexual relations with multiple men, usually Chads. Stacy’s portrait is extremely stereotypical and it includes shallowness, lack of intelligence, and promiscuity.

Homogenisation and dehumanisation of women are constants in incel narratives. Women are referred to as *female humanoid organisms*, often shortened to *foids*, a term that is usually followed in English by the pronoun “it” to further dehumanise them. In hundreds of posts, women are described with the most derogatory and humiliating epithets. They are irrational and unintelligent, promiscuous, selfish, manipulative, and attention-seeking. Very popular are the acronym AWALT for “All Women Are Like That” and EWALT “Enough Women Are Like That.” The underlying theory is that even women who eventually marry *betas*³³ still want Chads and will invariably cheat on their honest and caring husband with a less sensitive but more attractive man.

Every item of incel-dom’s rich jargon contributes

27 “I have committed the last ten years of my life to the study of men who struggle to find intimacy, both sexually and emotionally (...) As a trained ethnographer with a Ph.D in the social sciences, my past academic scholarship has focused on male body image dissatisfaction, and masculinities.”, Dr. Castle, “The Blackpill Theory,” 2019, p. 1.

28 Ibid., p. 19.

29 Ibid., p. 16.

30 Alt-right currents and forums have many other pills as well. See, for instance, Anti-Defamation League (ADL), “The Extremist Medicine Cabinet: A Guide to Online “Pills,”” ADL, 9 November 2019.

31 Moonshot CVE, Violent misogyny, mass murder and suicide: it’s time to save incels from themselves. Available at: <http://moonshotcve.com/save-incels-from-themselves/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

32 Incel Inside Forum. Available at: https://incels.wiki/w/Incel_Forum_Term_Glossary, accessed 12 November 2020.

33 One of the terms incels use to describe themselves.

to the categorisation of incels and the rest of the world, creating a distinctive worldview and set of acronyms, nicknames, and plain insults denoting these concepts, which are then threaded through from one online post to another, stimulating the development of a unique radical milieu.

Inceldom as a radical milieu: tangible and intangible violence

The notion of radical milieu and its informative value for the study of inceldom

An increasing number of scholars assert that extreme fringes of the incel community and the actual attacks perpetrated by self-defined involuntary celibates should be considered terrorism. Tim Squirrel, who has carried out substantial research on incels' vocabulary, argues that incel violence should be labeled misogynist terrorism.³⁴ Amarnath Amarasingam highlights that calls for violence are commonplace on incel forums and that — under the right set of psychological and personal circumstances — these kinds of forums can be dangerous and push people into violence.³⁵

In a recent paper, Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware, and Ezra Shapiro note that, to date, violence committed by males calling themselves incels or in sympathy with incel ideology has claimed the lives of nearly fifty victims, and that there is ample reason to believe the threat from violent incels will remain grave going forward.³⁶ Further, Hoffman et al. warn in the same work that classifying incels is very difficult because

incel violence is not triggered by purely political motivations. Nevertheless, its ethos revolves around subjugation and repression and, for this reason, it is appropriate to talk about terrorism, at least when it comes to incels' most radical fringe.³⁷ With a few notable and insightful exceptions,³⁸ experts are gradually reaching a consensus that considers tangible incel violence as terrorism. Indeed, when it is aimed at violently dismantling a social order — primarily the order governing sexual interactions and gender roles — it displays one of the major characteristics of terrorism, which is exactly overthrowing the status quo that perpetrators see as unjust. J.M. Berger cautions that the word *terrorism* has been politicised like few others and there is no universal definition of it. However, he admits that, for the sake of clarity, we can describe it as public violence aimed at advancing a political, social, or religious cause or ideology.³⁹ Alek Minassian's post, left after his April 2018 car-ramming attack in Toronto, for instance, announces that the revolution has begun, in the form of his attack.

On 23 April 2018 in Toronto, a van drove into pedestrians killing ten people and injuring sixteen others in the deadliest attack of its kind in Canadian history. The attacker Alek Minassian, a self-described incel, was then arrested after trying to goad police into shooting him. In his statement, Minassian quotes incel terrorist Elliot Rodger. On 23 May 2014, 22-year-old Rodger killed six people and injured fourteen in Isla Vista, near the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), before committing suicide. Rodger penned a 141-page, 100,000-word manifesto about his sexual deprivation and the evils of women before his attack.⁴⁰

While consensus on the opportunity to consider tangible incel violence as terrorism

34 Tim Squirrel, "New article at The Independent: why Incels are more (and more violent) than just Men's Rights Activists," timsquirrel.com, 26 April 2018. Available at: <https://www.timsquirrel.com/blog/2018/4/26/new-article-at-the-independent-why-incels-are-more-and-more-violent-than-just-mens-rights-activists>, accessed 12 November 2020.

35 Justin Ling, Jill Mahoney, Patrick McGuire and Colin Freeze, "The 'incel' community and the dark side of the Internet," The Globe and Mail, 24 April 2018. Available at: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-the-incel-community-and-the-dark-side-of-the-internet/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

36 Hoffman, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence," 2020, p. 565.

37 Ibid. p. 568.

38 Phil Gurski, "Incel violence is not terrorism... at least not yet," Borealis Threat and Risk Consulting, 28 May 2020. Available at: <https://borealisthreatandrisk.com/incel-violence-is-not-terrorism-at-least-not-yet/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

39 J.M. Berger, "The Difference Between a Killer and a Terrorist," The Atlantic, 26 April 2018. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/04/the-difference-between-killer-and-terrorist/558998/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

40 The incel discursive features that Rodger and Minassian revealed will be analysed in the following sections of the Paper.

is gradually growing, there is no such dynamic when it comes to incel communities as whole, including its non-physically violent fringes, where aggressive and misogynistic narratives are in any case pivotal. While increasingly grappling with the many facets of the incel community and documenting its complexities, experts have not yet found a complete theoretical framework or an informative notion that could potentially enrich the debate; this paper proposes that regarding inceldom as a radical milieu could help filling this gap. In the incel context, radical milieu would be defined as an environment that, while not physically violent itself, shares core elements of the terrorists' perspective and experiences. In this way, radical milieus provide the breeding and recruiting ground, as well as direct and indirect support to those individuals who might continue their process of radicalisation to the point of committing actual attacks. This definition aligns with that given by Stefan Malthaner and Peter Waldmann, who use the term "radical milieu" to describe the community in which radicalisation takes place.⁴¹ The radical milieu is composed of people who are not necessarily violent or radicalised, but where members can find a support system, a unique sense of belonging and camaraderie, and, within this environment, individuals find implicit or explicit legitimisation for their grievances and frustration. In the case of self-defined incels, loneliness plays a major role in their lives, as it emerges from their own words, and sharing emotions and feelings with

an online peer group is particularly appealing. Scrutinising similarities and differences between the incel radical milieu and other comparable radical environments will be crucial to better understand the trajectory of this ideology.

The notion of a radical milieu could be crucial for identifying the radicalisation processes taking place within incel communities. It is in this milieu that demands for recognition and legitimacy are voiced and the gradual separation from the out-group — i.e. mainstream society — takes place, as the in-group sees itself as increasingly vulnerable and threatened by the out-group.⁴² In the last few years, scholars have been observing these patterns mostly when studying jihadism,⁴³ and jihadist recruitment, but their insights largely are generalisable to other forms of radicalisation. The confluence of peer-to-peer interaction, coupled with the ubiquitous connectivity of social media, creates the "perfect storm for recruitment",⁴⁴ and tempting alternatives to a life perceived as meaningless.⁴⁵ Lisa Sugiura describes incel forums as a "networked misogyny", and urges such forums be taken seriously — not only because of the widespread hate speech, but also because of the inherent nature of grooming that could radicalise more vulnerable, disillusioned young men.⁴⁶

It should be noted that within the incel radical milieu, the practice of grooming has peculiar

41 Malthaner, "The Radical Milieu," 2020, p. 1; Malthaner, "Radikale Milieus. Das soziale Umfeld terroristischer Gruppen," 2012; Stefan Malthaner and Peter Waldmann, "The radical milieu: conceptualizing the supportive social environment of terrorist groups," *Studies in conflict and terrorism*, Vol. 37, No. 12 (2014), pp. 979-998. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2014.962441>, accessed 12 November 2020.

42 J.M. Berger, "Extremist Construction of Identity: How Escalating Demands for Legitimacy Shape and Define In-Group and Out-Group Dynamics," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT)*, 21 April 2017. Available at: <https://icct.nl/publication/extremist-construction-of-identity-how-escalating-demands-for-legitimacy-shape-and-define-in-group-and-out-group-dynamics/#:~:text=Extremist%20Construction%20of%20Identity%3A%20How%20Escalating%20Demands%20for%20Legitimacy%20Shape,Group%20and%20Out%2DGroup%20Dynamics&text=By%20J.M.%20Berger,forerunner%20known%20as%20British%20Israelism>, accessed: 12 November 2020.

43 See for instance Arturo Varvelli, ed., *Jihadist Hotbeds. Understanding Local Radicalization Processes*, (Milan: Institute for International Political Studies, 2016); Rosanna E. Guadagno, Adam Lankford, Nicole L. Muscanell, Bradley M. Okdie and Debra M. McCallum, "Social Influence in the online Recruitment of terrorists and terrorist Sympathizers: Implications for Social Psychology Research," *Revue Internationale de Psychologie Sociale*, Vol. 1, No. 23 (2010), pp. 25-56. Available at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-psychologie-sociale-2010-1-page-25.htm#>, accessed 15 June 2020; Francesco Bergoglio Errico, "Where Do I Belong?" — Identity Crises and Islamic Radicalism," *European Eye on Radicalization*, 12 September 2018. Available at: <https://eeradicalization.com/where-do-i-belong-identity-crises-and-islamic-radicalism/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

44 Ali Soufan and Daniel Schoenfeld, "Regional hotbeds as drivers of radicalization," in Arturo Varvelli, ed., *Jihadist Hotbeds. Understanding Local Radicalization Processes* (Milan: Institute for International Political Studies, 2016), p. 19.

45 Valentina Colombo, "Multiple Layers of Marginalization as a Paradigm of Tunisian Hotbeds of Jihadism," in Arturo Varvelli, ed., *Jihadist Hotbeds. Understanding Local Radicalization Processes* (Milan: Institute for International Political Studies, 2016), p. 116.

46 Amelia Tait, "Rise of the women haters: Inside the dark world of the British 'incels'," *The Telegraph*, 18 August 2018. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/the-filter/rise-women-haters-inside-dark-world-british-incels/>, accessed 15 November 2020.

characteristics.⁴⁷ Instead of being carried out by charismatic leaders or recruiters belonging to the group that the individual is yet to join, in the case of inceldom a sort of reciprocal grooming can be observed, in which peer-to-peer pressure, in synergy with the value attributed to the actions of incel “heroes” like Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian, seems to have remarkable radicalisation potential. This horizontal radicalisation, which largely abandons the hierarchical structure of other ideologies and social movements, is one of the features of the inceldom that make it a unique radical milieu in need of further research.

Similar to any other radical milieu, incels’ online forums show an ongoing tension between trying to recruit more members to their cause and protecting themselves from the outside world — of *normies* and alpha men. This tension leads the milieu to a perpetual struggle over authenticity,⁴⁸ which in turn fosters the categorising obsession analysed above. Users engage in endless arguments over how pure an incel has to be and accuse each other of being *fakecels* or voluntary — instead of involuntary — celibates, thus creating a radical milieu that is constantly fed with narratives of victimhood, misogyny, authenticity issues, and *us vs them* discourses.

Tangible violence: consolidating incels’ radical milieu

In the last six years, violence perpetrated by individuals who self-described as incels has killed almost fifty people. These attacks represent the shift from theorisation of violence to tangible destructiveness. Interestingly, all the perpetrators of major incel attacks had a variable degree of proximity and participation to incel radical milieu, which range from being an active user of incel online forums — like Elliot Rodger or Alek Minassian — to Armando Hernandez, who declared his intention to target couples but, according to the first results of the police investigation, did not seem as active as

other perpetrators online.

The Rodger case in California in May 2014 has become a model and inspiration to the fringes of inceldom. Firstly, Rodger stabbed three men to death in his apartment and, a few hours later, he drove to a sorority house but failed to gain access. He then shot three women outside, killing two of them. Rodger then shot to death a student in a deli nearby and, while driving through Isla Vista, shot and wounded several pedestrians while running over others with his car. Fourteen people were wounded in total. The attacker’s car eventually crashed into a parked vehicle and police found him dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

Before staging his multiple attacks, Elliot Rodger had uploaded a video on YouTube, titled “Elliot Rodger’s Retribution.” It was a sort of manifesto outlining the details of the imminent actions and his motives. His main goals were punishing women for rejecting him and punishing sexually active men because he envied them.⁴⁹ After uploading the video, the terrorist circulated a further manifesto, a manuscript titled *My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger* that he sent to some family members, acquaintances, and his therapist, describing his childhood, family conflicts, and, most importantly, frustration over inability to find a girlfriend, his hatred of women, and his contempt for couples, particularly interracial couples. In the video, he explains:

“Well, this is my last video, it all has to come to this. Tomorrow is the day of retribution, the day in which I will have my revenge against humanity, against all of you. For the last eight years of my life, ever since I hit puberty, I’ve been forced to endure an existence of loneliness, rejection, and unfulfilled desires — all because girls have never been attracted to me. Girls gave their affection, and sex and love, to other men but never to me [...] I’ve been through

47 The term grooming has been introduced in terrorism and radicalization studies to describe the process in which a recruiter creates emotional bonds with the potential recruit through increasingly close interactions. The notion originally indicates the behaviour of online sexual predators with their victims.

48 Tim Squirrell, “A Definitive Guide to Incels Part Three: the History of Incel,” [timsquirrell.com](https://www.timsquirrell.com/blog/2018/6/4/a-definitive-guide-to-incels-part-three-the-history-of-incel), 4 June 2019. Available at <https://www.timsquirrell.com/blog/2018/6/4/a-definitive-guide-to-incels-part-three-the-history-of-incel>, accessed 12 November 2020.

49 Associated Press, “Transcript of video linked to Santa Barbara mass shooting,” CNN, 28 May 2015. Available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/24/us/elliott-rodger-video-transcript/index.html>, accessed 12 November 2020.

college for two and a half years, more than that actually, and I'm still a virgin. It has been very torturous. [...] Within those years, I've had to rot in loneliness. It's not fair. You girls have never been attracted to me. I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it. It's an injustice, a crime, because [...] I don't know what you don't see in me. I'm the perfect guy and yet you throw yourselves at these obnoxious men instead of me, the supreme gentleman.”⁵⁰

During his self-declared Day of Retribution, he was planning to take his War on Women to the climax, while imagining an ideal world in which he would have quarantined all women in concentration camps. At these camps, the vast majority of the female population would have been deliberately starved to death. He also dreamed of,

“A pure world, where the man's mind can develop to greater heights than ever before. Future generations will live their lives free of having to worry about the barbarity of sex and women, which will enable them to expand their intelligence and advance the human race to a state of perfect civilization.”⁵¹

Minassian's attack took place just under four years later. A self-described incel, Minassian's mother publicly said that her son has Asperger syndrome.⁵² Before the attack, he had posted this Facebook message: “Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak

to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161.”⁵³ The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!”⁵⁴

The terrorist quotes and celebrates Rodger, with whom Minassian claimed to have been in contact until days before Rodger's 2014 attacks, thus displaying patterns of ideological and operational acknowledgment and imitation that are frequently found in other radical milieus.⁵⁵ Minassian's interrogation with a detective from Toronto police was later made public and contains crucial insights into the perpetrator's grievances and frustrations, and his own description of the process of being radicalised by incel ideology online.⁵⁶

Just a few months later, on 2 November 2018, Scott Paul Beierle entered a yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida, and shot dead two women, then killed himself. Beierle was a military veteran and a former teacher. He had been charged twice for battery, in 2012 and 2016.⁵⁷ YouTube videos dating back to 2014 showed that he identified with the involuntary celibate community, sympathised with Elliot Rodger, and used to post misogynistic songs on SoundCloud. In February 2020, police in Toronto charged to a 17-year-old boy with terrorism following a machete attack at a north-end Toronto massage parlour, where the perpetrator killed a woman. During the investigation, police say they found evidence the teen was inspired by incels.⁵⁸ More recently, on 20 May 2020, Armando Hernandez shot and injured three people at Westgate Entertainment

50 Elliot Rodger, “My Twisted World, The Story of Elliot Rodger,” 2014. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/05/25/us/shooting-document.html>, accessed 12 November 2020.

51 Ibid.

52 Stewart Bell, “‘If you bothered him, he might hiss at you’: Former classmates recall Toronto van attack suspect,” Global News, 24 April 2018. Available at: <https://globalnews.ca/news/4166115/if-you-bothered-him-he-might-hiss-at-you-former-classmates-recall-toronto-van-attack-suspect/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

53 A source in the Department of National Defence told media that C23249161 was Minassian's military identification number during his army training.

54 Ben Collins and Brandy Zadrozny, “After Toronto attack, online misogynists praise suspect as ‘new saint’,” NBC News, 25 April 2018. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/after-toronto-attack-online-misogynists-praise-suspect-new-saint-n868821>, accessed 12 November 2020.

55 Sara Brzuszkiewicz, “Jihadism and Far-Right Extremism: Shared Attributes With Regard to Violence Spectacularisation,” European View, (April 2020). Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1781685820915972>, accessed 12 November 2020.

56 Electronically Recorded Interview of Alek Minassian by Detective Robert Thomas (2917) of the Sex Crimes Unit Polygraph Unit on Monday, 23 April 2018 at 22:46.

57 Gary Fineout, “Man who appears to have made racist, misogynistic videos kills 2 women in Tallahassee yoga studio shooting,” Chicago Tribune, 3 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/ct-florida-yoga-studio-shooting-20181103-story.html>, accessed 12 November 2020.

58 Ben Cousins, “Teen ‘incel’ charged with terrorism could change how we view similar cases: expert,” CTV News, 20 May 2020. Available at: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/teen-incel-charged-with-terrorism-could-change-how-we-view-similar-cases-expert-1.4947684?cache=wpwecmoua>, accessed 12 November 2020.

District, a popular shopping and restaurant strip in Glendale, west of Phoenix.⁵⁹ The suspected shooter shared his attack on Snapchat, filming his assault rifle and naming himself. According to authorities, he is a self-described involuntary celibate who was targeting couples. A few days later, on 2 June, the 23-year-old Cole Carini went to a Virginia hospital with one hand amputated, several fingers missing from his other hand, and shrapnel wounds to his neck and throat. In his bedroom, federal investigators found bomb-making materials, including an explosive substance and rusty nails. Behind his home, the FBI also found a crumpled letter, which mentioned violence against “hot cheerleaders,” and Carini’s desire to make a statement like Elliot Rodger.⁶⁰

All the perpetrators of major incel attacks show a variable degree of ideological and communicative proximity to the incel radical milieu. Evidence of this proximity are the choice of filming the attack for the benefit of fellow incels, writing and circulating manifestos, participating in incel online forums, and using incel keywords and tropes in them. This proximity implies being an active user of incel online forums — like Elliot Rodger or Alek Minassian — or having a behaviour that is more similar to that of Armando Hernandez, who declared his intention to target couples but, according to the first results of the police investigation, did not seem as active as other perpetrators online. Regardless of the perpetrators’ degree of participation in online forums, all these episodes of incel tangible violence strengthen and legitimise incel radical milieu by providing it with visibility and attention and showing users that taking action against the unjust outside world is possible.

In a vicious circle, the incel radical milieu functions as a legitimising and radicalising environment

for incel violence and, concurrently, tangible violence consolidates the role of incel online communities as a radical milieu. Within the incel radical milieu, the multiple narratives and tropes analysed above contribute to create a fertile ground for radicalisation. Arguably, the most distinctive trait that informs the entire incel *Weltanschauung* within the radical milieu is the so-called external locus of control, the core of the next section of the paper.

External locus of control: incels’ crucial trait

Conceptualising locus of control

The locus of control is a psychological notion introduced by Julian B. Rotter in 1954 and has since become a crucial concept in personality studies.⁶¹ It indicates the degree to which individuals believe they have control over the events in their lives — or vice versa, that they are at the mercy of external factors that determine their successes and failures. A person’s locus is conceptualised as internal if the belief that they control the direction of their life dominates, whereas the locus is external if the belief that life is controlled by outside factors that one cannot influence prevails.⁶²

Even though different loci of control are located on a spectrum and an individual rarely shows a uniform internal or external locus in every situation. It is also true that those who self-identify as incels display a markedly external locus of control that doubtlessly overshadows the internal one. Locus of control is one of the four dimensions of core self-evaluations, which are one’s fundamental appraisal of oneself, along with neuroticism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Twenge, Zhan, and Im note that the feeling of not having control can nurture

59 Other deadly attacks that have cited incel ideology or inspiration have occurred at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, in October 2015; Aztec High School in Aztec, New Mexico, in December 2017; Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in February 2018. For some caveats about Hanau attack (19 February 2020) see Greta Jasser, Megan Kelly and Ann-Kathrin Rotherme, “Male supremacism and the Hanau terrorist attack: between online misogyny and far-right violence,” ICCT, 20 May 2020. Available at: <https://icct.nl/publication/male-supremacism-and-the-hanau-terrorist-attack-between-online-misogyny-and-far-right-violence/>, accessed 12 November 2020.

60 Jill Sederstrom, “Man Who Revered ‘Incel’ Murderer Blows Off His Own Hand While Allegedly Making Bomb To Target ‘Hot Cheerleaders’, Authorities Say,” Oxygen, 8 June 2020. Available at: <https://www.oxygen.com/crime-news/cole-carini-blows-off-hand-while-allegedly-making-bomb-to-target-hot-cheerleaders>, accessed 12 November 2020.

61 Julian B. Rotter, “Social learning and clinical psychology” (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1954).

62 Julian B. Rotter, “Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement,” *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied*, Vol. 80 (1966), pp. 1–28.

victimhood mentality and narratives, whereby adversity is consistently attributed to outside forces.⁶³

When talking about incelism, one is dealing with a sort of institutionalised external locus of control. This is not only visible as a core component of most communicative exchanges within incel online communities, but is also a pillar of the broad theoretical framework of incelism. Accordingly, members are designated as *involuntary* celibates because of women's unrealistic demands and promiscuity, and because they are genetically unlucky, while at the same time their social life is non-existent or very limited because the world is an unfair place. Systematically interpreting and experiencing the world through the lenses of a categorically external locus of control fosters a sense of powerlessness and exclusion. This, in turn, further undermines the notion of personal responsibility, which might otherwise provide a brake on the slide towards antisocial behaviour and radicalisation.⁶⁴

Incel radicalisation through external locus of control

Incels perceive themselves as “unlucky men who are left out of the mating market”⁶⁵ and, in some instances, they demand the same empathy as is given to “other marginalised groups.”⁶⁶ According to the discourse that involuntary celibates create and articulate online, their frustrating status is simply ingrained in certain oppressive cultural and economic factors, such as lookism and classism, which engender inequality throughout society. In the incel worldview, involuntary celibates do not have any kind of responsibility for their social- and love-life difficulties.

Incelism, therefore, reflects a radical form of nihilism: if genetic, social, and/or economic preconditions are set, then any amount of work is just a futile expenditure of effort. *It is over*

or, most likely, *It never started*, two sentences that have become common tropes of incel discourse.

In some instances, incels' critique of the world becomes profound and goes beyond mere anger against *Stacys* and *Chads*. When this happens, *accelerationism* — the idea that society as we know it should collapse — takes over. Society is sick and the harmful cult of meritocracy dominates in every field: “Why do we assume that one aspect of our lives, dating and sex, is always controllable? That if we put effort into romance and bettering ourselves, no matter how short or ugly the starting point, we will always be rewarded with a caring, loving relationship?”⁶⁷ This, according to incels and the black pill theory, is one of the most widespread fallacies of mankind. As human beings, we like to believe that we are in control of the outcomes of our lives and that most of our successes and failures are the result of something that we did.

In the pure incel worldview, society is obsessed with meritocracy and self-improvement, which in involuntary celibates' discourse are simply ways to oppress incels through unrealistic social expectations. If loneliness, powerlessness, and emotional and sexual frustration are caused by external problems outside incels' control, the same external locus is applied when it comes to demands and desires. In other words, the outside world — made of *Stacys*, *Chads*, and the entire sick society — is both the source of incels' problems and the counterpart from which the solution to those problems should come. In his *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*, Michael Kimmel theorises the notion of aggrieved entitlement as stemming from the perception of a dramatic loss of what some men believe to be their privilege.⁶⁸ If you feel entitled and you have not got what you expected, that is a recipe for humiliation, which can be conducive to violence.⁶⁹

63 Jean M. Twenge, Liqing Zhang and Charles Im, “It's Beyond My Control: A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis of Increasing Externality in Locus of Control, 1960-2002,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (February 2004), pp. 308-319.

64 Willem Koomen and Joop Van Der Pligt, *The Psychology of Radicalization and Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2015).

65 Dr. Castle, “The Blackpill Theory,” 2019, p. 6

66 Ibid. p. 10.

67 Ibid. p. 26.

68 Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Type Media Center, 2013).

69 J. Oliver Convoy, “Angry white men”: the sociologist who studied Trump's base before Trump,” *The Guardian*, 27 February 2017.

Violent behaviour is particularly salient for men who feel entitled to certain social privileges and, in the case of some incels, to satisfactory emotional and sexual relations. When these expected privileges are thwarted, these men often respond with frustration and hatred. In line with their external locus of control, broader social forces, such as greater gender equality and women being more selective in their choice of partners, stop men from acquiring perceived rewards, resulting in a sense of reduced privilege in society.⁷⁰

Men who experience aggrieved entitlement might perceive violence as justified and necessary for restoring their dominance against those who caused humiliation.⁷¹ Elliot Rodger's manifesto, *My Twisted World*, offers multiple instances of both external locus of control and aggrieved entitlement. The very first line clarifies: "All of my suffering on this world has been at the hands of humanity, particularly women."⁷²

In accordance with his worldview deeply shaped by aggrieved entitlement, Rodger also posits that women should be sexually attracted to intelligent gentlemen, rather than those who demonstrate hegemonic masculinity: "Females truly have something mentally wrong with them...They are attracted to the wrong type of man (...) everything my father taught me was proven wrong. He raised me to be a polite, kind gentleman."⁷³ Because of his almost total absence of internal locus of control and sense of personal responsibility, his social difficulties are blamed on the outside world: sex is a sort of market in which other men's sexual relationships with women contributed to Rodger's sexual starvation. Dr. Castle, the

alleged scholar specialising in masculinity issues and males' self-perception, recounts a post found online that is quintessential of external locus of control and aggrieved entitlement: "I was your stereotypical polite, respectful, and quiet person for the longest time. The world has stomped and spit on me because of my genetics and I became this way as a result. It was not the product of 'toxic masculinity' or some other retarded shit. I became a cynical shit-poster that hates life because society has shit [sic] on me."⁷⁴

During the 2020 Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic, involuntary celibates' locus of control has become — if possible — even more external and focused on outside forces and events. On forums and subreddits, many incel users celebrated the lockdown enforced in their countries because finally *Chads* and *Stacys* would be forced indoors and would not have the chance of seeing each other and having sex.⁷⁵ In addition, many posts across these forums see coronavirus as karma for having casual sex, whereas the most violent fringes call coronavirus a *gift from God* or *St. Coronavirus* because "it increases the likelihood that *normies* will die."⁷⁶ In the context of intersexual relations, involuntary celibates get to the point of comparing women with the virus itself: "*Foids* are making society way worse than corona virus ever could."⁷⁷ In incel communities, the institutionalised external locus of control functions as the strongest justification for verbal and — at times — physical violence, giving individual grievances the opportunity to become tropes of an entire radical milieu premised on male sexual entitlement.⁷⁸

Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/27/michael-kimmel-masculinity-far-right-angry-white-men>, accessed 12 November 2020.

70 Christopher Vito, Amanda Admire and Elizabeth Hughes, "Masculinity, aggrieved entitlement, and violence: considering the Isla Vista mass shooting," *International Journal for Masculinity Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (October 2017). Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/18902138.2017.1390658>, accessed 12 November 2020.

71 Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 2013.

72 Elliot Rodger, "My Twisted World," p. 1.

73 Ibid., p. 84, p. 99.

74 Dr. Castle, "The Blackpill Theory," p. 158.

75 Anh V. Vu, "The Pandemic as Incels see it, Cambridge Cybercrime Centre COVID Briefing Paper #5," 4 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.cambridgecybercrime.uk/COVID/COVIDbriefing-5.pdf>, accessed 12 November 2020.

76 Sarah Manavis, "Incels are celebrating lockdown because attractive people can't have casual sex," *New Statesman*, 24 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/coronavirus/2020/03/incels-celebrating-lockdown-casual-sex-chad-stacy-4chan-reddit>, accessed 12 November 2020.

77 Ibid.

78 Manavis, "Incels are celebrating lockdown because attractive people can't have casual sex," 2020.

Conclusion

In the last few years, involuntary celibates' violence has attracted increasing attention, particularly because attacks committed by males calling themselves incels or in sympathy with incel ideology have killed nearly fifty people. In order to increase our knowledge of this violence and incel online multi-faceted communities, analysing incels' own words and narratives is crucial. Listening to what they say and observing how they say it is fundamental to effectively assessing the threat they pose.

Through the investigation of involuntary celibates' communicative exchanges, this paper identified a number of ideological pillars related to incels' self-representation and identity, views on gender relations and misogyny, and the perceived uselessness of being kind to women. All of these ideological points are based on the typical incel assumption of being unable to have romantic relationships because they are systematically rejected by women, who are unreliable, promiscuous, and attracted by a small number of males who dominate the market of romance. Incels' theoretical framework reveals a unique form of misogyny, as they are not hostile to women out of a sense of superiority. On the contrary, they hate them from a position of inferiority, since they believe that women are privileged and control the mating market. These are all painful truths that incels can understand when swallowing the so-called *redpill*. By choosing the blue pill, individuals opt for reassuring ignorance, whereas by choosing the red pill they are willing to know shocking and sad truths.

Redpilling is a core philosophy for incels but, after knowing the truth, they usually acknowledge that nothing can be done about it, because their loneliness and marginalisation cannot be improved. Taking this step, they swallow the so-called *blackpill*, bitterer than the red one. This entire set of narratives on *inceldom*, women, and nihilism contributes to creating a shared space in which, in a sort of reciprocal grooming, individual grievances become group grievances.

The present paper argues that this shared

space can be effectively described as a radical milieu. Scholars are reaching an increasingly broad consensus about considering incel violence as terrorism. However, a theoretical tool aimed at studying incel communities as a whole — including their non-physically violent fringes, is yet to be found. The notion of radical milieu could help fill this gap. A radical milieu can be described as an environment made up of people who are not necessarily radicalised, but capable of offering members a unique sense of belonging and camaraderie. Within this environment, individuals find implicit or explicit support and legitimisation. Moreover, in this radical milieu demands for recognition and legitimacy are voiced and the separation from the out-group increases. For all these reasons, the notion of radical milieu is crucial for identifying and monitoring the radicalisation processes taking place within incel communities.

Arguably, the most distinctive trait that informs this radical milieu is the so-called external locus of control, which is the belief that life is controlled by outside factors that one cannot influence. This external locus of control has been effectively institutionalised, becoming a pillar of inceldom's worldview, according to which they are celibates and lonely because of women's unrealistic demands and promiscuity, because they are genetically unlucky, and because the world is unfair. It is the widespread view of incels that they do not have any kind of responsibility for the difficulties in their social- and love-lives. Society is sick and the harmful cult of meritocracy dominates in every field, according to incels, leading people to believe in the *myth* of self-improvement. Inceldom's peculiar misogyny, the evolution of inceldom's radical milieu, and the institutionalisation of their external locus of control require close monitoring and further research.

Considering inceldom as a radical milieu is recommended as it could provide scholars and practitioners with an effective research category to describe the entire incel environment, including its non-violent components, which represent the overwhelming majority. By doing so, the notion of breeding ground for radicalisation, which remains insufficiently conceptualised in relation

to the incels community, can take on a new role, characterised by high explanatory power on the entirety of incelism, instead of limiting the scope of the analysis to incel terrorist perpetrators only. Furthermore, introducing new perspectives on this radical milieu would make it possible to increase our awareness of the similarities and differences between incels' milieu and other forms of radical environment.

As far as the notion of locus of control is concerned, the implications of understanding this incelism's primary feature are potentially many and diverse. The research on incelism is still in its infancy, but deepening our knowledge of the mechanisms related to external locus of control could be crucial both for sharpening our ability to identify possible warning signs of radicalisation and to develop effective counter-narratives based on individual accountability, principles of personal choice, and consent in sexual relations — that is to say, challenging the very principle of external locus of control.

Online communities of involuntary celibates are extremely accessible, since joining them does not require any particular knowledge or training, and participation is based on personal frustration and grievances. Understanding how these grievances are weaponised within incel radical milieu is vital for any counter-radicalisation effort.

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The Islamic State's Global Insurgency and its Counterstrategy Implications

Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside and Charlie Winter

Abstract

At the dawn of its caliphate, the Islamic State's global pretensions were limited to being the premier destination for foreign "travellers," but we now understand that the caliphate was more than a destination: it was to be the foundation for a more rigorous transmission of global jihad. The collapse of its political project affords us an opportunity to reassess the Islamic State movement. Today its underground insurgency is the flagship of a political enterprise consisting of formal and aspiring affiliates dotting the Middle East, Africa and Asia while coordinating and inspiring terror operations abroad. We present a conceptual framework through which to understand how the Islamic State's network of insurgent affiliates operates, based on an analysis of its attack data and primary sources. When we assess the bureaucratic fluidity of its structure in both time and place, combined with a wide ranging spectrum of relationships with affiliates and networks far and wide, the adhocratic nature of the Islamic State enterprise emerges and demands attention as we try to understand the role its structure and management influences its resilience as a global movement.

Keywords: islamist extremism, adhocracy, organisational structures, insurgency, counterinsurgency, Iraq, Syria, ISIS

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Introduction

When the Islamic State's long-time spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani announced the establishment of a caliphate with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as its leader six years ago, there was a valuable debate about the true character of the group and its objectives.¹ At the dawn of its caliphate, the Islamic State's global pretensions were limited to being the premier destination for foreign "travellers," but we now understand that the caliphate was more than a destination: it was to be the foundation for a more rigorous transmission of global jihad.² The killing of Abu Bakr, the collapse of its political project, and loss of all territorial control in the last year affords us an opportunity to reassess the Islamic State movement. This time the task will be more difficult than understanding an insurgency that successfully consolidated power over parts of majority Sunni areas of Iraq and Syria; today its underground insurgency is also the flagship of a political enterprise consisting of formal and aspiring affiliates dotting the Middle East, Africa and Asia while coordinating and inspiring terror operations abroad.³ We argue that the Islamic State is evolving as a *global adhocratic insurgency* that champions and exports both its brand and a core set of ideological (*aqeeda*) and strategic principles (*manhaj*) that have remained largely constant throughout its history, and which it exports across its transnational enterprise.⁴

The concept of a global insurgency is not new for those familiar with the Cold War and has been used more recently to describe al-Qaeda, the Islamic State's former parent.⁵ But it is clear that al-Qaeda had such a conservative and restrained view of promoting wide-spread, territorial governance projects prior to its split with Islamic State that it could be more easily

confused with a violent political movement or terror network than managing a global insurgency. Meanwhile, the Islamic State has outshone al-Qaeda since 2014 in popularity among prospective local jihadists around the globe while putting the "i" back into global insurgency with its leadership and advocacy of armed revolution with the goal of creating a caliphate.

Adhocracy, on the other hand, is a different take on a group whose structure and bureaucracy during its administration of millions of people living under the caliphate will be studied for some time as a preeminent example of rebel governance. But the group looks nothing like this now structurally, morphing back into a familiar clandestine existence — its second major transformation in just half a dozen years. The most recent leader of the Islamic State's Delegated Committee — the board of directors if you will — actually described the group as largely decentralised and complained to captors that the central leadership's influence was often blunted by the whims of subordinate commanders.⁶ Assessing this organisational fluidity and the wide-ranging spectrum of relationships with affiliates and networks far and wide, we can see how the adhocratic nature of the Islamic State enterprise influences its resilience as a global movement.

Our intent here is to present a picture of the contemporary Islamic State movement, and the organisational and strategic transitions shaped by its territorial defeats, and use this analysis to present some principles for how current and future coalitions of willing states can confront the contemporary Islamic State. Accordingly, this paper lays out a framework through which to consider the contemporary Islamic State phenomenon that fuses historical, organisational, and strategic perspectives.

1 Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside and Charlie Winter, "The Caliphate Rises," in Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside and Charlie Winter, eds., *The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State Movement*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 161-176.

2 Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Seamus Hughes and Bennett Clifford, "The Travelers: American Jihadists in Syria and Iraq," Program on Extremism, The George Washington University, February 2018. Available at: <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/TravelersAmericanJihadistsinSyriaandIraq.pdf>.

3 After a restructure in 2018, the Islamic State's global provinces include: West Africa Province, Central Africa Province, Algeria Province, Libya Province, Sinai Province, Somalia Province, Syria Province, Iraq Province, Turkey Province, Yemen Province, Khurasan Province, Pakistan Province, India Province, Caucasus Province, East Asia Province, Najd Province, Hijaz Province, Bahrain Province.

4 Henry Mintzberg, "The Innovative Organization," in Mintzberg on Management, (New York: Free Press, 1989), pp. 196-220.

5 David J. Kilcullen, "Countering global insurgency," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (January 2007), pp. 597-617. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390500300956>.

6 Husham al-Hashimi, "Interview: ISIS's Abdul Nasser Qardash," Center for Global Policy, 4 June 2020. Available at: <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/interview-isis-abdul-nasser-qardash/>.

Drawing on the Islamic State's own attack data and primary source materials to examine how this movement operates its global insurgency, it explores a series of key strategic implications for confronting the global threat. As liberal states increasingly posture to address the threat posed by authoritarians, it will be crucial to contain the jihadist movement, suffocating it from opportunities created by these emerging geopolitical rivalries. At the heart of this counterstrategy must be a transnational effort that centralises 'influence operations', practically supports military and intelligence operations in partner nations, and prioritises the training of local multi-sector specialists to lead civilian government, military, and civil society activities.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 1 presents a conceptual framework through which to understand how the Islamic State's network of insurgent affiliates operates both as a whole and when broken down into its constituent parts. Section 2, building on this framework, uses Islamic State attack data collected between December 2018 and May 2020 to evaluate its operational capabilities and reach, tracking key conflict dynamics through its defeat in Baghuz in March 2019 and well into 2020. Section 3 reflects on the implications of these data by comparing the Islamic State's current roster of priorities with those of its earlier iterations, namely the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). The last part considers Sections 1-3 as a whole and, based on them, presents a four-pillar strategy for meaningfully and permanently undermining the Islamic State insurgency as it exists today.

Conceptualising the Islamic State's global insurgency

In our recent book, *The ISIS Reader*, we trace the Islamic State movement's evolution through four distinct historical periods: its founding under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1990s-2006); the establishment of its first state and rebuilding

after its destabilisation on the back of the Awakening/Surge (2006-2011); its transnational spread and the establishment of its caliphate (2011-2016); and the collapse of its state and transition to global insurgency (2016-present).⁷ During each of these transitions, analysts and practitioners alike struggled to understand and explain the 'new' phenomenon.⁸ The Islamic State of 2020 has proven particularly tricky to grasp — with an operational presence in at least twenty countries, it poses a qualitatively different menace in each of them — and the tendency to use the movement's history since 2014 as a point of reference may prove more deceptive than elucidating. After all, for most of its history the Islamic State movement has operated as an insurgency and so it would be deeply misleading to disproportionately focus on those fleeting moments (circa 2006-07 and 2014-17) when it looked and attempted to act like a state. At the same time, it is faulty to simply compare today's activity to the past, because the Islamic State has changed in important ways. Expanding our analytical aperture to capture the full spectrum of the movement's evolution offers a fuller lens through which to analyse the group's contemporary campaigns and the scale with which it has shifted its strategy and adapted its organisational structure.

The Islamic State movement circa 2020 finds itself in an unprecedented situation, with new leaders, an adapting structure, and a unique level of global influence. In the space of five years, the Islamic State declared its caliphate only to lose all its territory and its first caliph. The open control of territory had allowed the group to establish a centralised, hierarchical, and deeply bureaucratic organisation, and its recent defeat has forced it to morph into something very different, even from its own familiar background of local insurgency. This is largely thanks to the Islamic State's transnational enterprise which presents risks and opportunities for it that are new in the scope of its history. The pragmatism and agility displayed by these organisational transformations is a reflection of the Islamic State's adhoc traits, which allow it to create,

⁷ In the *ISIS Reader*: Milestone texts of the Islamic State movement, we analyse the group's history from its inception in the 1990s to al-Baghdadi's death in 2019 through these four historical periods. For more see Ingram, Whiteside and Winter, *The ISIS Reader*, 2020.

⁸ For example, see Eric Schmitt, "In battle to defang ISIS, U.S. targets its psychology," *The New York Times*, 28 December 2014. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/29/us/politics/in-battle-to-defang-isis-us-targets-its-psychology-.html>.

reimagine, and manage a complex array of different relationships within its organisational structure and with its formal and aspiring affiliates around the world.

The Islamic State Adhocracy

Over the decades-long history of the Islamic State, a number of researchers have examined the group's organisational structures and processes focusing on different stages of its evolution⁹ or particular parts of the organisation.¹⁰ Based on primary source analyses, these studies made invaluable contributions to our understanding of rebel governance.¹¹ Much of this past and current work on the Islamic State's administration in both clandestine and open governing styles has created the perception of a robust and all-encompassing bureaucracy. Our current research on the structure reveals some revision of these perceptions is required, and this is strengthened by the group's adept organisational and strategic transition away from a proto-state and back to clandestine insurgency, while simultaneously advancing its global agenda. We argue that the Islamic State as an organisation is best understood as an adhocracy.¹²

An 'adhocracy'¹³ is a type of organisation that tends to emerge in environments characterised by dynamism and change in which "a structure of interacting project teams" come together to achieve an overarching purpose and/or express a shared identity.¹⁴ To navigate the

complexity that characterises its environment, adhocracies tend towards a decentralisation of decision-making power, especially regarding tactical and operational decisions, even though a core of specialists at the heart of the organisation may drive strategic direction and promote collaboration towards that overarching purpose/identity. As Mintzberg asserts: "The organization that has need for sophisticated innovation must usually cede to this pull [towards collaboration], welding staff and line, and sometimes operating personnel as well, into multidisciplinary teams of experts that achieve coordination within and between themselves through mutual adjustment."¹⁵ Adhocracies are designed to be innovative, flexible and adaptive to change, especially as strategic conditions shift. Indeed, adhocracies may organisationally transition towards different structures under certain conditions (e.g. more formal, hierarchical, and bureaucratic) only to later evolve in other ways as circumstances change again.

Coordination is vital within an adhocracy to keep the components of the organisation on task. Consequently, managers and liaison units play a central role in synchronising efforts to ensure that potentially disparate parts of the organisation are appropriately contributing to the group's overarching purpose and identity. As Mintzberg asserts, "...the managers of adhocracy must be masters of human relations, able to use persuasion, negotiation, coalition, reputation, and rapport to fuse the individualistic experts into smoothly functioning teams."¹⁶ Throughout its history the Islamic State has

9 For example, Brian Fishman, "Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons learned from inside Al Qa'ida in Iraq," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Dysfunction-and-Dcline.pdf>; Muhammad Al-'Ubaydi, Nelly Lahoud, Daniel Milton and Bryan Price, "The group that calls itself a state: Understanding the evolution and challenges of the Islamic State," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, December 2014, Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2014/12/CTC-The-Group-That-Calls-Itself-A-State-December20141.pdf>; Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "The Evolution in Islamic State Administration: The Documentary Evidence," Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 9, No. 4 (August 2015), pp. 117-129. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26297420.pdf>.

10 For example, analyses of Islamic State's media apparatus. See Craig Whiteside, "Lighting the Path: the evolution of the Islamic State media enterprise (2003-2016)," The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT), (November 2016). Available at: <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ICCT-Whiteside-Lighting-the-Path-the-Evolution-of-the-Islamic-State-Media-Enterprise-2003-2016-Nov2016.pdf>; Daniel Milton, "Pulling back the curtain," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, August 2018. Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/08/Pulling-Back-the-Curtain.pdf>.

11 One notable study that includes the Islamic State's early incarnation: Jacob N. Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organizations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

12 The purpose of this analysis is to briefly identify the key attributes of an adhocracy and how it broadly relates to the Islamic State. Future publications will offer a more in-depth historical and organisational analysis of the Islamic State as an adhocracy.

13 For more, see Mintzberg, "The Innovative Organization," 1989.

14 Henry Mintzberg, "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?" *Harvard Business Review*, January 1981. Available at: <https://hbr.org/1981/01/organization-design-fashion-or-fit>.

15 Ibid.

16 Mintzberg, "The Innovative Organization," 1989, p. 207.

recognised the importance of leadership as a cohering mechanism.¹⁷ As uniquely modern organisations, adhocracies also tend to rely heavily on modern communications to not only coordinate across potentially disparate parts of the enterprise but to project a façade of being a more coherent and structured organisation to its competitors and supporters. As the Islamic State rose in prominence, social media became crucial for communicating its propaganda and expanding its support base. It is clear that modern communication is vital for not only maintaining its online efforts but communicating with affiliates and enabling rapid reporting of activities from around the world. While adhocracies are common in a range of fields, especially in highly competitive industries dominated by start-ups, Mintzberg specifically identifies “guerrilla warfare”¹⁸ as a field in which this type of organisation tends to flourish.¹⁹

This basic outline of the key organisational traits, strengths and weaknesses of an adhocracy offers a useful lens through which to consider the Islamic State, especially now that it has evolved back into an insurgency at its core with a transnational network on its peripheries. Despite the loss of *tamkin* in Syria and Iraq, that core serves as the central nervous system for global efforts to achieve *tamkin* in isolated and scattered pockets of the *ummah*. What coheres the Islamic State's transnational enterprise are its affiliates commitment to and application of the group's *manhaj* and pledge (*bayat*) to the caliph.²⁰ These affiliates help to project and champion the Islamic State's ‘brand’, provide strategic and operational depth which helps to stretch the focus of its adversaries, and increases the pool of material for its propaganda efforts and recruits for mobilisation. Moreover, throughout its history, the Islamic State has demonstrated an ability to organisationally transition in response to changing strategic conditions while exhibiting a tactical, operational and

strategic innovativeness in its politico-military and propaganda activities around a persistent core set of guiding principles.

Adhocracies tend to be characterised by organisational strengths that include being innovative, flexible, and attuned to deal with change as strategic conditions shift across time and space. However, adhocracies are also susceptible to certain weaknesses. For instance, they are heavily reliant on communication via the deployment of specialist personnel (such as managers and liaison units) and/or the use of communication technologies to keep the organisation's activities synchronised. If communication breaks down, then adhocracies are susceptible to tactical, operational and strategic incoherence that can lead to organisational fraying.²¹ Given the environment and circumstances within which adhocracies tend to operate, they are also susceptible to internal competition for operational effectiveness or ideological purity that can result in extremism within the ranks, especially on its fringes. Adhocracies can sometimes too hastily or belatedly attempt to organisationally transition which renders them susceptible to operational and strategic missteps, and even organisational breakdown.²²

The weaknesses inherent to adhocracies also shed light on many of the historical problems that the Islamic State movement has experienced. During different times in its history, the Islamic State has struggled to cohere operationally as pressure has been applied to its communication networks.²³ Despite its willingness to organisationally transition to take advantage of opportunities to fulfil its mission to establish an Islamic State, these periods of fleeting conventional success have been followed by comprehensive material defeats, resulting in the loss of personnel, material, leaders, and territorial control. While much of this can be explained by the overwhelming strength of its adversaries,

17 Ingram, Whiteside and Winter, “Advice to The Leaders of the Islamic State,” in Ingram, Whiteside and Winter, eds., *The ISIS Reader*, 2020 pp. 93-106.

18 Mintzberg, “The Innovative Organization,” 1989, p. 207.

19 Al-Qaeda is another example of an adhocracy.

20 Aaron Zelin, “The Islamic State's Bayat Campaign,” *Jihadology*, 3 November 2019. Available at: <https://jihadology.net/2019/11/03/the-islamic-states-bayat-campaign/>.

21 Also see Mintzberg, “Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?” 1981.

22 Mintzberg, “The Innovative Organization,” 1989, pp. 219-220.

23 Fishman, “Dysfunction & Decline,” 2009.

it is also the product of a movement that has struggled to organisationally transition its structures and processes to sustaining a more formal bureaucratic enterprise. Moreover, during its most recent period of transition back into an insurgency circa 2017, then caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi struggled to manage ideological extremism within the Islamic State's own shura council.²⁴ During the last retreat of the organisation in 2007, it lost control of its associate groups and much of its manpower—a resource that required painstaking years to rebuild during what we described in *The ISIS Reader* as its “second resurgence.”²⁵ Overall, what is important to draw from these reflections is the potential utility of understanding the Islamic State as an adhocracy to shape future analysis and strategic-policy thinking. To this organisational lens it is necessary to add a strategic perspective.

Evaluating the Islamic State insurgency

The Islamic State's transnational enterprise has emerged due to a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces. On the one hand, the Islamic State seeks to expand globally (top-down forces) while, on the other hand, local groups pursue the Islamic State's recognition and support largely motivated by local factors (bottom-up forces). It is the complex interaction of local actors seeking to attract the Islamic State and the Islamic State trying to manage its global expansion and project it as a sign of its efficacy and credibility that will be crucial for predicting its strategic fortunes. While the Islamic State has argued since

establishing its caliphate in June 2014 that all Muslims are jurisprudentially obliged to pledge allegiance to its caliph and join the group, it has established criteria which local groups need to satisfy to be formally accepted as an affiliate. According to the Islamic State's own documents, speeches, and its practice over time,²⁶ this has involved a pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State's caliph,²⁷ approval (if not the direct appointment) of the group's leader, efforts to consolidate other local groups under a single banner, and the adoption of the Islamic State's *aqeeda* (creed) and *manhaj* (methodology) to guide its ideological, military, governance, and propaganda activities. For the purposes of this report, it is the latter which is most important because it is through the exportation of its strategic guidelines that the Islamic State is able to project the image of a coherent transnational insurgency. Moreover, the multi-phased method proposed by the group – which consists of *hijrah* (migration), *jama'ah* (organisation), destabilising the *taghut*, *tamkin* (consolidation), and finally, establishment of the caliphate (*khilafah*)²⁸ – provides its local affiliates with a framework to guide and synchronise their activities. To understand the Islamic State's global war, it is useful to first consider the attack data before analysing the doctrine and strategic principles that help to drive it.

In recent months analysts have published excellent assessments of Islamic State operations in Iraq, Syria, Sinai, Yemen, Africa (Greater Sahel, West Africa, Central Africa, Somalia), Central/South Asia (Khorasan, Hind), and East Asia.²⁹ We conducted a similar, but globalised, assessment that is based on Islamic

24 Cole Bunzel, “The Islamic State's Ideology: History of a Rift,” Program on Extremism, George Washington University, (June 2020). Available at: <https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/downloads/kp78gg36g?locale=en>.

25 Anonymous, “Analysis of the State of ISI,” Document NMEC-2007-612449, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point Archives. Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/harmony-program/analysis-of-the-state-of-isi-original-language-2/>; Ingram, Whiteside and Winter, *The ISIS Reader*, 2020, p. 9.

26 What follows is based primary source analyses of primary sources including Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, “This is the Promise of Allah,” al-Hayat Media, 2014; Unknown author, “Remaining & Expanding,” Dabiq, Issue 5 (2014), pp. 22-33; Unknown author, “Wilayat Khurasan and the bay'at from Qawqaz,” Dabiq Issue 7 (2015), pp. 33-37; Unknown author, “A fatwa for Khurasan,” Dabiq, Issue 10 (2015), pp.18-24; Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, “O Our People Respond to the Caller of Allah,” al-Hayat Media, 23 June 2015; Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, “So they kill and are killed,” al-Hayat Media, 12 March 2015; Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, “Say, ‘Die in your Rage’,” al-Hayat Media, 26 January 2015; al-Furqan Media, “The structure of the caliphate,” al-Furqan Media, 2016 (video).

27 Daniel Milton and Muhammad Al-Ubaydi, “Pledging Bay'a: A benefit or burden to the Islamic State?” CTC Sentinel, Vol. 8, No. 3 (March 2015). Available at: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/pledging-baya-a-benefit-or-burden-to-the-islamic-state/>.

28 Unnamed author, “From Hijrah to Khilafah,” Dabiq, Issue 1 (2014), p. 39. Available at: https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/_pda/2014/07/islamic-state-22dc481biq-magazine-122.pdf.

29 Michael Knights and Alex Almeida, “Remaining and expanding: The recovery of Islamic State operations in Iraq 2019-2020,” CTC Sentinel, Vol. 13, No. 5 (May 2020). Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/remaining-and-expanding-the-recovery-of-islamic-state-operations-in-iraq-in-2019-2020/>; Allison McManus, “ISIS in the Sinai: A Persistent Threat for Egypt,” Center for Global Policy, 23

State self-claims prepared and distributed by the group in its weekly newsletter, *al-Naba'*. Specifically, both sets of data — the incident and impact counts — originally appeared in the “Harvest of Soldiers” infographic series, which, prepared by the Central Media *Diwan* of the Islamic State, has been running on a weekly basis since July 2018. To capture a sense of the full spectrum of its insurgent activities today, we focus on just five of its eighteen provinces — Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, West Africa (which includes the Sahel), and East Asia (which includes the Philippines and Indonesia) — tracking, via the weekly data provided in these infographics, their progress over the course of 2019 and the first half of 2020. We made a decision to limit our focus to just these five provinces and just this particular period of time because our intention here is to provide a strategic level evaluation of the Islamic State insurgency eighteen months on from its ‘defeat’ in early 2019, not a ground-level tactical analysis of the entirety of its day-to-day activities.

Given the provenance of these data, it is important to consider them critically. They were, after all, disseminated by the Islamic State with a distinct strategic intent — to demonstrate the reach of its global affiliates and amplify their kinetic capabilities. That being said, it would be short-sighted to dismiss them simply because they are “propaganda.” As the United States-led coalition has itself conceded, the Islamic State’s attack reporting is largely accurate as an indicative measure, even if it obfuscates at times and exaggerates at others.³⁰ Hence, provided the data is treated solely as an appreciation of activity trends and not a definitive list of specific operations, its utility as analytical markers is clear. Indeed,

in them, the Islamic State gives us a unique opportunity to make a like-for-like comparison between the reported activities of its global network of affiliates, inadvertently providing a window into their perceived health and strategic priorities. Even if this comparison is only indicative, its value to those seeking to understand and subsequently undermine the evolving threat of this movement is substantial.

Global assessment

Figure I presents the Islamic State-reported attacks from December 2018 through May 2020. While data are available for all its international affiliates and supporters, for clarity’s sake only those pertaining to Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, West Africa and the Sahel, and the Philippines and Indonesia have been included in this assessment. This allows us to consider the full extent of the movement’s insurgency at present—from its conventional-style tactics in Nigeria to its now-exclusively terrorist operations in Afghanistan.

Before considering the data on a disaggregated regional basis, it is worth first remarking on a series of peaks that relate to specific decisions made by the Islamic State over the last year and a half, each of which is demarcated in Figure I by a red arrow. On each of these occasions, the Islamic State declared the initiation of a global *ghazwah*, meaning “raid” or “battle.” Since March 2019, there have been five such raids—one in April 2019 to “avenge Wilayat al-Sham”; another in December 2019 to “avenge the two shaykhs,” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abul Hasan al-Muhajir; and three raids of “attrition” that were launched in June and August 2019 and May 2020 respectively. While not all peaks in the data can be accounted for

June 2020. Available at: <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-the-sinai-a-persistent-threat-for-egypt/>; Elisabeth Kendall, “ISIS in Yemen: Caught in a Regional Power Game,” Center for Global Policy, 21 July 21, 2020. Available at: <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-yemen-caught-in-a-regional-power-game/>; Wassim Nasr, Wassim. (2020). “ISIS in Africa: The end of the “Sahel Exception.”,” Center for Global Policy, 2020. Available at: <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-africa-the-end-of-the-sahel-exception/>; Amira Jadoon and, Andrew Mines, “An Examination of State-led Operations against Islamic State Khorasan in Afghanistan and Pakistan (2015-2018),” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 23 March 23, 2020. Available at: <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-africa-the-end-of-the-sahel-exception/>; Shweta Desai and Amarnath Amarasingam, “ISIS in South Asia: Struggle for Survival Beyond ‘Khorasan,’” Center for Global Policy, 29 July 29, 2020. Available at: <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-south-asia-struggle-for-survival-beyond-khorasan/>; Amira Jadoon, Nakissa Jahanbani and, Charmaine Willis, “Rising in the East: A Regional Overview of the Islamic State’s Operations in Southeast Asia,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, July 2020. Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/rising-in-the-east-a-regional-overview-of-the-islamic-states-operations-in-southeast-asia/>.

³⁰ Department of Defence Office of Inspector General, “Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve I Quarterly Report to the United States Congress I January 1, 2020 – March 31, 2020,” Department of Defence Office of Inspector General, 13 May 2020. Available at: <https://www.dodig.mil/In-the-Spotlight/Article/2185254/lead-inspector-general-for-operation-inherent-resolve-i-quarterly-report-to-the/>.

by these centrally organised global raids, there is a clear correlation between when they are declared and five out of the six operational peaks in Islamic State kinetic activity that are visualised in Figure I. This dynamic is clearest in Iraq and Syria but also apparent to a more limited extent in the context of West Africa. Considered as a whole, it hints at levels of coordination that can only be possible due to varying combinations of globally effective channels of communication, potentially direct/indirect planning between the Islamic State's core and transnational units in-theatre, as well as a strategic and operational uniformity that comes with having a shared *manhaj*.

Regional Assessment

This assessment is based on two streams of data and a compound statistic arrived at by combining them. The first stream, which is visualised in Figure II, is derived from the total number of attacks reported by the Islamic State. Because this does not account for the relative complexity of said attacks, the value of these data in evaluating the Islamic State's kinetic capabilities is limited if they are considered in isolation. It can be used to track numbers, but cannot be used to get a sense of scope, complexity or scale. The second data

stream, which is visualised in Figure III, is the total number of kills and casualties reported by the Islamic State. From these two datasets, it is possible to derive a "lethality score"—that is, the total number of attacks reported divided by the total number of kills and casualties reported. This can then be used as a rough proxy for the average scale of the attacks in question.

Figure II shows that, aside from two brief periods in spring and autumn 2019, the Islamic State province in Iraq (IS-I) reported more activity than any other part of the Islamic State's global network. Following a gradual but moderate deceleration towards the end of 2019, the IS-I's activities accelerated precipitously from February 2020 onwards. This meant that, by May 2020, the Islamic State was more active in Iraq than it had been since early 2018. Notably, though, the average lethality of its attacks there remained relatively low (Figure III), having decreased slightly across the first quarter (Q1) of 2020, with a 12-week lethality score of two kills and casualties per attack reported. This reflects the fact that, while the Islamic State's supporters may have been highly active in Iraq, their objectives were, until then at least, limited to relatively low impact signalling violence geared towards denying the emergence of security, signalling local resolve

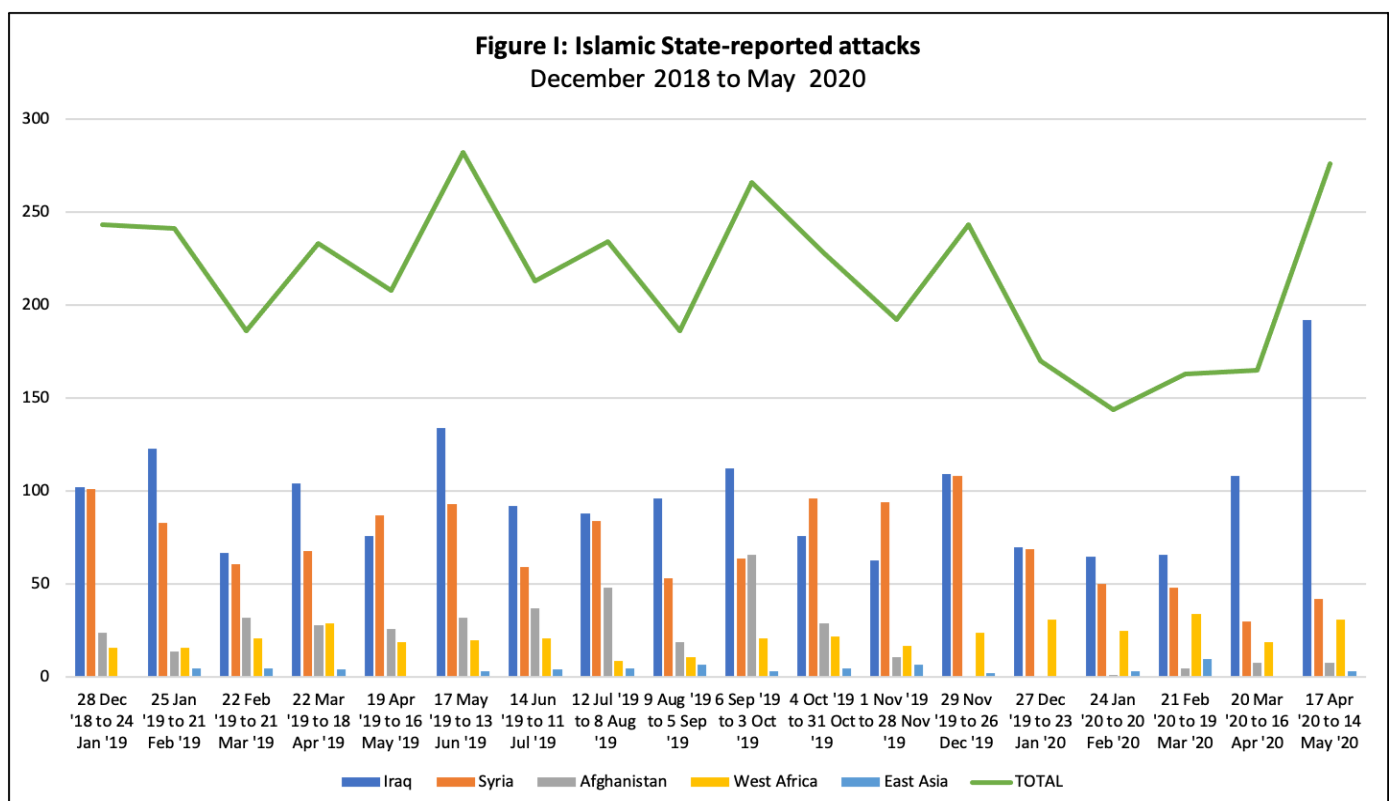


Figure II: Islamic State-reported attacks
28 December 2018 to 14 May 2020

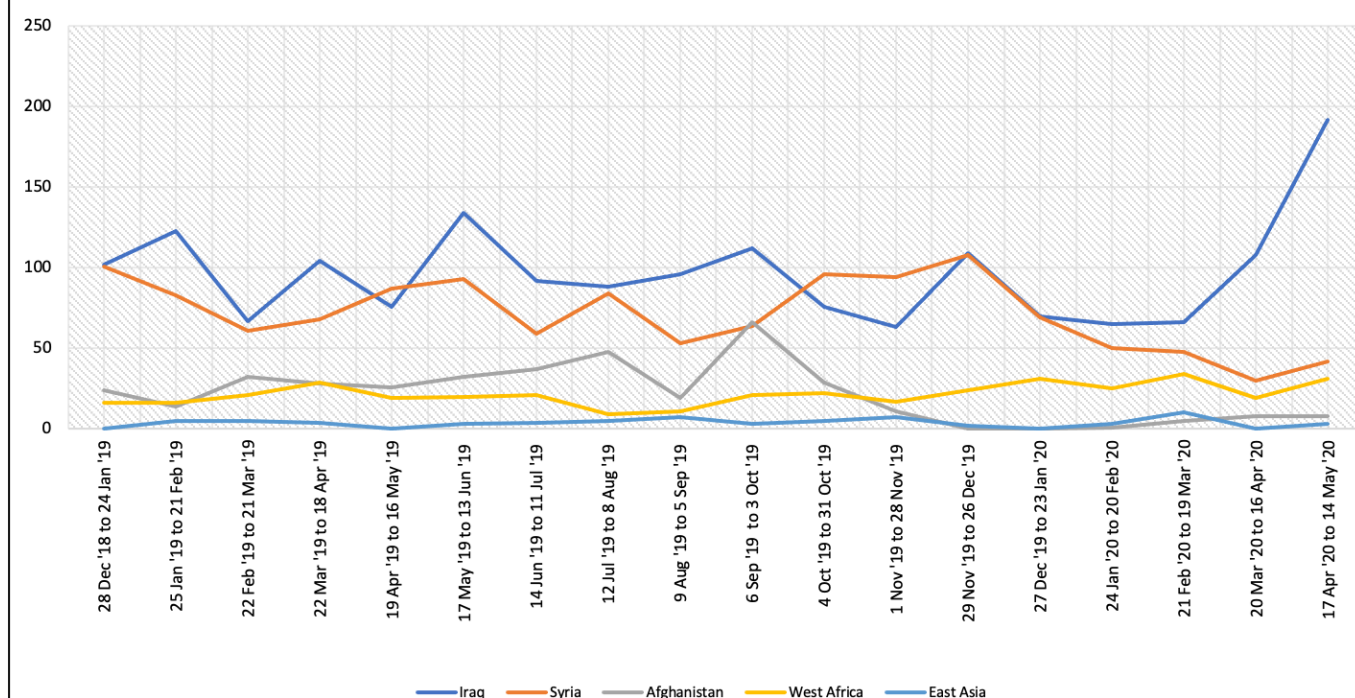
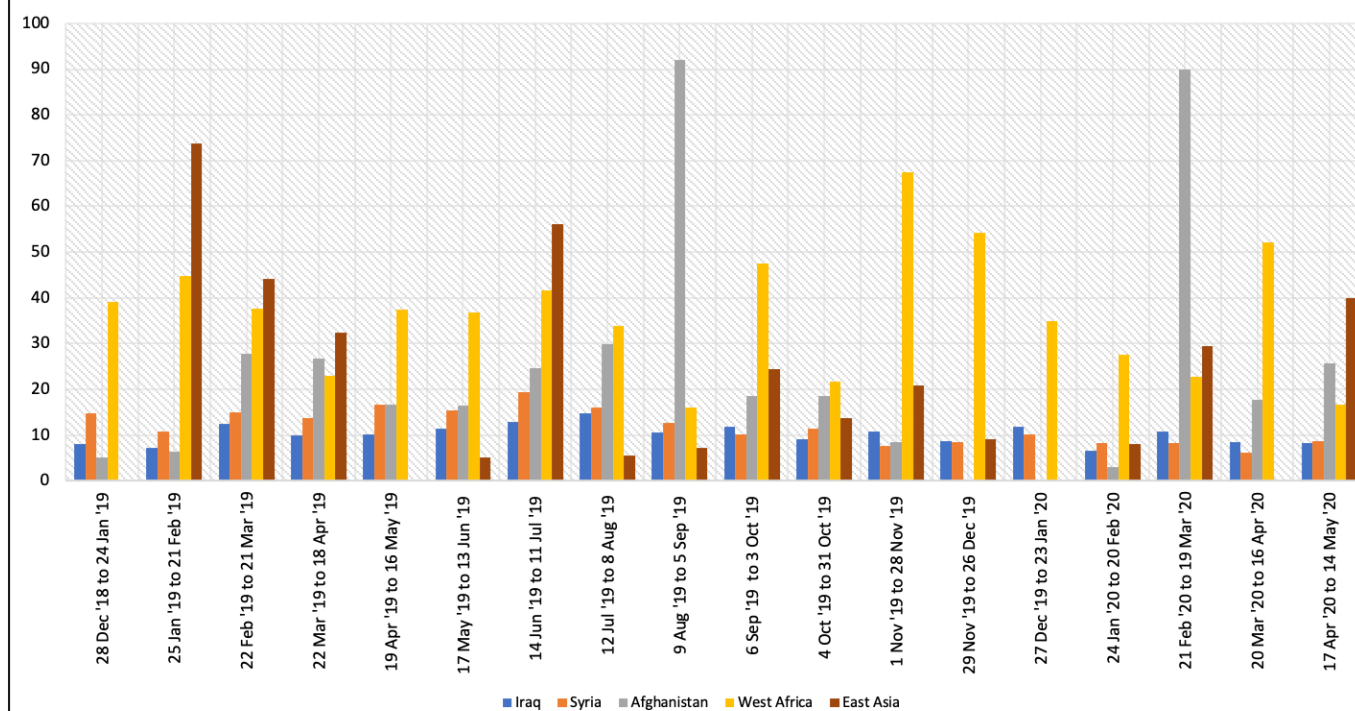


Figure III: Lethality of Islamic State-claimed attacks
28 December 2018 to 14 May 2020



and degrading enemy morale.³¹ In that sense, notwithstanding these comparatively high levels of activity, which are worryingly close to those that presaged its resurgence in 2012,³² IS-I generally appears to be moving from a (re)

building phase into one that is characterised by brazen guerrilla-style attacks on outlying government forces and its supporters.³³

While the Islamic State's province in Syria (IS-S)

³¹ Knights and Almeida, "Remaining and Expanding," 2020.

³² Ibid.

³³ Mao Tse Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*. Translated by Samuel B. Griffith II. (Baltimore: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1992).

was the second-most active part of its global network, its prospects were starkly different to those of its supporters in Iraq during the same period. Indeed, in the Syrian theatre, its supporters did not appear to experience anything like the period of ascendancy that their Iraqi associates enjoyed in the first half of 2020. Aside from the steep operational uptick that came in response to the Islamic State's announcement of its third global "raid of attrition" in May 2020, Figure II indicates that IS-S's activities steadily declined during the first six months of the year. In terms of its average lethality score, the impact of its operations followed a trajectory similar to that of IS-I, with approximately two kills or casualties being reported for every one attack, which is about half as many as was the case in early May 2019 (Figure III).

This sustained net decline in activity, coupled with the steady decrease in lethality, indicates that IS-S had entered a kinetic status quo, one that saw it engaging in less regular, less impactful attacks than it had done in years. That being said, the fact that it was able to mobilise as markedly as it did during May's "raid of attrition" shows that this new norm is borne of strategic decision as much as anything else.³⁴ Evidently, the Islamic State's residual presence in Syria is significant, and waiting to be mobilised after additional restructuring in the building phase of insurgency.

The ascendance of the Islamic State in West Africa and the Greater Sahara (IS-WA/GS) is well-known,³⁵ but, per these data, its kinetic scale is more striking than is commonly imagined, especially when compared with the prospects of IS-I and IS-S. In terms of raw numbers, IS-WA/GS was the next most active component of the global Islamic State insurgency. Indeed, since the summer of 2019, it has become steadily

more active in a continually expanding theatre of operations. While this trend is interesting, it is IS-WA/GS's average lethality score that is most illuminating. Considered over the course of the period in question, its attacks were four times as impactful as those that were deployed in Iraq and Syria, with some eight kills and casualties being reported per incident.

This impact disparity is down to the fact that IS-WA/GS is fighting in a more advanced stage of insurgency than in Iraq or Syria. This is confirmed by local media reporting as well as the video- and photo-propaganda published by West African/Greater Sahel provinces in recent months, which speaks to the increasingly conventional tenor of its activities.³⁶ Unlike in Iraq and Syria, the mainstay of its operations is not covert tactics like improvised explosives devices and assassinations. Instead, it has been more accustomed to mounting complex offensives against conventional military targets, deploying dozens of militants at a time as well as medium and heavy weapons systems in a manner distinctly reminiscent of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2013/14.³⁷ IS-WA/GS appears to be operating on a different strategic plane than that on which its associates are fighting—except, perhaps, in Mozambique. Instead of seeking to slowly degrade enemy morale and signal to supporters the organisation's mere survival, it is aggressively attacking urban settlements, seizing territory, and advancing towards conventional-style warfare.³⁸

After intense efforts by the government of Afghanistan, its US partners, and even the Taliban to defeat the group in that country by 2019, the Islamic State province in "Khorasan" (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, parts of Central Asia) was markedly less active than other elements of the global network.³⁹ That being

34 See, for example, dynamics identified in Gregory Waters, "Strengthening and expanding: ISIS' central Syria campaign," Center for Global Policy, 19 August 2019. Available at: <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/strengthening-and-expanding-isis-central-syria-campaign/>.

35 See, for example, Nasr, "ISIS in Africa," 2020; Jacob Zenn, "ISIS in Africa: The Caliphate's Next Frontier," Center for Global Policy, 16 May 2020. Available at: <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-africa-the-caliphates-next-frontier/>.

36 See Tomasz Rolbiecki, Pieter van Ostaeyen and Charlie Winter, "The Islamic State's Strategic Trajectory in Africa: Key Takeaways from its Attack Claims," CTC Sentinel, Vol. 13, No. 8 (August 2020). Available at: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/the-islamic-states-strategic-trajectory-in-africa-key-takeaways-from-its-attack-claims/>.

37 See, for example, Associated Press, "20 soldiers, 40 civilians killed in attacks in Nigeria's Borno state," Aljazeera, 14 June 2020. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/14/20-soldiers-40-civilians-killed-in-attacks-nigerias-borno-state>.

38 Rolbiecki, "The Islamic State's strategic trajectory in Africa," 2020.

39 Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Mujib Mashal, "ISIS is losing Afghan territory. That means little for its victims," The New York Times, 2 December 2012. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/02/world/asia/isis-afghanistan-baghdadi.html>.

said, the low frequency of its attacks did not equate to kinetic incapacity, as demonstrated by the high lethality of the operations it deployed from February to May 2020. As Figure II indicates, from November 2019 onwards, there was a significant deceleration in Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) reporting, with just one attack being claimed between December 2019 and February 2020. This correlated with the Afghan government's announcement that it had been defeated. From February through May 2020, though, there was a very slight increase in activity, with 21 operations being reported in the same 12-week period. Notably, at nine kills and casualties per incident, the average lethality score of the province's activities during this period was much higher than any other element of the global network, something that is down to the specific high-casualty orientation of these operations.⁴⁰

Contextualising the current state of play

It is important to place the preceding data into a broader context and, in doing so, provide a more comprehensive picture of the contemporary Islamic State movement. This section begins by providing an historical context to the contemporary trends by presenting attack data from 2008-14. It then outlines how the Islamic State describes its approach to guerrilla warfare with reference to primary sources produced by the Islamic State before highlighting the importance of political, governance, and propaganda efforts as interconnected and mutually reinforcing components of the Islamic State's overall strategy. Together these components offer a nuanced lens through which to understand the Islamic State movement's evolution and project its future transitions to inform strategic

policy decisions.

Historical context

To put the current attack data in historical context, Figure IV (below) tracks Islamic State self-claims (in blue) from 2008 to early 2014.⁴¹ Current Islamic State activity in all provinces are somewhat relatable to its predecessors in Iraq from 2009 through 2011. These are compared to media reported attacks coded using Global Terrorism Database (GTDB) protocols for events (in red)⁴² and attacks causing casualties (in green) among Iraqis as recorded by Iraqi Body Count (IBC).⁴³ Recent comparisons of current activity in Iraq to the level of 2012 is clearly overstated—today's activity does not match the early "Breaking the Walls Campaign" as depicted in Figure IV, according to Islamic State claims. Activity in that breakout year in Iraq with the United States military completely gone was almost three times as much, on average, that we measured in Figure II.⁴⁴ Moreover, the campaign is accelerating at a much slower pace compared to the dramatic increases in 2012-13 that preceded an exponential rise in 2014. Rates of increase are important here, as they build momentum for the group to advance its activities, propaganda, and shadow governance activities into more advanced phases of insurgency.

40 Consider, for example, IS-KP's attack on a Sikh temple in Kabul in March. Emma Graham-Harrison, "Afghanistan: Dozens killed in attack on Kabul Sikh temple," *The Guardian*, 25 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/25/afghanistan-dozens-killed-in-attack-on-kabul-sikh-temple>.

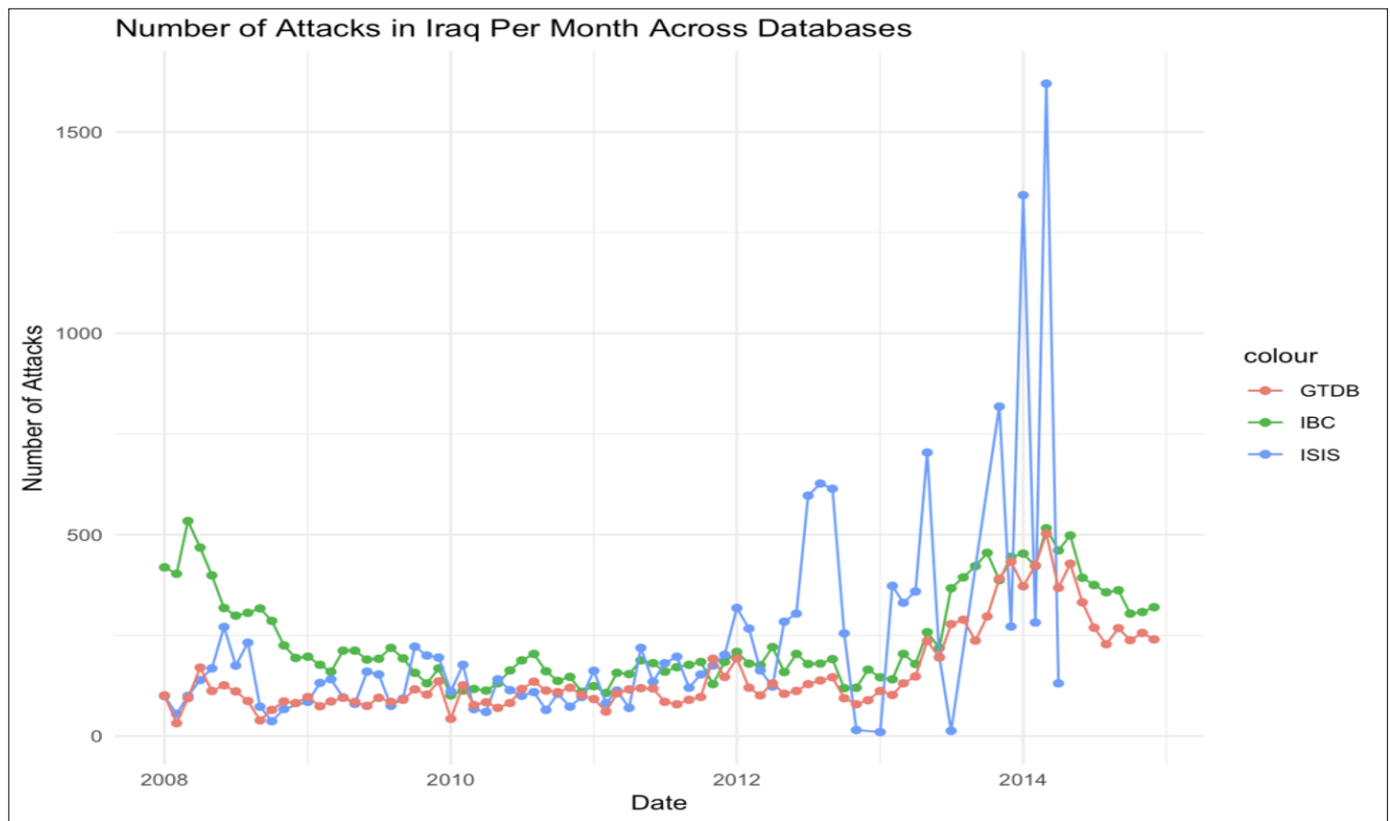
41 Data collected for a project on the rise of the Islamic State, a joint project between researchers at Naval Postgraduate School and the Middlebury Institute for International Studies. The data is derived from Islamic State of Iraq claims during this period in monthly operational reports in the same format, but different distribution system, that the Islamic State uses now.

42 START, "Global Terrorism Database Codebook: Inclusion Criteria and Variables," University of Maryland, (October 2019). Available at: <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf>.

43 "Iraqi Body Count," Iraqi Body Count database. Available at: <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/>, accessed 2016.

44 Souad Mekhennet and Joby Warrick quoting Michael Knights in "The appeal of ISIS faces among Europeans who returned home from Syria," *The Washington Post*, 14 June 2020. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/the-appeal-of-isis-fades-among-europeans-who-returned-home-from-syria/2020/06/14/754b3e0e-acb9-11ea-9063-e69bd6520940_story.html.

Figure IV: Attacks in Iraq from 2008 to early 2014 (ISIS claims versus IBC and GTDB)



Strategic context

The progress of any guerrilla warfare campaign is hard to assess from attack data alone, because the qualitative aspects of the targets and their importance cannot be evaluated from an aggregate of raw data. To make matters more difficult, the Islamic State has published no authoritative doctrine outlining its overall approach to insurgency warfare; at least not in the form of classics like Mao Tse-Tung's *On Guerrilla Warfare*,⁴⁵ Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare*⁴⁶ or even Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin's *A Practical Course for Guerrilla War*.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the Islamic State has been clear about the principles that inform its model of asymmetric warfare, an approach that appears to be highly influenced by these classics, and it infuses these concepts and examples of it in practice throughout its publications, speeches,

doctrine and propaganda materials.⁴⁸ Generally, the Islamic State applies a three-stage approach of first building an organisation with clandestine cells, then increasing guerrilla attacks to expand influence and push incumbent forces out of key rural population centres, and finally transitioning to semi-conventional offensives and seizing and controlling population centres to govern according to Shari'a.⁴⁹ The group describes its operational phases as *nikaya* (guerrilla style stabs); *sawlat* (hit and run) as part of a larger campaign of *istanzaf* (attrition); and *tamkin* (consolidation/political empowerment).⁵⁰ These concepts are central to the Islamic State's *manhaj* (method) and it is in the nuances of how each phase should be conducted and timed that it both distinguishes itself from rivals, such as al-Qaeda, bases its claims of credibility, and influences the activities of its global affiliates.

45 Mao Tse Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 1992.

46 Ernesto Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, (Hawthorne CA: BN Publishing, 2012).

47 Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, "A Practical Course for Guerrilla Warfare," in Norman Cigar, ed., *Al'Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2009).

48 Craig Whiteside, "New Masters of Revolutionary Warfare: The Islamic State Movement (2002-2016)," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (August 2016). Available at: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2016/issue-4/403-new-masters-of-revolutionary-warfare-the-islamic-state-movement-2002-2016-by-craig-whiteside.pdf>.

49 Ibid.

50 Ingram, Whiteside and Winter, *The ISIS Reader*, 2020, pp. 124-134; Hassan Hassan, "Insurgents Again, The Islamic State's Calculated Reversion to Attrition in the Syria-Iraq Border Region and Beyond," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 10, No. 11 (December 2017).

The movement founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi defended his early insurgency strategy from critics (including former mentor al-Maqdisi) that claimed it was all about irritation (*nikaya*) and had no real plans to achieve empowerment (*tamkin*). This is a common critique of an exhaustion strategy that can look like mindless violence if it is not assessed holistically across space and time. Al-Zarqawi urged patience and faith in the overall strategy in an audiotaped speech in 2005 as the group escalated its operations and, the following year, established its first state.⁵¹ Since then, the movement's approach to insurgency has stayed true to this logic, both in the way it looked at the US presence and how it planned on removing rivals from areas it intended to control. However, its language has changed over time. The Islamic State of Iraq's 2009 strategy document — "The Fallujah memorandum" — articulated a "cleansing strategy" of removing "apostate" forces out of key areas to create breathing room for mobility and a higher tempo of operations. It also outlined a careful "targeting strategy" designed to prioritise eliminating highly trained military, intelligence, and political figures in the Iraqi government.⁵²

Ten years later, in 2019, a four-part series in the Islamic State's *al-Naba* newsletter described the logic behind its current strategy having lost control of its territories across Iraq and Syria.⁵³ While the purpose of publishing this primer seemed to be to reassure its supporters that a long and patient strategy would once again achieve *tamkin*, it was also an opportunity to communicate its insurgency doctrine to global supporters and affiliates who face similar asymmetric battles against comparatively more powerful foes. Its authors assessed that in its two central provinces the Islamic State was in the first phase of guerrilla warfare and thus

limited to "fleeting attacks" on government forces in lightly defended areas, once again targeting key security and political leaders with surprise attacks.⁵⁴ Since government forces could not defend everywhere, these attacks would eventually force them to strongpoint their own key locations leaving a greater freedom of manoeuvre to the Islamic State's insurgent cells. To grow the force, *ghanima* (spoils of war) from these raids was a priority with weapons and ammunition to supply its new recruits or to sell in the black market, and private property being captured for resale.⁵⁵

More recently, amidst its May 2020 global 'attrition' campaign, *al-Naba* again articulated its insurgency strategy with the idea of exhaustion at its core. The article, titled 'Except for one manoeuvring for battle, or retreating to [another fighting] company',⁵⁶ presented the religious justification and the strategic context for these types of attacks as a necessity towards achieving *tamkin*. Applying an exhaustion strategy is designed to transform asymmetric weakness to parity and then asymmetric strength. What is especially important in this article is that the authors argue that there is no need to rush the exhaustion phase given that *tamkin* is an inevitable product of its application for both jurisprudential and strategic reasons. The Iraqi Army in Mosul was not reduced by attrition (as least not in the strict military sense) but rather exhausted from years of *niqaya* and the constant state of alert required to counter snipers, explosions, subversion, and perceived hostility from a local population that informed insurgents on their movements. On those occasions when the Iraqi security forces quit the battlefield (e.g. Mosul 2014) it was due to a sudden realisation that their position had become untenable. This death by a thousand cuts exhausts the enemy physically and psychologically, simultaneously weakening

51 Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, "Clarification Of Issues Raised By Sheikh Maqdisi During His Interview With Al-Jazeera Television," audiotape, al-Qaeda Jihad Media Battalion office, 12 July 2005.

52 Ingram, Whiteside and Winter, *The ISIS Reader*, 2020, pp. 126-129.

53 Islamic State, "Bringing Down the Towns Temporarily as a Method of Operation for the Mujahidin," *al-Naba*, No. 179, 25 April 2019. Translated by Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi. Available at: <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/04/islamic-state-insurgent-tactics-translation>.

54 Islamic State, "Bringing Down the Towns Temporarily as a Method of Operation for the Mujahidin," *al-Naba*, No. 181, 9 May 2019. Translated by Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi. Available at: <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/05/islamic-state-insurgent-tactics-translation-2>.

55 Islamic State, "Bringing Down the Towns Temporarily as a Method of Operation for the Mujahidin," *al-Naba*, No. 180, 2 May 2019. Translated by Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi. <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2018/12/islamic-state-insurgent-tactics-translation-1>.

56 Islamic State, "Except for one manoeuvring for battle, or retreating to [another fighting] company," *al-Naba*, No. 236, 28 May 2020. Translated by Sam Heller. Available at: <https://abujamajem.wordpress.com/2020/05/31/the-islamic-state-conceptualizes-guerrilla-warfare/>.

their will and capability. A cumulative campaign with no concrete timeline or milestones, just an underlying logic of patience and sustained attacks in an increasing symphony of violence, is extraordinarily difficult to understand for those amidst this mayhem. Therefore, it is important to provide local partners with an understanding of the logic of the Islamic State's violence to help inform more sustained and targeted strategies to confront it. Of course, violence is only one line of effort in the Islamic State's approach.⁵⁷

As discussed earlier, this style of irregular warfare is a good fit for an organisation with adhocratic traits. It is open ended, decentralised, resourced largely at the lower level, and scales up to include special operations and semi-conventional forces when the situation allows. Many of these units were put together for specific operations, and then disbanded to continue guerrilla warfare, essentially serving as ad hoc task forces.⁵⁸ Some foot soldiers in the Islamic State's *Diwan al-Jund* (Department of Soldiers) began their career in guerrilla cells prior to what they call "the Conquest" (of Mosul), transformed into conventional units during the caliphate period, then dispersed back into desert and mountain enclaves to prepare for the next phase. During the caliphate phase, the *Diwan* consisted of multiple armies differentiated by function and language that worked together in particular fronts in a complex relationship between top leadership and local commanders, that widely varied by location.⁵⁹ Soldiers (and to some extent supporters) have always been part of an organisational culture that has shape-shifted to be whatever the leadership needed it to be, based on the strategic environment.

Politics, governance, and propaganda

It is important to add further nuance to this analytical picture because, while violence is undoubtedly an important measure for assessing the Islamic State, a broader strategic aperture is needed. In addition to violence, three other lines of effort are especially important means by which the Islamic State seeks to control a population and outcompete the politico-military efforts of its adversaries. The first involves the implementation of a top-down political strategy which typically involves reaching out to local authorities and their networks. These activities are designed to be complementary to the Islamic State's use of violence which seeks to undermine, coerce, and ultimately eliminate government and other rival authorities. Such violence must be legitimised carefully according to the group's published doctrine and serve a clear political purpose, even if this is instilling fear in the enemy. At the same time, the positive outcomes of the use of violence (e.g. framed as self-defence for Sunnis against militia predation or pre-emptive strikes) need to be tailored for a diverse audience.

Second are bottom-up governance efforts designed to build relationships or coerce compliance from the local population. These can come in a variety of forms including intelligence gathering, conflict resolution and mediation, the enforcement of laws regulating behaviours in the local population and, of course, the collection of taxes.⁶⁰ Again, such activities are meant to complement the Islamic State's campaigns of violence and top-down political activities. Put simply, the Islamic State uses violence to hamper the

57 Lukas Milevski, "Revisiting J.C. Wylie's Dichotomy of Strategy: The Effects of Sequential and Cumulative Patterns of Operations," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2012), pp. 223-242.

58 Craig Whiteside, Ian Rice and Daniele Raineri, "Black Ops: Islamic State and Innovation in Irregular Warfare," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2019.

59 Craig Whiteside, et al., "The ISIS Files: The Islamic State's Department of Soldiers," George Washington University Program on Extremism, forthcoming 2020.

60 For example, see, Danielle F. Jung, Jacob N. Shapiro, Jon Wallace and Pat Ryan, "Managing a Transnational Insurgency: The Islamic State of Iraq's 'Paper Trail', 2005-2010," Harmony Project, Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point, 16 December 2014. Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/managing-a-transnational-insurgency-the-islamic-state-of-iraqs-paper-trail-2005-2010/>; Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "The Evolution in Islamic State Administration," 2015; Eric Robinson, Daniel Eger, Patrick B. Johnston, Sean Mann, Alexander D. Rothenberg and David Stebbins, "When the Islamic State Comes to Town: The Economic Impact of Islamic State Governance in Iraq and Syria," (RAND Corporation, 2017). Available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1970.html; Hassan Hassan, "ISIS in Iraq and Syria: Rightsizing the Current 'Comeback'," Center for Global Policy, 12 May 2020. Available at: <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-iraq-and-syria-rightsizing-the-current-comeback/>.

political and governance efforts of its rivals as it then seeks to fill that void (which it exacerbated, if not helped to create) with its own governance initiatives and outreach to potential political allies. To only appreciate the Islamic State's governance efforts during those fleeting periods of success when it controlled territory and formalized its bureaucracy (i.e. 2006-07 and 2014-16), completely misses potentially years of largely covert grassroots engagements that established the foundations for those times of more conventional success.

The Islamic State's targeting of Sunni tribal *Sahwa* (Awakening movement) due to their collaboration with Coalition forces prior to 2011 and violation of religious mandates to fight against the occupation is a good example of how the Islamic State synchronises its strategies of violence, politics and governance.⁶¹ By targeting the *Sahwa*, the Islamic State created the political and psychosocial conditions in which tribes perceived it to be in their self-interests to partner with the Islamic State through 2013-15.⁶² The Islamic State's efforts to eliminate the *Sahwa* not only nullified a physical threat but a rival Sunni governance mechanism which it looked to replace with their own shadow government. Of course, at the heart of its multi-year anti-*Sahwa* efforts was a propaganda campaign designed to reshape how its potential supporter base (i.e. Sunni Muslims) perceived both historical and future Awakening efforts. This influence effort was experimental at first, testing failed narrative after failed narrative on counter-*Sahwa* targeting until it found one that resonated with the audience and was acceptable to the leadership — a technique successful propagandists have frequently used.⁶³

Throughout its multi-decade history, propaganda has played a central role in the Islamic State's approach to war, politics and governance.⁶⁴ There has been a tendency to see the propaganda produced by violent extremists as inherently deceptive in its strategic and operational purposes. Yet messaging is an important means by which groups like the Islamic State persuade its audiences and so accuracy in messaging is important for projecting credibility. Analysing the propaganda output from the Islamic State's official sources can provide important insights into where the group perceives itself to be strategically in different locations but also how it is planning to evolve into the future. This is especially important when the Islamic State movement seeks to demonstrate the credibility and the divine sanctity of its *manhaj*. One important way that the Islamic State seeks to project its credibility over time is to deploy messages that are designed to prepare its supporters for strategic transitions in its military, political and governance campaigns. For example, in al-Adnani's final speech in 2016, he warned of the group's decline and reminded supporters that commitment to the Islamic State's cause was far more important than material losses.⁶⁵ Indeed, throughout its history, the Islamic State has been remarkably frank both within its ranks and with its broader supporter base underscoring the importance of propaganda analysis as a means to track and project its operational and strategic transitions.

Propaganda may also be a means for the Islamic State to create a common language of purpose (or at least project that perception) across its transnational branches. This may be especially important for facilitating operational and strategic consistency across its global enterprise. For example, the Islamic State

61 Craig Whiteside, "Nine Bullets for the Traitors, One for the Enemy: The Slogans and Strategy behind the Islamic State's Campaign to Defeat the Sunni Awakening (2006- 2017)," ICCT, (September 2018). Available at: <https://icct.nl/publication/nine-bullets-for-the-traitors-one-for-the-enemy-the-slogans-and-strategy-behind-the-islamic-states-campaign-to-defeat-the-sunni-awakening-2006-2017/>.

62 Fishman, "Dysfunction & Decline," 2009; Craig Whiteside and Anas Elallame, "Accidental Ethnographers: the Islamic State's Tribal Engagement Experiment," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (February 2020). Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09592318.2020.1713529?scroll=top&needAccess=true&journalCode=fswi20>.

63 Whiteside, "Nine Bullets for the Traitors, One for the Enemy," 2018.

64 Charlie Winter, "Redefining 'Propaganda': The Media Strategy of the Islamic State," *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 165, No. 1 (March 2020). Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071847.2020.1734321>; Haroro J. Ingram, "The strategic logic of Islamic State's full-spectrum propaganda," in Stephane J. Baele, Katharine A. Boyd and Travis G. Coan, eds., *ISIS Propaganda*, (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2020). Available at: <https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780190932459.001.0001/oso-9780190932459-chapter-2>.

65 Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside and Charlie Winter, "Defining success and failure," in Ingram, Whiteside and Winter, *The ISIS Reader*, 2020, pp. 215-225.

uses terms like ‘attrition’, ‘harvesting’ and ‘breaking the walls’ as means to not only project commitment in the application of its *manhaj* and consistency in its use of branding to facilitate that perception but also to synchronise activities across its transnational enterprise. This also helps to transfer some of the legacy of success from its campaign to win a caliphate in Iraq and Syria in 2014 to the long campaigns ahead in Africa, Asia and other parts of the Middle East. Consider, for example, the global *ghazwat al-istinzaf* (‘battles of attrition’) campaigns that are periodically deployed by the Islamic State. Usually, these manifest in a steep operational intensification for its cells in Syria and Iraq, with a less pronounced acceleration for those based outside of its core territories. Crucially, during these campaigns, which usually last about ten days, all Islamic State attacks — wherever they are, whoever they target, and however impactful they manage to be — are given the same linguistic tagline, “and during the battle of attrition.” This slight tweak to the regular attack reporting format has the effect of presenting the full range of the Islamic State’s affiliates around the world as a strategically coherent, tactically coordinated whole, even if the organisational reality within the Islamic State’s transnational enterprise is very different.

Somewhat paradoxically, the Islamic State media office is the most centralised aspect of the movement, with its leaders maintaining tight control over all Islamic State messaging — including outlying provinces that are in all other aspects loosely managed by the Delegated Committee.⁶⁶ Within the media department, however, the group has tightly integrated security, Shari’a, and administrative aspects of the larger organisation to jointly

operate a clandestine unit with virtual offices around the world securing, moving, vetting, and disseminating information. This is very different from its imitation of a traditional organisational chart for its internal media structure back in 2007.⁶⁷ This adhocatic solution to camouflaging its high-profile and still productive media department is further enhanced by the existence of an online ecosystem filled by volunteers that takes its direction from the central management.⁶⁸

A framework for confrontation

Throughout its history the Islamic State movement has benefitted from underestimations and misunderstandings by its adversaries, especially during those periods of decline when targeted and sustained pressure would have blunted its ability to recuperate. The contemporary Islamic State finds itself, yet again, as an insurgency in Iraq and Syria but with provinces across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia now offering the movement strategic depth, stretching the focus of its adversaries, and providing almost endless fodder of operations and narratives for its much-vaunted central media units. Within the Islamic State’s orbit, it claims that its creed of perpetual war can only be realised by applying the phased politico-military strategy captured in its *manhaj* in an effort that is jurisprudentially justified as an obligation in its *aqeeda*. All the while, the adhocatic traits that characterise its organisation give it the flexibility to adapt as strategic conditions change. Comprehensively degrading the transnational threat posed by the Islamic State’s global adhocatic insurgency requires a sustainable posture that will need to

66 Whiteside, “Lighting the Path,” 2016.

67 Islamic State of Iraq, “Two charts displaying the Administrative Structure of the Media Center for the Western Region,” Reference Number: NMEC 2007-633658 (Harmony Document, captured in 2007), Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point archives. Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/harmony-program/two-charts-displaying-the-administrative-structure-of-the-media-center-for-the-western-region-original-language/>. Despite this conventionality, the fact that the central media office in 2007 subordinated its al-Furqan Media (its strategic communications platform then and now) under the future caliph al-Mawla—the Shari’i in Mosul and several layers below the central management of the group in 2007—demonstrates an early example of the adhocatic trait that we discuss in this paper. See Daniel Milton, “The al-Mawla TIRs: An Analytical Discussion with Cole Bunzel, Haroro Ingram, Gina Ligon, and Craig Whiteside,” CTC Sentinel, Vol. 13, No. 9 (September 2020). Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-al-mawla-tirs-an-analytical-discussion-with-cole-bunzel-haroro-ingram-gina-ligon-and-craig-whiteside/>.

68 Bennett Clifford and Helen Powell, “Encrypted Extremism, Inside the English-Speaking Islamic State Ecosystem on Telegram,” Program on Extremism, The George Washington University, June 2019; Chelsea Daymon and Meili Criezis, “Pandemic Narratives: Pro-Islamic State Media and the Coronavirus,” CTC Sentinel, Vol. 13, No. 6 (June 2020); Charlie Winter and Jade Parker, “Virtual Caliphate Rebooted: The Islamic State’s Evolving Online Strategy,” Lawfare, 7 January 2018. Available at: <https://www.lawfareblog.com/virtual-caliphate-rebooted-islamic-states-evolving-online-strategy>.

be proportional, methodical, and strategically calibrated to undermine the Islamic State's strengths and exploit its weaknesses. Based on the preceding analysis, we propose a four-pillar strategic framework.

Pillar 1: An archipelagic counter-strategy

The application of a strategy to affect a global insurgency is difficult to grasp, as insurgencies have almost exclusively worked in national contexts and, even then, typically isolated to certain pockets of activity. Too often, the idea of combating this global threat has been used polemically to conjure the imaginary threat of the spread of “radical Islam.” This conflates the many complex political threads of Islamists and extremists, who often fight each other, into a monolith that does not exist. But the Islamic State, like its rival al-Qaeda, is a very specific threat that has conducted a dramatic expansion since the declaration of its caliphate. Like insurgencies within a state, the group seeks to build on its narrative as the legitimate leaders of a global effort to create safe spots for the implementation of its unique (and extreme) version of Islamic governance in places around the globe that are receptive to its ideology and where its *manhaj* can be applied in the field. Mackinlay envisioned almost two decades ago that a more interconnected world would make this kind of archipelagic insurgency possible.⁶⁹ These islands of *tamkin* would not be physically connected but exist in a common construct defined and championed by the Islamic State itself via the exploitation of its global adhocratic enterprise. By adopting the movement's *aqeeda* and *manhaj*, its affiliates will leverage the Islamic State brand and, assuming its activities reflect the group's *manhaj*, will enjoy global notoriety when its propagandists project its local struggle as a global and cosmic one.

The Islamic State will look different in different locations, and partner assistance to countries combatting the group will need to reflect this. For some partners, the jihadist threat

is existential (e.g. Iraq) while for others it is secondary to more pressing threats (e.g. the Philippines). The Islamic State is a global threat, but it will be defeated community by community, street by street, and house by house.⁷⁰ While military and intelligence support will be important for some partner nations facing a direct military threat, what is needed in every country with an Islamic State affiliate is the training of local units across different sectors (civilian government, military, and civil society) specialised in Islamic State strategies who operate at the grassroots community level and take their applied knowledge and adapt it to local nuances. Overall, these efforts will need to be guided by an all-encompassing logic that seeks to:

- degrade the Islamic State's primary exports to global affiliates
- exploit weaknesses inherent to adhocratic organisations
- salt the earth to prevent legacy-based resurgences

It is important to briefly outline the rationale and implications for each of these pillars.

Pillar 2: Degrade the Islamic State's primary exports

The Islamic State's *aqeeda* and *manhaj* are arguably the primary exports to its transnational network. After all, it is the adoption of these guiding principles by its local affiliates, along with their pledge to the caliph, that qualifies them to be officially associated with the Islamic State brand and their application of it in the field that attracts the attention of the Islamic State's central media units. The appeal of the Islamic State's strategic approach has been exponentially boosted by its demonstration through 2014-2016 that its *manhaj* can be successful, perhaps especially so compared to al-Qaeda.⁷¹ At the heart of the Islamic State's approach are the following core principles:

- the discriminant deployment of violence

69 John Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago: From Mao to Bin Laden* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

70 This follows Kilcullen's logic of disaggregation in his previous writings on al-Qaeda's global insurgency, see Kilcullen, “Countering Global Insurgency,” 2007.

71 Ingram, Whiteside and Winter, *The ISIS Reader*, 2020, p. 37.

is a powerful tool not only for tactical and operational ends but to shape its strategic environment;

- the imperative of building governance capacity not only to control the population but demonstrate both the efficacy of its agenda and its divine sanctity;
- implementing a political strategy that builds on (exploits) local ethno-tribal structures as a means to ingratiate with the population and, overtime, transform perceptions of the group; and,
- a respect for the power of propaganda to broadcast its political goals, support narratives, and amplify its battlefield progress when winning, and generate hope and faith when it is losing.⁷²

These core principles are transmitted to Islamic State's provinces for adoption (and adaption) into local strategies.⁷³ Consequently, there will be a broad commonality of strategies and operational trends across the Islamic State's transnational enterprise. While its affiliates may seek to import and adopt the Islamic State's strengths, they are also importing and adopting its vulnerabilities. To give local actors the best chance at devising a sustainable, proactive and nuanced approach to confronting the Islamic State's affiliates, it will be essential to provide training to government, military, and civil society sectors in the Islamic State's strategies especially its *aqeeda* and *manhaj*. By exposing select local specialists to the Islamic State's campaign approaches, this strategic literacy training helps to reduce the sense of confusion and surprise that can delay the development and implementation of effective strategies. Furthermore, an understanding of Islamic State strategies can help locals to devise not only locally nuanced defensive counter-strategies but proactive efforts designed to put local pro-Islamic State actors on the backfoot.⁷⁴

Following the overarching logic of the archipelagic approach, the more that each Islamic State affiliate is being weakened by local government, military, and civil society actors, the more these efforts will help to cumulatively degrade the Islamic State's brand. The Islamic State's brand is built on projecting credibility and trust to its members and supporters. Undermining the credibility of the Islamic State will, in turn, erode trust across its ranks. A simple, yet highly effective, way to degrade the credibility of the Islamic State's brand is to use action and messaging that is designed to expose and highlight the gap between what the Islamic State says and what it actually does. After all, a say-do gap is a credibility gap and it is a messaging approach that can potentially be leveraged by a range of different messengers in a variety of thematic ways. For example, while civil society actors might focus on the say-do gaps of local pro-Islamic State actors, religious scholars can focus on jurisprudential discrepancies in Islamic State ideology, and western strategic communications can highlight say-do gaps across the Islamic State's transnational enterprise. Of course, Islamic State's credibility gaps are best accentuated by ensuring that those working to counter the Islamic State are narrowing their own say-do gaps by effectively synchronising their actions and messaging.

The US Government's release of replacement caliph Amir Muhammad al-Mawla's tactical interrogation reports from his 2008 detention in Iraq is a timely and good example of attacking the credibility of Islamic State leaders.⁷⁵ Leadership transitions are critical milestones for organisational survival, which is why leader targeting is a frequently used counter-terrorism tool. A year on from the killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the group's global ambitions have survived. There was a great chance that affiliates would use the collapse of the caliphate and the death of the caliph to decide

72 For more on these principles, see this interview: Joel Wing, "The Enduring Principles and Strategies Of The Islamic State: Interview With Authors Of The ISIS Reader: Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside and Charlie Winter," Musings On Iraq, 24 June 2020. Available at: <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/2020/06/the-enduring-principles-and-strategies.html>.

73 One example of this two-way relationship are the development of the provinces in West Africa and East Asia, see Jacob Zenn, "The Islamic State's Provinces on the Peripheries: Juxtaposing the Pledges from Boko Haram in Nigeria and Abu Sayyaf and Maute Group in the Philippines," Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2019).

74 The authors have extensive experience providing this type of in-field support in various locations.

75 Daniel Milton and Muhammad al-'Ubaydi, "Stepping out from the Shadows: The Interrogation of the Islamic State's Future Caliph," CTC Sentinel, Vol. 13, No. 9 (September 2020). Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/stepping-out-from-the-shadows-the-interrogation-of-the-islamic-states-future-caliph/>.

to go their own way, and yet almost no one did. The organisation had prepared for this possibility, and one of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's last public speeches was designed to present the caliph position as the legitimate director of the global enterprise.⁷⁶

Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi was presented with little identification other than his kunya (with a link to the Prophet's tribe and clan) and the briefest of biographies indicating he was a veteran of the war against the Americans (prior to 2011) and was religiously trained. The deliberate opaqueness serves a purpose, to ensure that ties to the organisation are not personal but a recognition of the power of the Shura council to pick the best leader for the global movement — that is, it is geared towards reinforcing the movement's legitimacy of the institution not the cult of personality.⁷⁷ The fact that Islamic State West Africa province leadership chose to publish a short book outlining why their original pledge to the Islamic State should continue despite the collapse of the caliphate explains both the logic of staying in a global alliance while reinforcing the perception of legitimacy of the caliph position, and how the Islamic State has handled its leadership succession.⁷⁸

Despite successfully navigating these difficult shoals, there is still some danger for the group with its unknown leader who has yet to give a public appearance. First, he has been publicly identified by the United States as Muhammad abd al-Rahman al-Mawla, which gives the Islamic State's enemies the opportunity to shape what little is known about the leader. Previous attempts to identify leaders of the Islamic State were ham-fisted and backfired, and this should be avoided unless the information that is available can be verified with a high degree of confidence. There exists a vocal group of dissenters that could be amplified, and they are known to be critics of the new leader, assuming his identity is correct. Al-Mawla's

personal background as a self-proclaimed Arab from a mixed Turkmen/Arab area of Northern Iraq makes his claim of Quraysh lineage more complex than those of others (like Abu Bakr's claim through the more prominent al-Badri), and these kind of cracks can be picked at.⁷⁹ Al-Mawla's remaining prison records could be released, and any other information that makes it more likely that he will be recognised, found, or discredited.⁸⁰ While American government information operations targeting the new caliph will not directly undermine the Islamic State's legitimacy, certainly jihadi rivals are watching and will likely use this in other ways to achieve the same end.

Pillar 3: Exploit weaknesses inherent to adhocracies

As highlighted earlier, adhocratic organisations tend to be susceptible to several vulnerabilities. Three are especially significant. First, adhocracies rely heavily on communications to maintain their strategic and organisational coherence. For the Islamic State, this involves the use of communication technologies but also liaison personnel.⁸¹ It is also worth noting that while much of this communication is necessarily covert, the messaging from the Islamic State's central media units is also a means by which it communicates with its affiliates and broader supporter base. This highlights the importance of maintaining pressure across all the Islamic State's communications — online and offline, covert and overt — as a means to exploit a vulnerability that will exacerbate its other weaknesses.

Adhocracies are also susceptible to internal competition and ideological extremism on its fringes. The Islamic State has been susceptible to fracturing within its ranks especially concerning the appropriate application of its *manhaj* and differing interpretations of the appropriate jurisprudential interpretation of

76 "The Guerrilla Caliph," in Ingram, Whiteside and Winter, *The ISIS Reader*, 2020, pp. 293-301; Milton, "The al-Mawla TIRs," 2020.

77 Haroro J. Ingram and Craig Whiteside, "Caliph Abu Unknown: Succession and Legitimacy in the Islamic State," *War on the Rocks*, 25 November 2019. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2019/11/caliph-abu-unknown-succession-and-legitimacy-in-the-islamic-state/>.

78 Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The 'Boko Haram' Allegiance Pledge to Islamic State: An Ansar al-Shari'a Tunisia Connection," Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, 8 August 2018. Available at: <http://www.aymennjawad.org/21476/the-boko-haram-allegiance-pledge-to-islamic-state>.

79 Milton, "Stepping out from the Shadows," 2020.

80 Precedence for this can be found in the release of Kataib Hezbollah leader Qais Khazali's interrogation reports in 2018, AEI "The Qayis Khazali Papers," AEI.org. Available at: <https://www.aei.org/the-qayis-al-khazali-papers/>.

81 Al-Hashimi, "Interview: ISIS's Abdul Nasser Qardash," 2020.

takfir and its implications.⁸² These tensions within the Islamic State will be exacerbated by breakdowns in communication across the organisation and the effects of defeats in the field on morale.

Finally, adhocracies can sometimes attempt to hastily transition as an organisation. For the purposes of this study, the issue of hastiness is perhaps secondary to the transition itself. The Islamic State remains in a period of organisational transition as it moves from a state-like bureaucratic hierarchy into a uniform insurgency in Iraq and Syria managing a transnational enterprise. History demonstrates that the Islamic State can cyclically build and rebuild its organisation as it moves up and down the phases of its politico-military strategy. Periods of transition are times of vulnerability for any organisation but especially those with adhoc traits. This highlights the importance of maintaining pressure on the Islamic State in the variety of different ways outlined in this paper.

Pillar 4: Salt the earth to prevent legacy-based resurgences

The Islamic State tends to re-emerge in locations where it has had previous success. While returning to locations that are known and where previous networks were forged certainly contributes to this trend, the Islamic State often plays upon nostalgia to re-write the history of its occupations to sow the psychosocial seeds for a return. It is a strategy that tends to resonate when central government efforts to rehabilitate and develop these communities have failed in the aftermath of the Islamic State's removal. There is a compounding dynamic that emerges in which the failure of rehabilitation efforts and resentments towards the central authorities (e.g. the national government) for their perceived failings increases susceptibility to the Islamic State's legacy appeals. In such

contexts, civil society plays a crucial role in offering communities an alternative to pro-Islamic State and other violent extremist actors. It is vital that civil society groups actually living in vulnerable communities develop an understanding of Islamic State strategies and use this to devise nuanced, grassroots, local campaigns to defensively and proactively pushback against legacy-based resurgence efforts.⁸³

Summary

The challenge of keeping focus on the Islamic State threat has been made considerably more difficult by the pivot of many nations, especially in the west, towards great power competition. Yet maintaining pressure on the Islamic State, especially as described here, is not mutually exclusive towards those broader strategic aims. Indeed, supporting fragile partner nations in their efforts to deal with the Islamic State threat – whether across the Middle East (e.g. Iraq), Africa (e.g. Nigeria, Congo, Mozambique), or Asia (e.g. Philippines) – should be a means to strengthen partnerships in geopolitically important locations. Indeed, the archipelagic approach to countering the Islamic State can be a means to strengthen the fronts against Russian and Chinese influence.

Conclusion

The ability of the Islamic State to survive the loss of its caliph and caliphate in the last two years is readily apparent to most, even those rightfully interested in leaving this behind to focus on greater threats to global stability and peace. The political and military defeat of the caliphate project, as successful a cooperative effort the globe has seen in recent years, has obscured the trends easily seen in the data we present and compare with many others in this paper. The Islamic State's effort to globalise has been just as successful, and the trends look

82 Abu al-Faruq al-Masri, "1437AH, Message on the Manhaj," Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, 31 October 2016. Translated by Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi. Available at: www.aymennjawad.org/19341/dissent-in-the-islamic-state-abu-al-faruq-al; "Dissent in the Islamic State's Yemen Affiliates: Documents, Translation & Analysis," 29 February 2016. Translated by Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi. Available at: www.aymennjawad.org/2016/02/dissent-in-the-islamic-state-yemen-affiliates; Cole Bunzel, "Ideological infighting in the Islamic State," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (February 2019). Available at: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2019/issue-1/bunzel.pdf>.

83 Omar Mohammed, "Exposing Terror, Building Resilience: Harnessing Citizen Journalists and Social Media to Confront Terrorism", *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, 29 September 2020. Available at: <https://gnet-research.org/2020/09/29/exposing-terror-building-resilience-harnessing-citizen-journalists-and-social-media-to-confront-terrorism/>.

poor for those interested in stability and peace in countries across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia dealing with various manifestations of this threat. While global cooperation will be essential to ensure that the Islamic State threat is confronted wherever it emerges, it does not necessarily require investments by western nations, especially the United States, on the scale of the last two decades. At least, it does not have to.

What we have attempted to outline here are the broad parameters for a strategy to confront the Islamic State's global insurgencies that is based on a nuanced understanding of the threat. It is why pressure needs to be maintained across those key theatres to ensure, in outcompeting the Islamic State on military, political, governance and propaganda grounds, it is unable to strategically and organisationally transition. The Islamic State will be presented with opportunities – whether through its own actions or the missteps of adversaries – that it will seek to exploit but even then, there will be risks that can be leveraged. Equally, potential opportunities will emerge to strike decisively at the Islamic State but they, too, will have risks that need to be considered. By transforming the paradigm from 'defeat' to 'outcompete', a more realistic and sustainable posture that emphasises the role of global partners will be necessary. The Islamic State is a problem that cannot be wished away by being ignored nor willed away by a refocusing on great power competition.

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Funding in Place: Local Financing Trends Behind Today's Global Terrorist Threat

Katherine Bauer and Matthew Levitt

Abstract

Over the last decade, the terror finance landscape has changed dramatically. The proliferation of un- or under-governed spaces has allowed terrorist organisations to exploit local populations and resources to support their operations. Together with a trend toward self-radicalised lone actors and self-financed individuals or small cells, this has led to a discernible trend toward localised terrorist financing, or funding in place. As a result, some now call into question the value of traditional tools used to counter the financing of terrorism (CFT). Such critiques typically focus on the ineffectiveness of financial sanctions against territory-controlling terrorist organisation and/or the difficulty financial institutions face in identifying and flagging terror-related transactions. However, the idea that the focus of counter-terrorist financing efforts is primarily on tracking the movement of funds through banks accounts and investigating reports of suspicious activity is false. Rather, CFT broadly includes strategic efforts to protect the integrity of the financial system from exploitation through standard-setting and diplomatic outreach; identification of emerging threats and typologies and international cooperation. Likewise, the use of financial activity by intelligence and law enforcement to track and analyse terrorist activity –so-called “financial intelligence”—extends well beyond bank-filed suspicious transaction reports.

In this study, the authors examine current trends in localised terrorist financing and the counter-terrorist financing tools available to deal with this shift away from transnational to more local financing. Specifically, how geography, ideology and a host of other practical concerns shape the manner in which terrorists raise, store and move funds. The study examines the various means terrorists use to move money, both tried and true methods, as well as emerging trends; how terrorist financing is not only a factor of cash money, but also of resourcing the materials a terrorist group requires; and the re-emergence of the abuse of charities as a CFT concern. Ultimately, they conclude that the underlying principles that have guided anti-money laundering and counter-terror finance strategies to date – such as standard-setting, information sharing and international cooperation – remain effective even in the face of these new challenges.

Keywords: countering terrorist financing, al-Qaeda, terrorism, financing, charities, anti-money laundering, financial system, homegrown extremists, cryptocurrencies

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At first, al-Qaeda financed its far-flung affiliate groups much as a venture capitalist might provide seed money for its start-up businesses. Later, as global counter-terrorism efforts began to take their toll and core al-Qaeda fell on hard times, the group's affiliates sent funds back to al-Qaeda leadership — a reverse directional flow that foreshadowed the group's declining prospects. Today, terrorist groups and their followers tend to follow a simpler model that is less reliant on funding from far-off places: funding in place. These groups still need to move money and need to find ways to plug into the global economy, but their funding models are more local than global, even as they leverage forces of globalisation to their advantage.

Jurisdictional distinction and funding in place

Time and again the now old adage has proven true: by following the money, both governments and the private sector — from law enforcement and intelligence services to banks and other financial institutions — have helped thwart attacks, disrupt illicit networks, and constrict the environment within which terrorist operatives and groups operate. Of course, terrorist threats persist, and the nature of these strategic threats continues to evolve even in the face of tactical successes such as countering terrorist financing. Financial tools alone cannot solve the threat of terrorism, but they have proven to be especially effective at mitigating such threats by making it harder for terrorists to carry out their activities.¹

But over the last decade, the terror finance landscape has changed dramatically. Sometimes a product of necessity, oftentimes of opportunity, terrorists have developed new ways to raise and move money. At the same time, they have also reverted to historically tried and true funding and transfer methods, including some — like abuse of charity — that authorities had effectively curtailed for a period

of time but later re-emerged as global events enabled their return. Today, following the money takes investigators down many paths, some familiar and others entirely new.

In part, this phenomenon is the product of globalisation and the advent of new technologies that facilitate the mobilisation and movement of people, goods and ideas — as well as the raising and transfer of funds — around the world. But when it comes to terrorist financing, an even greater factor contributing to this phenomenon is localisation. Terrorist groups today are much more likely to self-finance or fund-in-place than seek financial support from far off benefactors. When they do seek far-flung donors, these are typically secondary or auxiliary rather than primary financing sources. Again, this phenomenon is both a factor of necessity (counter-terrorism measures and intelligence tools that complicate international funding streams) and opportunity (control of territory and the ability to inspire followers to finance acts of individual or small-group terrorism of their own). Even groups that enjoy significant state-sponsorship, of the kind that Lebanese Hezbollah receives from Iran, sometimes find that events (the maximum pressure campaign targeting Iran, the drop in the price of oil, and the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic) force them to diversify their financial portfolios and develop their own means of raising funds (in Hezbollah's case, largely criminal enterprises).²

Nearly two decades after 9/11, jurisdictional distinction — the particular means of raising, storing, transferring, and accessing funds most easily available in any given location — may best help explain why terrorists engage in one type of terrorist financing scheme over another.

The breakdown of political systems and the proliferation of un- and under-governed spaces have allowed terrorist organisations to increasingly control territory, creating a unique funding opportunity based on taxing and extorting local populations, extracting and

¹ Katherine Bauer and Matthew Levitt, "Can Bankers Fight Terrorism? What You Get When You Follow the Money," Foreign Affairs, November/December 2017. Available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2017-10-16/can-bankers-fight-terrorism>, accessed 11 November 2020.

² Matthew Levitt "The Lebanese Hizbullah Financing Threat in Europe," Research Briefing No. 1, Project CRAFT, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), (April 2020). Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-lebanese-hizbullah-financing-threat-in-europe>, accessed 11 November 2020.

selling natural resources, and even selling rights to dig for antiquities in specific plots of land. Terrorist organisations have also capitalised on globalisation, which has facilitated ever-greater movement of ideas, people, and funds.

As groups have moved propaganda online, the trend toward self-radicalised lone actors and self-financed individuals or small cells has led some to call into question the value of combating the financing of terrorism (CFT). Many of these critiques focus on the difficulty financial institutions face in identifying and flagging terror-related transactions, as well as ineffectiveness of financial sanctions against territory-controlling terrorist organisation. However, the idea that the focus of counter-terrorist financing efforts is primarily tracking the movement of funds through bank accounts and investigating reports of suspicious activity is a misconception. Rather, CFT broadly includes strategic efforts to protect the integrity of the financial system from exploitation through standard-setting, diplomatic outreach, identification of emerging threats and typologies, and international cooperation. Likewise, “financial intelligence” – a term used by policymakers, law enforcement and intelligence authorities – extends well beyond bank-filed suspicious transaction reports.

The tools available to combat terrorist financing were never intended to defeat terrorism, but rather to disrupt terrorist networks and deny them the funding necessary to carry out their activities. Even here, such tools will always be more effective when employed as part of a larger strategy in tandem with other military, diplomatic, law enforcement and intelligence tools rather than instead of these.

In this paper we lay out the importance of jurisdictional distinction as a key element explaining the fundamental shift in terrorist financing trends away from international financing plots and toward localised funding in place. Such models are not mutually exclusive, but we demonstrate here that what started out as a shift in directional flow of international terrorist financing – from funds al-Qaeda core providing funds to actors abroad, to al-Qaeda affiliates and followers sending funds back to a financially depleted al-Qaeda core leadership – has expanded into an identifiable trend

focused on raising funds more locally.

On top of that, globalisation and the communications revolution has ushered in a complimentary trend where groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda need not recruit, train, fund and dispatch their own operatives when they can reach across borders through social media and communications applications to inspire lone actors to act on their own. These inspired plots cost the groups themselves nothing, and because they are typically low-cost attacks they can be self-financed by the inspired lone-actors through their own funds, small-scale criminal activities, otherwise licit financial loans, or similar self-driven efforts to secure small amounts of money needed for low-tech and low-cost operations.

Deciding how to raise, store, move, or access terrorist funds is also a factor of a group’s ideology, its geography and a host of other practical, even banal concerns. Does a group control territory? Does it prioritise independence over the benefits of state-sponsorship? Are there particular illicit financing activities available to a group by virtue of where it is located? Such considerations also contribute to the increase in localised terrorist financing activities.

Despite this trend, however, terrorists still need to move money and increasingly do so through informal banking and value transfer systems. Funds may be raised locally, but they sometimes have to be sent elsewhere, for example to pay for weapons or other resources. Banks are still used, especially by front organisations, but we explain that when terrorist groups need to move money they increasingly do so through Money Service Businesses, informal value transfer systems like hawalas and, in a trend just now beginning to gain traction, through virtual currencies.

Increasingly, counter-terrorism authorities are recognising that terrorist financing is not only a factor of cash money, but of resourcing the materials a terrorist group needs. In this regards, procurement plays an important role in the resourcing of terrorist groups. From the Islamic State to Hezbollah, groups now spend significant time, effort and resources procuring explosive material and other weapons. This,

too, factors into the trend toward funding in place we describe here.

Finally, we explore the return of abuse of charity as a CFT concern. Following post 9/11 crackdowns on the abuse of charity, this fell out of favour as a preferred illicit finance typology for terrorist groups. But with the advent of the war in Syria and other conflicts across the Middle East and North Africa, abuse of charity has once again become a terrorist vulnerability – and one intimately tied to our theme of localised funding in place.

Given this trend toward local terrorist financing, the paper concludes with a discussion about potential policy prescriptions to address this shift in terrorist financing trends.

From shifting directional flows to funding in place

Counter-terrorist financing efforts post-9/11 were predicated on two principles. First, although the cost of an individual attack may be small, terrorist organisations rely on a steady flow of funds to support operational costs such as salaries, training, transportation, and even recruitment. Second, understanding how a terrorist organisation manages its assets is critical to depriving the organisation of funds and disrupting its activities in the long term.³

While these principles remain valid, the CFT regime stood up post-9/11 was designed primarily to counter an organisation – al-Qaeda – that largely relied on external donations and exploiting charitable organisations and the formal financial system to raise and move funds.⁴ For terrorist groups, this dependence represented a considerable vulnerability to detection and disruption by law enforcement

and intelligence agencies. Targeted financial sanctions were deployed to block assets, publicly expose financiers and facilitators, and deter potential deep pocket donors. Furthermore, these targeted measures were demonstrations of multilateral and international resolve. While other tools in the counter-terrorism toolkit, such as counter-radicalisation, are generational and operations are most often clandestine, targeted financial sanctions represented an immediate and public response to the terrorist threat.

They were also largely effective. Whereas al-Qaeda's annual budget was estimated to be roughly \$30 million prior to 9/11, by 2004, it had fallen to a few million dollars a year; by 2010, al-Qaeda core's annual budget was estimated to be less than \$1 million.⁵ Indeed, in 2005 the deputy leader of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, sent a letter to the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, asking for money and noting that "many of the lines [of financing] had been cut off. Because of this we need a payment..."⁶

The rise of a reverse-directional flow of money going from al-Qaeda affiliates toward the increasingly impoverished core precipitated decentralisation within al-Qaeda.⁷ Along with the decline in funding came a "general weakening of the hierarchical relationship between the core and the affiliates," according to former Treasury Undersecretary David Cohen. "The ability of Al-Qa'ida's core to direct the activities and attacks of its affiliates has diminished, with those affiliates increasingly setting their own goals, specifying their own targets, and providing jihadist expertise," he said.⁸ In fact, documents recovered from AQI in 2009 revealed that in the intervening years (since that 2005 letter), al-Zarqawi's organisation, then called the Islamic State in Iraq,

3 The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), "FATF Report: Emerging Terrorist Financing Risks," FATF, (October 2015), p. 5. Available at: <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Emerging-Terrorist-Financing-Risks.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

4 Regarding al-Qaeda's reliance on abuse of charity, see John Roth, Douglas Greenberg and Serena Wille, "National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States: Monograph on Terrorist Financing, Staff Report to the Commission," National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 4. Available at: https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/staff_statements/911_TerrFin_Monograph.pdf.

5 Greg Bruno, "Al-Qaeda's Financial Pressures," Council on Foreign Relations, 1 February 2020. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/background/al-qaedas-financial-pressures>; Roth et. al, "Monograph on Terrorist Financing," 2004, p. 28.

6 Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, 9 July 2005. English translation available at: https://fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_english.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

7 Matthew Levitt, "Al-Qa'ida's Finances," CTC Sentinel, Vol. 1 Issue 5 (April 2008). Available at: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/al-qaidas-finances-evidence-of-organizational-decline/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

8 Press Center, "Remarks of Under Secretary David Cohen at Chatham House on "Kidnapping for Ransom: The Growing Terrorist

took the strategic decision to derive revenues locally, largely to avoid foreign dependence and direction, as well as disruption.⁹

By the late 2000s, most al-Qaeda affiliates had diversified their funding streams, most prominently engaging in such criminal tactics as kidnapping for ransom and extortion. In northwest Africa, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) received roughly \$100 million in ransom payments between 2008 and 2014.¹⁰ In 2015, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) took advantage of the ongoing conflict in Yemen to take control of parts of Hadramawt governorate, seizing as much as \$100 million from a Central Bank branch,¹¹ extorting funds from the national oil company, and raising as much as \$2 million per day in taxes on goods and fuel coming into the port of al-Mukalla.¹² In Somalia, al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabaab generated as much as \$25 million in revenue from the illicit charcoal trade alone when it controlled Kismayo port from 2009-2012, according to the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea.¹³ The group continues to generate significant revenue through extortion, even in areas it no longer controls: it is estimated to have made as much as \$13 million during the first six months of 2020 from checkpoints and mafia-style protection rackets targeting merchants and traders in Southern Somalia, including at Kismayo port.¹⁴ “It’s no longer an insurgency but an economic power,” Rashid Abdi, an analyst specialising in the

Horn of Africa, told the *New York Times*: “It’s a shadow state that’s out-taxing the government even in areas it doesn’t control.”¹⁵

Today, observers note more “terrorist economies,”¹⁶ where groups take advantage of weak, corrupt states lacking rule of law or full territorial control to tax, extort, and exploit local resources. Speaking in 2016, former US Deputy National Security Advisor Juan Zarate noted some of the challenges presented by such terrorist economies:

The constraints on our financial gameplan have been twofold: a lack of good information about the specifics of the ISIS economy and its continued control of territory that allows them access to populations and resources, like oil, antiquities, and granaries. There is also the problem that ISIS—in occupying major urban centers—has created economic defensive shields, understanding that we are not going to bomb all the banks in Mosul or starve the economy of millions of people. There are material constraints to what we can do while ISIS controls real territory and populations.¹⁷

Likewise, the collapse of the Islamic State’s (IS, or ISIS) territorial caliphate has fundamentally altered its financial structure and its relationship with global affiliates. Despite the Islamic State’s early prosperity, its

Financing Challenge,” US Department of the Treasury, 5 October 2012. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1726.aspx>, accessed 11 November 2020.

9 Patrick B. Johnston et al., “Foundations of the Islamic State: Management, Money, and Terror in Iraq, 2005–2010,” (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016) p. xxiv. Available at: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1100/RR1192/RAND_RR1192.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

10 Rukmini Callimachi, “Paying Ransoms, Europe Bankrolls Qaeda Terror,” *The New York Times*, 29 July 2014. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/30/world/africa/ransoming-citizens-europe-becomes-al-qaedas-patron.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

11 Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, “Twenty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015), United Nations Security Council, 27 July 2018. Available at: <http://undocs.org/S/2018/705>.

12 Yara Bayoumy et al., “How Saudi Arabia’s War in Yemen Has Made al Qaeda Strong—and Richer,” *Reuters*, 8 April 2016. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/yemen-aqap/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

13 Kim Sook, Letter exchange between the Chair and the President of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea, United Nations Security Council, 12 July 2013. Available at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/413, accessed 11 November 2020.

14 Abdi Latif Daher, “Feared Shabab Exploit Somali Banking and Invest in Real Estate, U.N. Says,” *The New York Times*, 11 October 2020. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/11/world/africa/feared-shabab-exploit-somali-banking-and-invest-in-real-estate-un-says.html?fbclid=IwAR2i8lvFB5TKPwJhRyO2PHt4HEMYxRstY-sYAz5vDb9lne9_0btajg6Vouw, accessed 11 November 2020. See also: Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve, Letter exchange between the Chair and the President of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Somalia, 1 November 2019. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2019/858>, accessed 11 November 2020.

15 Daher, “Feared Shabab Exploit Somali Banking and Invest in Real Estate, U.N. Says,” 2020.

16 Bryan Price, “A View from the CT Foxhole: The Honorable Juan C. Zarate, former Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 9, Issue 4 (April 2016). Available at: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/a-view-from-the-ct-foxhole-the-honorable-juan-c-zarate-former-deputy-national-security-advisor-for-combating-terrorism/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

17 Ibid.

considerable expenses created vulnerabilities that the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, along with the government of Iraq, effectively exploited. For example, in August 2015, the Iraqi government ceased paying salaries to employees in IS-controlled territories, thereby cutting the group's revenue from the taxation of salaries and reducing liquidity in those territories.¹⁸ In late 2015, the Coalition also began to use air strikes to target and degrade Islamic State-controlled oil extraction, refining, and transportation.¹⁹ Coalition airstrikes also targeted IS cash storehouses, destroying millions of dollars in cash currency—an especially effective tactic in traditionally cash-heavy terrorist economies where credit cards do not function.²⁰

As such, the greatest impact on IS's bottom line has been the loss of territory, which deprived the organisation of local resources – including people – to tax and extort. Nonetheless, as of mid-2019, IS continued to provide some financial support to its branches, as well as to empower them to raise funds locally, according to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).²¹ As IS has reverted to an insurgency, it has returned to many of the fundraising methodologies deployed by AQI, including kidnapping for ransom (KFR), extortion of individuals and businesses, as well as some commercial activity.²²

But funding in place is not just a function of terrorist group control of territory. It is also a function of the ability of terrorist groups to leverage social media and other platforms, as well as often-encrypted communication applications, to reach across borders to like-minded followers who can fund their own activities be they local attacks or their travel to join militants abroad.

Foreign inspiration, local funding

Beyond its insurgent activities, IS remains a global terrorist concern largely due to the threat posed by inspired home-grown violent extremists (HVEs) who, acting alone or in small groups, present a particularly challenging terror-financing problem set. The same holds true for inspired networks of White Supremacist or other racially and ethnically motivated violent extremist (REMVE) groups. Once an individual or small group has become radicalised and is determined to carry out a terrorist attack, there are many ways he or she may fund an attack. Lone offender and small group attacks can be carried out very quickly, with minimal funding and preparation. As a result, authorities lose both the lag time within which they can run an effective investigation and the benefit of key tripwires — like the ability to follow travel, communications and financials trails — that previously proved productive to investigative inquiry.

The 2015 US National Terrorist Financing Risk Assessment notes the case of Michael Todd Wolfe, from Houston, who planned to fund his travel abroad to fight for radical groups in Syria by using an expected tax refund of \$45,000 to cover his expenses. The same type of simple self-funding could also underwrite attacks at home. “Of particular concern,” the assessment bluntly concluded, “is that these homegrown violent extremists may use this type of activity to fund domestic terrorist activity in support of extremist ideology espoused by a terrorist group, but without direct assistance from the terrorist group.”²³ According to an October 2020 US Department of Homeland Security

18 Daniel Glaser, “The Evolution of Terrorism Financing: Disrupting the Islamic State,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 21 October 2016. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-evolution-of-terrorism-financing-disrupting-the-islamic-state>, accessed 11 November 2020.

19 Ibid.

20 Katherine Bauer, Lori Plotkin Boghardt and Matthew Levitt, “Defeating the Islamic State: The Economic Campaign,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 24 February 2016. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/defeating-the-islamic-state-the-economic-campaign>, accessed 11 November 2020.

21 FATF, “FATF Actions to Identify and Disrupt ISIL, Al-Qaeda and Affiliates’ Financing,” FATF, 21 June 2019. Available at: <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/methodsandtrends/documents/fatf-action-against-terrorist-financing-june-2019.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

22 Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, “Twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities,” United Nations Security Council, 3 July 2020, p. 17. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2020/717>, accessed 11 November 2020.

23 US Department of the Treasury, “2015 National Terrorist Financing Risk Assessment,” US Department of the Treasury, 2015, p. 44. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/terrorist-illicit-finance/Documents/National%20Terrorist%20Financing%20>

assessment, the most likely terrorist threat comes from “ideologically motivated lone offenders and small groups,” with domestic violent extremists posing the “primary terrorist threat” inside the United States.²⁴

HVEs may raise funds for several purposes, including to carry out attacks at home, to fund their own or others’ travel to foreign conflict zones, or to provide material support to a terrorist organisation at home or abroad. Looking back at home-grown plots in the West — including both homegrown networks and lone offenders — several key patterns emerge.

Low-cost attacks

As large, complex terror plots are becoming increasingly difficult to carry out, many terrorists are setting their sights lower and are planning smaller, cheaper attacks. Lone offender and small terror cells are able to keep costs low for their plots since they have few members to train and equip, rely on simple weapons, and in contrast to larger terrorist organisations, are not subject to the high and indirect costs of developing and maintaining a terrorist organisation and sustaining its activities and ideology.²⁵ According to a 2015 Norwegian Defence Research Establishment report, 75 percent of the forty jihadi plots studied in Europe between 1994 and 2013 cost less than \$10,000 to execute.²⁶

For example, in 2013, Michael Adebolajo murdered Lee Rigby, a British soldier in London. Adebolajo first ran Rigby over with his car and

then stabbed him to death with a machete and a knife. Adebolajo purchased the knives the day before the attack, likely for no more than £20 or £30.²⁷ In another case, in September 2014, Ahmad Numan Haider used a knife to attack two counter-terrorism police officers in Melbourne, Australia.²⁸ In December that same year, Haron Monis held eighteen people hostage in a café in Melbourne, and ultimately killed one person, using an unregistered sawn-off shotgun in the attack that is thought to have been purchased for a low-price on Australia’s “grey market.”²⁹

Self-financing

In many cases, lone offenders or small groups may self-finance their activities through legal means, such as dipping into their own bank accounts, taking out a loan, or receiving welfare payments. In Europe, since 2001, the proportion of cells that are self-financed through licit activities is higher than those cells that receive external funding.³⁰ A review by the Program on Extremism at George Washington University of 209 individuals charged for Islamic State-related offenses in the US between 2013 and 2020 concluded that the vast majority of US-based IS supporters relied on self-financing.³¹

As demonstrated above, self-financed attacks tend to be cheaper, less sophisticated, and smaller-scale than more expensive attacks. But because they are less likely to raise suspicions, self-financed attacks are more likely to be successfully carried out than attacks that receive external funding. According to the

Risk%20Assessment%20E2%80%932006-12-2015.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

24 Catherine Herridge and Victoria Albert, “China, Russia and white supremacy top DHS’ first public threat assessment,” CBS News, 5 October 2020. Available at: https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-russia-and-white-supremacy-top-dhs-first-public-threat-assessment/?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=1587190_, accessed 11 November 2020.

25 Emilie Oftedal, “The financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe,” Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 6 January 2015, p. 7. Available at: <https://publications.ffi.no/nb/item/asset/dspace:2469/14-02234.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

26 Ibid., p. 3.

27 Laura Smith-Spark and Kellie Morgan, “What led Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebolawale to murder Rigby?” CNN, 19 December 2013. Available at: <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/19/world/europe/uk-soldier-killing-profiles/index.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

28 James Dowling, “Inquest finding into the death of radicalized teen Numan Haider,” Herald Sun, 31 July 2017. Available at: <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/law-order/inquest-finding-into-the-death-of-radicalised-teen-numan-haider/news-story/2e7b7bb84e585b41433f06ee21bf5c51>, accessed 11 November 2020.

29 Tom Keatinge and Florence Keen, “Lone-Actor and Small Cell Terrorist Attacks: A New Front in Counter-Terrorist Finance,” RUSI Centre for Defence and Security Studies, 24 January 2017. Available at: <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/lone-actor-and-small-cell-terrorist-attacks-new-front-counter>, accessed 11 November 2020. ; Australian Associated Press, “Sydney siege inquest: Man Haron Monis was a ‘psychopathic lone wolf terrorist,’” The Guardian, 2 May 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/may/02/sydney-siege-inquest-man-haron-monis-was-a-psychopathic-lone-wolf-terrorist>, accessed 11 November 2020.

30 Oftedal, “The financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe,” 2015, p. 7.

31 Lorenzo Vidino, John Lewis and Andrew Mines, “Dollars for Daesh: Analyzing the Finances of American ISIS Supporters,” Program on Extremism at George Washington University, (September 2020). Available at: <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Dollars%20for%20Daesh%20final%20report.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

Norwegian Defence Research Establishment report, “among entirely self-financed cells, 53 percent have managed to carry out their plans, compared to only 21 percent among those that receive some external support.”³²

In several cases, home-grown violent extremists in the US too have used their own salaries to fund attacks. For example, Christopher Lee Cornell saved his own money to buy supplies for his plot to set off bombs near the US Capitol. In 2015, Cornell had enough money to purchase two semiautomatic weapons and 600 rounds of ammunition with the intention of building, planting, and bombing the US Capitol and shooting people as they ran away.³³ The FBI caught Cornell before he was able to execute his plan; however, he had still managed to raise enough money to carry out his attack.

Some lone offenders and small cells that do not have sufficient salaries accept money from their families, or take money without their knowledge.³⁴ In other cases, self-financed terrorists ask to borrow money from friends and families without disclosing its usage.³⁵ Mohammed Merah received some financial and material support from his family before carrying out a series of shootings in France in 2012. For example, his sister Suad bought him cell phones, allowed him to use her internet while planning his attack, and purchased plane tickets for him.³⁶ In an interview, she admitted to giving him her credit card to buy plane tickets from France to Damascus, though she

said he paid her back afterwards.

Criminal activities

Crime has the potential to bring in sufficient funds for a home-grown attack as well. While criminal groups, lone offenders, and small cells may differ ideologically, they often cooperate and collaborate in criminal ventures to raise money for attacks.³⁷ In Europe, petty crime appears to be the second largest source of funding for lone offenders and small cell groups.³⁸ In Southeast Asia, particularly in the Philippines and Indonesia, terrorists have raised funds for attacks by theft, smuggling, kidnaping, and extortion.³⁹

Although receiving help from his family, Mohammed Merah, who carried out three attacks in France in 2012, relied on criminal activities as his main source of funding (namely theft, robbery, and drug trafficking).⁴⁰ Merah earned \$58,000 by acting as a drug courier between Spain and France, and was also heavily involved in a criminal network in France.⁴¹ He had at least eighteen convictions from French courts for his involvement in burglaries, thefts, robberies, and other petty crimes.⁴² Merah used this money to fund his travel to Pakistan in 2011, where he received training at a camp controlled by Tehrik Taliban Pakistan and al-Qaeda in Waziristan. When he returned to France in November 2011, he had approximately \$24,500, but wanted to raise additional money.⁴³ Merah refused to admit to

32 Oftedal, “The financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe,” 2015, p. 21.

33 United States of America v. Christopher Lee Cornell, Criminal Complaint, United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, 14 January 2015. Available at: https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/01/15/cornell_complaint.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

34 Oftedal, “The financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe,” 2015.

35 Gerald Roberts, “Money Flow in the Age of ISIS,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 15 May 2015. Available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/money-flow-in-the-age-of-isis>, accessed 11 November 2020.

36 Nicola Hebden, “Intel agency monitored gunman's sister: report,” The Local, 3 September 2012. Available at: <https://www.thelocal.fr/20120903/intel-agency-monitored-gunmans-sister-report>, accessed 11 November 2020.

37 Roberts, “Money Flow in the Age of ISIS,” 2015.

38 Oftedal, “The financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe,” 2015, p. 7.

39 AUSTRAC, “Terrorist Financing Regional Risk Assessment 2016: South-East Asia and Australia,” AUSTRAC, December 2016. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016-12-12-Session-III-1500-1630-Claudine-Lamond-AUSTRAC.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

40 Associated Press, “Exclusif - Transcription Des Conversations Entre Mohamed Merah et Les Négociateurs,” [Exclusive - Transcription of conversations between Mohamed Merah and the negotiators] Liberation FR, 17 July 2012. Available at: http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2012/07/17/transcription-des-conversations-entremohamed-merah-et-les-negociateurs_833784, accessed 11 November 2020.

41 Tamara Makarenko, “Europe’s Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorists and Organized Crime Groups in the European Union,” European Parliament Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2012, p. 45. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2012/462503/IPOL-LIBE_ET\(2012\)462503_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2012/462503/IPOL-LIBE_ET(2012)462503_EN.pdf), accessed 11 November 2020.

42 Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister, “How Did Mohammed Merah Become a Jihadist?” CNN, March 26, 2012. Available at: <http://www.cnn.com/2012/03/26/world/europe/france-shooting-suspect/index.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

43 Thibault Raisse, “Le Pacte Secret de Merah Avec Un Lieutenant de Ben Laden,” [Merah's secret pact with bin Laden's lieutenant] Le Parisien, 21 March 2014. Available at: <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/le-pacte-secret-de-merah-avec-un-lieutenant-de-ben->

the exact crime, but he said he reconnected with his criminal networks and “did some work with them,” earning him a little over \$12,000.⁴⁴

Merah claims that al-Qaeda offered to finance his attacks, but he refused, claiming it was “easy to get money in France.”⁴⁵ By March 2012, he had purchased the weapons he would use in his attack, as well as additional arsenal, guns, and ingredients for petrol bombs that were later found in his apartment.⁴⁶

Licit financial loans

Lone offenders and small cells around the world have exploited loans to fund attacks. For example, Ahmedy Coulibaly, one of the three terrorists in the 2015 Paris attacks, funded his plot by taking out a £6,000 loan from the credit agency Cofidis.⁴⁷ He provided the agency with a phone bill, pay slips, and identification in order to obtain the loan and finance his operation.⁴⁸ The San Bernardino shooter, Syed Rizwan Farook, who killed fourteen people in the 2015 shooting, borrowed \$28,500 from Prosper Marketplace, a San Francisco online lender, just two weeks before their December attack.⁴⁹ Officials believe that this loan may have financed the ammunition, pipe-bomb parts, and shooting practice at local gun ranges.⁵⁰

Online loans are an easy way to gain fast access to large sums of cash. While banks and money lenders are required to check customers’ names against a federal database of known terrorists and criminals, lone offenders and home-grown violent extremists are often not known to law enforcement authorities and may slip under the radar.

Ironically, the challenges posed by lone offender and small group terrorism should not have come as a surprise to practitioners. Indeed, the 9/11 Commission Report forecasted that increasingly self-sufficient terrorists would likely emerge:

Though progress has apparently been made, terrorists have shown considerable creativity in their methods of moving money. If al Qaeda is replaced by smaller, decentralized terrorist groups, the premise behind the government’s efforts—that terrorists need a financial support network—may become outdated. Moreover, some terrorist operations do not rely on outside sources of money and may now be self-funding, either through legitimate employment or low-level criminal activity.⁵¹

The role of ideology, geography, and other practical concerns

A number of factors influence decisions by terrorist organisations on how and where to raise funds, including ideology, geography, but none more than prosaic and practical concerns. The amount of money an organisation requires is determined by its size and objectives. Organisations that control territory, engage in insurgency, or provide social services require additional resources. The larger and more complex an organisation’s mission, the greater need it has for specialised procedures and personnel to handle financial matters. For example, the Islamic State recruited “an

laden-21-03-2014-3693621.php, accessed 11 November 2020.

44 Associated Press (Liberation FR), 2012.

45 Virginie Andre and Shandon Harris-Hogan, “Mohamed Merah: From Petty Criminal to Neojihadist,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 2013), p. 309. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2013.792655>, accessed 11 November 2020.

46 Ibid.

47 Rukmini Callimachi and Jim Yardley, “From Amateur to Ruthless Jihadist in France: Chérif and Saïd Kouachi’s Path to Paris Attack at Charlie Hebdo,” *The New York Times*, 17 January 2015. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/18/world/europe/paris-terrorism-brothers-said-cherif-kouachi-charliehebd.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

48 Ibid.

49 James Rufus Koren and Jim Puzzanghera, “Loan to San Bernardino shooter draws scrutiny to online lending industry,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 December 2015. Available at: <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-prosper-regulation-20151210-story.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

50 Ibid.

51 Thomas H. Kean and Lee Hamilton, “The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States,” National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 383. Available at: <https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

army of accountants”;⁵² al-Qaeda is known for requiring receipts⁵³; and the 9/11 hijackers even reportedly returned their remaining funds days before the attacks.⁵⁴ Such financial operations may create vulnerabilities to detection and serve as key nodes for disruption.

As such, while IS may today present a more limited global threat as an organised institution and a less reliable financial backer of its affiliates and operatives, its changed objective means it remains dangerous. IS has pivoted from its organised, global model of terror operations to one that encourages small, cheap, and decentralised cells. In other words, the group has lost access to much of its revenues but no longer needs anywhere near as much money as it once did. Unlike large attacks orchestrated over time by large groups, lone offender and small group attacks can be carried out very quickly, with minimal funding and preparation.⁵⁵

Ideology can also play a significant role in financing decisions. An organisation’s desire for autonomy of action may make state sponsorship untenable. Those averse to donors’ conditioning aid on the exercise of restraint, moderation, or participation in a political track will face a problem set different from proxies like Lebanese Hezbollah or Islamic

Jihad. Syrian affiliate, Jahbat al-Nusrah’s break from al-Qaeda in mid-2016 was likely as much a ploy to retain Gulf donors that viewed it as the “moderate extremists”⁵⁶ of the Syrian conflict, and an effort to evade international sanctions, as its stated desire to declare its ideological and operational independence as a Syrian–organisation (as opposed to a transnational one).⁵⁷

Geography also has a significant influence on an organisation’s ability to self-fund. AQIM targeted the European extractive industry operations in the Sahel because it thought it was likely to recover sizable ransoms for kidnapping Europeans there.⁵⁸ IS benefitted from established smuggling networks to move oil and other resources from the territory it controlled to market, as well as sizable populations under their control to tax and extort.⁵⁹ However, because of differences in the nature of oil production between the Sahel and Levant, and lower population density in Libya, IS’s Libyan province did not have similar successes.⁶⁰

Sophisticated terrorist organisations will look to diversify sources of funding, perhaps to help mitigate dependence on a foreign or state donor, supplement such support, or fund local operations without risking transnational

52 Harriet Alexander and Alastair Beach, “How Isil is funded, trained and operating in Iraq and Syria,” *The Telegraph*, 23 August 2014. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/11052919/How-Isil-is-funded-trainedand-operating-in-Iraq-and-Syria.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

53 Conner Simpson, “Al Qaeda Are Strict About Keeping Track of Their Receipts,” *The Atlantic*, 29 December 2013. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/al-qaeda-are-strict-about-keeping-track-theirreceipts/356552/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

54 John Roth, Douglas Greenberg and Serena Wille, “Appendix A: The Financing of the 9/11 Plot,” *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, 2004, p. 133. Available at: https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/staff_statements/911_TerrFin_App.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

55 Matthew Levitt, “Targeting the Dematerialized Caliphate,” *NATO Defense College Foundation*, 6 December 2018. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/targeting-the-dematerialized-caliphate>, accessed 11 November 2020.

56 Katherine Bauer and Matthew Levitt, “Al-Qaeda Financing: Selected Issues,” in Aaron Y. Zelin, ed., “How Al-Qaeda Survived Drones, Uprisings, and the Islamic State,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 2017, p. 101. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus153-Zelin.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

57 Colin P. Clarke, “Al Qaeda in Syria Can Change Its Name, but Not Its Stripes,” *The RAND Blog*, RAND Corporation, 23 March 2017. Available at: <https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/03/al-qaeda-in-syria-can-change-its-name-but-not-its-stripes.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

58 According to the US Government, as of 2011, AQIM was planning to target mainly Europeans, not Americans, for kidnapping operations because AQIM believed that some European governments were more likely to pay ransoms. See: Press Center, “Kidnapping for Ransom: The Growing Terrorist Financing Challenge,” 2012.

59 Erika Solomon and Ahmed Mhidi, “Isis Inc: Syria’s ‘mafia style’ gas deals with jihadis,” *Financial Times*, 15 October 2015. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/92f4e036-6b69-11e5-aca9-d87542bf8673?shareType=nongift>, accessed 11 November 2020; Erika Solomon, Robin Kwong and Steven Bernard, “Inside Isis Inc: The journey of a barrel of oil,” *Financial Times*, 29 February 2016. Available at: <https://ig.ft.com/sites/2015/isis-oil/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

60 Katherine Bauer, “Beyond Syria and Iraq: Examining Islamic State Provinces,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 9 November 2016, p. xvii. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus149-Bauer.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020; also, as of June 2020, ISIL-Libya raised funds by extorting small businesses and kidnapping local dignitaries for ransom, according to the United Nations. See, Triansyah Djani, “Twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,” 2020, p. 9.

funds transfers. While organisations such as Hezbollah and Shia militia in Iraq are primarily funded by Iran, they too have sought to complement that state sponsorship with a broader stream of funding from supporters and criminal activity both locally and abroad, mostly to contend with the effect of sanctions targeting Iran and the fall in the price of oil.⁶¹ Organisations that are reportedly self-sufficient in terms of financing, such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)⁶², are likely continue to receive external support, but they are no longer reliant on it.

Even where organisations are able to mobilise sufficient funds locally, they rely on external financial networks to procure goods, support foreign fighter travel or other operational activity, send financial support to affiliates abroad, and store or secret away financial reserves. Indeed, IS's external financial and logistics networks have undoubtedly become more important since the decline of the territorial caliphate. Relatedly, even when foreign financial flows constitute a small share of a group's revenue, donors—both states and individuals—will likely continue to exercise ideological influence on groups, such as has been the case with certain Iranian proxies in Iraq.⁶³

Plus ça change, plus c'est

la même chose: terrorists still need to move money

An organisation's location, relationship to state or other donors, and ability to exploit and monetise local resources will all have a bearing on its method of raising funds. In turn, the means by which a terrorist organisation deploys such funds will rely on similar factors, including banking and internet penetration in a given locale, access to hard currency, and the ability to engage in trade and procurement activities. Even when terrorist groups control territory or rely on the self-financing of inspired fellow travellers, they will still need to find ways to transfer funds. To do so, however, they are likely to use a combination of means, some of which will be sophisticated and new while others will be more simple and well-known.

Money service businesses

Terrorists will always look for the cheapest, fastest, and most anonymous method to move funds. Alongside cash and banks, money service businesses (MSBs), such as exchange houses or hawala-style transfer companies,⁶⁴ are the most commonly used channel for terrorist financing.⁶⁵ Where access to banks is limited or unavailable, MSBs provide important

61 Matthew Levitt, "Hezbollah's Criminal Networks: Useful Idiots, Henchmen, and Organized Criminal Facilitators," in Hilary Matfess and Michael Miklaucic, eds., *Beyond Convergence: World Without Order*, (Washington DC: National Defense University, 2016) pp. 155-156. Available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/opeds/Levitt20161025-NDU-chapter.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020; Michael Knights, "Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups," CTC Sentinel, Vol. 12, Issue 7 (August 2019). Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/irans-expanding-militia-army-iraq-new-special-groups/>, accessed 11 November 2020; Press Releases, "Treasury Sanctions Key Hizballah, IRGC-QF Networks in Iraq," US Department of the Treasury, 13 November 2018. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm546>, accessed 11 November 2020.

62 According to the United Nations Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, as of June 2020, HTS raised as much as \$13 million per month through the taxation of businesses and public utilities; collection of customs and tolls at Turkish border crossings and internal lines of control; and the control of petroleum sales and charitable operations in Idlib. See: Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, "Twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team," 2020, p. 7.

63 Alex Vatanka, "Iran's use of Shi'i Militant Proxies: Ideological and Practical Expediency Versus Uncertain Sustainability," Middle East Institute, June 2018. Available at: https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Vatanka_PolicyPaper.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

64 "Money service business" is a term used by regulators to cover business that (i) provide currency conversion services; (ii) transmit funds and (iii) are not banks. In other words, they are not depository institutions. This category often includes what are commonly called exchange houses. Unregulated MSBs can also include trading companies that provide remittance services and hawala-style transfer companies. The term hawala is traditionally associated with a money transfer mechanism that originated in South Asia along traditional trade routes in Middle East and parts of East Africa. It operated as a closed system within familial, tribal or ethnic groups. In recent times, the term hawala is often used as a proxy to describe a wider range of financial service providers, beyond these traditional and geographically tied systems. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) defines hawalas as money transmitters, particularly with ties to specific geographic regions or ethnic communities, which arrange for transfer and receipt of funds or equivalent value and settle through trade, cash, and net settlement over a long period of time. See: FATF, "The role of Hawala and other similar service providers in money laundering and terrorist financing," FATF, October 2013, <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Role-of-hawala-and-similar-in-ml-tf.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

65 FATF, 2015, p. 21. See also: Press Centre (US Department of the Secretary), 2018, p. 3.

services in terms of sending and receiving remittances, including humanitarian support, including to conflict zones and their environs. However, MSBs can also act as a conduit for comingling illicit funds with licit remittances. Indeed, according to the UN Monitoring Committee for al-Qaeda and IS, unregistered MSBs remain one of the most prevalent means of initiating transfers involving IS and al-Qaeda.⁶⁶

Even in non-conflict areas with sizable populations lacking bank access, MSBs act as bridge between cash-based informal economies and the banks upon which they rely to effect international transfers. This layer can help obfuscate illicit financial activity from the global financial institutions that it transits. As such, it is not that banks are not involved in the transfer of terror funds, but rather, that MSBs, especially those that are un- or weakly-regulated, can serve as gateways to the regulated financial channels.

Exchange houses or MSBs are among IS's preferred means of moving funds to affiliates and procuring goods, and are likely used to secret-away reserves.⁶⁷ Beginning in late 2015, the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) banned more than a hundred exchange houses operating in or around IS-controlled territory from participating in the country's currency auctions, cutting them off from access to the hard currency needed to convert funds and effect

cross-border transactions. In the intervening years, the United States-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS coalition, working closely with the Iraqi Central Bank and Counter-Terrorism Service, has continued to unravel IS exchange house networks, which reach from Iraq to Turkey, the Gulf, and beyond.⁶⁸

For example, IS exploited pre-established financial networks, such as the Rawi network of hawala and exchange houses, established in the 1990s to help the former regime of Saddam Hussein evade international sanctions.⁶⁹ In December 2016, the US and Iraq jointly designated the leader of the network, Syrian Fawaz Muhammad al-Rawi, who had pledged loyalty to IS in 2014.⁷⁰ According to the US Treasury, the Rawi network handled millions of dollars for the Islamic State, including regularly transferring hundreds of thousands of dollars on behalf of the IS Department of Oil to "buy and sell gold and eventually revert the gold proceeds back into cash for ISIS."⁷¹ Another member of the network, Abd-al-Rahman Ali Husayn al-Ahmad al-Rawi, was "one of the few individuals who provided ISIS significant financial facilitation into and out of Syria," including from Turkey, before he re-located there.

Indeed, as the territorial caliphate collapsed, IS likely moved some funds to or through Turkey, via hawala⁷² dealers on the Syria/Turkish border, and possibly via other militants based

66 Kais Kabtani and Dian Triansyah Djani, "Joint report of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team," United Nations, June 3, 2020, p. 16. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2020/493>, accessed 11 November 2020.

67 The Islamic State often uses exchange houses to collect international funds, pay its fighters and employees and make purchases. With the majority of its territory lost, exchange houses are now particularly useful to move funds out of Syria and Iraq. See: Katherine Bauer, "Survey of Terrorist Groups and Their Means of Financing," Testimony submitted to the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Terrorism and Illicit Finance, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 7 September 2018, p. 6. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/testimony/BauerTestimony20180907.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020; Katherine Bauer and Matthew Levitt, "Denying the Islamic State Access to Money-Exchange Houses," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 3, 2016. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/denying-the-islamic-state-access-to-money-exchange-houses>, accessed 11 November 2020; Kabtani and Djani, "Joint report of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team," 2020.

68 Office of the Inspector General, "Operation Inherent Resolve - Summary of Work Performed by the Department of the Treasury Related to Terrorist Financing, ISIS, and Anti-Money Laundering for First Quarter Fiscal Year 2020," US Department of the Treasury, January 6, 2020, p. 4. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/about/organizational-structure/ig/Audit%20Reports%20and%20Testimonies/OIG-CA-20-009.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020; US Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Designates Key Nodes of ISIS's Financial Network Stretching Across the Middle East, Europe, and East Africa," US Department of the Treasury, April 15, 2019. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm657>, accessed 11 November 2020.

69 Ibid.

70 Thomas Jocelyn, "US designates members of Rawi network for financing Islamic State," FDD's Long War Journal, April 16, 2019. Available at: <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/04/us-designates-members-of-rawi-network-for-financing-islamic-state.php>, accessed 11 November 2020.

71 US Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Designates Key Nodes of ISIS's Financial Network Stretching Across the Middle East, Europe, and East Africa," 2019.

72 See FN 64 above for definition of hawala.

in Idlib province.⁷³ IS-linked exchangers claim to have sent millions of dollars through other militant organisations in Turkey, then onward to Europe.⁷⁴ In August 2017, the US and Iraq jointly designated IS finance Emir Salim al Mansur, who is believed to have moved from Iraq to Turkey in early 2017, under its counter-terrorism authorities.⁷⁵ Six months later, the US designated Yunus Emre Sakarya and his company Profesyoneller Elektronik in Turkey, also under counter-terrorism authorities, due to his involvement in procuring unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV, or drone) equipment worth \$500,000 in 2016 for the Islamic State.⁷⁶ In mid-March 2018, Turkish police raided a currency exchange in Istanbul with alleged ties to the Islamic State, arresting two and recovering \$1.3 million, as well as gold, silver, British pounds, and weapons.⁷⁷

More recently, the United Nations Monitoring Team for the Islamic State, al-Qaeda and the Taliban has raised concerns about money transfer services operating in the so-called “foreigners” annex to the al-Hawl refugee camp in north-eastern Syria, which houses women and children, some of whom are alleged to have ties to IS.⁷⁸ The team’s January 2020 report said that funds sent to detainees originate as “wire transfers via traditional banking channels to neighbouring states which are subsequently collected and couriered into the Syrian Arab Republic or transferred via hawala networks.”⁷⁹ In June 2020, the monitoring team highlighted the use of social media campaigns to raise

money for the families of foreign terrorist fighters who remained in conflict zones and in the al-Hawl camp, in particular. A number of IS-affiliated women reportedly escaped from the camp during this period. It is suspected that they used the funds to bribe guards and pay smugglers to assist with their escapes.⁸⁰ In July 2020, the US Treasury sanctioned Faruq Hamad for operating a branch of the Tawasul hawala in al-Hawl camp. According to the Treasury, Tawasul hawala, a separate branch of which was designated in November 2019, served IS members and transferred payments for IS from outside Syria.⁸¹

In another case involving state sponsorship of terror, in May 2018, the US and United Arab Emirates exposed an exchange house network employed by the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force to procure and transfer millions of US dollars (USD) in bulk cash for distribution to Iranian proxies.⁸² With US sanctions hindering Iran’s ability to access its oil revenue and other foreign currency reserves, the IRGC sought access to USD because its proxies have little use for Iranian Rial. Hezbollah, for example, operates in a highly-dollarized economy; the organisation, like IS, needs hard currency to pay salaries, make cross border payments, and procure goods. Since 2013, the US Treasury has raised concerns about Iran’s use of exchange houses and general trading companies to evade US and multilateral sanctions.⁸³

73 Ibid.

74 Erika Solomon and Ahmad Mhidi, “Isis finds escape route for the profits of war,” Financial Times, 23 August 2017. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/b2f616d4-8656-11e7-8bb1-5ba57d47eff7>, accessed 11 November 2020.

75 US Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Collaborates with Iraqi Government to Sanction ISIS Finance Emir,” US Department of the Treasury, August 29, 2017. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/sm0149.aspx>.

76 US Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions ISIS Facilitators Across the Globe,” US Department of the Treasury, February 9, 2018. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-release/sm0284>, accessed 11 November 2020.

77 Associated Press, “Turkish police discover around \$2M in cash in Istanbul office of 2 Daesh-linked suspects,” Daily Sabah, 4 April 2018. Available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2018/04/04/turkish-police-discover-around-2m-in-cash-and-gold-in-istanbul-office-of-2-daesh-linked-suspects>, accessed 11 November 2020.

78 Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, “Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities,” United Nations, 20 January 2020, p. 17. Available at: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/53>, accessed 11 November 2020 ; See also: Aaron Y. Zelin, “Wilayat al-Hawl: ‘Remaining’ and Incubating the Next Islamic State Generation,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 2019. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyNote70-Zelin.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

79 Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, “Twenty-fifth report,” 2020, p.17.

80 Ibid.

81 US Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Designates Key ISIS Financial Facilitators in the Middle East,” US Department of the Treasury, 28 July 2020. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1070>, accessed 11 November 2020.

82 US Department of the Treasury, “United States and United Arab Emirates Disrupt Large Scale Currency Exchange Network Transferring Millions of Dollars to the IRGC-QF,” US Department of the Treasury, 10 May 2018. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0383>, accessed 11 November 2020.

83 Office of Foreign Assets Control, “The Use of Exchange Houses and Trading Companies to Evade US Economic Sanctions Against Iran,” US Department of the Treasury, 10 January 2013. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/>

Virtual currency

Perhaps contrary to conventional wisdom, a 2019 RAND Corporation study of terrorist use of cryptocurrencies concluded that “[c]urrent concerns about cryptocurrency as a significant enabler of terrorist groups are almost certainly overblown, but coming improvements in cryptocurrency technologies will likely have a significant long-term effect on CTF.”⁸⁴ Yet, in August 2020, the US Department of Justice announced an operation that led to the largest seizure of terrorists’ cryptocurrency account ever and the dismantling of three different “cyber-enabled” terror finance campaigns by Hamas’ terrorist wing (Al-Qassam Brigades), al-Qaeda, and IS.⁸⁵

Terrorist groups clearly believe that cryptocurrencies might provide a measure of anonymity and thus undermine law enforcement efforts to monitor illicit financial transactions, as US officials assert was the case in this disruption. Indeed, according to a 2018 European Parliament study of cryptocurrencies and blockchain, “[t]he key issue that needs to be addressed in the fight against money laundering, terrorist financing and tax evasion via cryptocurrencies is the anonymity surrounding cryptocurrencies.”⁸⁶ In fact, most cryptocurrencies are pseudonymous, not anonymous, and with proper sleuthing, addresses can often be linked back to actual identities.

For example, in the Hamas case, the al-Qassam Brigades posted a call online for Bitcoin donations to fund the group’s terrorist activities. Hamas “boasted that bitcoin donations were untraceable and would be used for violent causes. Their websites offered

video instruction on how to anonymously make donations, in part by using bitcoin addresses generated for each individual donor,” the Department of Justice explained. Unfortunately, for the donors, these donations were not, in fact, anonymous. Federal agents tracked and seized 150 cryptocurrency accounts and executed criminal search warrants for US-based subjects who donated to the Hamas fundraising campaign. They then seized the actual infrastructure of the Hamas websites, and proceeded to run them covertly such that when people made donations intended for Hamas, the funds actually went to bitcoin wallets controlled by United States authorities.⁸⁷

In another case indicted in the United States, al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups — mostly in Syria — reportedly operated a bitcoin money laundering network on several social media platforms. They solicited cryptocurrency donations to fund terrorism, sometimes posing as charities. Authorities identified 155 virtual currency assets tied to this campaign and filed a complaint in court seeking their forfeiture. Likewise, in the IS case, authorities filed a forfeiture complaint targeting the social media accounts of an IS facilitator who reportedly managed IS hacking operations and was selling fake personal protective equipment in a COVID-19 online scam.⁸⁸ Such plots are beginning to pop up elsewhere as well. In October 2020, police in France arrested thirty and charged eight with financing Islamic extremists in Syria through a complex cryptocurrency scheme.⁸⁹

Procurement as a form of resourcing

sanctions/Programs/Documents/20130110_iran_advisory_exchange_house.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

84 Cynthia Dion-Schwarz, David Manheim and Patrick B. Johnston, “Terrorist Use of Cryptocurrencies: Technical and Organizational Barriers and Future Threats,” RAND Corporation, 2019, p. 55. Available at: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR3000/RR3026/RAND_RR3026.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

85 Office of Public Affairs, “Global Disruption of Three Terror Finance Cyber-Enabled Campaigns,” US Department of Justice, 13 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/global-disruption-three-terror-finance-cyber-enabled-campaigns>, accessed 11 November 2020.

86 Robby Houben and Alexander Snyers, “Cryptocurrencies and Blockchain: Legal Context and Implications for Financial Crime, Money Laundering, and Tax Evasion,” Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, European Parliament, July 2018, p. 9. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/150761/TAX3%20Study%20on%20cryptocurrencies%20and%20blockchain.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

87 Office of Public Affairs, “Global Disruption of Three Terror Finance Cyber-Enabled Campaigns,” US Department of Justice, 13 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/global-disruption-three-terror-finance-cyber-enabled-campaigns>, accessed 11 November 2020.

88 Ibid.

89 Associated Press, “8 Charged in French Cryptocurrency to Finance Jihadis,” 2020.

Even as terrorist groups turn to local financing, lessening their dependence on financial support from abroad, they will still need to move funds cross border to get what they cannot get at home. Procurement of weapons and other necessities is not a new phenomenon in the context of terrorist financing, but the scale and scope of such activities can be far more significant today in the context of terrorist control of territory and terrorist economies. Indeed, the evolution and growth of certain terrorist actors into larger, better-resourced, and better-financed organisations has also portended a shift from as-needed procurement to the development of bureaucratic and large-scale resourcing enterprises.

“Terrorist resourcing,” as conceptualised by the Canadian Integrated Threat Assessment Centre, looks at all of the ways that terrorist organisations get the various resources they need (be those funds, goods, or less tangible forms of support) to those involved in terrorist acts and those who direct and support them.⁹⁰ Whereas terrorist financing is traditionally characterised as a linear process that runs from collection to transmission and use of funds, the model suggests that the terrorist resourcing trail is a broad river with many branching tributaries. In this sense, resourcing is seen as a process that involves many items from a variety of sources to many recipients through multiple channels for different uses. As such, terrorist procurement often relies on networks of intermediaries, including those with no relation to the terrorist group. In this sense, such networks are especially vulnerable to disruption through exposure because they must maintain an air of legitimacy, especially in order to obtain items that could be dual use.

At the height of the territorial caliphate, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were the weapon of choice for IS, according to the United Nations.⁹¹ Although the components were the same as they were roughly a decade earlier, during the Iraq war, procurement evolved to meet the scale. Likewise, since it was harder to predict access to inputs at any given time, considering the territory’s isolation, IS engaged in more stockpiling and warehousing. Indeed, in June 2017, the US Treasury sanctioned an IS leader who, in addition to his work on chemical weapons and missile development, was part of an IS group that ran a factory in Hajjah, Iraq manufacturing IEDs, mines, and up-armed car or truck bombs, also known as vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs).⁹²

A US Defense Department official described IS IED procurement as following a cone shape, with the person using the IED at the tip and the broad range of legitimate suppliers comprising the conical base.⁹³ In fact, according to a 2017 study by Conflict Armament Research (CAR), which mapped the legal trade in components ultimately recovered from IEDs in and around IS-controlled territory, IS acquired many components quickly after they were lawfully supplied to distributors and smaller commercial entities in other countries.⁹⁴

Documents recovered in Iraq related to IS’s drone program detailed how IS managed its weapons development programmes, including acquisition forms, mission reports, and supply lists.⁹⁵ Although the documents do not reveal how the Islamic State actually acquires such materials, they do provide specific price information. The dollars and cents suggest a reliable, stable supply source, supporting the conclusion that IS was likely acquiring some of

90 FATF, “FATF Report: Terrorist Financing in West Africa,” FATF, October 2013, p. 10. Available at: <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/TF-in-West-Africa.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

91 Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, “Eighteenth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities,” United Nations Security Council, 19 July 2016, p. 7. Available at: <https://www.undocs.org/S/2016/629>, accessed 11 November 2020.

92 Press Center, “Treasury Targets ISIS Leader Involved in Chemical Weapons Development,” US Department of the Treasury, 12 June 2017. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/sm103.aspx>, accessed 11 November 2020.

93 Bhojani, Fatima, “How ISIS Makes IEDs: The Supply Chain of Terrorism,” Foreign Affairs, 2 March 2016. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-03-02/how-isis-makes-ieds>, accessed 11 November 2020.

94 Conflict Armament Research, “Tracing the Supply of Components Used in Islamic State IEDs,” Conflict Armament Research, February 2016. Available at: https://www.conflictarm.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Tracing_The_Supply_of_Components_Used_in_Islamic_State_IEDs.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

95 Don Rassler, Muhammad al-Ubaydi and Vera Mironova, “The Islamic State’s Drone Documents: Management, Acquisitions, and DIY Tradecraft,” CTC Sentinel, 31 January 2017. Available at: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/ctc-perspectives-the-islamic-states-drone-documents-management-acquisitions-and-diy-tradecraft/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

this equipment through third parties outside their territory.

This acquisition typology is of course not unique to IS.⁹⁶ Although Hezbollah receives hundreds of millions of dollars a year from Iran, it has long employed a worldwide network for financial and logistical support: to store, move, and raise funds; procure weapons and dual-use items; obtain false documents; and more.⁹⁷

US law enforcement have disrupted multiple Hezbollah attempts to procure arms and other dual-use and military items from the US. In a notable early case, a Hezbollah procurement cell in Charlotte, North Carolina arbitrated cigarette tax rates between that state and Michigan to raise funds for Hezbollah. The proceeds were sent to Canada, where Hezbollah-affiliated individuals purchased night vision goggles and other dual-use equipment and shipped it to Hezbollah in Lebanon.⁹⁸

Hezbollah also employs front companies globally to obscure its involvement in the purchase of sensitive and dual-use goods. In 2014, the US Treasury sanctioned Kamel and Issam Mohammad Amhaz,⁹⁹ their consumer electronic business Stars Group Holding in Beirut, and its subsidiaries in the UAE and China. According to the Treasury, “[i]tems obtained by Hizballah using the Stars Group Holding network have directly supported the group’s military capabilities, including the development of unmanned aerial vehicles

(UAVs), which have been used most recently to support Hizballah’s military activities in Syria and to conduct surveillance operations in Israel.”¹⁰⁰

In another recent example, Lebanese nationals Issam and Usama Hamade pled guilty in US federal courts in March and May 2020 respectively to conspiring to violate US sanctions and export controls laws. From 2009 to 2013, the Lebanese brothers allegedly acquired sophisticated technologies, such as piston engines, video-recording binoculars, inertial measurement units and digital compasses and exported them to Hezbollah. In a prime example of the “tributary model” of resourcing, the Hamade scheme involved the transit of money and goods through the United States, United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Japan, Germany, and Lebanon.¹⁰¹

Combatting the financing of terrorism is not just about money, but about resources and procurement as well. Whether terrorist groups raise money locally, as we have detailed here is increasingly the case with AQ and IS, or whether they receive significant funds from a state sponsor, like Hezbollah, they will need to move funds cross border to resource themselves. While it is true that there is a general shift to funding in place, that is not the case in every instance or case. Consider the case of Abdullah Ramo Pazara. According to a federal indictment, throughout 2013, a Bosnian-American couple in St. Louis, Missouri raised funds and purchased military equipment

96 FATF, “FATF Report: Financing of the Terrorist Organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),” FATF, February 2015, p. 36. Available at: <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Financing-of-the-terrorist-organisation-ISIL.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

97 Levitt, “Hezbollah’s Criminal Networks,” 2016, p. 155.

98 “United States of America v. Mohamad Youssef Hammoud et al.,” Superseding Indictment, United States District Court, Western District of North Carolina, Charlotte Division, Docket No. 3:00CR147-MU, filed 28 March 2001, p. 33, pp. 41-50. Available at: https://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/121.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020; US Department of Homeland Security, “Mohamad Youssef Hammoud sentenced to 30 years in terrorism financing case,” US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 27 January 2011. Available at: <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/mohamad-youssef-hammoud-sentenced-30-years-terrorism-financing-case>, accessed 11 November 2020. See also, Matthew Levitt, “Hezbollah Finances: Funding the Party of God,” in Jeanne Giraldo and Harold Trikunas, eds., “Terrorism Financing and State Responses: a Comparative Perspective,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2007. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-finances-funding-the-party-of-god>, accessed 11 November 2020.

99 Issam Amhaz was removed from the OFAC Specially Designated Nationals list in December 2019. No reason was given for his delisting. See: US Department of the Treasury, “OFAC Recent Actions,” US Department of the Secretary, 30 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/ofac-enforcement/pages/20191205.aspx>, accessed 11 November 2020.

100 US Department of the Treasury Press Center, “Treasury Sanctions Procurement Agents Of Hizballah Front Company Based In Lebanon With Subsidiaries In The UAE And China,” US Department of the Treasury, 10 July 2014. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2562.aspx>, accessed 11 November 2020.

101 Washington Institute for Near East Policy, “Lebanese Hezbollah: Select Worldwide Activity, Entry 644: Usama and Issam Hamade Arrested,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/hezbollahinteractivemap/#id=644>, accessed 11 November 2020.

requested by Pazara and other IS fighters in Syria.¹⁰² The couple received funds through Western Union and PayPal from sympathetic friends and then bought goods to ship to intermediaries in Saudi Arabia and Turkey for onward use by IS in Iraq and Syria.¹⁰³ FATF reports have documented other cases in which sympathetic donors sent material to IS based on appeals from IS fighters for equipment and supplies, often made via social media.¹⁰⁴

More recently, in October 2020, the US Treasury sanctioned an al-Qaeda financial facilitator who used his Australia-based international gemstone business as a cover to move funds on behalf of the group.¹⁰⁵ Whatever the form of resourcing, be it cash or material, funds raised locally or internationally will need to be spent on things and terrorist groups will need to move money across borders to do it. This will remain a trend worthy of attention even as terrorist groups continue to shift to a more localised financing model overall.

The return of abuse of charity as a CFT concern

For a while, it seemed like terrorist abuse of charity was outdated as a preferred illicit finance typology. Then came the war in Syria and a series of other conflicts across the Middle East and North Africa, and the issue is now back on the agenda as a counterterrorism priority.

Charities remain crucial for alleviating the accompanying humanitarian crises such wars bring in their wake, but it can be uniquely vulnerable to the misuse and abuse of funds. Auditing the delivery of humanitarian supplies to war-torn areas is no easy task. A report by Australia and six other Southeast Asian countries noted that Australia had “experienced suspicious ‘pop-up’ NPOs (non-profit organisations) that appear to dissolve after raising funds for ‘humanitarian efforts’ in Syria and Iraq.”¹⁰⁶ In Britain, the UK Charity Commission struck off two organisations from its official charity register in August 2017, after concluding that they had raised money and supplies for IS and AQ. The charities’ missions were ostensibly to help victims of Syria’s civil war, and Kurdish Muslims in the English city of Birmingham. Instead, the founder of the two organisations, Adeel Ul-Haq, bought “a high-powered laser pointer, night-vision goggles and a secret waterproof money pouch.”¹⁰⁷

Another series of cases in Lebanon and Australia uncovered possible misdeeds in connection with the Sydney-based Dar al Quran wa Sunnah charity, which purported to help Syrian orphans, and operated in Lebanon, Turkey, and Bangladesh. In May 2015, Lebanese authorities arrested Ibrahim Barakat on charges of fundraising for jihadists and recruiting for the Islamic State. A second man with dual Lebanese-Australian citizenship was reportedly arrested, charged with funding jihadists, and later released.¹⁰⁸ A statement from the charity disavowed Barakat,¹⁰⁹ and

102 “United States of America vs. Hodzic et al.,” Indictment, United States District Court Eastern District of Missouri, 4:15CR00049 CDP/DDN, filed 5 February 2015. Available at: <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Hodzic%20et%20al.%20Indictment.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

103 Seamus Hughes and Bennet Clifford, “First He Became an American—Then He Joined ISIS,” *The Atlantic*, 25 May 2017. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/05/first-he-became-an-americanthen-he-joined-isis/527622/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

104 FATF, “FATF Report: Financing of the Terrorist Organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),” 2015.

105 US Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Designates al-Qai’da Financial Facilitator,” US Department of the Treasury, 21 October 2020. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1157>, accessed 11 November 2020.

106 Matthew Levitt, “Terrorist Abuse of Charity in the Age of the Islamic State and the Syria War,” Testimony submitted to the Senate of Canada, National Security and Defence Committee, 13 February 2017. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/testimony/LevittTestimony20170213.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

107 William Watkinson, “Charity Commission punishes UK ‘charities’ that raised cash for Isis and Al-Qaeda,” *International Business Times*, 30 July 2016. Available at: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/charity-commission-punishes-uk-charities-that-raised-cash-isis-al-qaeda-1573367>, accessed 11 November 2020.

108 Lisa Main and Suzanne Dredge, “Islamic State: Member of Australian charity charged with raising funds for jihadists and recruiting for IS,” *ABC News*, 2 July 2015. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-07-03/australian-charity-investigated-for-alleged-is-links/6591174>, accessed 11 November 2020.

109 Max Margan, “Sydney Muslim charity linked to a man accused of funding Islamic State ‘under investigation after raising \$800,000 in two years from Australian donations,’” *Daily Mail*, 28 July 2016. Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3713791/Sydney-Muslim-charity-linked-man-accused-funding-Islamic-State-investigation-raising-800-000-two-years-Australian-donations.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

in July 2019, the charity's registration was revoked by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.¹¹⁰

In another case of charity abuse, in November 2019, Dutch and Belgian authorities arrested six men who established a foundation based in the Netherlands which raised some €200,000 to “provide assistance to war victims.” In fact, authorities believe the men used some of the money to fund their travel to Turkey and Syria, provided around €130,000 to fighters of the Islamic State (IS), and also gave funds to another organisation affiliated with IS.¹¹¹

Organisations funnelling money to al-Qaeda continue to come to light as well. Saudi Arabia and the United States jointly acted against the Al-Furqan Foundation Welfare Trust in April 2015.¹¹² The US Treasury identified Al-Furqan as the successor entity to two organisations it had previously designated, the Afghan Support Committee and the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society, and described it as a “charitable organization that is a major conduit of financial and material support for terrorist groups ... in some cases under the guise of humanitarian work.”¹¹³ In addition to supporting al-Qaeda, the Treasury also called out Al-Furqan for aiding the Taliban and the Pakistani jihadist group Lashkar-e-Tayyiba.¹¹⁴ Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia designated Al-Furqan under its own counter-terrorism laws.¹¹⁵

Less than a year later, the US and Saudi Arabia again took joint action against four individuals

and two organisations, for supporting the same three terrorist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹¹⁶ Among those sanctioned was the Al-Rahmah Welfare Organization (RWO), and its Scottish-born president, CEO, and chairman, James McLintock. According to the Treasury Department, RWO and other associated outfits received “large amounts of money from British donors who were not aware of the NGOs’ Taliban ties.”¹¹⁷

The Shi’a Lebanese terrorist organisation Hezbollah is a particularly adept fundraiser. A glaring example of Hezbollah raising funds through purportedly charitable donations was its use of the Islamic Resistance Support Organization (IRSO). The US Treasury designated the IRSO in 2006 for its weapons procurement fundraising,¹¹⁸ but in the wake of reimplementing of US sanctions targeting the group’s primary sponsor, Iran, the group has renewed its IRSO procurement fundraising campaigns.¹¹⁹ Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah himself recently lamented the impact of sanctions and publicly called upon Hezbollah’s members and sympathisers to donate funds to the group’s Islamic Resistance Support Organisation (IRSO).¹²⁰

As conflicts erupt in areas where terrorists groups operate, opportunities arise for terrorist groups and their supporters to raise funds fraudulently under the guise of legitimate charitable giving. This is especially the case in those situations where terrorists control territory, but also in cases where the need

110 Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) “Dar al Quran wa Sunnah Incorporated,” ACNC, 11 July 2019. Available at: <https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/cea2bc50ce0f7a0521be71f2e64e4eb8#overview>, accessed 11 November 2020.

111 Associated Press, “Two Belgian suspects arrested in international investigation into financing of terrorism,” The Brussels Times, 12 November 2019. Available at: <https://www.brusselstimes.com/belgium/78178/two-belgian-suspects-arrested-in-international-investigation-into-financing-of-terrorism-netherlands-report-secret-services-war-victims-turkey-syria/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

112 US Department of the Treasury Press Center, “The US and Saudi Arabia Take Joint Action Against Terrorist Financing Entity Attempting to Evade U.S. and UN Sanctions and Violate Saudi Laws,” US Department of the Treasury, 7 April 2015. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/j110019.aspx>, accessed 11 November 2020.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.

116 US Department of the Treasury, “United States and Saudi Arabia Designate Terrorist Fundraising and Support Networks,” US Department of the Treasury, 31 March 2016. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/j10400.aspx>, accessed 11 November 2020.

117 Ibid.

118 US Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Designates Key Hizballah Fundraising Organization,” US Department of the Treasury, 29 August 2006. Available at: <http://www.treas.gov/press/releases/hp73.htm>, accessed 11 November 2020.

119 Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, “Hezbollah Launched a Campaign to Raise Money for Military Purposes Using the Islamic Resistance Support Association,” Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2 December 2019. Available at: <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/hezbollah-launched-campaign-raise-money-military-purposes-using-islamic-resistance-support-association/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

120 Associated Press, “Nasrallah: Resistance needs support because we are in the heart of the battle,” An-Nahar (Lebanon), 8 March 2019.

is most dire and time that might otherwise be spent conducting due diligence is fast-tracked to get support where it is most needed in an effort to save lives. Such calculations are understandable, but they also present a serious terrorist financing vulnerability directly related to the theme of localised funding.

Responding to terrorist financing in place

When the Islamic State took vast swaths of territory in Syria and Iraq in 2014, it presented an unprecedented threat by virtue of its control of key resource-rich territory. Additionally, IS revenue sources were different from those of al Qaeda and most other terrorists groups in that its funds were primarily raised locally, within territories the group controlled. Already by October 2014, US Treasury Undersecretary David Cohen noted that “with the important exception of some state-sponsored terrorist organisations, ISIL is probably the best-funded terrorist organisation we have confronted.”¹²¹ And yet, the response to the challenge of IS financing ultimately mirrored two traditional and interdependent objectives that stood as the cornerstone of counter-terrorist financing efforts: (1) cut terrorists off from their source of funds and (2) deny them access to the global financial system.¹²² By suspending salaries to Government of Iraq employees in IS-controlled territory, authorities succeeded in lessening the liquidity for IS to tax and extort. The bombing of IS-controlled oil facilities and cash vaults hindered IS oil sales and destroyed one-time windfalls taken from banks vaults. Cutting off bank branches and exchange houses in and around IS-controlled territory made it harder for the group to move funds to support affiliates,

foreign fighter travel and procurement efforts. Ultimately, it was the territorial defeat of the caliphate that had the greatest impact on the organisation’s financial footings.

Such measures were novel only in their scale and scope since there is ample precedent for targeting industry and infrastructure funding terrorists controlling territory. A 2012 UN Security Council Resolution banned the charcoal trade in Somalia, taking aim at a lucrative source of revenue for al-Shabaab.¹²³ Authorities have struggled to combat Taliban funding through opium trade and illegal logging,¹²⁴ and both Egypt and Israel have targeted Hamas smuggling tunnels from Gaza into Sinai as a means of Hamas’ tunnel trade and the taxation revenue it generated for the group.¹²⁵

Indeed, efforts to counter the financing of the Islamic State specifically and terrorist financing more broadly are built on earlier efforts supported by two underlying lines of action. Firstly, efforts to increase transparency in the financial system and ensure the traceability and track-ability of financial activity so that terrorists and others engaged in illicit finance cannot act anonymously. And secondly, marshalling and employing actionable information to support a range of targeted measures to disrupt terrorist financing.¹²⁶ These actions include financial sanctions, law enforcement actions, regulatory findings, information sharing with foreign governments. Together, the ability to use anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) regulatory efforts to harden the financial system against potential exploitation and to collect actionable information on illicit financial activity, will prove the most effective tools to contend with the trend of terrorist financing in place.

121 US Department of the Treasury, “Remarks of Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David S. Cohen at The Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, “Attacking ISIL’s Financial Foundation,” US Department of the Treasury, 23 October 2014. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2672.aspx>, accessed 11 November 2020.

122 US Department of the Treasury, “Testimony of A/S for Terrorist Financing Daniel L. Glaser Before The House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, and House Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities,” US Department of the Treasury, 9 June 2016. Available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl0486.aspx>, accessed 11 November 2020.

123 United Nations Security Council, “Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolution 751(1992) Concerning Somalia,” United Nations Security Council. Available at: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/751>, accessed 11 November 2020.

124 Gretchen Peters, “How Opium Profits the Taliban,” United States Institute of Peace, August 2009. Available at: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/taliban_opium_1.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

125 Raphael S. Cohen, David E. Johnson, David E. Thaler, Brenna Allen, Elizabeth M. Bartels, James Cahill, Shira Efron, “From Cast Lead to Protective Edge: Lessons from Israel’s Wars in Gaza,” RAND Corporation, 2017. Available at: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1800/RR1888/RAND_RR1888.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

126 US Department of the Treasury, “Testimony of A/S for Terrorist Financing Daniel L. Glaser Before The House Committee,” 2016.

Over the past two decades, considerable efforts have been made at the systemic level to establish and encourage adoption of international best practices, such as FATF recommendations, designed to make the international financial system a hostile environment for terrorist support and other forms of illicit finance. This effort involves, *inter alia*, raising awareness of the risks of terrorist financing and facilitation and helping governments in high-risk jurisdictions develop tools to effectively implement such standards. Furthermore, by sharing actionable information, either confidentially or through public notification of sanctions actions, governments are incentivised—and sometimes compelled—to disrupt terrorists’ means to raise, store, and move funds.

One development that has proven particularly effective has been the growth of public-private partnerships and relationships focused on identifying and curbing illicit financial activity. Banks run financial intelligence units, which in several cases have provided “that missing piece of the puzzle to identify someone here or abroad who is planning or supporting plans to attack our interests,” according to Gerald Roberts, the former section chief of the FBI’s Terrorist Financing Operations Section.¹²⁷ In one particularly telling case, private sector financial data gleaned by finance ministries and shared with US military and law enforcement agencies helped identify financial targets for military strikes on IS oil infrastructure and cash depots.¹²⁸

Alongside efforts to disrupt terrorist financing is another equally powerful tool: using financial data to gather intelligence. As the 9/11

Commission’s report concluded, “Expect less from trying to dry up terrorist money and more from following the money for intelligence, as a tool to hunt terrorists, understand their networks, and disrupt their operations.”¹²⁹ Financial intelligence (FININT) has provided valuable information in several high-profile investigations. In 2003, transactions between a known al-Qaeda suspect and a previously unknown figure in South Asia allowed the US government to track down Riduan Isamuddin, the mastermind of the 2002 Bali bombing.¹³⁰ The UK’s National Terrorist Financial Investigations Unit helped thwart the 2006 airline plot by tracking large money transfers disguised as “earthquake relief” from a British-based Islamic charity to the three suspected bombers.¹³¹

One particularly effective FININT program—the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program (TFTP)—produced more than 18,000 FININT leads that US authorities shared with their European counterparts through February 2016.¹³² The TFTP collects data on international financial transactions to gain information about terrorist networks and plots.¹³³ The TFTP has successfully intercepted many illegal transactions and thwarted many plots, such as threats to the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in London and a 2011 assassination plot to kill the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States.¹³⁴ In the case of small scale plots by lone offenders or small groups, where international transactions are less likely to take place, FININT, such as TFTP, will still prove to be an effective investigative tool in the wake of an attack, as it did in the investigations that followed the 2013 Boston bombings, the January 2015 shooting at the offices of the magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, and

127 Gerald Roberts, “Money Flow in the Age of ISIS,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 15 May 2015. Available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/money-flow-in-the-age-of-isis>, accessed 11 November 2020.

128 Yeganeh Torbati and Brett Wolf, “In Taking Economic War to Islamic State, U.S. Developing New Tools,” Reuters, 24 November 2015. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-shooting-usa-sanctions-insightidUSKBN0TD0BJ20151124>, accessed 11 November 2020.

129 Kean, “Executive Summary”, 2004.

130 Eric Lichtblau and James Risen, “Bank Data Is Sifted by U.S. in Secret to Block Terror,” The New York Times, 23 June 2006. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/23/washington/23intel.html?pagewanted=print>, accessed 11 November 2020.

131 Stephen Dametto, “Money trail is the best lead in the fight against terror,” WAtoday, 9 November 2014. Available at: <https://www.watoday.com.au/opinion/money-trail-is-the-best-lead-in-the-fight-against-terror-20141109-11j8ee.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

132 US Department of the Treasury, “Terrorist Finance Tracking Program Questions & Answers,” US Department of the Treasury, 15 March 2016. Available at: https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/terrorist-illicit-finance/Terrorist-FinanceTracking/Documents/tftp_brochure_03152016.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

133 Terrorist Finance Tracking Program Questions & Answers,” US Department of the Treasury, March 15, 2016, <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/246/Terrorist-Finance-Tracking-Program-Questions-and-Answers.pdf>

134 Ibid.

the November 2015 attacks in Paris.¹³⁵ While no one system can monitor every transaction, the TFTP is an important measure that the West has in place to address terrorists' exploitation of the international banking system. Perhaps most important, the TFTP program was designed—in cooperation with the SWIFT company—with multiple levels of privacy protections.¹³⁶

Importantly, FININT is not limited to suspicious activity reports (SARs) submitted by financial institutions and TFTP alone. Rather, it also includes clandestine collection, business records and grey literature, as well as financial records, such as invoices, receipts and other pocket litter, recovered from law enforcement action or in and around conflict zones.

Some critics argue that in the age of the Islamic State, the traditional tools used to fight terrorist financing are ineffective at preventing the kinds of self-funded attacks that have recently become common.¹³⁷ However, such attacks often cost more than meets the eye; because even the cheapest attack is not free, when terrorists are frozen out of their bank accounts, they have to resort to riskier tactics.

Consider the case of Ismail Issa, an IS operative arrested while traveling from Germany to Syria. The group had to send Issa with cash to shop for supplies rather than wiring money to an operative already in the country, precisely because it had become too difficult for IS members to transfer money without being picked up by the authorities.¹³⁸ In this case as in others, jihadists have grown so worried that their transactions are being monitored that they are too scared to collect the funds.

“We have no illusion that we can entirely prevent the flow of funds to terrorist groups,” then Treasury Undersecretary David Cohen stated in 2010.¹³⁹ “Some funds will find a way to flow. But that does not mean the effort is futile—far from it. What we have learned

is that by deterring would-be funders and disrupting the financial facilitation networks, we significantly impede terrorists' ability to operate.”¹⁴⁰ Disrupting terrorists' financial transactions makes it harder for them to travel, bribe officials, procure materials, provide for their own families, and, ultimately, engage in operations. Denying terrorists—as well as insurgents and proliferators—easy access to financial tools forces them to use more costly, less efficient, and often less reliable means of financing their activities. Trends toward increased jurisdictional distinction and funding in place in terrorist financing matter, but while specific tactics and procedures may have to be adjusted to deal with developments like self-funded lone-offender terrorists or proto-state terrorists groups controlling territory, the underlying principles that have guided counter-terror finance strategies to date remain effective even in the face of these new challenges.

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¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Peter R. Neumann, “Don't Follow the Money, The Problem with the War on Terrorist Financing,” *Foreign Affairs*, 24 July 2017. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2017-06-13/dont-follow-money>, accessed 11 November 2020.

¹³⁸ Justin Huggler, “German jihadi trial shows Islamic State's money transfer struggle,” *The Telegraph*, 5 November 2014. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/11210325/German-jihadi-trial-shows-Islamic-States-money-transfer-struggle.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

¹³⁹ David Cohen, “Tackling Terrorist Financing,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 28 January 2010. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/event/tackling-terrorist-financing-0>, accessed 11 November 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

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Community and Gender in Counter-Terrorism Policy: Challenges and Opportunities for Transferability Across the Evolving Threat Landscape

Jessica White

Abstract

This article examines the transferability of two decades of counter-terrorism policy structures which are focused on Islamist extremism. It illustrates how these policies are challenged by the emergence and resurgence of different threat profiles on the security horizon, especially focusing on right-wing extremism. Prevention has become a prominent part of the counter-terrorism strategy, with much of this programming focused on engaging “at risk” communities to reduce grievances which might encourage participation in violent extremism. This article assesses, through a review of literature and policy as well as contextual comparative analysis, whether “at risk” communities for other forms of extremism can be identified by the same simplistic categorisation processes which are often employed with the Islamist inspired threat. Identifying the challenges of community-based programming highlights the importance of gender roles within communities and the radicalisation narrative, thus emphasising the essential nature of a gender lens for effective counter-terrorism policy.

Keywords: counter-terrorism, preventing and countering violent extremism, transferability, community, gender, islamist extremism, far right extremism

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Introduction

Current counter-terrorism (CT) policy in much of the world, both at the national and international levels, has largely been built on the two-decade legacy of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). This perspective has focused policy almost exclusively on the threat of Islamist extremism. However, the threat landscape is constantly evolving. It is becoming more widely recognised that while there is still a threat from the likes of ISIS, al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and affiliates, they are certainly not the only threat and perhaps not even the most considerable one at this point in time.¹ The threat from the extreme right-wing (XRW) has been increasing steadily, spurred on in the current climate of conspiracy and mistrust exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and government measures taken in its wake.² Therefore, this article seeks to highlight some of the challenges and opportunities for CT policy transferability. This requires acknowledging the shortcomings presented by a single-minded policy focus on Islamist extremism and taking lessons-learned in some areas, such as community and gender, to adapt policy going forward making it more widely applicable to an ever-evolving threat landscape.

Over the last decade, prevention strategies have evolved as a key pillar of CT policy and have largely taken the shape of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programming.³ This type of programming, due to the focus on Islamist extremism, has been focused on developing resilience in various types of communities determined “at risk” to violent extremism (VE).⁴ In identifying the challenges of transferability of CT policy, this

article looks at how the concept of community and its profiling for the purposes of P/CVE programming is challenged by the varying nature of community within different threat profiles. It also focuses on how the concept of identifying “at risk” communities is closely intertwined with common assumptions around gender.⁵ The importance of applying a gender lens to P/CVE programming and wider CT policy has been increasingly recognised over the past few years.⁶ Therefore, this article focuses on identifying where lessons learned in research and practice can be transferred across terrorism threats or reimagined where not effective – in order to prevent the same mistakes being made during adaptation of CT policy to new threats.

The body of the article is organised into six sections, with the next section addressing the methodology and the following section explaining key concepts. While often considered to be at opposite ends of a spectrum, the key concepts section highlights how there are similarities as well as differences between the Islamist and XRW threats. The third section then provides an overview of the common pillar formation of CT frameworks. After that, a three-tiered approach is used to breakdown the challenging, intertwined issue of efficacy and transferability. The first tier briefly highlights some examples of challenges to the various pillars. The second tier focuses on the prevention pillar. It illustrates some of the challenges made apparent over the last decade around interpretation of community and how these could be made even more complicated with the disparate nature of “community” often associated with the XRW. This leads to the third tier, which emphasises

1 United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTED), “Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism,” CTED, 2020. Available at: https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CTED_Trends_Alert_Extreme_Right-Wing_Terrorism.pdf, accessed 27 August 2020.

2 Claudia Wallner and Jessica White, “The Far-Right and Coronavirus: Extreme Voices Amplified by the Global Crisis,” The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Commentary, 30 April 2020. Available at: <https://rusi.org/commentary/far-right-and-coronavirus-extreme-voices-amplified-global-crisis>, accessed 27 August 2020.

3 E.g. EU Council, “Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism,” EU Council, 2014. Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9956-2014-INIT/en/pdf>, accessed 27 August 2020.

4 RUSI, “The Prevention Project,” (London: RUSI, 2020). Available at: <https://rusi.org/project/prevent>, accessed 27 August 2020.

5 Jessica White, “Gender in Countering Violent Extremism Program Design, Implementation and Evaluation: Beyond Instrumentalism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (September 2020), pp. 1-24.

6 Eleanor Gordon and Jacqui True, “Gender Stereotyped or Gender Responsive? Hidden Threats and Missed Opportunities to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism in Indonesia and Bangladesh,” *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 164, No. 4 (September 2019), pp. 74-91; Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), “Addendum to the GCTF Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism, with a Focus on Mainstreaming Gender,” GCTF, 2020. Available at: <https://www.thegctf.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=jA1tbXKhobE%3D&portalid=1>, accessed 27 August 2020.

the importance of considering gender in how community is constructed and how prevention programming is applied. These sections highlight some of the challenges to CT policy and the ways in which they are intensified when considering if and how current CT policy is transferrable to the evolving threat landscape. They also seek to illustrate lessons learned from past programming and where it could benefit adaptation of policy.

Methodology

This article comprises a review of the primary issues around transferability of CT policy. It also provides a qualitative comparative analysis of representative samples of the work that has been done on community and gender in the often siloed research areas looking at Islamist versus XRW terrorism and the CT policy and P/CVE programming associated with them. Charles Ragin developed the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) case study research design as a critical realist approach to in-depth examination and comparison of examples.⁷ This allows for what Clifford Geertz termed “thick description” to be developed.⁸ This approach is very useful in policy research as it allows policy makers and practitioners to “to transfer understanding of complex social processes in context from one locale of social action to another.”⁹ Often in the fields of research on P/CVE, and especially on gender mainstreaming in this context, there is very little data. This requires that an interpretive approach is taken to this nascent area of research in order to glean what lessons have been learned and

apply them to other contexts and policy arenas where possible.¹⁰ In this article, the adopted critical realist perspective accepts the realist assertion that community and biological sex are objectively real. However, they are constructed by sociocultural norms and expectations into subjective interpretations of community and gender roles. Therefore, this article uses an interpretivist-based theoretical approach to identify how community and gender roles are socially constructed and how that impacts people’s path to extremism.¹¹

A feminist constructivist theoretical perspective is employed for the analysis in this article, which is part of the wider family of interpretivist approaches.¹² This perspective accepts that the author’s own understanding of insecurity and inequality shapes the analysis of this article.¹³ While the interpretivist approach acknowledges subjectivity, this does not mean that rigor and testability are not valid in this approach, just that they are approached differently.¹⁴ The interpretivist theoretical approach to case study design allows for in-depth examination and generation of new knowledge.¹⁵ The feminist perspective included in the theoretical approach acknowledges the importance of using a gender lens and of gender equality.¹⁶ The two cases used for comparison in this article are not singular examples but rather two contexts, constituted of representative examples of the bodies of literature written on community and gender in Islamist and XRW extremism. Due to the relative nascency of research in these areas and the little amount of data available, the examples given were chosen through an interpretive process of

7 Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, Revised 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

8 Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in Yvonna S. Lincoln and Norman K. Denzin, eds., *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief* (AltaMira Press, 2003) pp. 143-168.

9 David Byrne, Wendy Olsen and Sandra Duggan, “Causality and Interpretation in Qualitative Policy-Related Research,” in David Byrne and Charles Ragin, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Case-Based Methods*, (London; London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2009), p. 511.

10 Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True, *Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science*, 2nd ed. (New York: Red Globe Press, 2010).

11 Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Leeds: Leeds Books, 1975); Tony Lawson et al., *Critical Realism* (GB: Routledge Ltd, 1998); Margaret Archer et al., *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (Routledge, 2013).

12 Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations: The Politics of Reality* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Alexander Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1995), pp. 71-81.

13 Cerwyn Moore, “Reading the Hermeneutics of Violence: The Literary Turn and Chechnya,” *Global Society*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (June 2006), pp. 179-198.

14 Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011).

15 Cerwyn Moore and Chris Farrands, *International Relations Theory and Philosophy: Interpretive Dialogues* (Routledge, 2010).

16 Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern and Jacqui True, *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

looking for the data in centres of expertise or from key researchers on these issues.

Key Concepts

Terrorism is a highly political and contested term because “deciding whether a particular act of violence constitutes an ‘act of terrorism’ relies on judgments about the context, circumstances and intent of the violence, rather than any objective characteristic inherent to it.”¹⁷ Terrorism is often accepted as an act of violence used by non-state actors to incite terror in a general audience in order to achieve a political goal.¹⁸ Bruce Hoffman describes terrorism as “designed to create power where there is none or to consolidate power where there is very little.”¹⁹ While the definition of terrorism varies, it does in most contexts hold legal weight. Extremism, on the other hand, is a nebulous term which does not necessarily refer to violence or the contravening of any laws, so is more ambiguous and does not hold legal weight.

The 9/11 attacks in the United States (US) in 2001 and subsequent GWOT elicited a global focus on the threat of Islamist terrorism over the last two decades. This has encouraged international agreements and CT frameworks to be established around the threat of foreign terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS. Due to the perceived difference in this threat than, for example, the significant role of left-wing terrorism in the 20th century, the language of CT policy has shifted to include extremism and the process of radicalisation. This path to violent extremism can signify a deviation from the expectation of terrorism being carried out for the purpose of a political gain. However, like terrorism and extremism, radicalisation is also a contested term. It can

be understood as non-linear and fluid social and psychological process of becoming incrementally more committed to extremist ideologies – not necessarily leading to participation in violence.²⁰

Radicalisation can be “blamed on many things, including exposure to ideology, victimization, alienation, socialization, social networks, the internet, deficiencies in family bonds, trauma, relative social and economic deprivation, and ‘cultures of violence.’”²¹ It has been associated, through some CT policy framing, with the process of foreign terrorist organisations encouraging violent extremism within a domestic population, or “home-grown” terrorism.²² As they are not concrete or legal terms, the concepts of radicalisation and extremism can be used in a politically-driven manner. The political nature of their application is highlighted in the XRW context, as these are often expressions of varying levels of extremism from within the majority population and perspective, and are, therefore, more politically sensitive to frame negatively.

The challenge of defining these basic concepts of terrorism and extremism is made more complicated by the umbrella categories that are often used to account for a variety of different ideologies. For example: the term Salafi-Jihadi terrorism encompasses a wide range of Islamist extremists based on variances of Islamic theology.²³ The XRW also encompasses a wide range of ideologies, including ultra-nationalism, xenophobia, white supremacy, neo-Nazism, extreme Christian fundamentalism, and others. There is an additional challenge in the definition of this threat, as XRW is only one of many terms used, often interchangeably, including extreme far-right, radical right, and others.²⁴ This lack of coherency can leave confusion discursively

17 Richard Jackson et al., *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 35.

18 Walter Laqueur, *A History of Terrorism*, 5th ed. (London: Transaction Publishers, 2001).

19 Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, Revised and Expanded ed. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2006), p. 41.

20 Mark Sedgwick, "The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (September 2010), pp. 479-494.

21 Katherine E. Brown, "Gender and Counter-Radicalization: Women and Emerging Counter-Terror Measures," in Margaret L Satterthwaite and Jayne Huckerby, eds., *Gender, National Security, and Counter-Terrorism* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), p. 37.

22 Charlotte Heath-Kelly, "Counter-Terrorism and the Counterfactual: Producing the 'Radicalisation' Discourse and the UK PREVENT Strategy," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2013), pp. 394-415.

23 Sasha Jespersen et al., "Islamist Violent Extremism: A New Form of Conflict or Business as Usual?" *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2017).

24 Archie Henderson, "Faces" of the Radical Right," Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR), 2020. Available at: <http://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2020/08/14/faces-of-the-radical-right/>, accessed 27 August 2020.

between the mainstream far-right and the XRW. Left-wing extremism is another umbrella category which is part of the evolving threat landscape and is potentially on the rise again, especially with growing social movements and concern over climate change. It encompasses a wide range of anti-capitalist, imperialist and colonialist ideology, often including radical environmentalism and support of animal rights.²⁵ These umbrella categories are often used to lump together the wide range of threats which CT policy must address.

While Islamist and right-wing extremism are often considered opposite ends of a spectrum or potentially encouraging each other in a cycle of reciprocal radicalisation, they in fact share some similarities. For example, as is shown above both can include elements of religiously motivated terrorism. Also, they both exist at the far-right conservative end of the political spectrum, often implementing very fundamentalist concepts of social structure and identity politics.²⁶ These similarities and differences are explored further in this article when looking at their constructs of community and gender. While some lessons can be learned from the way that gender has been researched and applied across these two threats, the applicability and effectiveness of transferring commonly used approaches to prevention can be called into question, especially with the differences in the way that these extremist communities are formed and identified. In order to further this examination, an understanding of the common pillar approach to CT frameworks must be established first.

Overview of CT Frameworks

At the intergovernmental level, the United Nations (UN) has developed a CT strategic approach and makes recommendations to Member States. There are four pillars which are the foundation of the UN Global Strategy:

- Addressing the Conditions Conducive to the Spread of Terrorism
- Preventing and Combatting Terrorism
- Building States' Capacity and Strengthening the Role of the United Nations
- Ensuring Human Rights and the Rule of Law²⁷

These pillars have guided the biennial review of the strategy and have informed the updates and improvements which have been made since its original 2006 adoption, including keeping it attuned to the CT priorities of Member States.²⁸

An example of CT strategy at the supranational level is the European Union (EU). They originally designed their CT strategy in 2005 with the following four pillars:

- Respond: to prepare for and minimise the consequences of a successful terrorist attack.
- Protect: to protect citizens and infrastructure and reduce vulnerability to an attack.
- Pursue: to pursue terrorists, bring them to justice, and build local capacity to do so.
- Prevent: to prevent people turning to terrorism by tackling the factors which can lead to radicalisation and aid recruitment.²⁹

25 Seth Jones, Catrina Doxsee and Nicholas Harrington, "The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States," Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2020. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states>, accessed 27 August 2020.

26 Tahir Abbas, "Ethnicity and Politics in Contextualising Far Right and Islamist Extremism," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2017), pp. 54-61.

27 UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), "UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," UNOCT, 2018. Available at: <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy>, accessed 27 August 2020.

28 There have been six completed reviews of the strategy since 2006 - in: 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 – the 2020 review was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

29 EU Council, "The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy," EU Council, 2005. Available at: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2014469%202005%20REV%204>, accessed 27 August 2020.

Additionally, many national level CT strategies share this pillar design, often including similar pillars or purposes.³⁰ One representative example is the United Kingdom (UK) CONTEST CT strategy, which includes the following four pillars:

- Prevent: to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism
- Pursue: to stop terrorist attacks
- Protect: to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack
- Prepare: to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack³¹

This CONTEST strategy was first introduced in 2003 and at the time the PREVENT pillar played a relatively minor role. However, as the threat of “home-grown” terrorism increased so did the emphasis on this strategy.³² The UK’s PREVENT programming is now often looked to as the first and most wide-ranging domestic P/CVE platform.³³

P/CVE, a common form of programming under the prevention pillar, has been developed in recognition that hard CT measures alone, such as military intervention or legal prosecution, are not enough to counter the threat and can sometimes even exacerbate it.³⁴ P/CVE is another definitionally challenging subject, but has gained traction as a concept over the last

decade. It is often defined, especially in the Western context, according to a public health three-tier model:

- First tier: addresses underlying social conditions which might act as drivers of extremism, such as unemployment, poor governance, inequality, human rights violations, etc.
- Second tier: focuses on identifying and engaging with “at risk” populations in order to advert their path to radicalisation
- Third tier: focuses on the deradicalisation and reintegration of individuals who have already chosen to participate in VE³⁵

There have been a lot of challenges to use of this model, with some argument to split these three tiers into separate types of programming. PVE programming would be the first tier, bridging the gap to development and other types of programming which are already addressing these wider social ills without linking them to security goals.³⁶ CVE programming would focus on identifying “at risk” populations and trying to address the individual drivers that draw them in to VE.³⁷ Disengagement, De-radicalisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programming would remain focused on the third tier of neutralising the threat from those who have already chosen to participate in VE.³⁸ However, for the purposes of this article

30 E.g. US Executive Branch, “National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the USA,” (Washington DC: The White House, 2018). Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf>, accessed 27 August 2020; Australia New Zealand CT Committee, “National Counter-Terrorism Plan,” Australia New Zealand CT Committee, 2017. Available at: <https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/WhatAustraliaIsDoing/Pages/Australia-New-Zealand-Counter-Terrorism-Committee.aspx>, accessed 27 August 2020; UK Home Office, “UK Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST),” UK Home Office, 2018. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest>, accessed 27 August 2020.

31 UK Home Office, “UK Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST),” 2018.

32 The CONTEST strategy has been reviewed and updated four times since 2003 - in: 2006, 2009, 2011, and 2018.

33 RUSI, “The Prevention Project,” 2020.

34 Naureen Chowdhury-Fink, “The Blue Flag in Grey Zones: Exploring the Relationship between Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR),” in UN Field Operations, in United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, “UN DDR in an Era of Violent Extremism: Is it Fit for Purpose?” (Tokyo: United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, 2015), pp. 62-79. Available at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/un_ddr_in_an_era_of_violent_extremism.pdf, accessed 27 August 2020.

35 Jonathan Challengren et al., “Countering Violent Extremism: Applying the Public Health Model,” Georgetown Security Studies Review, (October 2016). Available at: <https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NSCITF-Report-on-Countering-Violent-Extremism.pdf>, accessed 27 August 2020.

36 William Stephens, Stijn Sieckelinc and Hans Boutellier, “Preventing Violent Extremism: A Review of the Literature,” Studies in Conflict & Terrorism (January 2019), pp. 1-16.

37 James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, “Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation,” RUSI, June 2016. Available at: <https://rusi.org/publication/whitehall-reports/countering-violent-extremism-and-risk-reduction-guide-programme-design>, accessed 27 August 2020.

38 John Horgan, “Deradicalization Or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation,” Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 24, No. 2 (February 2008), pp. 291-298.; Tore Bjørgo and John G. Horgan, Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement (Routledge, 2008).

the prevention pillar of CT policy is referred to as P/CVE and encompasses all three tiers.³⁹ There is some variance among approaches to P/CVE programming, especially regarding how cooperative it needs to be. However, the EU, for example, requires a coalition between governments, communities, civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private sector actors. This coalition approach allows the scope to implement P/CVE programmes jointly on local, regional, national, and international levels.⁴⁰

Over the last few years there has been an increasing focus on the need to include women more equally in CT policy and programming as well as the wider process of security. The first formal international agreement on this issue came with the formation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda laid out by UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000. This UNSCR focused on the need to not only include women more equally in the process of security but also encouraged CT policy to take into account the varying impact of conflict on women.⁴¹ There have been nine additional UNSCRs passed since 1325 relating to the WPS agenda, most recently 2493 in 2019.⁴² This high-level political commitment to the inclusion of women has unfortunately

not always filtered down to meaningful on-the-ground implementation.⁴³ Where there have been strategies developed to work on achieving more equal inclusion of women in CT policy and practice, these strategies are often referred to as gender-mainstreaming. However, gender-mainstreaming has a controversial reception among feminist scholars, as it is often equated with the 'add women and stir' method of just increasing numbers of women in current security processes, instead of actually re-examining inequality in security.⁴⁴

The process of implementing a meaningful strategy of gender equality as essential to security requires a multifaceted understanding of gender. Thus far, when there has been attention to including women in P/CVE policy, it has most often been focused on the empowerment of women as mothers, wives, and peacemakers in the community to counter radicalisation.⁴⁵ There is not only very little evidence of the effectiveness of this approach to including women, this is also encouraging gender essentialism and limiting the way in which women's roles in P/CVE are viewed.⁴⁶ The examination of gender in security needs a much wider perspective and the application of a gender lens to all policy and programming.

Historically, gender has been conflated with

39 UNOCT, "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism," UNOCT, 2015. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674, accessed 27 August 2020.

40 EU Council, "Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism," 2014.

41 UN Security Council Resolution 1325, October 2000. Available at: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>, accessed 27 August 2020; Christine Chinkin, "Adoption of 1325 Resolution," in Sara Davies and Jacqui True, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Thania Paffenholz et al., "Making Women Count-Not just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations," UN Women, Inclusion, Peace and Transition Initiative, 2016. Available at: <http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Making%20Women%20Count%20Not%20Just%20Counting%20Women.pdf>, accessed 27 August 2020.

42 The 10 WPS UNSCRs are: 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2008), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019).

43 Laura Shepherd, "The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda at the United Nations," in Anthony Burke and Rita Parker, eds., *Global Insecurity*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 139-158; Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, "Women, Peace, and Security: A Transformative Agenda?" in Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Nicola Pratt and Sophie Richter-Devroe, "Critically Examining UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* Vol. 13, No. 4 (2011), pp. 489-503.

44 Jacqui True and Laura Parisi, "Gender Mainstreaming Strategies in International Governance," in Gülay Caglar, Susanne Zwingel and Elisabeth Prügl, eds., *Feminist Strategies in International Governance*, (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 59-78; Jacqui True, "How Effective is Gender Mainstreaming in International Peace and Security Policymaking?" in Jill Steans and Daniela Tepe, eds., *Handbook on Gender in World Politics*, (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), pp. 457-466; Jacqui True, "Mainstreaming Gender in Global Public Policy," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (June 2003), pp. 368-396.; Paffenholz et al., "Making Women Count-Not just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations," 2016.

45 Emily Winterbotham, "What can Work (and what has Not Worked) in Women-Centric P/CVE Initiatives: Assessing the Evidence Base for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," (London: RUSI, 2020). Available at: <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/what-can-work-and-what-has-not-worked-women-centric-pcve-initiatives>, accessed 27 August 2020.

46 Emily Winterbotham, "Do Mothers Know Best? How Assumptions Harm CVE," (London: Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2018). Available at: <https://institute.global/policy/do-mothers-know-best-how-assumptions-harm-cve>, accessed 27 August 2020; Jessica White, "Evaluating Gender Mainstreaming in Counter-Terrorism Policy" PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2020.

biological sex; however, in current feminist analysis, the term sex normally refers to the biological differences associated with being male or female and the term gender refers to the wider sociocultural construction of role expectations based on a person's sex.⁴⁷ This article argues that this wider perspective of gender needs to be employed as part of the gender lens for P/CVE programming and CT policy. Policy needs to take into account more than just essentialised roles women can play. Instead, it needs to look at how underlying expectations of masculinity and femininity impact the roles people play in communities and why and how people engage in VE or in P/CVE. Social construction of gender roles can play a significant role in how extremist communities are formed and why individuals seek to join or support VE organisations.⁴⁸ This is examined further in later sections.

The following sections now use the common formation of CT policy frameworks highlighted in this section to illustrate where challenges and opportunities are present for transferability across the threat landscape.

Tier 1: Challenges for transferability of CT policy

As shown above, there tends not to be explicit focus within the language of CT strategies on one type of threat. However, this section

briefly identifies some of the ways in which current policy design is implicitly focused on the era of the GWOT and the threat of Islamist extremism – an issue which ultimately creates challenges for the policy to be transferrable between types of threat. First, it is important to remember that the terrorism threat landscape is constantly evolving.⁴⁹ In the 1970's and 80's the biggest concern tended to be left-wing extremism focused on anti-capitalism and colonialism, then after the 9/11 attack in the US the GWOT shifted the focus to Islamic extremism.⁵⁰ Now the XRW is presented as a new and rising concern on the CT landscape, especially in the West, due to rising expression of extremist sentiment and violence. However, this threat is historically engrained in most white, European societies and is a resurgence of extreme ideologies which have already caused conflict.⁵¹ White majority societies have long demonstrated various elements of XRW ideology, often stemming from histories of colonialism and imperialism. These roots have manifested in transnational links between many of these ideological groups, with support bases in multiple countries.⁵² As with all threats, this transnational ideological link sometimes manifests in the traveling of violent extremists from one location to other in order to fight for the ideological cause.

Due to the multiple pillars of many CT frameworks, programming can include a range of things from the 'hardening' of soft targets

47 Terrell Carver, "Sex, Gender and Sexuality," in Jill Steans and Daniela Tepe, eds., *Handbook on Gender in World Politics*, (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), pp. 58-65; Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*, 1st ed. (GB: Zed Books, 2007); Jill Steans, *Gender and International Relations*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013). The author acknowledges that gender is fluid and that people hold more than just male and female identities. The author also acknowledges that this gender fluidity does have an impact on VE because of the way that extremists characterise masculinity, but for the purposes of this paper male and female will be the primary distinctions.

48 Martine Zeuthen and Gayatri Sahgal, "Gender, Violent Extremism, and Countering Violent Extremism" (London: RUSI, 2018). Available at: https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201809_cr_gender_and_ve_final_1.pdf, accessed 27 August 2020; Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Soldier, Sailor, Rebel, Rule-Breaker: Masculinity and the Body in the German Far Right," *Gender and Education* Vol. 29, No. 2 (January 2017), pp. 199-215.

49 David Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," in Audrey Cronin and James Ludes, eds., *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), pp. 3-11.

50 Erica Chenoweth et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

51 Rob May and Matthew Feldman, "Understanding the Alt-Right: Ideologues, 'Lulz' and Hiding in Plain Sight," in Maik Fielitz and Nick Thurston, eds., *Post-Digital Cultures of the Far Right*, (2019). Available at: <https://www.degruyter.com/transcript/view/book/9783839446706/10.14361/9783839446706-002.xml>, accessed 27 August 2020; Daniel Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe," *Prism*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (July 2016), pp. 84-105. Available at: <https://cco.ndu.edu/PRISM/PRISM-Volume-6-no-2/Article/839011/right-wing-extremism-and-terrorism-in-europe-current-developments-and-issues-fo/>, accessed 27 August 2020; Paul Hainsworth, *The Extreme Right in Europe* (Routledge, 2008).

52 Soufan Center, "White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement," (2019). Available at: <https://thesoufancenter.org/research/white-supremacy-extremism-the-transnational-rise-of-the-violent-white-supremacist-movement/>, accessed 27 August 2020; Soufan Center, "The Atomwaffen Division: The Evolution of the White Supremacy Threat," (2020). Available at: <https://thesoufancenter.org/research/the-atomwaffen-division-the-evolution-of-the-white-supremacy-threat/>, accessed 27 August 2020.

such as airports and crowded places, to legal deterrence through increasing punishments and strengthening international agreements, to outright police or military intervention and 'use of force', to use of P/CVE programming.⁵³ This established framework is challenged by the varied nature of different threats on the spectrum. However, from a practical point of view, the dismantling of the current CT framework and rebuilding of a new one would be an immensely political and lengthy process. Therefore, forcing examination of transferability for current policy and practice, with adaptation and improvement from lessons learned and emerging research.

Although, the challenges become apparent when examining the harder measures such as legal deterrence, tracking, and prosecution.⁵⁴ Due to the two-decade focus on the threat from international Islamist organisations, many of the policies, strategies, and international CT agreements have been built on the threat posed by foreign terrorist organisations, while in many countries not as effectively addressing the threat of domestic extremism.⁵⁵ The distinction of pursuing a foreign terrorist organisation in most Western countries' national CT legal frameworks and international intelligence sharing agreements opens the door for intelligence gathering and information sharing. However, this legal enforcement apparatus often depends on being able to link an individual or group to a foreign terrorist organisation and thus being able to designate them as a foreign terrorist threat.⁵⁶ While it was relatively easy to establish the transnational ties between organisations declaring their allegiance to al-Qaeda or ISIS, the evidence of these transnational links between XRW organisation and networks have been harder to prove.

It is not as easy of a process to designate the terrorist legal status when extremist organisations or networks are domestic. While the law may be equipped for terrorism, extremism is often a highly political issue. Even the designation of domestic terrorist organisation can still protect members of these groups in some ways from some of the layers of investigation and prosecution, as governments are bound by legal protections against gathering intelligence on their own citizens.⁵⁷ This proves especially pertinent in the case of the XRW, as even though individuals who identify with this ideology may be perpetrating or encouraging the same level of violence as foreign terrorist organisations, they are often able to evade much of the same scrutiny. XRW groups have shown proclivity for group and branding adaptation, as well as keeping violent activities minor enough to evade large scale legal and media attention.⁵⁸

The XRW is often characterised as being more loosely affiliated individuals who do not adhere to the same rigid organisational structures as, for example, groups like ISIS.⁵⁹ This plays a significant role, as in this context it is difficult to attribute individuals to an organisation or network they may identify with. This presents challenges for transferability of many of the current tracking, prevention, and prosecution strategies which are based on the linkage of individual terrorists to proscribed organisations and the further transnational link of that organisation to a foreign terrorist threat. These challenges also highlight the issue of lone-actors and attributing individual crimes to terrorism.⁶⁰ While lone-actors are a threat under any ideology, this type of terrorist act certainly presents a unique challenge to CT frameworks.

53 Jackson et al., *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction*, 2011 p. 231

54 Jessica White, "Far-Right Extremism: A Challenge to Current Counterterrorism Strategies and Structures?" (London: RUSI, 2020). Available at: <https://rusi.org/publication/rusi-newsbrief/far-right-extremism-challenge-current-counterterrorism-strategies-and>, accessed 27 August 2020.

55 The International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ), *Addressing Homegrown Terrorism Initiative Workshop: Scoping Working on Addressing Racially- and Ethnically-Motivated Terrorism (REMT)*. Valletta, Malta: 05-07 November 2019.

56 Ibid.

57 Brian Michael Jenkins, Andrew Liepman and Henry H. Willis, "Identifying Enemies among Us: Evolving Terrorist Threats and the Continuing Challenges of Domestic Intelligence Collection and Information Sharing," (RAND Corporation, January 2014). Available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF317.html, accessed 27 August 2020.

58 Soufan Center, "The Atomwaffen Division: The Evolution of the White Supremacy Threat," 2020.

59 Daniel Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe," 2016; Daniel Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremist Radicalization Processes: The Formers' Perspective," *Journal Exit-Deutschland*, Vol. 1, No. 2196-8136 (March 2014), pp. 307-377.

60 George Michael, "Leaderless Resistance: The New Face of Terrorism," *Defence Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 2012), pp. 257-282.

Some countries have used legal authority to designate XRW domestic organisations as terrorist threats, for example with the UK proscription of the group National Action. However, the US, for example, had been seen as reluctant to engage in this legal and political grey area, with their first designation of a XRW group, The Russian Imperial Movement, coming in 2020.⁶¹ Additionally, the loose affiliations of domestic organisations to international ones and the legal framework around domestic terrorist statutes inhibit the designation of transnational links between organisations.⁶² In the case of the US, reluctance to legally designate domestic VE groups as terrorist organisations means that the US Department of State cannot hinder travel of individuals with allegiance to these organisations, the US Department of Treasury cannot criminalise financial support for these organisations and the US Department of Justice cannot prosecute individuals for providing material support for these organisations.⁶³

Another example of a challenge to current policy and legal frameworks can be the issue of denying a platform to or prosecuting hate speech and incitement to violence versus the protection of free speech. This tends to be to be hotly debated in the US, for example, where freedom of speech is strongly protected as a constitutional right.⁶⁴ However, some other countries, for example in Europe, demonstrate more protections against hate speech.⁶⁵ This is especially pertinent to the XRW context, as their extreme ideological perspectives can often be represented in more mainstream media sources or in far-right politics.⁶⁶

These are a few examples of ways in which the transferability of harder CT policies can be hindered by the current focus on foreign Islamist terrorist organisations. The preventative strategies tend to display an even stronger bias towards addressing Islamist extremism.⁶⁷ This seems to be primarily due to the fact that the use of P/CVE programming in the transnational space has been developed as a pillar of CT policy during the period of the GWOT, thus programming in this space tends to be almost singularly focused on preventing or countering Islamist VE. The focus of P/CVE programming in the Western, domestic context can become a little more varied, often including more programming centred on the XRW, especially under the third tier of P/CVE or DDR focused programmes.⁶⁸

Tier 2: Specific challenges for P/CVE programming and interpretation of community

Due to intensive focus on Islamist extremism for P/CVE programming since the beginning of its use about 15 years ago, the concept of extremism in policy and programming circles often becomes equated with Islamist extremism. However, the recent concern over increasing influence and impact of the XRW should emphasise to policy makers and practitioners alike that extremism comes in a multitude of expressions.⁶⁹ With the sentencing of the XRW terrorist in New Zealand comes a fresh reminder that terrorist violence is motivated by various ideologies.⁷⁰ Extremism,

61 Soufan Center, "The Atomwaffen Division: The Evolution of the White Supremacy Threat," 2020.

62 Ibid.

63 Soufan Center, "White Supremacy Extremism," 2020.

64 Caleb Yong, "Does Freedom of Speech Include Hate Speech?" *Res Publica*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (November 2011), p. 385; Nadine Strossen, "Hate Speech and Pornography: Do we have to Choose between Freedom of Speech and Equality," *Case W.Res.L.Rev.*, Vol. 46 (1996), p. 449. Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2096&context=caselrev>, accessed 27 August 2020.

65 Article19, "Responding to 'Hate Speech': Comparative Overview of Six EU Countries," Article19, (2018). Available at: <https://www.article19.org/resources/responding-hate-speech-comparative-overview-six-eu-countries/>, accessed 27 August 2020.

66 E.g. In the US in "alt-media" outlets such as Breitbart or the US-based websites The Daily Stormer and Renegade Tribune.

67 George Selim, "Approaches for Countering Violent Extremism at Home and Abroad," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 668, No. 1 (October 2016), pp. 94-101.

68 RUSI, "The Prevention Project", 2020.

69 UN CTED, "Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism," 2020.

70 BBC, "Christchurch mosque attack: Brenton Tarrant sentenced to life without parole," BBC News, 27 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53919624>, accessed 27 August 2020.

in all its forms, is often subject to the same psychological pathways and can evolve in similar ways across ideological perspectives.⁷¹ Thus groups with similar fundamentalist views can gain momentum from each other, such as Islamist and XRW organisations. Often extremists “express oversimplified views which form an easy rallying point for their followers and focus on the way in which ‘others’ threaten their worldview.”⁷² Changes in social and political environments can be conducive for the spread of extreme ideology, allowing them to seize the opportunity to be more openly vocal with their ideas and amplify their impact while raising membership. For example, years of conflict in the Middle East leading to refugee crisis in Europe have fuelled anti-immigrant sentiment, giving oxygen to xenophobia and ultra-nationalism. Additionally, with the global crisis spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as racial tensions flaring in the US, a conducive environment has been created for XRW ideology to creep further into the mainstream.⁷³

Often XRW and Islamist extremism are framed as being at opposite ends of the spectrum. This is perhaps due to an assumption of cumulative radicalisation - the idea that XRW ideology is becoming more widespread in reaction to Islamist attacks on the Western world of even immigration of Muslim populations.⁷⁴ XRW ideology is often fuelled by anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment, which has permeated Western societies over the last two decades.⁷⁵ However, in reality, they are

not opposites. They are both fundamentalist and misogynist ideologies at the extreme-right end of the spectrum, which are repackaged as needed to include current social and political context. Negative perceptions of government overreach, economic downturn, and social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic are ultimately feeding both forms of extremism.⁷⁶

The concept of community is often instrumentalised in the literature on P/CVE, especially when focusing on the importance of directing programming towards ‘at risk’ communities due to the budget and time length restrictions of most P/CVE programming.⁷⁷ Often, in the Islamist extremism-focused framework of transnational P/CVE programming, the main goal of a programme intervention is to develop further community resilience to VE.⁷⁸ Community in this sense can mean a variety of things - it can be a community located in a particular place where conflict is more common, thus fuelling joining of VE organisations; or a particular minority community; or it can be more abstract, for example referring to a group of ‘at-risk’ youth as the target community for programming intervention. Unfortunately, this framework has set up a system where P/CVE programming is often linked to profiling of communities in a negative way, such as profiling based on ethnic or religious background.⁷⁹ Preventative CT strategy in the transnational context, which is often linked with development aid, can even become a form of wielding soft power or ‘virtue signalling’.⁸⁰

71 Jane Prince, "Psychology of Extremism," in Imran Awan and Brian Blakemore, eds., *Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and Policing*, (Routledge, 2016), pp. 51-68.

72 White, "Far-Right Extremism: A Challenge to Current Counterterrorism Strategies and Structures?" 2020, p. 3.

73 Wallner, "The Far-Right and Coronavirus: Extreme Voices Amplified by the Global Crisis," 2020; CTED, "Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism," 2020.

74 Jamie Bartlett and Jonathan Birdwell, "Cumulative Radicalisation between the Far-Right and Islamist Groups in the UK: A Review of Evidence," (London: Demos, 2013). Available at: <https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Demos%20-%20Cumulative%20Radicalisation%20-%20Nov%202013.pdf>, accessed 27 August 2020.

75 Cathrine Thorleifsson, "In Pursuit of Purity: Populist Nationalism and the Racialization of Difference," *Identities*, (June 2019), pp. 1-17.

76 Alexandra Phelan et al., "COVID-19 and Violent Extremism: Gender Perspectives," Monash Gender Peace and Security Webinar, 3 June 2020; Richard McNeil-Willson, "Framing in Times of Crisis: Responses to COVID-19 Amongst Far Right Movements and Organisations," *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT)*, June 2020. Available at: <https://icct.nl/publication/framing-in-times-of-crisis/>, accessed 27 August 2020.

77 Khalil, "Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction," 2016; Amy-Jane Gielen, "Countering Violent Extremism: A Realist Review for Assessing what Works, for Whom, in what Circumstances, and how?" *Terrorism and Political Violence*, (May 2017), pp. 1-19.

78 RUSI, "The Prevention Project," 2020; Stephens, "Preventing Violent Extremism: A Review of the Literature," 2019, pp. 1-16

79 Floris Vermeulen, "Suspect Communities—Targeting Violent Extremism at the Local Level: Policies of Engagement in Amsterdam, Berlin, and London," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (November 2014), pp. 286-306.; Katherine Brown, Fiona de Londras and Jessica White, "Embedding Human Rights in Countering Extremism: Reflections from the Field and Proposals for Change," UK Commission for Countering Extremism, 2019. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/embedding-human-rights-in-countering-extremism-reflections-from-the-field-and-proposals-for-change>, accessed 27 August 2020.

80 James Pamment, "Towards a New Conditionality? The Convergence of International Development, Nation Brands and Soft Power in

Using a method of risk assessment or profiling to identify the most ‘at risk’ communities is also done in the domestic context, sometimes resulting in the profiling of minority populations. However, in the domestic context community profiling becomes a more inflammatory issue, where perceptions of social and welfare services being securitised and used as a CT tool become a politicised violation of citizen and human rights.⁸¹ For P/CVE programming aimed at Islamist extremism in Western domestic contexts, it is often simplified down to identifying the minority ethnic and religious communities which hold beliefs based on Islamic religious ideology and targeting them. However, profiling for XRW extremism in the domestic context is not so easy. As XRW groups and individuals often fit into the majority ethnic and religious profile, it is simply not possible to identify and profile them in the same way that it is with minority ethnic or religious communities. Additionally, and “especially under the scrutiny of modern communications, it seems infeasible for the state to link terrorist designations to a domestic population which bases their VE views on the majority racial background and/or religious affiliation of its citizens.”⁸² Thus the transferability of current P/CVE strategy is not only questionable as an effective approach, but also challenged in how to identify who are the right “at risk” XRW communities to target with this type of preventative programming.⁸³

Due at least partially to the less centralised nature of many XRW groups and their general lack of structured grouping, online forums and groups have become a type of community which are often used to spread XRW ideology.⁸⁴ This type of community can be more difficult to identify and investigate. However, online communities have an undoubtedly more

significant reach and can contribute to the radicalisation process of individuals.⁸⁵ This sense of online connectivity that is strong in the XRW context also encourages the transnational links between XRW organisations. Similar to the way in which ISIS recruited individuals from around the world to come and fight for them, XRW organisations seem to be growing their ability to expand their own transnational ties and, in the example of the conflict in Ukraine, to draw fighters. However, until these transnational links can be transferred into legal designation of individuals as tied to foreign terrorist organisations, this does not necessarily aid in the transferability of current legal CT apparatus to track, detain, and prosecute them.⁸⁶ The individual nature of many expressions of XRW violence challenges the organisational focus of much CT policy and the requirement to be able to tie actions to a proscribed terrorist organisation.⁸⁷

The more decentralised structure of many XRW communities challenges current conceptions of what a community is, as well as construction of roles within those communities. This inevitably makes it harder to apply many types of P/CVE programming. Extremist groups across the board are forcing evolution of the meaning of community and tailoring it to fit their needs. Therefore, those trying to transfer P/CVE programming need to identify ways in which to reach these new types of communities. For example, counter-narrative programming (i.e. the development of messages and programming intended to counter radicalising content and narratives) has been a commonly used P/CVE tool, especially in the wake of ISIS’ capability to produce high quality online radicalisation material. However, this type of P/CVE programming has gone

the British National Security Strategy,” *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (September 2018), pp. 396-414.

81 Brown, “Embedding Human Rights in Countering Extremism,” 2019.

82 White, “Far-Right Extremism,” 2020, p. 3

83 CARR and Connect Futures Webinar, “When it Comes to Preventing Far-Right Terrorism and Extremism, Who is the “Community” we should be Engaging with?” 9 September 2020.; William Baldet, “Here’s How We Should Combat Radical Right-Wing Terrorism,” CARR Insights, 31 October 2018. Accessed at: <https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2018/10/31/heres-how-we-should-combat-radical-right-wing-terrorism/>, accessed 27 August 2020.

84 Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, “The Fringe Insurgency – Connectivity, Convergence and Mainstreaming of the Extreme Right” ISD, (2017). Available at: <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/the-fringe-insurgency-connectivity-convergence-and-mainstreaming-of-the-extreme-right/>, accessed 27 August 2020; Soufan Center, “The Atomwaffen Division,” 2020.

85 Katherine Brown and Elizabeth Pearson, “Social Media, the Online Environment and Terrorism,” in *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 175-190.

86 Soufan Center, “White Supremacy Extremism,” 2020; Soufan Center, “The Atomwaffen Division,” 2020.

87 Koehler, “Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe,” 2014, pp. 84-105.

largely unevaluated and its impact still remains uncertain.⁸⁸ Therefore, the transferability of online counter-narrative programming to the context of XRW online communities depends on further research and data gathering in order for conclusions to be drawn on effectiveness, but it could potentially be adapted to address new types of communities. An arguably more evidenced type of effective P/CVE programming is mentorship, which is transferrable to the XRW context and is often found in DDR programmes.⁸⁹ In the DDR context, programming often focuses on creating a safe space for individuals to choose to disengage from these types of ideologies and groups.⁹⁰

When thinking about the challenges of P/CVE programming and the issues that have been highlighted with how it is often applied to communities, this raises more concern in some cases over its efficacy in being adapted or transferred to the XRW context. As part of this examination of the efficacy of programming over the last few years, there has been increasing recognition of the role that gender (i.e. sociocultural interpretations of masculinity and femininity) plays in how extremist communities are formed and why people choose to join them. Therefore, when looking at the adaptability of community-based P/CVE programming it is important to consider gender and to take, where possible, lessons that have been learned on the importance of using a gender lens in analysis of the evolving threat landscape.

Tier 3: Importance of a Gender Lens in Understanding and Countering Extremism

The focus of gender research in the XRW context has largely been on constructions of masculinity or 'toxic masculinity' and how it drives radicalisation.⁹¹ This focus on masculinity in XRW research highlights the historical difference between it and research in the Islamist extremism context.⁹² Due to the emphasis on the need to empower women as part of the security solution raised through the WPS agenda, researching gender in the context of Islamist extremism and transnational CT policy has largely emphasised looking at the roles of women.⁹³ Thus, the two have often been siloed. However, this article finds that they could benefit more from each other and learn lessons from points of crossover in their analysis.

There are similarities between these two contexts and their expectations of gender roles due to them both being on the far-right, conservative end of the ideological spectrum. They follow many of the same narratives for engaging men and women in VE. The narrative for men to join both these types of extremism is often to protect their race, religion, and way of life, inciting the need to use violence in a heroic way. Women often join both contexts to fulfil their role to produce and socialise the next generation within the radical context.⁹⁴ For example, the role of women in the XRW context is often presented as mothering the next white generation. It is their duty to aide their male partners in their defence of the white racial identity. Women can join these

88 Michael Jones, "Through the Looking Glass," RUSI, 2020. Available at: <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/through-looking-glass-assessing-evidence-base-pcve-communications>, accessed 27 August 2020.

89 Emily Winterbotham, "How Effective Are Mentorship Interventions? Assessing the Evidence Base for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," (London: RUSI, 2020). Available at: <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/how-effective-are-mentorship-interventions-assessing-evidence-base>, accessed 27 August 2020.

90 Bjørge, "Leaving Terrorism Behind," 2008; Tore Bjørge, "Dreams and Disillusionment: Engagement in and Disengagement from Militant Extremist Groups," *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (February 2011), pp. 277-285.

91 Alex DiBranco, "Mobilizing Misogyny," Political Research Associates, (2017). Available at: <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2017/03/08/mobilizing-misogyny>, accessed 27 August 2020.

92 Ibid.

93 Katherine Brown, "Gender and Counter-Radicalization: Women and Emerging Counter-Terror Measures," in Margaret Satterthwaite and Jayne Huckerby, eds., *Gender, National Security, and Counter-Terrorism: Human Rights Perspectives*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), pp. 36-59; Katherine E. Brown, *Gender, Religion, Extremism: Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

94 Zeuthen, "Gender, Violent Extremism, and Countering Violent Extremism," 2018.

organisations seeking to revert from ideals of a more liberal society to the patriarchal structure of this fundamentalist perspective, knowing and desiring to play the supporting role and finding a sense of empowerment in it.⁹⁵ This concept of extremist maternalism places birthing and socialising the next generation in a radical and heroic light and is used in both ideological contexts.⁹⁶

Ironically, due largely to the nature of the WPS agenda being developed during the period of the GWOT and the push for transnational implementation of P/CVE programming, a huge portion of the work that has been done focused on utilising the role of women as wives and mothers and their ability to aid in identifying and potentially avert the radicalisation process in their male relatives and community members.⁹⁷ However, this narrow perception of the inclusion of women in P/CVE has been challenged over the last few years, encouraging more work looking at the wider impacts of gender and the role of social constructions of masculine and feminine identities on why individuals choose to participate in VE.⁹⁸ It is evident, especially from research in the Islamist context, that often women's roles are expanded and morphed, as either women push for more engagement in active roles within the organisation or need arises to use women in this way.⁹⁹

More research is needed to fully assess the complexity of the ways in which gender impacts roles in extremist organisations. Unfortunately, a layer of difficulty can be added to researching group dynamics when communities are primarily based online. As indicated in the above section, this community dynamic can make identification and interpretation more difficult. However, online communities certainly play a significant role in extremism and radicalisation and thus are important to research. The encrypted nature of many of these online forums and the challenges of governance in this space (e.g. the lack of control over private tech platforms, the issues around governments gathering intelligence on their own citizens, etc.) can limit how much information is gathered from these channels of communication and dissemination, especially by governments. However, generally, there is a significant amount of academic research currently ensuing which attempts to monitor and understand these communities, in both the XRW and Islamist extremism contexts.¹⁰⁰ When trying to understand the narratives used in these online spaces, as well as with in-person recruitment, it is necessary to account for social construction of gender and the influence this has on the roles that individuals take in these organisations and why they choose to join them.¹⁰¹ The crossover between the spheres of online XRW community and gender begin

95 Ashley Mattheis, "Shieldmaidens of Whiteness: (Alt) Maternalism and Women Recruiting for the Far/Alt-Right," *Journal for Deradicalization*, No. 17 (December 2017), pp. 128-162.

96 Ashley Mattheis and Charlie Winter, "The Greatness of Her Position': Comparing Identitarian and Jihadi Discourses on Women," *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR)*, 2019. Available at: <https://icsr.info/2019/05/15/the-greatness-of-her-position-comparing-identitarian-and-jihadi-discourses-on-women/>, accessed 27 August 2020.

97 Winterbotham, "What can Work (and what has Not Worked) in Women-Centric P/CVE Initiatives: Assessing the Evidence Base for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," 2020; Winterbotham, "Do Mothers Know Best? How Assumptions Harm CVE," 2018.

98 GCTF, "Addendum to the GCTF Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism, with a Focus on Mainstreaming Gender," 2020; Alexandra Phelan, Melissa Johnston, and Jacqui True, "Growing Threats of Violent Extremism: The Urgency for a Gender-Based Response," *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, (March 2020). Available at: <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/growing-threats-of-violent-extremism-the-urgency-for-a-gender-based-response/>, accessed 27 August 2020; Jacqui True et al., "Building an Evidence Base for Empowering Women for Peaceful Communities: A Case Study of Bangladesh and Indonesia," *UN Women*, 2019. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/02/building-an-evidence-base-for-empowering-women-for-peaceful-communities>, accessed 27 August 2020; White, "Evaluating Gender Mainstreaming in Counter-Terrorism Policy," 2020.

99 Deborah Margolin, "The Changing Roles of Women in Violent Islamist Groups," in Audrey Alexander, ed., *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender, & Violent Extremism*, (Washington DC: The George Washington University, 2019), pp. 40-49; Katherine Brown, Harmonie Toros and Swati Parashar, "Violent Extremist Myths and Masculinities: Two Country Case Studies," in Katherine E. Brown, David Durie-Smith, Farhana Rahman, and Jacqui True, eds., *Conflicting Identities: The Nexus between Masculinities, Femininities and Violent Extremism in Asia*, UNDP and UN Women, 2020, pp. 31-52. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/digital-library/publications/2020/03/conflicting-identities-the-nexus-between-masculinities-femininities-and-violent-extremism-in-asia>, accessed 27 August 2020; Christine Sylvester and Swati Parashar, "The Contemporary 'Mahabharata' and the Many 'Draupadis': Bringing Gender to Critical Terrorism Studies," in Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth and Jeroen Gunning, eds., *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 178-193.

100 Mike Sutton and Cecile Wright, "Finding the Far Right Online: An Exploratory Study of White Supremacist Websites," *Internet Journal of Criminology*, 2009; Anne Aly et al., *Violent Extremism Online: New Perspectives on Terrorism and the Internet*, (Routledge, 2016).

101 Elizabeth Pearson, "Online as the New Frontline: Affect, Gender, and ISIS-Take-Down on Social Media," *Studies in Conflict &*

in the murky world of the ‘manosphere’ and various gendered expressions of hate online. There are multiple academic disciplines which analyse different aspects of this world of extreme expressions of masculinity; however, overall, there is very limited research and what is there can be difficult to find for non-specialists.¹⁰²

Even in XRW online forums the overarching gender narrative is sometimes undercut by the desire of women to engage in wider roles.¹⁰³ In a recent study on the nexus of masculinities and femininities in VE narratives, Katherine Brown et al. look at:

“...how structures of patriarchy and harmful performances of masculinity are deeply embedded in the *modus operandi* of violent extremist groups. The researchers found that such groups often manipulate or build on existing gender stereotypes to incite men and women to commit violence and to find refuge and support within extremist communities. Much greater efforts are needed to ensure policies address harmful constructions of masculinity and femininity promoted by violent extremist groups. Programmes must work with local communities to respond to the unequal gender power dynamics that shape and fuel extremist violence, including through empowering

women and girls to be agents of peace.”¹⁰⁴

This more recent shift to focus on a wider meaning of gender and the intersection of masculine and feminine identities is essential.¹⁰⁵ The application of a gender lens and focus on gender impact and equality are concepts which are gaining more traction in policy contexts, often referred to as gender-mainstreaming strategies. However, there is often still a lack of meaningful commitment and implementation. Thus, it is important to emphasise the need to seek gender equality as part of meaningful security solutions.¹⁰⁶

CT policy needs to take into account the wider perspective of how socialised constructions of gender identities drive both men and women to participate in violence, how a gender lens can help in identifying areas of concern, and how gender equality is a necessary element of meaningful and sustainable peace. For example, there is work currently being done looking at how domestic violence can be a forerunner and warning sign of fundamentalism in many cases.¹⁰⁷ This type of wider examination of gender impact is needed, rather than repeating over-simplified assumptions about the roles that men and women play. These generalisations, which are often embedded in the CT framework, can make it difficult to identify and address the multidimensional nature of gender and

Terrorism, Vol. 41, No. 11 (September 2018), pp. 850-874; Emily Winterbotham and Elizabeth Pearson, “Different Cities, Shared Stories,” *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 161, No. 5 (2016), pp. 54-65.

102 Ashley A. Mattheis and Michael S. Waltman, “Gendered Hate Online,” *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication* (July 2020), pp. 1-5.; Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware and Ezra Shapiro, “Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 43, No. 7 (April 2020), pp. 565-587.

103 Elizabeth Pearson, “Gendered Reflections? Extremism in the UK’s Radical Right and Al-Muhajiroun Networks,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (May 2020), pp. 1-24.; ICCT, “Gender and Violent Extremism Today,” ICCT, Live Briefing, 4 June 2020. Available at: <https://icct.nl/event/icct-live-briefing-gender-and-violent-extremism-today/>, accessed 27 August 2020.

104 Katherine Brown et al., “Conflicting Identities: The Nexus between Masculinities, Femininities and Violent Extremism in Asia,” UN Women, 2020, p. IV. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/digital-library/publications/2020/03/conflicting-identities-the-nexus-between-masculinities-femininities-and-violent-extremism-in-asia>, accessed 27 August 2020.

105 Elizabeth Pearson, Emily Winterbotham and Katherine Brown, “Countering Violent Extremism: Making Gender Matter” (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Katherine Brown, “Gender Mainstreaming Principles, Dimensions and Priorities for PVE,” UN Women, 2019. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/gender-mainstreaming-principles-dimensions-and-priorities-for-pve-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1610>, accessed 27 August 2020.

106 Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, “Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview,” (New York: UN, 2002). Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/e65237.pdf>, accessed 27 August 2020; Naila Kabeer, “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal 1,” *Gender & Development*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (March 2005), pp. 13-24; Sandy Ruxton, ed., *Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice* (Great Britain: Oxfam, 2004).

107 Jacqui True, “Ending Violence Against Women in Asia: International Norm Diffusion and Global Opportunity Structures for Policy Change,” United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), 2016. Available at: [https://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/\(httpPublications\)/0AE05C2AE73E998DC1257FD10051838E?OpenDocument](https://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/(httpPublications)/0AE05C2AE73E998DC1257FD10051838E?OpenDocument), accessed 27 August 2020; Melissa Johnston and Jacqui True, “Misogyny & Violent Extremism: Implications for Preventing Violent Extremism,” UN Women 2019. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/10/misogyny-violent-extremism>, accessed 27 August 2020.

the importance of a gender lens.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the essential nature of looking at the whole picture of gender adds robustness to the argument for a comparative approach, and accentuates the need to consider lessons learned from across the spectrum of ideological contexts where possible.

Recent P/CVE programming which has utilised a gender lens is much more transferrable between the different community contexts. Due to academic recognition of the way in which these two extremisms are opposite sides of the same fundamentalist coin, there has been some acknowledgment of their similarities and the ways in which they drive each other in cycles of hate.¹⁰⁹ However there are very limited examples of data showing the gendered nature of Islamist versus XRW group dynamics.¹¹⁰ Due to nascency of much of this research, the comparative perspective has largely not yet benefited the CT policy conversation. Lessons learned need to be transferred between the work that has been moving forward on gender in relation to transnational P/CVE programming, focused the importance of empowering women and gender equality, and the study of extreme or “toxic” masculinity which is more often happening in relation to the XRW context.

Ultimately, there is also a need to apply a gender lens to all pillars of CT policy.¹¹¹ Recently, there has been more focus on the roles that women play in harder CT policy approaches.¹¹² This type of research needs to be expanded on in order to allow a gender-sensitive perspective to shape military, legal, and protective CT policy as well as the preventative strategies. CT strategy also needs to account for the gendered nature of its impact. This is a lesson learned which could present an opportunity for CT policy to be positively adapted with a gender lens while being more transferrable

across contexts.

Conclusion

This article identifies multiple challenges to transferability of CT policy, due to the many differences between threats. While in some cases lack of efficacy indicates policies and programmes should not be transferred, the entire dismantling and rebuilding of the CT framework is a daunting practical and political consideration. Therefore, where reimagining a new framework presents a roadblock to change, transference of adapted and improved policies and programmes should be considered. Areas where this is possible are important to highlight for governments and international organisations as they move into a time of shifting focus and increasing acknowledgement of the various threat profiles which challenge CT policy and programming.

Focus on Islamist extremism throughout the last two decades, in the context of the GWOT, has shaped national and international level CT strategies to such a degree that it can make transferability very difficult. Legal deterrence and prosecution, intelligence gathering and sharing, and even identification of “at risk” communities can present unique challenges in varying contexts of domestic versus international and majority versus minority populations. These differences have made multiple elements of programming very difficult to adapt, especially in the context of P/CVE programming. Lessons still need to be learned and carried forward on how to interpret community and its importance to VE.

However, there are also similarities between different ideological contexts, and it is important to carry over some of the policy and programming advances when identifying new threats on the CT landscape. Using a

108 Elizabeth Pearson, "Extremism and Toxic Masculinity: The Man Question Re-Posed," *International Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 6 (November 2019), pp. 1251-1270; Marysia Zalewski, "Well, what is the Feminist Perspective on Bosnia?" *International Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (April 1995), pp. 339-356; Linn Egeberg Holmgren and Jeff Hearn, "Framing 'Men in Feminism': Theoretical Locations, Local Contexts and Practical Passings in Men's Gender-Conscious Positionings on Gender Equality and Feminism," *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (December 2009), pp. 403-418.

109 Julia Ebner, *The Rage: The Vicious Circle of Islamist and Far-Right Extremism*, (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

110 Pearson, "Gendered Reflections? Extremism in the UK's Radical Right and Al-Muhajiroun Networks," 2020, pp. 1-24; Elizabeth Pearson and Emily Winterbotham, "Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation: A Milieu Approach," *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 162, No. 3 (August 2017), pp. 60-72.

111 ICCT, "Gender and Violent Extremism Today", 2020.

112 Joana Cook, *A Woman's Place: US Counterterrorism since 9/11*, (Oxford University Press, 2020).

gender lens to formulate effective CT policy and implement programming is essential to finding lasting security solutions. This is a structural element of policy and programming which presents an opportunity to carry forward lessons learned. While there are similarities and differences across contextual narratives, constructions of masculine and feminine identities play a significant role in why people engage in all forms of VE. The awareness raised on the importance of gender to security will improve transferability and adaptability of programming going forward.

Currently the attention is on the shift from Islamist to right-wing extremism. However, as issues of climate change and social inequality become more prominent and dominate the concerns of communities, left-wing extremism could become the next big concern on the horizon. Ultimately, myopic focus is dangerous – terrorism and extremism are constantly shifting and presenting different threats. Therefore, CT policy needs to be redesigned in a nuanced way that is adaptable and transferrable to various threat profiles, which means that programming needs to be designed with robust monitoring and evaluation so that data can be gathered, lessons can be learned, and good practice can be carried forward.

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Normalisation, Party Politics and Vigilantism: Why the Next Terrorist Wave will not be Right-Wing Extremist

Teun van Dongen

Abstract

The right-wing extremist terrorist attacks in the last three years have led many to designate right-wing extremist terrorism as the next major terrorist threat. This paper will argue that for large parts of the West such concerns are misguided for two main reasons. First, right-wing extremists lack the organisational clout to generate a wave of terrorist attacks that is on a par with the wave of jihadist terrorism in the West in recent years. Second, right-wing extremists have displayed a preference for other tactics; many of these tactics are non-violent, and even when they are violent, they are not necessarily terrorist in nature. We should acknowledge the importance of these other tactics and not make the mistake of viewing right-wing extremism as another form of terrorism, as that will lead to a fundamental misunderstanding of what the threat of right-wing extremism entails.

Keywords: right-wing extremism, terrorism, cultural racism, politics, islamist extremism, far right extremism

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Introduction

Terrorism has a way of taking us by surprise. No matter how focused governments are on preventing terrorist attacks, it will always be difficult to tell when, where, and how terrorists are going to strike. In fact, this unpredictability and the resultant fear among the public go a long way towards explaining the appeal of terrorism as a form of political violence. But the element of surprise in terrorism is not limited to individual attacks. We not only fail to see attacks coming, we also fail to anticipate entire waves of terrorism. Few people had ever heard of al-Qaeda when 9/11 happened, and the most recent jihadist wave of terrorism, driven and inspired by ISIS, took off at a moment when many observers believed that the jihadist movement was done for. One only has to recall the enthusiastic responses to the Arab Spring in 2011, which many read as proof that jihadist terrorist organisations were yesterday's news.¹

But this time around things are different. The terrorist attacks committed in the last three years or so by right-wing extremists have alerted terrorism scholars and counter-terrorism practitioners alike to the possibility that a new terrorist threat might be brewing. Determined not to be caught flat-footed again, the editorial boards of *Perspectives on Terrorism* and the *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* recently issued special editions of their journal entirely devoted to right-wing extremist violence.² Echoing the sentiment that the fight against terrorism should focus more on right-wing extremist terrorism, then FBI-director Christopher Wray told Congress in July 2019 that most terrorist plots in the US

are right-wing extremist, not jihadist.³ In the UK, the Metropolitan Police declared that right-wing extremist terrorism is the fastest growing threat to the UK's national security.⁴

But is it possible that we're jumping the gun here? Could it be that we are too eager to brand right-wing extremism as the next terrorist threat, on a par with the wave of jihadist attacks in the period 2014-2017? The purpose of this article is, simply put, to show that with regard to large parts of the West (the US and Germany may be exceptions) the answer to both of these questions is 'yes'. Right-wing extremist activists deploy a variety of ways to achieve their political goals, and terrorism does not play a large role in this. Actually, several of these tactics are incompatible, or at the very least not easily reconcilable, with openly violent strategies such as terrorism. Given the ways right-wing extremist groups are currently trying to make their influence felt, it is more likely that they will largely stick with non-terrorist tactics. If there is an increase in the number of right-wing terrorist attacks, it will be the work of fringe figures.

But before setting out to make this point, a word about definitions is in order, especially in light of the fact that the lines between the various elements of the far right (political parties, non-violent protest movements, violent extremist groups) are blurring.⁵ As Alex P. Schmid pointed out in a widely-cited ICCT-paper on the meaning of terms like radicalisation and de-radicalisation, "[e]xtremists strive to create a homogeneous society based on rigid, dogmatic ideological tenets; they seek to make society conformist by suppressing all opposition and subjugating minorities."⁶ The

1 Ian Black, "Al-Qaida Already Looked Irrelevant after Arab Spring," *The Guardian*, 2 May 2011. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/02/al-qaida-irrelevant-arab-spring>, accessed 28 April 2020; Associated Press, "Al Qaeda Now 'increasingly Irrelevant' Britain," *Zee News*, 11 September 2011. Available at: https://zeenews.india.com/news/world/al-qaeda-now-increasingly-irrelevant-britain_730929.html, accessed 11 November 2020. As late as May 2012, Fawaz Gerges, generally a well-informed observer of the jihadist movement, wrote that the Arab Spring "unraveled the standard terrorism narrative" and that "only a miracle will resuscitate a transnational jihad of the al Qaeda variety". Fawaz Gerges, "Fawaz A. Gerges on How the Arab Spring Beat Al Qaeda," *The Daily Beast*, 13 May 2012. Available at: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/fawaz-a-gerges-on-how-the-arab-spring-beat-al-qaeda>, accessed 28 April 2020.

2 See, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (2018), and *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2019).

3 Igor Derysh, "FBI Director to Congress: Most Domestic Terror Cases Are Driven by 'White Supremacist Violence'," *Salon*, 24 July 2019. Available at: https://www.salon.com/2019/07/24/fbi-director-to-congress-most-domestic-terror-cases-are-driven-by-white-supremacist-violence/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=ios_app, accessed 11 November 2020.

4 Vikram Dodd and Jamie Grierson, "Fastest-Growing UK Terrorist Threat Is from Far Right, Say Police," *The Guardian*, 19 September 2019, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/sep/19/fastest-growing-uk-terrorist-threat-is-from-far-right-say-police>, accessed 11 November 2020.

5 Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge and Medford MA: Polity Press, 2019).

6 Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, de-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *The*

homogeneity the right-wing extremists are shooting for should be understood in ethnic terms. In other words, right-wing extremists are willing to go to great lengths to shield their ethnically defined in-group and its way of life from external influences.

This being the case, this article applies Schmid's assertion to right-wing extremism by adopting the "minimal definition" put forth by Elisabeth Carter, who understands right-wing extremism as "an ideology that encompasses authoritarianism, anti-democracy, and exclusionary and/or holistic nationalism."⁷ Right-wing extremist groups and activists are anti-democratic, first, in the sense that they deny ethnic groups other than their own the rights and safeguards typically provided for in liberal democratic constitutions and, second, in the sense that they are highly critical of liberal democratic systems for enabling political and cultural pluralism, even if that does not automatically mean that they are all against democracy *per se*. They are authoritarian in the sense that they favour a strong state and envisage the strict application of law-and-order tactics to create and maintain the ethnically uniform order they desire. Their nationalism is exclusionary and holistic in the sense that they believe the members of their ethnic in-group form a natural whole and that membership of that group entitles its members to a position that people with different ethnic backgrounds will be denied.

Phrased differently, this paper will focus primarily on the extreme right as defined in a 2019 ICCT Policy Brief by Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal. They distinguish the radical right, which wants to maintain democracy and claims that Western civilization should be protected against Islam, from the extreme right, which wants to overthrow democracy and adheres to ideas about their racial superiority over other groups.⁸ It should be noted, however, that such distinctions are tricky, as they suggest clear delineations in a movement where many actors have views

that are insufficiently articulate or consistent to allow for neat categorisation. Moreover, one of the claims of this paper is that, to use Bjørgo and Ravndal's terms, the extreme right is adopting the terminology of the radical right to appear more acceptable, which further complicates the distinctions between various strands among the far right.

A final point that deserves mentioning here, concerns the nature of the actors whose actions this paper will be analysing. Although it does not follow immediately from the definitions just provided, this article concerns extra-parliamentary groups and social movements, not political parties that have been or want to be elected representative bodies. The latter are highly unlikely to engage in terrorism; it is the former from whom the threat of terrorist attacks is believed to emanate. Thus, the extra-parliamentary groups are much more relevant for the current analysis.

Right-wing extremism lacks the organisational clout to sustain a terrorist wave

The first reason why we should be sceptical of the claim that we are at the beginning of a wave of right-wing extremist terrorism is that the right-wing extremist movement, if one can indeed speak of one movement, does not have the organisational clout to create a terrorist wave. In order to make this point, it can be instructive to mention some obvious differences between right-wing extremist terrorism and jihadist terrorism, as that will make clear that, at the very least, there are some hurdles to be overcome before the former can operate on the same scale as the latter.

First of all, right-wing extremist terrorism lacks the centripetal mobilising force of the kind that played an important role in the rise of jihadist terrorism in, roughly, the period 2012-

International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT), (March 2013), p. 9. Available at: <https://icct.nl/publication/radicalisation-de-radicalisation-counter-radicalisation-a-conceptual-discussion-and-literature-review/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

7 Elisabeth Carter, "Right-Wing Extremism/Radicalism: Reconstructing the Concept," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2018), p. 174. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13569317.2018.1451227>, accessed 11 November 2020.

8 Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses," ICCT, (September 2019), pp. 3-4. Available at: <https://icct.nl/publication/extreme-right-violence-and-terrorism-concepts-patterns-and-responses/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

2017. Through a skilfully executed propaganda campaign, the Islamic State managed to present itself to its potential supporters in the West as a viable and promising alternative to life in their home countries.⁹ This enabled the group to absorb the resources, skills and manpower of its supporters and steer them into the right direction.¹⁰ Put differently, the Islamic State's main achievement was to set up an international, coordinated effort to fight for the caliphate. As a result, the group came a long way towards the realisation of their political goals.

And the group's success was in a way self-reinforcing. Once the Islamic State had recruited an army big enough, it could establish a proto-state in Syria and Iraq, which could function as a hub for the planning and perpetration of large-scale terrorist attacks in Europe. This, in turn, helped the organisation draw more support, being as it was the most important and notorious jihadist organisation in the world.¹¹ Also, its proto-state, the caliphate, allowed the Islamic State to intensify its online propaganda and recruitment campaigns as well as provide remote instructions and support for jihadist attack perpetrators who had not travelled to Syria or Iraq.

The most recent jihadist wave of terrorism was carried by a mobilisation, concentration and coordination of resources that are as yet lacking in right-wing extremist terrorism. Right-wing extremist attempts at cooperation or coordination have traditionally – and still are – hampered by discord and infighting. Cas Mudde lists several explanations for why this is so, including one that would be particularly hard to overcome, namely the fact that right-wing extremist groups have narrowly defined in-groups whose interests do not easily coalesce. As Mudde explains, “the Croatian and the Serbian far right dream of a largely

similar territory – Greater Croatia for the former, Greater Serbia for the latter – while many West European far-right activists look down on East Europeans, and several East European far-right groups are strongly anti-German.”¹² It is true that in the caliphate relations between jihadists from different countries were at times strained¹³, but the Islamic State, again, owed much of its ability to create a wave of terrorism to the way it managed to mobilise large numbers of people from very different countries for one and the same cause. This will be very hard to accomplish for right-wing extremist terrorists.

Moreover, right-wing extremist terrorists lack a space from where they can train its fighters and attract new recruits. Yes, the war in Ukraine attracted its share of foreign fighters, many of which were right-wing extremists. The vast majority of those (some 15,000 out of an estimated 17,000) were Russians, but this still leaves some 2,000 fighters who could travel back to their home countries in the West and use their expertise and their status as war veterans to organise terrorist attacks.¹⁴ This latter number, though, is a lot smaller when compared to the numbers of jihadist foreign fighters, which run into the hundreds even for medium-sized Western countries like Belgium and the Netherlands. Moreover, there is little to suggest that the Ukrainian war zone is being used as a hub for training and attack planning in the same way the caliphate and the al-Qaeda training camps in Pakistan once were.

As a result of the persistent fragmentation, right-wing extremist terrorism has so far been the work of isolated groups or cells. It has been less organised, more spontaneous and less planned than many of the most deadly jihadist attacks. This is reflected in the numbers of deadly victims of jihadist and right-wing extremist terrorist attacks in the West.

9 Charlie Winter, “The Virtual ‘Caliphate’: Understanding Islamic State’s Propaganda Strategy” (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2015). Available at <https://www.quilliaminternational.com/shop/e-publications/the-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

10 Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger, *ISIS: the State of Terror* (HarperCollins: New York, 2015), chapters 5, 6 and 7.

11 Clint Watts, “Deciphering Competition Between al-Qa’ida and the Islamic State,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (July 2016), pp. 1-6. Available at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/deciphering-competition-between-al-qaida-and-the-islamic-state/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

12 Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 2019, p. 65.

13 Jeremy Bender, “Cracks in ISIS Are Becoming More Clear,” *Business Insider*, 1 March 2015. Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/weaknesses-of-isis-2015-3?international=true&r=US&IR=T>, accessed 28 April 2020.

14 Kacper Rekawek, “‘It Ain’t Over ‘Til It’s Over’: Extreme Right-Wing Foreign Fighters in Ukraine,” *Counter Extremism Project*, 23 September 2019. Available at: <https://www.counterextremism.com/blog/it-ain-t-over-til-it-s-over-extreme-right-wing-foreign-fighters-ukraine>, accessed 28 April 2020.

According to the data presented by Jacob Ravndal et al., the 208 fatal right-wing extremist attacks in Western Europe in the period 1990-2019 killed 330 people.¹⁵ The Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) states that in the US, right-wing extremists killed 335 people in 893 violent attacks in the period 1994-2020.¹⁶ For comparison, the current author's personal database of jihadist terrorist attacks in the West¹⁷ shows that jihadist attacks in Europe, Canada and the US killed 772 in the period 2004-2019. Unfortunately, all these numbers do not lend themselves to a neat comparison, as the various databases do not measure exactly the same things. For instance, unlike the current author's personal database, the data presented by Ravndal et al. covers only fatal attacks and includes terrorist as well as non-terrorist acts of violence. But in spite of these methodological reservations, these data do make clear that jihadist terrorism took considerably less time (fifteen years) and fewer attacks (96 to be precise) to get to a higher number of deadly victims. Thus, jihadist terrorist attacks are more lethal and flared up more intensely than right-wing extremist terrorist attacks have done so far.

One could argue that the higher lethality rate of jihadist violence has to do with political and ideological considerations rather than with organisation and the mobilisation of resources. Right-wing extremists generally operate in areas where the majority of the population could theoretically be supportive, and this may incline them towards more focused attacks rather than towards the mass casualty attacks that jihadist terrorists built their reputation on. On the other hand, the perpetrators of recent right-wing extremist mass shootings showed no intention to keep the number of victims low. Also, not all jihadist terrorist attacks are mass

casualty terrorist attacks. Many are targeted against police officers, Jewish people, Islam critics or other specific victim categories. These two things being the case, the higher degree of organisation, cooperation and coordination in the jihadist movement is likely to be one of the explanations of its higher lethality rate. Indeed, many – although, admittedly, not all – of the most deadly jihadist attacks (the Madrid, London and Brussels bombings, the attacks in Paris in November 2015, and of course 9/11), did require training, planning, cooperation and long-distance travel, things the jihadist movement could provide because of its higher degree of organisation and coordination. This means that right-wing extremism would have to change quite fundamentally before it will be able to create a terrorist wave that is on a par with the jihadist wave of recent years.

One further relevant difference between the jihadist and the right-wing extremist movement is that highly deadly right-wing extremist terrorist attacks, the ones which triggered a fear of a right-wing extremist terrorist wave, are concentrated in a smaller number of countries. As far as is known to the current author, there have been only four right-wing extremist terrorist attacks in the period 2010-2020 that killed more than two people and that did *not* take place in the US or Germany.¹⁸ The US, of course, is a very particular case. Its wide array of militias, Ku Klux Klan-branches and white supremacist organisations and the free availability of assault rifles and other heavy calibre firearms makes for a deadly cocktail of circumstances that are lacking in – and do not easily spill over into – many other countries. Something similar goes for Germany, which practically since the end of the Second World War has dealt with groups that wanted to resurrect the Nazi ideology and has

15 Jacob Aasland Ravndal, Sofia Lygren, Anders Ravik Jupskås and Tore Bjørgo, "RTV Trend Report 2020: Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe, 1990-2019," (Oslo: Center for Research on Extremism, 2020), p. 7. Available at: https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/rtv-dataset/rtv_trend_report_2020.pdf, accessed 9 November 2020.

16 Seth G. Jones, Catrina Dooxsee and Nicholas Harrington, "The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States," Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Briefs (Washington DC: CSIS, 2020), p. 3. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states>, accessed 9 November 2020.

17 The database has been compiled using criteria that have been outlined in a previous ICCT Research Paper. See Teun van Dongen, "The Fate of the Perpetrator in the Jihadist Modus Operandi: Suicide Attacks and Non-Suicide Attacks in the West, 2004-2017," ICCT, (December 2017), pp. 3–5. Available at: <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2017/12/VanDongen-The-Fate-of-the-Perpetrator-December2017.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

18 In addition to the Breivik attacks (2011) and the Christchurch shooting (2019), there has been an attack on a high school in Sweden in which four people got killed (2015) and there has been an attack on the Islamic Cultural Center in Quebec City, Canada, in which six people got killed (2017).

long grappled with violent neo-Nazi groups and skinhead movements.¹⁹ This suggests that right-wing extremist terrorism in recent years needs to be understood to a considerable extent against the background of these two countries. One cannot simply assume that because such attacks occurred in Germany and the US, they are also likely to occur in countries that are very different in important respects.

But while there are reasons to doubt whether right-wing extremists will be able to sustain a full-fledged terrorist wave, this should not be read to mean that right-wing extremism is not a problem. Quite the opposite, the movement is growing and becoming more active. The reason that this will not translate into a terrorist wave has much to do with the fact that today's right-wing extremists choose to use different, non-terrorist tactics.

Cultural racism as a way to gain legitimacy

One important such tactic adopted by right-wing extremists is the reframing of their views. Previously, neo-Nazi groups were explicitly racist in the way they expressed their political ideas. Open references to Jews and black people as belonging to inferior races were quite common in such circles. Today things are different: only a fringe of the right-wing extremist movement still openly assert that non-white ethnic minorities are by definition inferior to whites. Right-wing extremists are more likely to express a version of what has been called 'cultural racism'. Instead of blatantly claiming that Muslims or people from the Middle East are biologically inferior to people from Western Europe, right-wing extremist groups now claim that Islamic values are somehow incompatible with Western values.²⁰ By couching their

worldview in such terms, they can claim that they are not racists, but are merely engaging in legitimate criticism of Islam.²¹ A salient example is the Identitarian movement, which fights against the Islamisation of Europe. The movement's aim is to increase the birth-rate among ethnically white Europeans to save European civilization, but the terminology of cultural racism allows Mark Willinger, one of its leaders, to claim that the Identitarians are "0 percent racist, 100 percent identity".²²

The concept of cultural racism has been criticised on the grounds that it broadens the concept of racism and thus strips it of its essence, i.e. the notion that biological characteristics decide whether someone belongs to an inferior race. As a result, very different forms of discrimination would all carry the label 'racism', which some critics feel is unwarranted. They have suggested using terms like 'cultural essentialism' instead.²³ But whatever terms are being applied, it is important to note that there has been a widely acknowledged shift among right-wing extremists from biological racism to a discourse of identity and values. This shift, which some authors noted as early as the 1990s, not only makes right-wing extremist causes appear more acceptable, but also opens the door for them to other, more mainstream causes, which are much more agreeable than the struggle for the biological purity of the white race.²⁴

More specifically, right-wing extremists can, using cultural racist or cultural essentialist rhetoric, claim that they want to take a stand against the threats to Western values. In a 2012 ICCT-paper, Arun Kundnani cites the English Defence League (EDL) as an example of a counter-jihadist activist group that claims to fight against the Islamisation of Europe out of concern for traditionally liberal causes. Rather than come out and openly profess racist views, groups like the EDL hold rallies and

19 Arie W. Kruglanski, David Webber and Daniel Koehler, *The Radical's Journey: How German Neo-Nazis Voyaged to the Edge and Back* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 9–13.

20 Sindre Bangstad, Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia (London: Zed Books, 2014), pp. 29–30.

21 Ibid.

22 Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 2019, p. 95.

23 See, for example, Hans Siebers and Marjolein Dennissen, "Is It Cultural Racism? Discursive Exclusion and Oppression of Migrants in the Netherlands," *Current Sociology*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (October 2015), pp. 470–489. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0011392114552504>, accessed 11 November 2020.

24 See, for example, Anthias Floya, "Cultural Racism or Racist Culture? Rethinking Racist Exclusions," *Economy and Society*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (May 1995), pp. 279–301. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03085149500000011>, accessed 11 November 2020.

demonstrations purportedly because they are concerned that the growing influence of Islam threatens individual liberty, freedom of speech, gender equality and gay rights.²⁵

And indeed, Kundnani's analysis still holds. When former EDL-leader Tommy Robinson was banned from Twitter for hateful conduct in 2018, he called on his supporters to stage a rally to defend freedom of speech in the UK. Several thousands of people turned up, including the famous right-wing commentator Milo Yiannopoulos and former UKIP-leader Gerard Batten. Also in the crowd were members of the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA)²⁶, a group of football supporters who, according to their website, banded together "following the 2017 terrorist attacks in London and Manchester, as a working class voice against social, economic and political injustice". The DFLA's objective, the site goes on, "is plain and simple – to combat terrorism and extremism".²⁷ They claim to be anti-racist and pro-freedom of expression, but that does not keep its members from cultivating ties to Polish Nazi football hooligans and bringing Nazi salutes at their marches.²⁸ One demonstrator at a DFLA-march in October 2018 lamented about his fellow protesters: "I detest some of the people I'm walking with. A lot of them hate people because of the colour of their skin."²⁹

Another theme right-wing extremists use to avoid espousing explicitly racist views is the protection of women. In the right-wing extremist narrative white women are helpless

victims against the stereotypically virile and hypersexual Muslim men and need the protection of vigilante groups like the Soldiers of Odin (see the paragraph on other forms of violence), who claim they want to protect women from asylum seekers.³⁰ In the same vein, Magnus Söderman, once a leading member of the neo-Nazi Swedish Resistance Movement, complained about the lack of real men willing and able to keep innocent, vulnerable Swedish women from being brutalised by Muslim invaders:

We live in a time in which the strong man – the protector – has been reduced to entertainment [e.g. Braveheart] for feminized men who hardly would protect their own. They have handed over this [responsibility] to the state and praise the police's monopoly of violence. [However] the state has neither the will, nor the capacity to protect our women and children. That task is our obligation. Be men, goddamnit!³¹

One could counter that perhaps right-wing extremist groups are sincere in their advocacy for free speech and women's interests. If this is the case, they are not helping their cause by their inconsistent positions on exactly these two points. With regard to women, right-wing extremists want to put a stop to the Islamisation of Europe because Muslims supposedly mistreat women. At the same time though, right-wing extremism is unmistakably misogynistic. In the right-wing extremist

25 Arun Kundnani, "Blind Spot? Security Narratives and Far-Right Violence in Europe," ICCT, (June 2012), p. 3. Available at: <https://icct.nl/publication/blind-spot-security-narratives-and-far-right-violence-in-europe/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

26 Damien Gayle, "Thousands March in 'Free Speech' Protest Led by Rightwing Figures," The Guardian, 6 May 2018, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/06/thousands-of-far-right-protesters-march-in-london-in-support-of-free-speech>, accessed 28 April 2020.

27 Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA), "About the DFLA," DFLA, 4 August 2018. Available at: <http://dfla.co.uk/2018/08/04/about-the-dfla/#more-146>, accessed 28 April 2020.

28 Sam Cunningham, "Football Must Send a Clear Message to Far-Right Groups: Our Doors Are Firmly Closed," INews, 19 March 2019. Available at: <https://inews.co.uk/sport/football/democratic-football-lads-alliance-islamophobia-far-right-wing-fa-505283>, accessed 28 April 2020; Bhishya Patel, "Nazi Salutes in the Heart of London: March by 'Far-Right Anti-Muslim Football Supporters' Turns Violent as Dozens Fight with Officers and Marcher Yells 'I'll Kill You' at Police," The Daily Mail, 13 October 2019. Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6272589/March-Democratic-Football-Lads-Alliance-turns-violent-marcher-yells-ill-kill-you.html>, accessed 28 April 2020.

29 Adam Forrest, "Democratic Football Lads' Alliance March Erupts into Violence with One Supporter Threatening 'to Kill Police Officer'," The Independent, 13 October 2018. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/democratic-football-lads-alliance-march-violence-riot-kill-police-officer-london-protest-a8582636.html>, accessed on 28 April 2020.

30 Anthony Faiola, "Soldiers of Odin: The Far-Right Groups in Finland 'Protecting Women' from Asylum Seekers," The Independent, 1 February 2016, Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/soldiers-of-odin-the-far-right-groups-in-finland-protecting-women-from-asylum-seekers-a6846341.html>, accessed 28 April 2020.

31 Quoted in Mattias Gardell, "Pop-up Vigilantism and Fascist Patrols in Sweden," in Tore Bjørgo and Miroslav Mareš, eds., *Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 291. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9780429485619/chapters/10.4324/9780429485619-18>, accessed 11 November 2020.

discourse, women are portrayed either as helpless, passive creatures who desire nothing else but children and a dominant husband, or as devious, aggressively assertive feminists who are undermining the natural order in Western civilization and who should be punished for not doing men's bidding, especially when it comes to granting them sexual favours.³²

The right-wing extremist rhetoric regarding the freedoms in liberal societies rings equally hollow. They fight Islamisation because they believe an increasing influence of Islam will put an end to people's freedom to say whatever they want. At the same time, right-wing extremist activists are trying to intimidate Muslims out of freely confessing their religion. In the Netherlands, members of the right-wing group The Right Fights Back (*Rechts in Verzet*) left a beheaded doll near a mosque in Amsterdam³³, while mosques in the eastern city of Arnhem came out in 2019 to say they regularly receive threatening letters, packages with pork and white powder letters.³⁴

It is hard to say with absolute certainty whether such inconsistencies are the result of cognitive dissonance or simply of the cynical use of liberal concepts to appear more acceptable to a mainstream target audience by advocating causes that many people will consider worth fighting for. That said, we should note that the Front National in France, one of the first parties to move from biological to cultural racism, did so to improve its public standing, not because it rejected its earlier views.³⁵ Also, given the virulently racist and misogynistic language that is being used in, for instance, closed-off

Facebook forums of groups that disavow racism and extremism on their websites suggests that the professed fight for causes like the freedom of speech and women's safety is a ploy to hide the movement's ugly face and gain acceptance among wider audiences.³⁶

In this context, we should also take note of the strategy known in right-wing extremist circles as meta-politics. Drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, the concept of meta-politics holds that political movements have to go through a period in which they quietly spread their views, not exclusively through political means (like elections and demonstrations), but also through cultural expressions, like lectures, books and documentaries. In doing so, the movement gradually increases the legitimacy and popularity of their ideas, up to the point where the movement will have enough support to pull off a seizure of power.³⁷ While this approach is too intellectual for the more action-oriented segments of the right-wing extremist movement (who have occasionally, for instance in the Nordic Resistance Movement, fought against the application of meta-politics³⁸), there has been a clear shift towards such tactics in the previous decades. Claiming scholarly, journalistic or even artistic legitimacy, right-wing extremists clad their culturally racist views in guises that are less repellent to their audiences than mobs bringing the Hitler salute and carrying swastika flags. Consequently, people will be more open to typical meta-political expressions, which often involve the rewriting of history as well as strident claims about the importance of the traditions and the unity of the ethnic or racial in-group.

32 Anti-Defamation League (ADL), "When Women Are the Enemy: The Intersection of Misogyny and White Supremacy," (New York: ADL Center on Extremism, 2018). Available at: <https://www.adl.org/media/11707/download>, accessed 28 April 2020.

33 Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, "AIVD Publicatie - Rechts-Extremisme: Een Fenomeen in Beweging" [AIVD Publication - Right-wing extremism in the Netherlands, a changing phenomenon] (The Hague: Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD), 2018), p. 15. Available at: <https://www.aivd.nl/documenten/publicaties/2018/10/02/rechts-extremisme-in-nederland-een-fenomeen-in-beweging>, accessed 11 November 2020.

34 Eric van der Vegt, "Dreigbrieven En Varkensvlees per Post: Arnhem Heeft Extreemrechts Op Korrel Na Signalen Radicalisering," [Threatening letters and pork by mail: Arnhem has the extreme right in the crosshairs after signals of radicalization] De Stentor, 18 September 2019. Available at: <https://www.destentor.nl/arnhem/dreigbrieven-en-varkensvlees-per-post-arnhem-heeft-extreemrechts-op-korrel-na-signalen-radicalisering~ac79e48/>, accessed 28 April 2020.

35 Kundnani, "Blind Spot?" p. 6.

36 Tom Wall, "Secret Facebook Page Reveals Violence at Heart of Forum for 'Football Fans,'" The Guardian, 17 March 2018, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/17/football-lads-alliance-secret-facebook-page-racism-violence-sexism>, accessed 28 April 2020.

37 Roger Griffin, *Fascism* (Cambridge and Medford MA: Polity Press, 2018), pp. 116–117; Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Transnational Militancy in the Making: A Primer on the Nordic Resistance Movement and Generation Identity," C-REX Working Paper Series (Oslo: Centre for Research on Extremism, November 2019), p. 7. Available at: <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/publications/c-rex-working-paper-series/transnational-militancy-in-the-making.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

38 Ravndal, "Transnational Militancy in the Making," 2019, p. 21.

Working through political parties

A second non-terroristic and non-violent tactic currently *en vogue* among right-wing extremists is the use of political parties, mostly on the far right, as vehicles to wield influence. By joining such parties or by cooperating or maintaining ties with them, right-wing extremists hope to shape those parties' political agendas, speculating this will lead to a broader acceptance of their ideas in the parliamentary political arena in general.

A case in point is the Dutch right-wing populist party Forum for Democracy (*Forum voor Democratie*), which in 2017 turned out to have ties to a right-wing extremist group called the Dutch People's Union (*Nederlandse Volksunie*, NVU). During the campaign for the parliamentary elections in 2017 the NVU helped the Forum for Democracy to set up a rally in Badhoevedorp, near Amsterdam.³⁹ Moreover, in an article for the NVU's in-house publication *We Europe (Wij Europa)* NVU-leader Constant Kusters spoke highly of the Forum for Democracy and its leader, Thierry Baudet. Kusters, who reported in the article on a Forum for Democracy rally where he met the party leadership, especially took to Baudet's comment that "you shouldn't learn Moroccans how to shoot in the army." (In fairness, Kusters was at the same time critical of the vagueness of some of Baudet's policy proposals.)⁴⁰ Especially revealing with regard to the extreme-right's tactics is Kusters' perception of the role of organisations like the NVU. In an interview with the magazine *De Kanttekening* he said he was happy to see that his ideas on immigration and Dutch identity are now being embraced by more and more parties in the Dutch Lower Chamber, adding: "We are avant-garde, we don't want to join a government. My

personal role is that I keep the parties in The Hague [where the Dutch parliament is seated, *TvD*] on their toes, and in that capacity I will be needed."⁴¹ In other words, it is through far-right but still parliamentary political parties that the NVU wants to achieve its political goals.

But it is not only established right-wing extremist organisations that use parliamentary parties on the far right. What also happens, is that people with right-wing extremist views who are not members of an established group simply join the political party they feel most closely affiliated with. Here too, the Forum for Democracy is a case in point. The party expelled the NVU member who was involved in setting up the rally in Badhoevedorp, but that did not make it any less attractive to right-wing extremists. In September 2019 the party stirred some controversy when several prominent right-wing extremists attended one of its gatherings⁴², and in spring 2020 a group of party members wrote a letter to the party leadership to voice their concerns about the views that were being expressed in Whatsapp groups of the Jongeren Forum voor Democratie (JFVD), the party's youth wing. According to the letter, JFVD members, some of whom reportedly hold prominent positions in the party, are using Whatsapp groups to convey "authoritarian, fascist and/or national-socialist ideas, including antisemitism, homophobia and racial imperialism."⁴³ Thus, the Forum for Democracy is not only egged on by right-wing extremist organisations, but is also used as a vehicle by right-wing extremists among its own members.

Another example of a party that appears to be a conduit for right-wing extremists who want to insert their ideas into the political mainstream is the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD). Especially the party's increasingly powerful far

39 Dennis l'Ami, "NVU-Voorman: 'Wij Werken Samen Met Forum Voor Democratie,'" [NVU leader: 'We work together with Forum for Democracy'] *De Kanttekening*, 25 August 2017. Available at: <https://dekanttekening.nl/samenleving/nvu-voorman-wij-werken-samen-met-forum-voor-democratie/>, accessed on 28 April 2020.

40 Constant Kusters, "Forum Voor Democratie: Een Bezoek van de NVU Op 9 Februari 2017," [Forum For Democracy: A Visit from the NCE On February 9, 2017] *Wij Europa*, 2017. No link available.

41 l'Ami, "NVU-Voorman: 'Wij Werken Samen Met Forum Voor Democratie,'" 2017.

42 Willem Wagenaar, "Fact Sheet 12: Extreemrechts in Nederlandse Gemeenten" [Extreme right in Dutch Municipalities] (Amsterdam: Anne Frank Stichting, 2020), p. 22. Available at: https://www.annefrank.org/nl/downloads/filer_public/63/7a/637a0b11-6953-4afd-bc24-65013ed66ac3/factsheet-extreemrechts-update-september-2020.pdf, accessed 9 november 2020.

43 Ton F. van Dijk, "FVD-Jongeren 'Fascistisch' En 'Antisemitisch' in Appgroepen," [FVD youths 'fascist' and 'anti-Semitic' in app groups] *HP/De Tijd*, 28 April 2020. Available at: <https://www.hpdetijd.nl/2020-04-28/forum-voor-democratie-jongeren-fascistisch-en-antisemitisch-in-app-groep/>, accessed 9 November 2020.

right wing, called *Der Flügel* (The Wing), and its youth wing have been raising eyebrows in this regard. The Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV), Germany's federal security service, announced in 2019 that it was going to monitor both of these AfD-currents because "[o]n the basis of an extensive collection of materials and a detailed expert assessment the BfV determined that both sub-organisations show enough sufficiently important factual indications of an effort against the free democratic order. Both are classified as suspect."⁴⁴ *Der Flügel* has since disbanded, but it remains to be seen whether this will be the end of the right-wing extremist influence in the AfD, as the former members of *Der Flügel* have not been expelled from the AfD. Earlier, state authorities in Lower Saxony defended their decision to monitor the AfD's youth wing on the grounds that they had noticed "a not insignificant ideological and personal overlap" between that organisation and the Identitarian movement.⁴⁵

Right-wing extremists in Belgium have tried to find ways to influence parliamentary politics as well. For instance, in 2019 Dries van Langenhove, widely known as the founder of the Flemish right-wing extremist movement *Shield & Friends* (*Schild & Vrienden*), won a seat in the Belgian federal parliament for the right-wing populist party *Flemish Interest* (*Vlaams Belang*).⁴⁶ Several other *Shield & Friends* members ran as well, trying to win seats for parties other than the *Vlaams Belang*, but they did not disclose their membership of *Shield & Friends*. They took their names off the ballots when the media reported that they were or had been members.⁴⁷

Another interesting example of how right-wing extremist groups can work their way into the mainstream is *Shield & Friends*' successful attempt to infiltrate not a political party, but the Flemish Youth Council, a consultative body whose eight members give policy advice to the Belgian government. In September 2018 it came out that no fewer than four of the eight members of the Youth Council were secretly members of *Shield & Friends*. In the words of the documentary filmmakers who broke the news, *Shield & Friends* was working on "long march through the institutions" in order to normalise their ideas and radicalise the Belgian political system from within.⁴⁸

What these examples show is that right-wing extremists do not violently attack the political system, but try to use it to their advantage. In doing so, it is likely that they are encouraged by the less than vehement responses by the heads of the parties they feel most closely associated with. The most famous example of this dynamic is, of course, Donald Trump. When Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke called on his supporters to vote for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential elections, Trump did not reject Duke's endorsement. Instead, he denied ever having heard of Duke, even though he had spoken publicly about him on several occasions in the previous decades.⁴⁹ After right-wing extremists killed an anti-racist protester in Charlottesville in 2017, Trump famously asserted that "there were fine people on both sides". That these signals were not lost on right-wing extremist groups is clear from reactions on *The Daily Stormer*, a right-wing extremist website in the

44 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, "BfV: Konzentration Auf Die Beobachtung Der Verdachtsfälle "Der Flügel" Und "Junge Alternative"; [BfV: Concentration on the observation of the suspected cases "Der Flügel" and "Junge Alternative"] Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 8 March 2019. Available at: <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/presse/pm-20190308-konzentration-auf-die-beobachtung-der-verdachtsfaelle-der-fluegel-und-junge-alternative>, accessed 11 November 2020.

45 Associated Press, "Far-Right AfD to Disband Youth Groups over Police Surveillance," Deutsche Welle, 3 September 2018. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/far-right-afd-to-disband-youth-groups-over-police-surveillance/a-45336059>, accessed on 28 April 2020.

46 Associated Press, "Oprichter Extreemrechtse Schild & Vrienden in Zee Met Vlaams Belang," [Founder of the extreme right-wing *Shield & Friends* works together with *Vlaams Belang*]

Algemeen Dagblad, 9 January 2019. Available at: <https://www.ad.nl/buitenland/oprichter-extreemrechtse-schild-en-vrienden-in-zee-met-vlaams-belang~aaa11627/>, accessed on 28 April 2020.

47 Associated Press, "Weer Twee N-VA-Kandidaten Trekken Zich Terug, Wegens Schild & Vrienden-Band," [Another two N-VA candidates withdraw due to ties with *Shield & Friends*]

Nieuwsblad, 12 September 2018. Available at: https://www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20180912_03738958, accessed 28 April 2020.

48 Maarten Rabaey, Pieter Gordts and Beau Wauters, "Ultrarechtse Beweging Schild & Vrienden Infiltrert in Vlaamse Jeugdraad," [Ultra-right movement *Shield & Friends* infiltrates the Flemish Youth Council]

De Morgen, 5 September 2018. Available at: <https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/ultrarechtse-beweging-schild-vrienden-infiltrert-in-vlaamse-jeugdraad~b30aca8/>, accessed on 28 April 2020.

49 Eugene Kiely, "Trump's David Duke Amnesia," FactCheck.Org, 1 March 2016, Available at: <https://www.factcheck.org/2016/03/trumps-david-duke-amnesia/>, accessed on 28 April 2020.

US, to the way Trump handled the fall-out of the Charlottesville incident. Andrew Anglin, the site's founder, was glad to see that Trump did not explicitly condemn neo-Nazis, commenting in a live feed: "No condemnation at all. When asked to condemn, he just walked out of the room. Really, really good. God bless him."⁵⁰

An even more blatant example of Trump's signalling occurred during the presidential debate annex shouting match between Trump and Joe Biden in September 2020. When pressed to distance himself from white supremacists, Trump stunned many observers by calling on the Proud Boys, a fascist and violent white supremacist group, to "stand back and stand by". Joe Biggs, a prominent member of the Proud Boys, took to Twitter to celebrate, saying: "Trump basically said to go f*** them up! This makes me so happy." Shortly after the debate, the Proud Boys began selling t-shirts and tank tops with their logo and the words 'stand back and stand by'.⁵¹

One has to speculate at this point, but it is certainly possible that other US right-wing extremists feel encouraged by Trump's performance to use the Republican Party as a vehicle to further their cause. What is indisputable is that the Republican Party does attract right-wing extremists. In the state of Illinois, several neo-Nazis and white supremacists tried to win the candidacy for the Republican Party in the 2018 midterm elections.⁵²

In fairness, and while it is easy to find examples, it is as yet unclear how widespread the influencing of parliamentary parties is as a tactic among right-wing extremists actually is. But the fact that it has already occurred in several countries with prominent far right parliamentary parties does suggest that this course of action is a serious option among

right-wing extremists in the West today.

Other forms of violence

The previous sections are not meant to suggest that right-wing extremism abandoned violence. No one will dispute that right-wing extremists have attacked immigrants, refugees, mosques and other targets, and it is probably also true that, as for instance Daniel Koehler argues, this kind of violence has not received the attention of media, politicians and scholars that it deserves. Another question is whether much of this violence can legitimately be labelled terrorism.

The line between hate crime and terrorism is fine, but there is a difference. A hate crime is, in the definition of Randy Blazak, "a criminal act that is motivated by a bias toward the victim or victims real or perceived identity group"⁵³ and does not have the communicative element that is necessary to speak of an act of terrorism. It is unlikely that we will ever see an end to the debate on how to define terrorism, but many definitions include a clause to the effect that the act of political violence has to be intended to send a message to an audience that is broader than merely the victims who are directly undergoing the act of violence.⁵⁴ This is not the case for hate crime, or at least not by definition.

How does this relate to right-wing extremist violence? Several right-wing extremist shooters in recent years issued manifestos in which they explain how their violent acts were meant to influence an audience beyond their immediate victims. In these cases it is clear that we can speak of an act of terrorism. And indeed, the copycats who emerged in the wake of the shootings by Anders Breivik (Norway, 2011) and Brenton Tarrant (Christchurch, 2019) show

50 Andrew Anglin, '#UniteTheRight: Charlottesville LIVE UPDATES' (The Daily Stormer). Seen at: <https://dailystormer.su/unitetheright-charlottesville-live-updates/>, dead link, accessed on 23 February 2020.

51 Graeme Massie, "'Downright Shameful': Proud Boys Wear 'Stand Back and Stand by' t-Shirts after Donald Trump's Remarks," *Independent*, 30 September 2020. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-election/proud-boys-trump-debate-t-shirts-supremacism-b724688.html>, accessed 9 November 2020.

52 Jane Coaston, "Self-Described Nazis and White Supremacists Are Running as Republicans across the Country. The GOP is Terrified," *Vox*, 9 July 2018. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/2018/7/9/17525860/nazis-russell-walker-arthur-jones-republicans-illinois-north-carolina-virginia>, accessed 9 November 2020.

53 Randy Blazak, "Isn't Every Crime a Hate Crime? The Case for Hate Crime Laws," *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (April 2011), p. 245. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2011.00364>, accessed 11 November 2020.

54 Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005), pp. 5–6 and p. 28.

that this *modus operandi* does have appeal, especially among those who are involved in online extremist subcultures. Fortunately, some were stopped before they could act, while some others carried out attacks that were mostly failures. But some, like the shooter in El Paso succeeded, which shows that the threat of right-wing extremist mass shootings is real.

But irrespective of how popular and appealing the playbook used by Breivik and Tarrant may be, many right-wing extremists (even the violent ones) choose not to use it. Crucially, explanations regarding the perpetrator's intentions are not always available in cases of right-wing extremist violence. In many cases there is not even a claim of responsibility, let alone a clear articulation of the message the perpetrators wanted to send. Some three quarters of the right-wing extremist attacks in Germany have been carried out without any kind of message or explanation on the part of the perpetrator.⁵⁵ For such attacks, for which it is unknown whether the perpetrator's intention was to send a message to a larger audience, it cannot be established whether they are acts of terrorism. They may be, but maybe they are not. And given the spontaneity and 'spur of the moment' nature of a sizeable part of the right-wing extremist attacks⁵⁶, it is possible that sometimes even the perpetrators themselves don't know.

But even if one does consider unclaimed and spontaneous attacks to be acts of terrorism, one still has to acknowledge that right-wing terrorism is different from previous waves of terrorism in an operational sense. One explanation for the relatively restrained way politicians and the media react to right-wing

extremist violence is that right-wing extremist violent incidents, exceptions notwithstanding, tend to be small-scale and claim few victims. There are not many hard data to rely on, but the few databases that are available show that right-wing extremist attacks tend to take the form of lower-intensity acts of violence, like vandalism, arson, assault and kidnapping.⁵⁷ While certainly reprehensible and problematic, especially given the fact that they occur quite frequently, they are less deadly than jihadist terrorists. As has been argued above, jihadist terrorism has a higher lethality rate than right-wing extremist terrorism, which suggests that right-wing terrorism is more of a constant, creeping kind, and less prone to the sudden outbursts that are characteristic of jihadist terrorism. Just as an indication, in the period 2004-2020 there have been thirteen jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe and the US in which ten or more people (perpetrators included) got killed, compared to five such right-wing extremist attacks in the same period and the same region.⁵⁸ Right-wing extremist terrorists could close that gap, but that would mean a drastic shift in a long-term pattern in the *modus operandi* of right-wing extremist terrorists.

Another reason why one could be sceptical about the notion that right-wing extremist groups will turn to terrorism when they take the step towards the use of violence is their response to the migrant crisis of 2015. The responses by right-wing extremists to the sudden increase of the numbers of refugees entering their countries were certainly violent. Germany, for instance, witnessed a wave of 'hive terrorism', spontaneous and generally small acts of violence by people without previous ties to the right-wing extremist groups.⁵⁹ But in

55 Daniel Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe: Current Developments and Issues for the Future," *PRISM*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (July 2016), p. 93. Available at: <https://cco.ndu.edu/PRISM/PRISM-Volume-6-no-2/Article/839011/right-wing-extremism-and-terrorism-in-europe-current-developments-and-issues-fo/>, accessed 11 November 2020.

56 Sweeney and Perliger identified 1,193 cases of spontaneous right-wing extremist violence in the US in the period 1990-2012. Matthew M. Sweeney and Arie Perliger, "Explaining the Spontaneous Nature of Far-Right Violence in the United States," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (December 2018), p. 58. Available at: <https://www.universiteitileiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2018/issue-6/a4-sweeney-perliger.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020. Ravndal put 110 of the 578 right-wing extremist attacks in Western Europe since 1990 in the category "spontaneous". Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Introducing the RTV Dataset," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (June 2016), p. 7. Available at: <https://www.universiteitileiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2016/issue-3/302-right-wing-terrorism-and-violence-in-western-europe-introducing-the-rtv-dataset-by-jacob-aasland-ravndal.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

57 Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe," pp. 92-95.

58 The number of jihadist attacks is derived from my personal database. The five right-wing attacks are the attacks by Breivik (2011), the shooting near the Olympia Shopping Mall in Munich (2016), the synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh (2018), the shooting in El Paso (2019) and the shootings at two shisha lounges in Hanau, Germany (2020).

59 Daniel Koehler, "Recent Trends in German Right-Wing Violence and Terrorism: What Are the Contextual Factors behind "Hive Terrorism"?" *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (December 2018), pp. 72-88. Available at: <https://www.universiteitileiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2018/issue-6/a4-sweeney-perliger.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2020.

several countries there was another response as well. Rather than committing terrorist attacks, right-wing extremist groups opted for another, non- or semi-terrorist form of violence, namely vigilantism, meaning that they took it upon themselves to protect or maintain, using force or the threat of force, the social order in their countries. They banded together, in some cases wearing military-style uniforms, to patrol the streets looking for transgressions by immigrants, ethnic minorities or refugees or to carry out attacks to mete out punishments to people they believe to have committed crimes that for some reason have been left unpunished by the authorities. In countries that are hubs for migrants and refugees they also patrolled the borders to put a stop to the influx of what they see as profiteers, intruders, criminals, or worse. In Greece, right-wing extremist vigilante groups even took to the sea to stop migrant ships from harbouring on the Greek islands. (Incidentally, in explaining their concerns regarding the sudden increase in the numbers of migrants, they also used the cultural racist rhetoric discussed above.)

Currently, right-wing extremist vigilantism is hardly a pressing concern in all countries. According to the analyses in *Vigilantism against migrants and minorities*, easily the most comprehensive treatment of this topic in recent years, right-wing extremist vigilante groups proved short-lived in Sweden, fell apart as a result of infighting in Canada, never really amounted to much in Norway, and remained “a rather fringe phenomenon in Germany”.⁶⁰ Even in countries where vigilante groups were working in league with political parties or governments, vigilantism has peaked. In Greece, for instance, the Golden Dawn was at one point the third largest party in the Greek national parliament and was openly allied with violent anti-immigrant vigilante groups, but the party’s fortune has since faded as a result of the murder of Pavlos Fyssas. This anti-fascist rapper’s brutal killing triggered a series of investigations and trials against the Golden

Dawn, whose members, up to and including its members of parliament, turned out to be deeply involved in all kinds of criminal activities, including attempted murder and weapons possession.⁶¹ The Golden Dawn took a series of poundings in the following elections and failed to win even a single seat in Greece’s national parliament.

But while right-wing extremist vigilantism may not be as prevalent as it was from 2015 to 2017, certainly in Western Europe, it does reveal something about the violent tendencies of right-wing extremism, and that is that it does not automatically resort to terrorism when it perceives an acute threat. Terrorism may be the most eye-catching form of political violence, but that does not make it the weapon of choice for groups who feel they have to fight back against whatever they believe poses an existential threat against their interests. There are many options available to right-wing extremist groups, but even when they go down the path of violence there are other options than terrorism. And if the past is anything to go by, these options are at least as likely as a right-wing terrorist wave.

Conclusion

Most readers of this special issue of the ICCT Journal will be professionally involved in terrorism, either because they study it, or because they are actually involved in the fight against it. When a new threat presents itself, it is therefore tempting for us, terrorism researchers and counter-terrorism practitioners, to focus on the aspects it has in common with terrorism. In the case of right-wing extremism, that would be its terrorist attacks. Instructive in this regard is *Perspectives on Terrorism*’s Special Issue on right-wing extremist violence. All contributions are about violence, as the issue’s objective was to “[explore] the modus operandi of extreme right terrorism and violence”.⁶² This focus on violence is perfectly understandable and

nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2018/issue-6/a5-koehler.pdf, accessed 11 November 2020.

60 Tore Bjørgo and Miroslav Mareš, eds., *Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

61 Daniel Trilling, “Golden Dawn: The Rise and Fall of Greece’s Neo-Nazis,” *The Guardian*, 3 March 2020. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2020/mar/03/golden-dawn-the-rise-and-fall-of-greece-neo-nazi-trial?CMP=share_btn_tw, accessed 28 April 2020.

62 Jacob Aasland Ravndal and Tore Bjørgo, “Welcome from the Guest Editors,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (December 2018), p. 1. Available at: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2018/issue-6/pot-xii-6.pdf>, accessed 12 November 2020.

legitimate for a journal about terrorism, and, again, it is probably true that over the years right-wing extremist violence has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. That said, it is also harmful to treat the current threat of right-wing extremism as a new or different variation of something we, as terrorism researchers and counter-terrorism practitioners, are familiar with. Looking at right-wing extremism through the prism of terrorism will make us overlook important parts of the strategy right-wing extremists are currently employing to achieve their political goals.

Regarding right-wing extremism's violent potential, this means that government policy needs to be adjusted to the non-terrorist nature of the threat. For instance, long and demanding efforts to infiltrate cells and networks make more sense when terrorist plots are more elaborate and are planned over a longer period of time. The same goes for the constant monitoring of someone's movement and communications. These methods, which have been successfully deployed against jihadist terrorists, require much time and manpower and therefore have to be used sparingly. For the collection of information to build a picture of the adversary's plans to bear fruit, there has to be a plan in the first place. When attack plans are smaller and can be carried out on a whim by any member or group of members of a movement, which is often the case in right-wing extremist violence, there is less point in applying such intensive intelligence methods. The pay-off is smaller, and by the time it is clear that an act of violence will be committed it might well be too late to intervene.

As for right-wing extremist vigilantism, governments should realise that, as Bjørge and Mareš explain, it is a response to a perceived lack of government action against a perceived existential threat. It will emerge when citizens believe governments are unwilling or unable to protect citizens against perceived threat of assault, rape and robbery by members of an out-group, typically refugees, ethnic minorities or immigrants. No government should allow its monopoly of violence to be undermined like that, so firm repressive responses are appropriate here, combined with outreach to communities to restore any confidence that may have been lost.

Crucially, we should be aware that right-wing extremism is not only a security threat, but also, and perhaps even more so, a political challenge, meaning that we need to take its non-violent tactics into account. One could be forgiven for reading parts of this article as an exposé of the devious scheme of the right-wing extremist masterminds, who are cleverly deceiving us and who are diabolically using our freedoms and our political system against us. The point of this article, however, is not that they are successful in every single application of these various tactics. There is, for instance, clearly something boastful in Kusters' claim that the NVU is keeping Dutch political parties on their toes; he is exaggerating his influence. But the fact that this is what he considers his organisation's role to be, says something about the approach right-wing extremist groups have adopted to achieve their political goals. It is important to acknowledge that right-wing extremism is fighting a battle on many fronts, and we should not focus only on the national security front, the one that we happen to be most familiar with and the one where we feel most comfortable fighting.

It is true that repression may have played a role in shaping the strategic preferences that have been described in this paper. Given the counter-terrorism infrastructure currently in place in many Western countries, the operational environment is not very permissive with regard to the use of terrorist violence and other clearly extremist activities. It is, for instance, interesting to note that National Action, a British right-wing extremist group, was blacklisted as a terrorist organisation under the Terrorism Act 2000. In other words, the fact that counter-terrorism laws and capabilities can also be brought to bear on right-wing extremist groups may make other strategies more attractive.

But even so, right-wing extremism needs to be recognised as a different kind of threat that requires a different kind of response. There are no jihadist attempts to normalise their views by tying them to traditionally liberal causes, nor are there jihadist attempts to infiltrate or otherwise use political parties or to organise patrols to protect neighbourhoods from crime or attacks, at least not in the West. This means that right-wing extremism is a threat that cannot be fought using the national security apparatus.

This is not a fight that can be won by deploying police and intelligence officers, who played such a crucial role in the degradation of the jihadist terrorist threat in recent years. Fighting right-wing extremism is also a matter of citizen engagement. Right-wing extremist violence, be it terrorism, hate crime or vigilantism, should be answered with repression, but the fight against the other right-wing extremist tactics is out of the hands of practitioners in the national security field, and to some extent even out of the hands of policy makers in general.

Surely governments can play a role in the fight against right-wing extremism by, to name just a few ways, launching educational programmes, strengthening civil society, adopting anti-discrimination laws and implementing action plans against racism. But at the same time, there are limits to how far governments can and should go in influencing the political views of their citizens. Thus, to the extent that the current right-wing extremist strategies pose no security threats and are not even illegal, we also have to count on citizens to repel right-wing extremist attempts to gain popularity or mainstream their views.

People in a democratic society have a responsibility to stay up to date with current events and to consume and support independent journalism into the dealings of political parties. More importantly, citizens have to hold these parties accountable if the latter allow right-wing extremists in their midst or are working – directly or indirectly – with right-wing extremists. The demise of the Golden Dawn in Greece shows how detrimental the withdrawal of public support can be. Citizens should also, in a variety of ways, raise their voices against actors that, wittingly or unwittingly, facilitate the spread of right-wing extremist views, and they should stay informed about the true intentions of right-wing extremist groups that try to hijack or work their way into campaigns for more amenable causes. If citizens are themselves involved in such causes, they should firmly reject the support of such groups. Political parties, of course, have a role to play as well. Parties that run the risk of being used as a vehicle for right-wing extremists should distance themselves unequivocally and decisively from right-wing extremist groups, in word as well as in deed.

It is important not to allow right-wing extremist views to enter mainstream political discourse.

Drawing up a social firewall of this kind is not easy, as it requires some degree of consensus about what political views are acceptable and what views are not. But if right-wing extremism is to a large degree a challenge that manifests itself through legal and non-violent means, it is up to the people themselves to push back.

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