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The Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) provides its publications to contribute toward expanding the body of knowledge about joint special operations. JSOU publications advance the insights and recommendations of national security professionals and the Special Operations Forces (SOF) students and leaders for consideration by the SOF community and defense leadership.

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# *Countering Transregional Terrorism*

*Foreword by Lieutenant General  
Michael K. Nagata*

*Edited by Peter McCabe*

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Comments about this publication are invited and should be forwarded to the Director of the Center for Strategic Studies, Joint Special Operations University, 7701 Tampa Point Blvd., MacDill AFB, FL 33621.

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**On the cover.** The Countering Transregional Terrorism Symposium, hosted by the Joint Special Operations University with Canadian Special Operations Forces Command and Special Operations Command North, was held 13-14 June 2017.

**Back cover.** PHOTO BY DIZAIN/SHUTTERSTOCK

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## From the Director

Symposia are signature academic engagements for the Center for Strategic Studies and this publication follows a 13-14 June 2017 symposium, “Countering Transregional Terrorism,” conducted at the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. We recognize that a single engagement is rarely sufficient to fully develop concepts or to listen to other voices, so it has become our custom to follow each symposium with an edited volume that extends the richness and reach of the conversation to JSOU Press readers. The contributions to this volume recap or advance major concepts and include other—perhaps dissenting—voices to the conversation.

A special note of thanks is necessary to acknowledge the continuing collaboration with the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command and the U.S. Special Operations Command North who invest time, effort, and intellect to make symposia and supporting research a reality. We also express our thanks to Lieutenant General Michael Nagata, U.S. Army, who graciously accepted our invitation to write the foreword.

As always, we appreciate your feedback or comments.

Francis X. Reidy  
Interim Director, Center for Strategic Studies



# Foreword

*Lieutenant General Michael K. Nagata*

Countering terrorism is very hard. Countering it across global and regional geographic boundaries is even harder. Also, as increasingly powerful technologies become available to terrorists, the consequences of failing to surmount their adaptiveness and agility become much larger.

In writing this foreword for such a notable collection of essays and papers, I had to confront the challenge of being brief enough to entice the reader while also being valuable enough to match the impressive content herein. Accordingly, I offer the reader four “appetizers” to ponder while consuming the more valuable “main dishes” offered in subsequent pages.

First, it is vital to recognize that, despite some very impressive progress the United States and the international community have made in combating terrorism since 9/11, we still struggle as a global community with the creation of durable, permanent solutions, and outcomes against it. The redeployment of significant U.S. military forces back into the Levant to combat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria only three years after our withdrawal from Iraq after defeating its precursor, al-Qaeda in Iraq, amply demonstrates how elusive durable solutions remain for us.

Second, the preponderance of the United States government’s organizations that combat terrorism are primarily organized geographically, while at the same time, terrorist movements and elements are increasingly effective at operating across, and without regard for, geographic boundaries. From Department of Defense geographically oriented combatant commands, to state department regional bureaus, to intelligence agencies’ country desks and offices, and beyond—we are “hardwired” to organize our thinking, our products, our promotion and professional development practices, and even our career paths according to how we have organized ourselves geographically. As a result, the terrorist is too often able to effectively “steal a march” on us in both the physical and virtual worlds by operating without regards to these boundaries.

Third, the access that people everywhere, including terrorist elements have, to increasingly powerful technologies and capabilities that once were

the sole province of the nation state makes the consequences of failure in grappling with the foregoing much more dangerous. When one considers the power that has arisen because of digital technology in such areas as weaponizing commercially available Unmanned Aerial Systems or online/virtual radicalization efforts, it should be abundantly clear there is a steep price to pay for failing to find either 1) durable solutions, or 2) more effective pathways to address terrorism challenges that are borderless.

Fourth, much of our contest against terrorist movements is increasingly moving into domains and arenas where our traditional reliance on military or “kinetic” power is already becoming far more difficult to employ. This fight is increasingly moving into arenas where our comparatively smaller and less well-resourced abilities to prevent terrorist travel, to deny terrorists their funding and resources, to more effectively contest their use of the internet, to combat their ideology, and to prevent the creation of terrorist movements and actors will often be more important than our military or kinetic power. This will require us to significantly strengthen our traditional investments for these “non-kinetic” tasks.

I commend the content of this important publication to the reader, and urge consideration of how we might be able to find better pathways, better solutions, and better designs into the future. The future will not wait for us.

Lieutenant General Michael K. Nagata, U.S. Army  
Director of Strategic Operational Planning  
National Counterterrorism Center

# Introduction: Countering Transregional Terrorism

*Peter McCabe*

In June 2017, Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), MacDill AFB, Tampa, Florida, hosted a symposium on countering transregional terrorism. While another symposium or conference focusing on terrorism might not elicit much excitement, this symposium gathered together an eclectic group of military, government civilians, academics, and practitioners from various backgrounds to tackle this difficult topic. The Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) and the U.S. Special Operations Command North were the main participants but the Mexican Special Operations Forces (SOF) also participated along with counterterrorism (CT) experts from government and industry.

There are numerous questions to be answered. Why meet on this particular topic? Are the various agencies across the range of governments devoted to countering terrorism successful or failing? What does this volume hope to achieve? First, the symposium was created to address this particular topic because despite some success, terrorism is still a global phenomenon. Second, CT organizations are having some tactical success but the wide-ranging nature of the issue prevents many organizations from seeing strategic progress. For example, in 2015, a total of 11,774 terrorist attacks occurred worldwide, resulting in more than 28,300 deaths and more than 35,300 people injured. In addition, more than 12,000 people were taken hostage.<sup>1</sup> However, the total number of terrorist attacks in 2015 decreased by 13 percent and total deaths due to terrorist attacks decreased by 14 percent, compared to

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2014. This was largely due to fewer attacks and deaths in Iraq, Pakistan, and Nigeria. This represents the first decline in total terrorist attacks and deaths worldwide since 2012.<sup>2</sup> Third, this volume is important because it provides various viewpoints on a range of CT topics. Much like the JSOU-sponsored symposium, with varied presentations and discussion, this volume covers multiple areas of concern for counterterrorism.

As previously mentioned, terrorism is a global phenomenon. Terrorist attacks took place in 92 countries in 2015; however, they were heavily concentrated geographically. More than 55 percent of all attacks took place in five countries (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and India), and 74 percent of all deaths due to terrorist attacks took place in five countries (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Syria).<sup>3</sup> One would believe that CT efforts should be focused in these few states, however, that would be treating the symptom and not the cause. Focusing CT efforts on a few bad actors would provide short-term results but would soon be ineffective. As Rich Yarger posits, “modern terrorism, like all things in the 21st century, is interconnected and interdependent.”<sup>4</sup> This means that terrorism is a pervasive and persistent threat that requires a long-term strategy.

While the mainstream media has recently focused on the right wing (nationalists) and left wing (antifa) terrorist threat, it is religious terrorism that presents the largest threat. A State Department study from 2011<sup>5</sup> explored ideologies behind terrorist attacks worldwide and concluded that religious (mainly Sunni-Salafi-Jihadi) extremists accounted for almost 71 percent of those attacks. Left wing (secular, political, anarchist) groups were a distant second at 15 percent and right wing nationalist groups only accounted for less than 1 percent. Overall, there were 12,533 attacks that killed more than 22,000 people. These numbers, however, do not tell the whole story and can be taken out of context. Mary Habeck contends the enemy must be defined through ideology, organizationally, and as combat groups. She does this by showing that Islam is not the enemy, rather, jihadi-salafi (.0167 percent of the Muslim community)<sup>6</sup> is the real enemy. Habeck argues that jihadi-salafi is an extreme version of Salafism, seeking to transform Islam, and have a global concept for their violence. Hence, as noted before, focusing CT efforts on specific locales does not provide long-term solutions. Rather precisely defining and understanding the enemy will allow an ideologically savvy, globally coherent, counterinsurgency strategy.<sup>7</sup>

This volume provides analysis of countering transregional terrorism from a broad range of perspectives. The chapters are written by practitioners who are active in operations, policy, and research. The reader will benefit from synthesizing these divergent viewpoints. The following can be considered an executive summary of each chapter to highlight the arguments and propositions of each author. The hope is that the reader will gain a better appreciation for the complex nature of the transregional terrorism problem set—even better if the reader can identify and advocate for certain possible solutions for implementation. As General Raymond A. Thomas III, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Commander argues, “[countering transregional threats] requires focused effort to secure and hold our gains by empowering local entities within and among the populations that terrorists exploit.”<sup>8</sup>

## **Building an Effective Model That Defeats a Pathway, Not a Commodity**

Brigadier General Burns’ chapter begins this edited volume because it covers a topic that was discussed at length during the symposium: How does the U.S. build an effective model that is effective beyond the tactical? General Burns concludes with it takes deeper analysis than is currently being done. Too much focus is spent on stopping the trafficking of certain commodities through pathways and not enough on defeating the pathways themselves. How does one focus on the pathway? First, by creating a strong ownership narrative that emphasizes the risk of illicit trafficking. Second, by establishing a flat organizational framework that can lead to operational success. Third, by building trust. This is much easier said than done, but can be accomplished when all agency equities are taken into account and addressed. This introductory chapter will challenge the reader to think differently about the trafficking problem.

## **CT in U.S. National Security Strategy**

The National Security Strategy report is published by the executive branch of the U.S. government. “It is intended to be a comprehensive statement articulating the worldwide interests, goals, and objectives of the U.S. that are important to its security.”<sup>9</sup> In this chapter, Nathan Barrick tackles this topic by tracing the evolution of the U.S. national strategy against global

jihadi and terrorism. He concludes the U.S. has been and continues to be in a reactive mode vice taking the strategic initiative. This is not to say that some approaches have not been successful. On the contrary, some current CT approaches must be continued. First, the military network of intelligence and operations is a necessity. Second, it is vital to continue to increase our partners' CT legal frameworks. Finally, whole of government approaches, such as sharing information and coordinating activities, have been successful. Mr. Barrick recommends changes to future CT strategies: emphasize a culture of resilience; defeat the global jihadist narrative; and starve the ideology of recruits through narratives to vulnerable populations that provide peaceful alternatives.

### **Making Sense Out of Chaos**

Thinking differently is the goal of Dr. Emily Spencer's chapter. As she notes, it is important to "fully understand the issue and address it from the correct perspective." The process involves recognizing one's own limitations and/or blinders so the correct question can be asked from the best perspective to solve the problem. Dr. Spencer is advocating introspection—the ability to examine or observe one's own mental and emotional processes. She provides numerous examples of how introspection can be an aid and how avoiding it can be detrimental. Applying introspection to the problem of countering transregional terrorism involves asking the right questions and Dr. Spencer provides examples of macro questions for SOF to consider. She concludes that "asking the right questions enables correct responses."

### **The Crime-Terror Nexus**

This chapter on the crime-terrorism nexus analyzes the problem from a different perspective. Dr. Colleen McCue, Lieutenant Colonel John Gaughan, and Major Meghan Cumpston examine why the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) supports "criminals and others demonstrating social deviance or other patterns of antisocial behavior." The authors conclude that three criminally oriented narrative themes—jihadi cool, super predators, and redemptive—are intentional lines of recruitment in the ISIS radicalization and recruitment strategy. This crime-terror nexus requires a different response from special operations and involves non-kinetic activities and increasing the role of law enforcement. Special operations can assist in the cross-border

collaboration among military, intelligence, and law enforcement agencies to counter transregional terrorism.

## **Transnational Criminal Organizations as a Social Phenomenon**

The previous chapter focused on the terrorism-organized crime nexus. This chapter by Dr. Paul Lieber tackles the problem of transnational criminal organizations as a social phenomenon. He does this by examining three aspects of transnational crime (transnational gangs, human trafficking, and drug trafficking) and concludes in each case they are social activities and require social actors to sustain and grow. This is another call for looking at the problem through a different lens which requires a different approach to counter.

## **Women of the Caliphate**

This sixth chapter by Drs. Lindsay and Howard Coombs explains the Canadian fight for the narrative concerning Western women radicalized by extremist organizations. The authors examine the radicalization narrative to help understand why it works. In the case of ISIS, the strategic narrative is “multidimensional and appeals to a broad spectrum of individuals.” Focusing on women, the narrative depicts joining ISIS as a “form of empowerment, liberation, and the opportunity to live in a society that reflects their belief systems and worldviews.” Dr. Coombs recommends developing a gendered strategic narrative created by women for women with two main aspects. First, Canada should increase the number of women (including Muslim) who work in the security sector countering the narrative. Additionally, “a Canadian strategic narrative should examine and emphasize the brutal realities of living in ISIS controlled territory.” These and other recommendations create a gendered strategic narrative created by women for women.

## **Origin and Epidemiology**

The rest of this title is “Extremism and Radicalization are Psychological Processes, not Religious Beliefs.” Hopefully this subtitle will intrigue the reader, and he or she will jump into this well-researched chapter by Dr. Patrick Christian, Dr. Aleksandra Nestic, et al. The authors argue that extremism and radicalization originates from a psychosocial crisis rather than religious

beliefs. Their research focuses on the most vulnerable populations susceptible to radicalization—refugees—and how trauma transference, countertransference, and extremism contribute to explaining their reality. More importantly, the authors provide a solution that reaches out to this vulnerable population before local and national security forces get involved.

## **Countering Transregional Terror: A Canadian Perspective**

Major-General Peter Dawe provides the Canadian perspective in a global fight. The General describes the transregional threat specifically to Canada through numerous, recent examples of extremist activity. The Canadian approach is outlined which highlights the most recently released Canadian Defence Policy (April 2017). CANSOFCOM serves as the “interface between national defence and the government’s national security apparatus, and is therefore a key contributor to the national campaign to counter transregional terrorism on a multitude of levels.” A networked approach is emphasized as the international community must work together if it hopes to be successful.

## **SOF Success, Political Success, and the Murky Middle**

The final chapter by Colonel (retired) Bernd Horn tackles a most difficult topic in the countering transregional terrorism discussion. He provides the reader with an examination of potential benchmarks for SOF success in countering transregional terrorism. How is it measured? Is SOF having a positive effect? What does success look like? Dr. Horn provides a short historical analysis of SOF performance in conflict to illustrate the difficulty of defining success. It is important to be successful in real terms as well as in the battle for perception. To that end, the author provides a list of benchmarks SOF can use to help determine success. While these benchmarks are not comprehensive, they do provide the reader with a yardstick to track accomplishments to help determine success.

## **Endnotes**

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# Chapter 1. Building an Effective Model that Defeats a Pathway not a Commodity

*Christopher Burns*

“News distracts us from deeper analysis.” These are some of the first words spoken at the June 2017 Countering Transregional Terrorism Conference hosted by Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), U.S. Special Operations Command North (SOCNORTH) and Canadian Special Operations Forces Command Education and Research Centre. These words came from Dr. Hassan Abbas, Professor of International Security Studies at National Defense University. As the newest Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC), these words run true and were strengthened at CAPSTONE<sup>1</sup> where the advice from the four-star leaders was to block time for strategic thinking. In this 24-hour news cycle with requests for information, it is easy to forget that our role as a TSOC is to look out beyond the ridge line and understand what is going on beyond the tactical and effect change that supports our outcomes. This chapter is my humble attempt to do just that. The intent of this chapter is to address what keeps the command up at night and also try and frame the issues in a way that may make more sense moving forward.

Answering the first question on what keeps the command up at night; it is illicit commodities that originate or come into the Western hemisphere that impact the U.S. way of life. This is a different perspective than has been discussed in the past. We historically look at specific threats and how to defeat them. This hyper focus on a single illicit commodity has not reduced

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*U.S. Army Brigadier General Christopher Burns retired in 2018 as the Commander of Special Operations Command North. He has successfully served in numerous assignments within special operations throughout his 33 year career to include working at operational detachment, company, battalion, and brigade level, as well as numerous theater special operations commands, Joint Special Operations Task Force, U.S. Special Operations Command, and the Joint Staff.*

overall supply. However, there is now a move afoot to look at the pathway instead. As a TSOC this makes sense because, as the threat evolves, the one constant in most cases is that the pathways remain to move people, drugs, gold and anything else imaginable for profit.

Illicit and licit pathways have been around for centuries pushing various commodities through them with little or no impact from state actors. It could be argued that transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) have so well established practices they are able to predict what will be seized along the path and adjust for that 'breakage rate.' The other challenge is that these groups have been around for decades or more and have an economic system all their own that is hard to break due to impacts at the local and societal levels. These pathways are a business and as such the U.S. needs to look at them differently. Examining various commodities it is easy to see that distribution is controlled and any attempt to curtail distribution is difficult due to the insatiable demand for the commodity. In fact, any pressure under the current construct drives more innovative ways to get it to the consumer. One only has to look at what is discovered at our borders by law enforcement to realize there is motivation and creativity to get the illicit commodity to the consumer. Money is no object if there is a high enough return on investment. The SOCNORTH and U.S. challenge is dealing with the producer, supplier, and consumer who see benefit in their illicit activities while market

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*The SOCNORTH and U.S. challenge is dealing with the producer, supplier, and consumer who see benefit in their illicit activities while market forces drive unwanted outcomes and risk.*

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forces drive unwanted outcomes and risk. In this supply chain the only entities pushing back are state governments and they are under resourced comparatively.

The other key issue to understand is that the nature of this network is different than what we have experienced with violent extremist organizations (VEOs). TCOs focus on the business aspect of their activities which requires taking a step back, relooking the problem and breaking out what is similar and what is different between TCOs and VEOs. There is also a need to explore where these two intersect for convenience. Both have the ability to impact the level of confidence a population has with its government. For TCOs, the goal is to create an environment where illicit commerce can flow with the least amount of disruption from legal authorities and rivals. For VEOs, it is

about destabilizing governments so these groups can fill the void with ideological views and govern as the government pulls back/fails. In most cases both prey initially on the vulnerable population that reside further from the capital. This requires looking at the TCO center of gravity and then creating an environment that is detrimental to business continuity or entry by other TCOs. This is a complicated network that is global in nature—similar to VEOs but with a business focus.

Much like a business, TCOs and VEOs use enablers to get things done. In some cases, these enablers serve both groups. Think about a businessman and how he moves through countries. He will have a travel agent, agenda, and key contacts at each destination to facilitate his movement. He also will have talented people who work for him on-site or at the home office whose job it is to plan and direct activities for the enterprise. Understanding how business and enablers work is key to how to impact the network. It is important to understand the demand for a product and how product lines evolve. The TCO goal is to remain profitable and relevant to customers. If TCOs lose product relevance, the product needs to be replaced or it will fail. In many cases TCOs will migrate to higher return illicit commodities that are also more risky. Another challenge is outside vendors that provide services to legitimate businesses as well as TCOs. These outside vendors view TCOs as preferred customers due to the unreported income obtained. A secondary benefit of outside vendors is the revenue they generate that supports local economies along the supply chain (elasticity of money; stores, services, housing, etc.).

TCOs are businesses and as such they assess and respond to the changes in the commodity climate and take advantage of increased demand. These changes can come very fast which challenge timely government reactions. This, combined with limited government influence in rural areas, allows TCOs to dominate a market with minimal risk to supply and distribution networks. This is different from a VEO that has a goal to take over the government. This presents a challenge to SOCNORTH because as TCO leadership changes, the new leader acts aggressively and is willing to change an established set of rules. A TCO's level of investment in (win over support of) a population is smaller than a VEO. In a sense, marketing and recruiting are much more cost-effective for a TCO. One area that can be more expensive for TCOs is human capital, where corruption and for-profit motives of employees affect the bottom line. This typically does not occur in a VEO

which has an ideological desire, not a profit motive. Both entities require competent talent or risk network failure.

So, what does this mean to those focusing on TCOs (with potential VEO nexus) on an illicit pathway? The key is to think differently but apply what we can from over a decade of fighting insurgents. There is a need to understand second and third order effects more so than in Iraq or Afghanistan. There is a need to create an environment that is not supportive of illicit businesses, but yet can support the local population's way of life through licit pathways. As such, it requires moving away from focusing on an illicit commodity and focusing instead on defeating the supply chain and demand pathways. Commodities will evolve through a pathway as the market changes. The key for the TSOC and geographic combatant command is to think about what is coming today and, more importantly, tomorrow, and try and deny it from getting on the pathway. In theory, this sounds easy but in fact it is hard because of the demand pull of the commodity. The U.S. relies on organizational innovation as do the pathway facilitators. The more money involved, the more sophisticated these organizations get. Just look at the weekly police blotter of a border city and you can see everything from smuggling of products and people in false trunks to tunnels. This requires creative thinking on both sides of the border.

So, how do we tackle this wicked problem<sup>2</sup> in a different way? First, ensure the focus centers on the pathways, and not the commodity. Focusing on pathways moves away from the cost benefit of a commodity. Develop a strong ownership narrative that highlights the danger of increasing pathway demand which will have a negative impact on society in the long run. The goal is to get people to take action around this narrative to affect change. Countries that do not take action do not embrace this narrative and will require partners to help them understand the risk to their country. This can work through reports that show the impact of allowing the pathway stay open, and the impact of inaction. The idea is to move the country to action. In executive coaching the phrase "if it is your goal you will take the action" is often espoused.<sup>3</sup> Once a strong ownership conversation takes place, if the partner does not take action, then it is not their goal and you know where you stand. The key is to create a strong ownership conversation.

Second, create a flat organizational framework built on trust. If you can't trust your partners in your country, you will have an even harder time trusting those outside your country. Corruption is a major issue. The author

believes that if people are held accountable for corruption (lack of ownership), the possibility exists to transform and unify whole governments. History is full of turning points when key leaders realize the status quo is unacceptable. Unfortunately, for most leaders it takes a historic flash point for action to occur. The author argues that strong ownership narratives can sway leaders. Ownership of the problem unifies organizations to focus on the problem and not compromise goals. If everyone believes change is needed then change will occur. The other benefit of a flat network is the speed with which information and operations can lead to operational success, not just tactical victories. Thoughtful measurements are required to show the value of such organizational change. Another benefit is the flat sharing of information and collaboration which has a cumulative effect—the power of teamwork. Each organization creates value for each other which leads to better actions and outcomes that could not be achieved in isolation. This leads to collective success, not individual glory.

Third, play to each other's strengths. An apt example is the find and fix portions of an operation against a TCO which involves a whole of government approach. But in the end, it becomes a law enforcement finish since it is a criminal activity. The Special Operations Forces (SOF) strength is network analysis and being an interlocutor for all the various organizations that get applied to this challenge. Law enforcement's goal is to make a case to bring to trial while SOF want to take apart the network so it is never able to function again. The conundrum is the discoverability line. How can SOF make sure they do everything they can to understand and take apart the network, while at the same time allow law enforcement to make a case? The answer is trust. If organizations trust each other they can make sure they pass information that benefits (both) the breakdown of the network and helps make a case without compromise.

A state's laws have to be strong enough so pathway suppliers and enablers perceive the risk as too high. An example of this would be stronger smuggling laws. The tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) to take down pathway facilitators need to be shared. There is also a need to understand how to define operational versus tactical success. This requires a thoughtful examination of who you 'roll up' and what impact that has 'bending the curve down' for an illicit network. This may create a worse problem if it is not done correctly. This is a global enterprise and, as such, the pathways

move from one area of responsibility into another. As such SOF can look at a problem globally and help deny the pathway.

This wicked problem is further complicated as the supply chain travels from country to country until it gets to the buyer. This requires the network to share information rapidly and understand each country's level of ownership of the problem and their ability to eliminate the illicit pathways. If SOF think of the buyer as the last stop, it is all about stopping the commodity as far upstream in the chain as possible; much like "defense in depth."<sup>4</sup> This requires all entities to declassify and share information that work under the detaining country's laws. This is no easy task given the current classification process, but to be flat and fast necessitates a need to share more.

To apply these concepts requires keeping in mind a few things. First, this is a team sport. All involved need to play to their strengths and understand the true value of collaboration and cooperation. That means sharing information, flat communications, and trust-based ownership of the problem. All credit is shared credit. Second, be careful not to over-build working groups so the focus and message gets lost. This can lead to diluting the force, especially in the interagency environment, as groups are spread out. Third, build structure and alignment from the strategic to tactical level that aligns and supports the end state. Fourth, capture and share best practices as they come up. During meetings, ensure accountability and coach agencies through frequent touch points to remain on track and identify shortfalls early and often. All partners have competing interests. The ones with strong ownership—that have accountability and success—can make an impact at all levels. Lastly, there is a need for diverse viewpoints to solve problems and allow experimentation. If this was an easy problem set, there would already be a solution. The fact we do not have one means we need to think outside the box. It requires a different viewpoint when planning. It is operationalized through actions and the impact measured. This is experimentation. Try it and see what happens. Bring the team together to review the impacts and try again with refined concepts. Success will follow as impact variables are understood. Obviously, the enemy gets a vote and has a profit motive which will change their TTPs.

In conclusion, we need to think differently than we have in the past about this problem. What needs to change is the ownership conversation from a commodity to a pathway. All governments have a natural desire to focus on the commodity that is impacting their population and not the bigger picture.

This leads to lack of interest when the commodity that is traveling through a country does not have an impact. A pathway will adjust to actions against it and as such a pathway needs to be degraded for all illicit commodities. This requires us to not be distracted by the news and do that deep thinking Dr. Abbas mentioned. By creating a sense of ownership, accountable actions, and experimentation, there can be a downward bend in the operational curve. This leads to impactful outcomes versus just changing actors on the illicit pathway. In the end it is about the illicit commodities on pathways being reduced year after year. To accomplish this we need to look at operational not tactical success.

## Endnotes

1. The CAPSTONE General and Flag Officer Course was created in 1982 with participation on a voluntary basis. The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 subsequently mandated that all newly-selected general and flag officers attend CAPSTONE. The course objective is to make these individuals more effective in planning and employing U.S. forces in joint and combined operations. The CAPSTONE curriculum examines major issues affecting national security decision making, military strategy, joint/combined doctrine, interoperability, and key allied nation issues. Additional information can be obtained at the National Defense University CAPSTONE website, accessed 30 Nov 17, <http://capstone.ndu.edu/>.
2. A wicked problem is a problem that is difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize. One example of organized crime and terrorist wicked problems, see Charlie Edwards, "Winning on Wicked Issues," *The World Today*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (February 2008): 19–21.
3. Marissa Bracke, "The Real Reason You're Not Taking Action on Your Goals" 11 April 2011, accessed 4 Dec 17, <http://marissabracke.com/real-reason-not-taking-action-on-goals>.
4. The practice of arranging defensive lines or fortifications so that they can defend each other.



## Chapter 2. Counterterrorism in U.S. National Security Strategy

*Nathan Barrick*

The United States has been at war for more than 16 years—its longest and most expensive conflict. These facts are not surprising to national security leadership, who have tried to explain that this war will be a long war and that it is a generational conflict.<sup>1</sup> The media and the American people may have heard and interpreted these warnings as euphemisms for difficult, but not as permanent. On 12 September 2001, few questioned the justification or need for a war against jihadi terrorists. Sixteen years later, we would be remiss if we do not challenge the assumptions underpinning the United States’ prosecution of what is popularly known as the “War on Terror.”<sup>2</sup> Looking past a long series of tactical and operational successes, by meaningful measures the United States is not winning the strategic level of this conflict.

Terrorism challenges conventional frameworks about the levels of war—strategic, operational, and tactical—because a terrorist act is an isolated tactical-level event intended to have strategic political consequences. Acts of terror are asymmetric tactics utilized when a group is not capable or willing to challenge established governments through existing political processes, or with conventional armed forces to achieve their political objectives. The United States and its counterterrorism (CT) coalition are fighting terrorist groups now frequently referred to as violent extremist organizations, who have become integrated into insurgencies or civil wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, and the Philippines. The United States is fighting two primary terrorist organizations with transregional reach attempting to establish a physical caliphate—al-Qaeda

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(AQ) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Hostilities have spread inexorably into country after country after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan: Nigeria against Boko Haram in 2002; against al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) after the U.S. invasion in 2003; to Yemen against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in 2004; Lake Chad Basin (Chad, Niger) against Boko Haram in 2009; Libya against first AQ allies in 2011 then later ISIS; followed by Salafi jihadists in the Sinai in Egypt in 2011; Kenya against AQ ally al-Shabaab in 2011; Syria against AQ, al-Nusra Front, then ISIS after 2012; and again to Iraq against ISIS in 2014. The number of Western nations attacked by catastrophic terrorism has increased. The number of jihadists has multiplied several times. This chapter will examine how jihadists seem to be closer to their desired strategic end state—an apocalyptic battle between Islam and unbelievers—than the U.S. is to a world in which jihadists are denied the ability to radicalize, mobilize, and organize terrorists to threaten the United States. This chapter examines how U.S. national strategy for defeating terrorism should adjust to account for this strategic reality or risk further surprises jeopardizing the expected victory.

## Introduction

In some ways, this strategic dilemma—winning the battles but losing the war—reflects the ongoing debate about the efficacy of CT strategies and the inherent difficulties in declaring war on a particular tactic, as opposed to orienting the war on an actual enemy or threat. In other ways, this situation challenges another perspective—the belief in a special American role in the world and whether historical verities about conflict and culture do or do not pertain to the United States.<sup>3</sup> Over the past decade and a half, people in the West have dramatically increased their understanding of Islam, and international anti-terrorism or CT efforts have evolved from a focus on direct action to kill or capture key terrorist leaders, to an attempt to address the root causes of grievances thereby undermining jihadist claims to legitimacy referred to as countering violent extremism (CVE).<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the broadening dialogue in public spaces, on open or encrypted communication apps (Twitter or Telegram), and in content sites offering anonymity (JustPaste.it or Pastebin) or in the Dark Web, has also served to radicalize elements of vulnerable populations.<sup>5</sup> Because the world's vulnerable populations—people at risk due to socio-economic ills, lack of effective governance

capacity, or other grievances—are so numerous, this aspect of the conflict has only increased the violent scope of a problem which predates 9/11. Even as the religious legitimacy of the jihadist cause is undermined by the increase of authoritative, moderate Islamic voices rejecting terrorism—especially suicide bomber attacks against other Muslims—and despite the losses suffered by AQ, AQI, and most recently ISIS, the popular appeal among Sunni populations for Salafi jihadism has increased substantially as measured by foreign fighter flows and an increase in attacks inspired by these organizations.<sup>6</sup>

When this increasing popularity of violent extremism—more inspired attacks and more radicalized individuals seeking to become foreign terrorist fighters—is paired with the CT strategic approach of decapitation, we observe an effect not unlike that of the mythical Lernaean hydra, whose heads multiply when cut off. Undoubtedly, this military methodology has resulted in hampering the effectiveness of jihadi attack planning and organizational leadership. Some leaders are harder to replace than others; some leaders' reputations grow in stature and capability after their death, providing an inspirational morale boost; other marginalized leaders are given newfound opportunities to realize their own skills and excellence. Describing the current jihadi terrorist threat as leaderless and inspirational may exaggerate the corporate effectiveness, but the terrorist organizational threat adapts to its political and security environments.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps an important starting point for challenging strategic assumptions is the practical question of victory: Is the United States winning? By almost any observable and measurable criteria of strategic victory, the answer is no. There are more terrorists in more unstable places continuing to wage jihad than when the fight started. In 2001, Salafi jihadist groups were active in at least 20 countries and there were nine countries where these groups had safe havens or significant operating spaces (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Indonesia, Philippines, Algeria, Tunisia, Mali, and Niger). By 2017, with some of the groups existing in 2001 declaring allegiance to AQ or responding to the rise of ISIS, Salafist jihadist groups were active in at least 35 countries, with known operating space or safe havens in 17 countries (all the same as 2001 except Indonesia, plus Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Kenya).<sup>8</sup> While the U.S. is not winning, there is progress. Important terrorist leaders have been killed like AQI's leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 2006 and AQ's leader Osama bin Laden in 2011, organizations destroyed or forced to fragment or adapt, the anti-terrorist coalition has

enlarged, territories controlled at one time by terrorist forces have been taken back, although some territory in Iraq and Afghanistan was temporarily taken back by terrorists and retaken by coalition and host nation forces. There has been progress with some successful operations and many tactically significant victories, but the anti-terrorist coalition is not winning.<sup>9</sup> Not winning is not the same thing as losing, but it can be and often is the same. Just not in this case, not yet. Because this is an ideological struggle, the nature of the conflict is akin to a war of attrition. Since exhaustion or loss of will to continue the struggle might occur for either side at any moment in a war of attrition, not losing and not winning can both be true.

Instead, the expansion of the conflict has increased the importance of the ideologies at stake. Precipitating this expansion and conflict was exactly AQ's strategic intent in conducting its jihadi terror campaign and also a strategic consequence AQ's rival, ISIS relished.<sup>10</sup> Jihadist theology and Western ideas are locked in a trial by combat. Fortunately, expansion does not necessarily aid the jihadists' strategic end-state of establishing a caliphate or achieving an apocalyptic defeat of Western civilization; expansion is only the first step towards those ends. Also, expanding and escalating the conflict by conducting terrorist attacks in Western lands has not had the exact effect jihadists desire but it has drawn Western attention to Muslim grievances and attracted foreign fighters and sympathizers, which advances their cause. Western governments and society have proven resilient in the face of terrorist casualties, and, secondly, there is no flagging of Western will to prosecute this fight. Even countries that recoiled from internationalizing the war on terror (Spain) continued to effectively counter terrorism in their own country.<sup>11</sup> Pakistan, which adopted Islamic militant proxies as an element of national grand strategy, found it necessary to distance itself from these proxies and wage a costly counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign to avoid being targeted by the United States as a state sponsor of terrorism.<sup>12</sup> U.S. efforts at internationalizing the conflict have proven a boon to terrorist recruiting, especially by the U.S. invasion of Iraq to prevent possible weapons of mass destruction (WMD) from reaching terrorist hands.<sup>13</sup> It is necessary to observe, however, that the U.S. coalition's strategic narrative does not adequately provide a counter to the strategic narratives of the Salafi jihadi. The U.S. coalition's denial of a conflict against Islam does not appear to resonate in the face of popular grievances about decades of exploitation by Western nations and the repressive, autocratic governments the U.S. has at times supported. The

coalition's expressions of resolve have not been effective in deterring terrorism or dissuading the jihadi threat. Also, U.S. diplomatic attempts to counter the influence of potential international partners like Russia and China, who are less interested in Western values, has divided the anti-terrorist narratives within the international involvement in terrorist-generated conflict zones.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, it seems that where the U.S. coalition or the Salafist jihadists have sought to expand the conflict, or limit undesired participants in the conflict, the effects have been the opposite of those intended.

Successive U.S. national strategies or strategic pronouncements have not given a satisfying explanation for the unexpected expansion of global jihadist threats. No articulation of U.S. national strategy included an expectation that global jihadi threats would expand before being destroyed. Successive U.S. presidents have not promised it will be darker before a victorious dawn—except perhaps President Bill Clinton prior to 9/11.<sup>15</sup> This omission is not simply a perceived necessity to avoid negative public opinion, but instead is an unexpected, adverse strategic effect. The expansion of the global jihadist threat and the increased numbers of terrorists has constituted a strategic surprise, whose relevance for the CT strategy has so far been under examined. It is possible to suspect that any subconscious or conscious consideration of this effect by U.S. national security leaders and strategists is immediately subordinated to the heartfelt belief that Western values will prevail (democratic rule, respect for human rights, commercial access to global markets, and separation of religion and politics). Therefore, if it is a well-grounded belief that Western values will prevail, then is it an effective strategy to downplay the ideological component of this conflict? Is it perhaps possible that Western officials' minimizing the religious aspect of this conflict (which is perceived in the West as prudent caution, beyond simple political correctness) in some way actually advancing the jihadist cause? Arguably, something is advancing, spreading, and metastasizing the jihadist cause. A war-winning coalition strategy must decisively address and end this jihadist expansion through a more effective strategic narrative.

This next section will trace the evolution of U.S. national strategy against terrorism and global jihadists. An important decisive moment along this path was the effect of 9/11 on U.S. CT strategy and the strategic parallels drawn from Pearl Harbor. After the U.S. invaded Iraq, U.S. CT strategy was adjusted by strategic reviews of the situations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although President Obama criticized President Bush's conduct of the War

on Terror, he doubled down on some aspects of U.S. strategy in ways that exacerbated the strategic dilemma and lack of strategic narrative. As this chapter is being written, an operational-level victory over ISIS in Syria and Iraq appears imminent and may afford an opportune inflection point to improve U.S. approaches to its national CT strategy.

## **Pre-9/11 U.S. CT Strategies**

The first national strategy for combating terrorism was published by the White House in February 2003, almost 18 months after the 9/11 attack by AQ.<sup>16</sup> But, the first publicly released National Security Strategy under President Reagan in January 1987 mentions terrorism in various forms about 25 times.<sup>17</sup> And the first major presidential step in what must be considered a nascent approach to national strategy against terrorism was President Richard Nixon's September 11, 1970 call for the U.S. commercial aviation industry to increase security measures on passenger airplanes, including armed guards onboard.<sup>18</sup> President Nixon then established a Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism, highlighting that it was a problem encompassing diplomatic, intelligence, and law enforcement functions.<sup>19</sup> In a memo recommending the establishment of the committee, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and John Erlichmann emphasized: "the total problem transcends the matter of trying to prevent terrorism. We must not only take every possible step to prevent such acts but also we must prepare to react quickly and effectively to an act of terrorism that directly involves the United States—for instance the kidnapping of an American diplomat abroad or a foreign diplomat here." Tellingly, for domestic political considerations, they continued, "We need to get the highest level of attention focused now on this problem ... as well as taking action that will pull the teeth of potential critics who might use an act of terrorism as a basis for raising the cry that government leadership is inadequate to meet such emergencies."<sup>20</sup> Less than six months later, the U.S. Ambassador to Sudan and the Charge d'Affaires, along with a Belgian diplomat were executed in a hostage situation in which the U.S. refused to negotiate with hostage takers. This was the start of the U.S. policy of non-negotiation with terrorists.

After the Nixon administration's first steps towards a national CT strategy, President Ford's administration was the first to consider the probability of a catastrophic terrorist attack inside the United States. Cabinet level

officials were skeptical about this low-probability high-impact event, frequently stymieing efforts by mid-level officials, who had responsibility for policy and strategy for addressing international terrorist threats, to prevent or deter attacks.<sup>21</sup> Importantly, the prospect of terrorists using WMD to attack the United States was highlighted after a 1974 nuclear bomb hoax in Boston, which led the Ford administration to create the Nuclear Emergency Search Team capability as part of U.S. counterterrorist forces.<sup>22</sup>

The President Carter administration initially deferred to diplomatic and economic sanctions to address the major terrorist crisis of Iranian extremists taking American diplomats hostage in Tehran. However, after months of frustrating diplomatic negotiations, and with presidential approval ratings dropping due to perceived weakness, President Carter turned to the U.S. Army's newly certified elite CT unit—the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta—more popularly known as Delta Force, to conduct a commando raid to rescue the hostages. Although the raid failed, the mission's failure set in motion an investigation (The Holloway Commission) recommending improvements which would contribute to military reform under the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. After thirty years of development and adaptation, more than half of which includes combat experience, the U.S. military now possesses unequalled CT capabilities.

Measures the President Carter administration implemented included enforcing Section 303 of the International and Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976, which sought to punish state sponsors of terrorism. This included dual-use technologies such as heavy equipment

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*Although the raid failed, the mission's failure set in motion an investigation (The Holloway Commission) recommending improvements which would contribute to military reform under the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986.*

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transport trucks to Libya, as well as making it more difficult for American businesses to operate in countries listed on the black list of state sponsors resulting in such countries receiving very limited U.S. assistance of any type. President Carter initially placed Libya, Iraq, Syria, and South Yemen on the list; President Reagan later added Iran, Cuba,<sup>23</sup> and North Korea; and Sudan was listed by President Clinton. Some countries have since been removed from the list in response to diplomatic efforts and negotiations: South Yemen was dropped when it merged with North Yemen to become Yemen; Iraq and

Libya were removed by President George W. Bush; North Korea removed by President Bush in 2008 during nuclear-related negotiations; and President Obama removed Cuba in 2015.<sup>24</sup> This focus on state sponsorship of terrorist groups remain a key component of the U.S. strategic approach to CT.

However, in the early 1980s, the impact on the United States by international terrorism was increasing. In 1983, over 250 Americans were killed in terrorist attacks—the most in a single year to that point.<sup>25</sup> President Reagan responded by asking Congress to pass four combating terrorism related bills: an Act for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Hostage-Taking; the Aircraft Sabotage Act; the Act for Rewards for Information Concerning Terrorist Acts; and a Prohibition Against the Training or Support of Terrorist Organizations Act of 1984.<sup>26</sup> President Reagan reiterated the United States policy to never make concessions to terrorists, because “to do so would only invite more terrorism.”<sup>27</sup> President Reagan administration’s efforts were in response to an increasing trend in terrorist attacks against the United States—a trend that continued until 1991.<sup>28</sup> Of note for consideration in reassessing U.S. strategy on CT is the Long Commission report written after an investigation of the Beirut Airport/U.S. Marine headquarters bombing in 1983. The Long Commission identified the potential threat in allowing U.S. terrorist opponents to impact U.S. political policy, especially if those terrorists were backed by state sponsors. The report advocated the U.S. should adopt a proactive CT policy, rather than waiting for terrorists to attack and then responding. Additionally, the report highlighted the ineffectiveness and inadvisability of relying on physical defenses.<sup>29</sup> However, the U.S. imposed measures to harden the physical defenses of overseas facilities, especially embassies in the Middle East, and, significantly, the State Department continued as the lead U.S. agency in combating terrorism. The U.S. strategic approach was embodied in the concept of terrorism as a crime and persuading or negotiating international protocols, bilateral and multilateral, to enhance and enforce cooperation in finding, apprehending, and prosecuting terrorists. The U.S. military, intelligence community, and agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) were supporting efforts that had more resources and capacity to implement counterterrorist policies than the State Department.

It is important to examine how the State Department approached this responsibility. Secretary of State George Schulz’s leadership was characterized by his empowering the internal bureaucracy of the department and

reliance on the professional Foreign Service. State's bureaucracy was not empowered to manage a CT strategy because the top-level leadership was not actively prioritizing the effort. The bureaucracy did lay the foundation of organizations and policies that could play a role in an active CT strategy if given prioritization including: a Rewards program to expand collection of intelligence on terrorists; better interagency cooperation on legal matters (including aiding in implementing the "long arm" statute which placed FBI legal attachés in many U.S. embassies); and an expanded intelligence activity inside the State Department, as well as a mechanism for sharing intelligence across the interagency (which was not supported fully). Unfortunately, most of these positive developments were hampered by the State Department's small staff and small budget. Additionally, the impetus driven by threatening events, dropped off due to fewer terrorist attacks occurring.<sup>30</sup>

President George H.W. Bush was one of America's key government officials very knowledgeable about international terrorism (he had been assigned as chair of a cabinet level Task Force on Combating Terrorism by President Reagan), but his administration saw a concurrence of events which resulted in a decade of decreasing attacks. U.S. victory in Desert Storm against Iraq, the negotiations in the Oslo Accords between Israel and Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization, as well as the collapse of the Soviet Union have a correlative, perhaps even causal, effect on a global decrease in terrorist attacks in the 1990s. This decrease was likely tied to the disruption in terrorist group safe havens, funding, and causes these events had in Eastern Europe, the region around Israel, and Iraq. Interestingly, in responding to criticism about ending the Desert Storm campaign and leaving Saddam Hussein in power in Iraq, President Bush said: "If we'd continued, hundreds of thousands of American troops would be on the ground in Iraq today attempting to pull warring factions together or bogged down in some guerrilla warfare. Whether in Korea or in Lebanon, history shows us the danger of losing sight of our objectives. Liberators can easily become occupiers. A Commander in Chief has to know not only when his objectives have been reached but when to consolidate his gains."<sup>31</sup>

Despite a decreasing number of attacks, terrorism remained a problem throughout President Clinton's administration, primarily due to Iran's state sponsorship, the rise of the Palestinian terrorist organization Hamas, and instability in Somalia. President Clinton issued Presidential Decision Directive 39, articulating that U.S. Policy on Terrorism would be to pursue

and prosecute terrorist criminals and help other countries in their efforts to do the same. President Clinton's administration took steps to increase international cooperation to combat terrorism. In 1996, at a G7 conference, President Clinton called on the international community to do four things to combat terrorism: give terrorists nowhere to hide, deny them resources, strengthen border security, and prevent terrorists from "misusing the high-tech communications we all rely on for commerce and cooperation."<sup>32</sup> In 1996, President Clinton emphasized the fight against terrorism as a national priority and a national security priority; he increased the references to terrorism in the National Security Strategy (NSS) in the early part of his term. In President Clinton's 1998 NSS, published after the East Africa embassy bombings, terror and its variants were mentioned 104 times (bin Laden's network was mentioned four times, though not by name). Presidents Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton mentioned terrorism in their published NSSs the following number of times: Reagan 27 times in 1987, and 18 in 1988; Bush 9 times in 1990, 11 in 1991, and 17 in 1993; Clinton 26 times in 1994, 27 in 1995, 57 in 1996, and 42 in 1997; 59 times in 2000 (bin Laden network 3 times) and 93 in 2001 (bin Laden network 5 times).

President Clinton was the first to also emphasize how difficult combating terrorism would become. In an address in 1996, two years before AQ destroyed two U.S. embassies in East Africa, President Clinton said: "This will be a long, hard struggle. There will be setbacks along the way. But just as no enemy could drive us from the fight to meet our challenges and protect our values in World War II and the Cold War, we will not be driven from the tough fight against terrorism today. Terrorism is the enemy of our generation, and we must prevail."<sup>33</sup> President Clinton importantly also addressed another aspect of how terrorism strategically affects a nation and the international community. Responding to critics who felt terrorism was an exaggerated threat (more people are killed by drunk driving for example, or struck by lightning), President Clinton highlighted the negative political impact on international negotiations which prevent intractable grievances from being resolved, perpetuating aspects of human misery. He claimed, "The question is not only how many lives have been lost in each attack, but how many futures were lost in their aftermath." Additionally, the psychological damage in fear and the danger of terrorists accessing higher technological capabilities to inflict harm were worthy of national security attention.<sup>34</sup> As one expert and close observer of the development of U.S. counterterrorism

opined, “American perceptions have gradually evolved from the traditional view of terrorism as a ‘crime’ to a new disposition characterizing it as a new and unprecedented tactical and strategic form of warfare.”<sup>35</sup> This chapter will discuss this point further, because how strategically harmful terrorism actually is must be reevaluated in the context of the United States’ strategic situation today.

## **The Impact of 9/11 on U.S. CT Strategy**

The event which crystallized terrorism as a threat to U.S. national security was AQ’s 9/11 attack on the United States, killing more Americans than were lost at Pearl Harbor in 1941. Many researchers and commentators view the 9/11 attack as a Pearl Harbor-like event bringing the U.S. reluctantly into a war it should be committed to finish as quickly as possible.<sup>36</sup> But we must set aside emotional, visceral reactions and think strategically. Pearl Harbor and 9/11 have fundamental differences, which are crucially necessary to realize before the U.S. makes fatally strategic errors that could result in catastrophic consequences. In the first place, Pearl Harbor was a significant military—specifically naval—defeat, which gave Japan operational and strategic opportunity to conduct activities in the Pacific theater. If Japan had been ready to, or even capable of, projecting force across the Pacific to invade the West coast of the U.S., little could have prevented it. Japan instead used the strategic moment it gained in time by its successful attack to act regionally and at the operational level of war, which afforded the U.S. an opportunity to exploit the fortuitous escape of its aircraft carriers from Pearl Harbor’s devastation. Despite Japan’s strategic surprise, the strike validated the concept of the aircraft carrier, which replaced the battleship as the strategically significant vessel in naval warfare. Because Japan missed destroying the U.S. aircraft carriers at Pearl Harbor, the apparent defeat was only an ephemeral setback—the only thing we had to fear was indeed fear itself. Strictly speaking from a strategic perspective, it could be argued the losses at Pearl Harbor were strategically inconsequential in terms of the United States’ naval strength in the Pacific, as demonstrated by the subsequent naval air battles of Coral Sea and Midway.<sup>37</sup> The United States had already started to shift its domestic manufacturing and production to a wartime footing over a year prior to the attack. What would have been the expected economic consequence of Pearl Harbor as a declaration of war—full mobilization—was moot because

military expansion and preparation had already been placed in motion. In the end, Pearl Harbor's actual significance was a legitimizing, unfalsifiable pretext for declaring war, which the democratic political establishment in Washington D.C. could proceed to do without jeopardizing their political careers. Japanese Admiral Yamamoto, the brilliant military mastermind of the Pearl Harbor attack, was entirely correct when his strategic intuition was no longer obscured by his preparations for the operation and could see beyond the strike to its consequences, "I fear all we have done is awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve."<sup>38</sup>

As horrible as the 9/11 attack was in terms of loss of life and personal traumatic experiences, in terms of strategic impact on the United States, it was inconsequential. The U.S. response to 9/11 has been extremely consequential, but how quickly the U.S. recovered from the attack itself needs noting. There was no enemy even remotely capable of exploiting the temporary strategic moment. The catastrophic terrorist attack did not change any military, naval, or aviation tactical, operational, or strategic verity or way of warfare. A Department of Homeland Security macroeconomic impact analysis determined that while there was short run impact of a 0.5 percent drop in annual gross domestic product growth for 2001, forecast fears of severe economic consequence were possibly "subject to significant error, and/or that forecasters were anticipating negative shocks such as subsequent attacks that did not materialize." The report concluded that it was not clear why the forecasts were wrong and recognized that national economic resilience was an "obvious possibility," but that more research was needed.<sup>39</sup> The 9/11 attack and subsequent war on terror do not seem to have negatively affected the long term economic growth of the United States.<sup>40</sup> Economic growth involves such a large number of factors, that assessing the impact of a single major event is difficult; hence, it diminishes the strategic economic significance of the 9/11 attack. It begs the question whether a different response than going to war might have had a different long-term economic effect. Such a counterfactual is beyond the scope of this research, but should be considered in contemplating the economic consequences of changing the U.S. strategic approach to continuing a longer war.

There is little known evidence yet that any jihadist strategic thinkers questioned the wisdom of the 9/11 attack result; there was apparently little intuitive sense of possible strategic error. Instead, the U.S. response to 9/11 was exactly the strategic outcome expected by the jihadists. Their strategic

intent was not to knock America to its knees, but instead initiate a war between the West and the nations in the Muslim world, which in bin Laden's view, would result in an ultimate victory for the Islamists.<sup>41</sup> Because there is an apocalyptic quality to the jihadi cause, from their strategic perspective, the continuing conflicts appear to indicate progress toward their ultimate ends. How the U.S. chooses to leave Afghanistan, and whether that outcome mirrors the Soviet departure after eight years of war in the 1980s, will likely shape future jihadist perceptions of their possible strategic success for this entire conflict.

From a Western national security perspective, the Taliban government of Afghanistan strategically erred in not surrendering Osama bin Laden and AQ fighters to U.S. demands. That action allowed the U.S. to avoid the debate about whether the nation could declare war on the technique of terrorism, or even a group of individuals as a non-state actor, by providing a territorially-bounded concept of a theater of operations. But from a non-state actor jihadi perspective, the U.S. fixated on a conflict where borders matter and ideology takes a back seat. AQ hoped to start an apocalyptic war between the West and Islam, by banking on Americans overreacting to the 9/11 attack; they hoped the U.S. would ignore how anti-American sentiment and tensions between Western and Islamic culture fueled AQ's movement.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, the conflict with the United States has expanded and energized tens of thousands of recruits to the jihadist cause and has spread to over three dozen countries where terrorist cells are known to operate and conduct regular attacks. Despite 16 years of CT successes, the number of jihadi terrorists has expanded exponentially since 2001.<sup>43</sup> In AQ's view, the United States strategically blundered into the "Bear Trap," as it were; however, whether AQ has fundamentally underestimated and misjudged the United States as an opponent—expecting a similar result as the mujahidin achieved in the Soviet-Afghan War—is, objectively speaking, still a matter of future assessment.<sup>44</sup> Al-Qaeda may view the U.S. engagement of other nations in a coalition of the willing to facilitate cross-border and transregional cooperation as an aid to expanding the conflict and not as strategic pressure. What the terrorists likely did not expect was the U.S. government's efforts to deny that the War on Terror was a war on Islam (in spite of jihadist claims to the contrary). The United States also started to empower moderate, non-jihadist and secular, Muslim voices and governments to attack the theological legitimacy of AQ's jihad. This approach was nascent in President Bush's 2003 *National*

*Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, comprising a single paragraph on page 24, but significantly expanded through the 2006 update to reflect an increasing emphasis on democratic values and the harm the jihadi cause was doing to Muslims. By President Obama's 2011 *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, this aspect of the conflict was a recurring theme throughout the document.

Before examining how the U.S. CT strategy post-9/11 evolved, it is worth summarizing U.S. grand strategy and the role CT had at the moment of 9/11. The complete explanation of the evolution of U.S. grand strategy is a subject for a longer work, but in late 2001, the U.S. had not identified any specific national strategic threat against which to organize its national security strategy—the Cold War had been over for more than a decade. The U.S. deliberately avoided simply switching the Cold War reticle onto the next largest Communist nation, the People's Republic of China, instead opting to capitalize on an expected peace dividend. After a decade of debate, the U.S. military settled on the concept of Transformation—transformation from threat-based strategic calculus to capabilities-based. The actual publication of the strategic approach would be after 9/11, but the intellectual heavy-lifting had already been worked. In this approach, terrorism was just one of a diverse set of challenges or risks. In a capabilities-based approach, the most pressing concern was the acquisition by a terrorist group of WMD capabilities. From the U.S. perspective, thorough understanding of a terrorist group's grievances, *raison d'être*, or adoptive strategy, was less important than preventing the capability to mount a WMD attack or conduct an operation to attack the U.S. homeland. The U.S. government's CT policy was a State Department-led, state sponsor-focused effort to enhance international law enforcement cooperation to identify, apprehend, and prosecute individual terrorists and enhance passive, defensive measures making high-probability targets less vulnerable and terrorist/criminal travel more difficult. The U.S. also ensured it possessed a rapid response, special operations, counterterrorist capability to react to multiple terrorist-related scenarios, including those potentially involving WMD.

Just prior to 9/11, a Congressional investigation into U.S. CT policy identified the need for a more unified government effort, especially in terms of homeland security. The hearing identified weaknesses in intelligence sharing procedures among U.S. agencies and with international partners. Terrorists had demonstrated an escalation of attacks against U.S. interests after Khobar Towers, the East Africa embassies, and the USS Cole. However, while the

committee recommended improvements in organization and passive defensive measures, the core tenets of U.S. CT policy remained unchanged: no concessions to terrorists; bring terrorists to justice through law enforcement channels; isolate and pressure state sponsors of terrorism; and assist partners and allies in improving counterterrorist capabilities.<sup>45</sup>

The U.S. approach to CT evolved after 9/11. First, the Patriot Act increased domestic surveillance capabilities and law enforcement authorities to capture suspected terrorists and thwart their attacks.<sup>46</sup> Second, President Bush ordered a comprehensive investigation into the 9/11 attacks, resulting in the 9/11 Commission Report which offered several recommendations for upgrading the U.S. approach.<sup>47</sup> Third, an outcome of the Congressional CT review in March 2001, as well as the 9/11 Commission report, a single cabinet-level department was created to better integrate cross-government efforts and agencies to defend the homeland.<sup>48</sup> Fourth, to realize a two-decades long effort to better integrate intelligence sharing on CT, the Bush Administration established the National Counterterrorism Center with representatives from across the intelligence and law enforcement communities, integrating border and transportation security processes, as well as financial capabilities.<sup>49</sup>

## The Evolving U.S. CT Strategy

The first published (in February 2003) *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* emphasized an important shift in U.S. policy—the U.S. was now using all elements of national power to “attack terror networks; reduce their ability to communicate and coordinate their plans; isolate them from potential allies and from each other, and identify and disrupt their plots before they attack.” The U.S. also articulated the international cooperation aspect of its strategic approach to CT in a more detailed and sophisticated fashion: “by eliminating their sanctuaries, leadership, finances, and command, control and communications capabilities; denying further sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists by cooperating with other states to take action against those who provide support; diminishing the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit by enlisting the international community to focus our mutual efforts and resources addressing legitimate political and social needs and by reducing security vulnerabilities in the countries most at risk; and, defending the United States, its citizens, and interests at home and abroad.”<sup>50</sup>

Three years later, the U.S. made a significant shift in CT strategy, presumably informed by the greater research and attention placed on studying and understanding the global Salafist jihadist threat. The 2006 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* included lines of effort now dedicated to longer term strategic elements related to the root causes of terrorism. The U.S. now wanted to: “advance effective democracies as the long-term antidote to the ideology of terrorism; prevent attacks by terrorist networks; deny terrorists the support and sanctuary of rogue states; deny terrorists control of any nation they would use as a base and launching pad for terror; and, lay the foundations and build the institutions and structures we need to carry the fight forward against terror and help ensure our ultimate success.”<sup>51</sup>

The invasion of Iraq and subsequent insurgency, as well as the decision to remain in Afghanistan, shifted U.S. strategy toward exporting democracy and nation-building. Was this shift in strategy a genuine change in the U.S. theory of victory over terrorism? Or was it a rhetorical fig leaf to cover the inability to make a decision to leave Afghanistan and Iraq after the initial CT-related objectives were mostly accomplished? It is well known and researched, that President Bush’s decision to pursue nation-building also advanced AQ’s strategy by embroiling the U.S. in a regional conflict. The draw of foreign jihadist fighters from around the world to Afghanistan and Iraq were possible because the U.S. decided to stay. The early signal the U.S. was shifting its counterterrorist strategy in a significant way occurred in July 2004, in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, when President Bush announced “we will confront them overseas so that we do not have to confront them at home.”<sup>52</sup>

The U.S. strategy on CT shifted under the Bush administration because of the nature of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. Prior U.S. CT strategy had not included actively invading other countries, toppling regimes, and pursuing terrorists relentlessly with military force in foreign countries. In

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*The draw of foreign jihadist fighters from around the world to Afghanistan and Iraq were possible because the U.S. decided to stay.*

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addition, the U.S. found itself unable to outpace AQ’s media capabilities. Although the U.S. was successful in keeping the Palestinian conflict sidelined in global media, AQ’s message continued to resonate drawing

foreign fighters by the thousands. Instead of eliminating terrorist safe havens in Afghanistan and Iraq, the zone of instability and terrorist network activity spread from West Africa to the Philippines and the danger of dirty

bombs and chemical-biological weapons increased with greater connectivity between terrorist and transnational criminal networks. Criticism in Western media channels of the Iraq invasion and occupation opened up a vulnerability in the U.S. coalition's cohesion that AQ and its affiliates attempted to exploit by conducting attacks in Spain, Uzbekistan, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

When President Obama took office in 2009, the U.S. was already on its way out of Iraq and at the new administration's urging was conducting strategic reviews about how and when it could withdraw from Afghanistan. As the complex realities 'on the ground' were realized by the Obama administration, the President's desire to improve the U.S. image and rebuild U.S. prestige resulted in doubling down on the role of U.S. values.<sup>53</sup> President Obama tried to undo growing concerns that the U.S. was waging a war on Islam. At first, the Obama administration attempted to move away from the rhetoric of expanding Western democracy, but a wave of popular protests and uprisings across North Africa and into Syria and Yemen in 2010 and into early 2011, commonly referred to as the Arab Spring, thwarted that effort.<sup>54</sup> Regional instability in the Arab world played into the global jihadist hands as they attempted to subvert popular uprisings against corrupt authoritarian governments. The U.S. initially supported these democratic uprisings, but were also hesitant because many of the existing governments were close partners in the war against violent Islamic extremist organizations like AQ. The U.S. quandary and delay in acting damaged the U.S. reputation for democratic values and tied American policy to corrupt regimes.

The widespread instability opened up space for a new jihadist organization, ISIS. Born out of the remnants of AQI and reinvigorated by anti-regime militants in Syria, in early 2014, ISIS (aka, the Islamic State in the Levant, or Daesh) exploded out of Raqqa, Syria to conquer huge swaths of eastern and southern Syria and northern and western Iraq. While the Obama administration may have ignored warnings from its intelligence community, the surprise onslaught was even more damaging to the fragile Iraqi security forces who struggled to halt the invaders.<sup>55</sup> The unexpected boon for U.S. CT efforts was that ISIS and AQ were not acting in concert and were possibly even at odds, despite their common desire for a caliphate. The U.S. reacted to save its Iraqi partner and respond to global concerns about the outmigration of the Syrian people from the extended conflict. The U.S. mounted military operations in concert with its partners to recover the initiative in

the region. Recent successes in liberating Mosul and overrunning the ISIS caliphate obscure the fact the U.S. may have lost the initiative. If the timing and location of U.S. CT efforts are dictated by enemy action, then the U.S. does not have the strategic initiative.

Others might claim the U.S. retains freedom of maneuver and the ability to conduct global strikes in a time and place and manner of its choice. But, in a strategic sense, this is not the same as exercising the strategic initiative. There are likely several distinct strategies which could be adopted to defeat the violent jihadist extremists, which would vary in their effectiveness and efficiency, costs both financial and human, collateral damage, and degree of success.

Even after an anticipated operational victory in Iraq and Syria, ISIS and its branches, AQ and its affiliates, as well as a myriad of lesser groups around the globe have still metastasized the jihadist threat into a global phenomenon. The shock of the 2014–2017 ISIS campaign in Syria and Iraq leaves indicators towards a few strategic options for the jihadists: they can attempt to renew the conflict in Syria/Iraq, they can relocate to another regional area (including returning to Afghanistan), they can subside into sleeper cells and wait another day, or a new group may achieve strategic surprise. The divide between AQ and ISIS also gives rise to strategic speculation whether the experience of ISIS, especially if key leaders are lost, will cause a rapprochement between the two groups. Will a jihadist “third way” group arise to reclaim the banner of jihad? What will be the strategic impact if the inspired attacks continue after ISIS is defeated in Syria and Iraq?

## Conclusion

The key question before Western decision-makers is whether or not the experience with ISIS can influence a needed shift in U.S. national CT strategy. The U.S. must acknowledge the ideological component of the jihadist threat, and then adjust its strategy to account for the ideological battleground. Some current CT approaches must be continued. First, the military network of intelligence and operations is a proven CT necessity and effective stratagem for taking on a distributed network of terrorists. Second, increasing the legal frameworks in various countries for prosecuting terrorists ensures our partners and allies have the capacity and capability to use nonmilitary means to CT. Third, establishing whole of government abilities to share information

and coordinate activities is another success that will have to be sustained. Finally, CVE campaigns being waged with the assistance of numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are beneficial. CVE efforts are longer-term, population mindset, culture-influencing events that can undermine the concept of jihad in best case scenarios. These approaches must continue as part of the longer-term U.S. CT national strategy.

The core elements of the current U.S. CT strategy, as articulated in the 2011 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, which should remain the focus of a robust National Counter-Terrorism Center and intelligence community effort, are: depriving terrorists of critical enablers; eliminating safe havens; and preventing the acquisition of WMD. Building partnership capacity should be carefully continued in terms of identifying partner needs, enhancing cooperation (especially intelligence sharing), and learning to rely on partner nations to act. The U.S. might consider outsourcing its critique on human rights-related issues to the United Nations and other NGOs, rather than publicly broadcasting these complaints as a central point of U.S. diplomatic action. U.S. values do not need to be constrained, just rechanneled into a venue that minimizes making the United States the standard bearer and primary target, and instead enhancing the legitimacy of such efforts by empowering the institutions of the international community.

The elements of the current strategy that should be amended include “degrading the linkages between AQ and its affiliates,” “diminishing the drivers of violence,” and “countering AQ’s ideology and narrative.”<sup>56</sup> Degrading the linkages between terrorist organizations will be a targeted effect of depriving these groups of their network enablers. This does not need to be a specified part of the overall strategy, because it will likely be a specific objective intrinsic to named operations. This point is minor compared to the adjustments necessary in the other two elements.

Diminishing the drivers of violence is a monumental task and is closely tied to other issues such as development, globalization, climate change, humanitarian relief, and poverty reduction. It is not the United States’ sole responsibility to do this for the globe; this is the responsibility of every government to provide for its citizens. This part of the strategy is well-intentioned and some might even argue, quixotic. The human condition is relative, and while an admirable goal, raising the standard of living of the lowest quartiles of the world’s population is a never-ending quest. The U.S. must not get distracted by nation-building to avoid tar pit-like quagmires.

Countering the ideology and narrative must be amended and defined as a decisive line of effort. Importantly, there is a difference between pushing/proclaiming an idea and defeating an idea. Pushing an idea is forcing someone to change the way they think, while defeating an idea creates space for an alternative idea. The U.S. must be receptive to an alternative that is not the U.S. narrative, but that would be better than the violent jihadist extremist narrative. This approach can build on ongoing CVE, diplomatic, and information-related efforts but the prioritization should reflect an approach more recognizable as COIN.<sup>57</sup>

Any change to future U.S. CT strategies must recognize that preventing all terrorist attacks is a desired, but aspirational goal. The reality is the U.S. national security institutions may not be able to stop all attacks, especially “inspired” attacks.<sup>58</sup> The truth is they do not need to. The focus must shift to a culture of resilience, which was an important principle President Obama added to the strategy.<sup>59</sup> The U.S. should expound upon this principle and make it a cornerstone of the strategy. The U.S. CT strategy must defeat the global jihadist narrative. Rather than attempting to outlast and outfight a foe who has demonstrated martyr-like qualities, the author recommends defeating this ideology by focusing on strategic narratives<sup>60</sup> to make space for vulnerable populations to choose a more pacific alternative.

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## Chapter 3. Making Sense Out of Chaos: Introspection as a Tool for Asking Pertinent Questions with Regard to Transregional Terrorism

*Emily Spencer*

A man approaches a stranger with a dog in a park. Politely he asks, “Does your dog bite?” The stranger replies that no, his dog does not bite. The man bends down to pet the dog only to be severely mauled by the beast. Bloodied and perplexed he questions the stranger as to why he would say that his dog does not bite. The stranger looks him in the eye and says simply, “this is not my dog.” The moral: ask the right question.<sup>1</sup>

**T**he Red Army Faction (RAF), also known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang, was a left-wing militant group in Germany that existed from 1970 to 1998. It claimed to be a communist and anti-imperialist urban guerilla group engaged in armed resistance against a fascist state. In total, the group is credited with causing 34 deaths and approximately 300 bomb attacks, arsons, and bank robberies. Although key leadership was captured throughout their existence and its effectiveness waned, particularly after the fall of the Soviet

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Union and the end of funding by the East German Stasi, the group was never fully run down and some members were still at-large at the end of the century.

When teaching strategic thinking, I often present the class with the above vignette and ask students to figure out how to locate and capture the remaining terrorists. This example is useful because it requires all elements of strategic thinking—critical and creative thinking as well as emotional intelligence<sup>2</sup>—to solve. In particular, it requires critical thinking skills as a first step towards finding a solution.

Not surprisingly, every group that I have worked with to date which has included military members, law enforcement, and intelligence analysts, as well as other groups within the defense and security framework, have come up with the same responses. In general, the solutions are all potentially viable but they are also quite predictable. The options include releasing prisoners and following them, bribing them, following known associates and family members, and trying to pose as a criminal in order to gain the confidence of imprisoned RAF members so that they might share information, just to mention a few (and not to mention the more politically incorrect options that sometimes surface).

What is predictable about all of these responses is that they all approach the issue from a law enforcement/security agency point of view. Every group has placed themselves in the position of the good guys trying to capture the bad guys. It is not until students are asked to change their perspective and to think like a terrorist—or someone living on the lam—that students start to broaden their point of reference.

When asked what the terrorists would need to survive and how they might need to live, groups tend to think of looking for things that stand out from the normal, much like the German Grenzschutzgruppe 9 (GSG9),<sup>3</sup> aka Border Guard Group 9, and police services eventually did. While the German government utilized a number of tactics to try and shut down the RAF—such as surveillance of known family and associates, analysing old Stasi files and agents/handlers, offering earlier release to incarcerated RAF members in return for information, etc.—the last members of the RAF were only located after authorities utilized a different lens to solve their quandary, specifically looking at the problem through the eyes of the fugitives. In the end, the elusive final felons were arrested by undertaking a search of all those in Germany who paid for utilities in cash. The logic was that if you were a

wanted felon, it would be difficult to get credit and have a credit card/bank account. As such, it was relatively easy for the GSG9 and police services to verify the actual identities of the very few people who paid for their utilities in cash. Importantly, when using this example in the classroom, most groups are also able to come up with this solution once they are prompted with the more direct question of how might you need to function if you were living as a fugitive.

What this example highlights is that in order to problem solve, you need to fully understand the issue and address it from the correct perspective. Not surprisingly then, the first step is to recognize your limitations and/or blinders in order to make sure that you are indeed actually asking the correct questions from the best perspectives in order to solve the problem.

As such, introspection becomes an important tool in developing the ability to ask effective questions. In fact, as Sun Tzu so aptly noted in the 5th Century BCE, “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.” The questions for our purposes are what does “know yourself” really mean; and how can this knowledge help uncover what questions we should be asking, specifically with regard to transregional terrorism?

Within the military context in general, knowing yourself tends to take on a very practical connotation. Often it is expressed within the realm of capabilities. In general, it refers to what individuals and/or groups can do and is reflected by notice to move times, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), standard operating procedures (SOPs), expertise, training, and experience for example. Sometimes when looking at the softer side of these capabilities, resiliency might be considered, or even gaps in ability. Ultimately, within a military context, “know yourself” is very practical, and measurable, expressed by what can (and sometimes cannot) be done. As such, it is very action focused.

Not surprisingly, the focus on knowing yourself within a military context tends to be on ‘what’ can be done while not nearly as much attention is generally given to the ‘why’ and ‘how’ elements that not just support, but, more importantly, drive the ‘what’ function. Biases, whether based on personal experience, or cognitive, associated more with brain composition and neurotransmitters, are generally not fully reflected upon. Nor are cultural beliefs and values and the emphasis on shared cultural values within a group and/or differences between groups. Additionally, individual differences such

as being an introvert or extrovert or preferring direct or indirect communication styles do not tend to get too much consideration either. This level of introspection is often considered irrelevant, time consuming, and perhaps even wishy-washy by military members who are more focused on immediate, often kinetic, solutions. Consequently, within a military context, the focus on knowing yourself tends to reside at the ‘what’ I/we can do level rather than at the ‘why’/‘how’ we do what we do level.

When tackling the problem of transregional terrorism, the potential solution space is going to be limited if individuals, departments, and agencies, and even nations, approach the issue from the same perspective. Understanding why we do, what we do and not just what we can and cannot do, is the first step in broadening this perspective.

Introspection as a potential solution to transnational terrorism would help to shed light on why those working in defense see the world the way they do. For example, why do we still think in terms of borders and jurisdictions and allow terrorists the freedom of maneuver? Terrorists are not limited by our point of view. But we are limiting ourselves if we do not understand where our own point of view is coming from and question whether or not it is still relevant to, or required of, the contemporary operating environment.

Part of building a solution based on introspection is the development of more diversification within teams as well. Notably, being a diverse group on its own does not imply being more effective. Diverse groups that show high levels of cultural intelligence and work well with each other, however, have been shown to outperform homogenous groups on every occasion.<sup>4</sup> As such, cooperation within a whole-of-government or international context is also important to establish, and much more likely to occur, if each group has been introspective about not just their capabilities—what they can and cannot do—but also why and how they do what they do.

When it comes to transregional terrorism, we want to make sure that we are asking the right questions. To go back to the case study presented at the beginning, initially, when students are asked how to catch the remaining terrorists the answers, as mentioned, are predictable. They focused on capabilities, what we can do, essentially running through potential TTPs and SOPs. When asked how the terrorists might need to live as fugitives, a whole new line of inquiry presented itself—one that helped to remove the unconscious blinders of how things are perceived in a given, accepted framework and instead look at how things might be.

Subsequently, the more precise issue with regards to Special Operations Forces (SOF) to ponder is what can introspection mean for SOF in terms of combating transregional terrorism? Again, applying introspection can help determine if the focus is on the right issues and the correct types of questions are being asked. For instance, specifically with respect to SOF, should the focus be more on the preventative side of defense, i.e., countering violent extremist organizations, or is being reactive the best option? Is a kinetic solution best or should a softer approach be applied? This line of inquiry highlights the issue of whether or not the right people with the right skill sets are being employed. Additionally, are the partnerships that are being established the correct ones or should SOF be looking to partner more strongly with non-governmental organizations and not-for-profits, for example? Are all partner nations committed to the same end? Do they see the problem the same way? Finally, how should success be measured?

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*This line of inquiry highlights the issue of whether or not the right people with the right skill sets are being employed.*

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Ultimately, introspection helps you understand why you do what you do. This understanding allows you to then more clearly see your limitations and potential possibilities. What this increased understanding of yourself subsequently provides is for you to have a more open-minded perspective. Being more open-minded ultimately helps with your ability to see other perspectives. The bottom-line of being able to see other perspectives more clearly is that you are more likely to be able to ask the right questions.

As Aristotle noted, “knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.”<sup>5</sup> The idea that introspection is a valuable tool is not new. It is time to re-harness its potential and expand our understandings of transregional terrorism. Therefore, the logical next step is to determine how this tool can be effectively utilized.

To help address this concern, I would like to share another anecdote that I often use when teaching. This particular story addresses the element of fear and how fear can affect decision-making. Notably, it is not the item that is feared that has an effect on decision-making, but rather one’s own views about the item that can prove to be detrimental. As such, like in so many instances, the power of fear rests within the individual and thus the solution begins with introspection.

The true story of the 19th century sinking of the U.S. whaleship *Essex*, as retold by Professor Karen Thompson Walker and which represented part of the inspiration for Herman Melville's epic tale *Moby Dick*, is an excellent example of how we create the world in which we live through our own thoughts and feelings.<sup>6</sup> In 1819, the whaleship *Essex* found itself nearly 5,000 kilometers off the coast of Chile. There were 20 U.S. sailors on board when the ship was struck by a sperm whale and sustained a massive leak. The 20 whalers huddled in three small whale-boats as the *Essex* flooded and sank. They were 16,000 kilometers from home and about 1,600 kilometers from the nearest landmass. They were floating in the middle of the Pacific with only rudimentary navigation equipment and limited food and water. There was no way to signal for help and there would be no search parties. As such, they were left alone with their fears.

Twenty-four hours after the *Essex* had sunk, the whalers came to the conclusion that they needed a plan. While they had options, none appeared good. They were just about as far from land as it was possible to be on earth. Their first option was to go to the nearest landmass, which were the Marquesas Islands (Tahiti), roughly 2,000 kilometers away. Even though they represented the closest landmass, there were rumors that the islands were inhabited by cannibals. Their second option was to sail to Hawaii. The danger with this option, however, was that given the season, they were likely to encounter potentially fatal storms along the way. Their third option was to go 2,500 kilometers south and then hope the winds would be favorable to get them to South America. The danger with this longest option was that they had limited food and water.

Essentially, they needed to choose between cannibals, storms, and starvation. Their imaginations went wild conjuring images of each of these possibilities. Not surprisingly, the most vivid image that they created was that of cannibals sinking their human teeth into human flesh and roasting live bodies or boiling them in water to later be devoured in some sort of ritualistic feast where limbs would be pulled off corpses and gnawed on like chicken bones.

As such, while sailing to Tahiti represented the most logical choice, and likely best chance of survival, the imagery of cannibals elicited the most fear and this choice was rejected. The fear of being ripped apart by storms also proved too much to bear. The least gruesomely imagined death, that of starvation, evoked the least fear and, despite the fact that this option represented

the furthest distance to travel and the most likely outcome of running out of water and food, it was chosen because it also evoked the least vivid imagery. Death by starvation and dehydration did not cause the same fear as being ripped to shreds by a storm or human teeth.

Two months into their journey, somewhat predictably, they ran out of food. By the time they were finally picked up by a passing boat over half of the crew of the *Essex* were dead. Ironically, amongst the survivors some had resorted to their own form of cannibalism—the very thing they feared most.

Ultimately, the fear the crew of the *Essex* chose to listen to governed their fate. What they feared most—cannibals—was instantaneously rejected as an option even though Tahiti represented the likeliest chance of survival. Conversely, the fear of dehydration and starvation did not elicit nearly as much detailed imagery and, consequently, fear, and was thus selected even though it represented the least probable chance of survival.

The ill-fated crew of the *Essex* had allowed their own thoughts and feelings, ultimately, their imaginations, to guide their decision-making. Consequently they made a poor decision that was based on fear rather than reason. It was a bad choice that many of them paid for with their lives. Importantly for our discussion, if they had been more introspective about why and how they came to the conclusions they had, the results may have been different. Indeed, they may have realized that they were not making rational choices, based on evidence and probabilities.

Not surprisingly, the first, and most important step in using introspection as an enabler for asking the right questions is to recognize that we are in control of our thoughts. Only by accepting that we live in a world of our own creation, will we be able to broaden our perspectives.

The second step in applying introspection as an enabler for asking the right questions is to be precise. In the case of the crew of the *Essex*, the question and follow-on discussions should not have been about what might happen in each circumstance, but rather which circumstance offered the highest probability of survival. At a minimum, the cost/benefit potential for each option should have been clearly expressed in a non-emotionally driven manner.

Finally, introspection helps to identify strengths and weaknesses so that we may leverage our strengths and mitigate our shortcomings. By knowing at what things, and under which circumstances, we excel, we can help create an optimum environment for success. Additionally, knowing your weaknesses

can allow you to preemptively establish methods to circumvent them or, at least, mitigate them.

To return to the issue of transregional terrorism and SOF, understanding your viewpoint more clearly through the use of introspection can allow for a more precise understanding of who allies are, who the enemy is, what options are realistically available, what constitutes success, what the legal boundaries are, and what moral and ethical concerns need to be addressed. Examples of macro questions could include:

1. What/who exactly is the threat?
2. What are the key issues with regards to security, financial interests, and humanitarian concerns?
3. Who are the principle stakeholders within both national and international perspectives (e.g. foreign affairs, defense, etc.)?
4. How does each group garner support?
5. What are the legal/ethical/moral guidelines?
6. What is the desired end-state?
7. What is an acceptable end-state?
8. What is the cost-benefit analysis? And, most importantly,
9. The issue of “how” and “why” should be applied to each question, leading to additional, more in depth, inquiry to each point.

SOF are, generally, natural problem solvers. Transregional terrorism is a problem that many governments have decided lies within the SOF domain of national defense. As such, SOF will, by default, want to solve the problem. This natural inclination, if unrecognized, however, could lead to a predictable response of a high-tempo, potentially capture/kill type mission—in short, a continuation of the decapitation strategy. By applying introspection and recognizing strengths, limitations, and natural inclinations, SOF will be able to place themselves in a position of strength by understanding their viewpoint, broadening their perspective, and asking pertinent questions.

For example, for SOF in Iraq, or anywhere for that matter, the difficult part of precision direct action raids is often locating the enemy. Sensitive site exploitation in Iraq consisted of gathering cell phones, computers and

documents into a sandbag and then dropping them off with analysts in a building in Baghdad. By the time the information was processed any useful intelligence had normally become irrelevant. Recognizing that there was a problem that needed to be fixed, the operational commander carefully explained how and why they were doing what they were doing. Through this introspection he conceived a better way to accomplish the goal. He then parlayed congressional funding into a buying spree of state-of-the-art technology that could process computer files and cell phone call logs of detainees in a matter of mere minutes. He also hired hundreds of Arab linguists and analysts to make sense of the information they were now privy too. As a result, the information from one raid could provide the necessary intelligence to allow follow-on raids conducted as early as the same day/night. He also strong-armed U.S. intelligence agencies into sending representatives to the Task Force's global headquarters. Finally, the commander decentralized decision-making and promoted a culture of risk-taking and innovation. The end result was increased effectiveness. The number of operations skyrocketed from ten a month in 2004 to 300 a month in 2006.

The above example highlights the importance of knowing your strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, it illustrates how introspection can lead to effective action by allowing you to ask the right questions of yourself and others. Ultimately, asking the right questions enables correct responses.

## Endnotes

1. Adapted from a commonly cited story.
2. Strategic thinking is the art of aligning critical and creative thinking, and emotional intelligence in a holistic manner in order to achieve sustainable success within complex, dynamic and multiplayer environments. See Emily Spencer, *Thinking for Impact: A Practical Guide for Special Operations Forces* (Kingston: ERC Press), in progress.
3. A counterterrorism hostage rescue and special operations police unit of the German federal police.
4. David Rock and Heidi Grant, "Why Diverse Teams Are Smarter," *Harvard Business Review*, 4 November 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter>; Katherine W. Phillips, "How Diversity Makes Us Smarter," *Scientific American*, 1 Oct 2014, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/>.
5. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book I, Chapter II, The Internet Classics Archive, <http://classics.mit.edu/aristotle/metaphysics.html>.

6. This story is derived from an excellent TedGlobal talk by Karen Thompson Walker. While the analysis is unique for this chapter, the story, including much of the vocabulary, is entirely that of Karen Thompson Walker. I recommend watching her TedGlobal talk. Karen Thompson Walker, "What Fear can Teach Us," TedGlobal 2012 [http://www.ted.com/talks/karen\\_thompson\\_walker\\_what\\_fear\\_can\\_teach\\_us](http://www.ted.com/talks/karen_thompson_walker_what_fear_can_teach_us).

## Chapter 4. The Crime Terror Nexus: Causes, Consequences, and Opportunities for Disruption

*Colleen McCue, John Gaughan, Meghan Cumpston*

Three years ago, when the caliphate was originally established, researchers started seeing what appeared to be intentional social media segmentation and associated microtargeting by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in support of direct outreach to criminals and others demonstrating social deviance or other patterns of antisocial behavior. Initially, this did not make sense, particularly when viewed within the context of the strict interpretation and application ISIS has of sharia law, to include public

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executions in ISIS-held territory for similar behavior.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the increased prevalence of criminal offending and other prior antisocial behavior among foreign fighters and attackers,<sup>2</sup> while unexpected and apparently inconsistent with the fundamental approach ISIS has of sharia, is consistent with their use of these individuals as an expendable or otherwise disposable resource.

While the increased prevalence of criminality among ISIS fighters and attackers seemed initially surprising, the confluence of crime and terrorism was not entirely unexpected. This finding aligns with three, criminally-oriented narrative themes outlined below that explicitly target criminal and other antisocial behavior: “jihadi cool,” “super predators,” the “redemptive” narrative, suggesting this line of recruitment is intentional and providing data supporting the efficacy of the microtargeting strategy of ISIS for the radicalization and recruitment of criminally-involved or otherwise socially deviant individuals.

## **What Can We Learn from History?**

Numerous authors have noted an increasing prevalence of criminals among fighters. In their analysis of the relationship between crime and terror, Basra and Neumann<sup>3</sup> documented an increased prevalence of known criminals among recent attackers using open source and media reports; noting that actual prevalence is likely higher than official reporting may indicate. In their analysis, they reviewed the complexity of the crime-terror link describing putative causes, consequences, and correlates of this relationship and noting that “no uniform profile emerges from the sample.”<sup>4</sup> Rather, several models describing the crime-terror relationship emerge. These proposed models include the “redemption” narrative, prison networking and recruiting, opportunities to transfer existing skill sets to supporting terrorist activities, social norms promoting the use of crime to advance jihad, and the use of white collar and other financial crimes to finance terrorism. In other words, different people radicalize for different reasons, under different circumstances, and in different ways. While Basra and Neumann<sup>5</sup> indicate they do not believe ISIS is directly targeting criminals for recruitment, some knowledge and understanding of their identified radicalization and recruiting pathways would support similarly targeted efforts designed to counter

directly these varied and disparate recruiting and radicalization pathways. These and other related models are described below.

**Convergent Recruiting.** The simplest and most direct explanation is that these groups are pulling from the same demographic pool. Direct overlap in the population increases the likelihood that the demographic typologies will align and there will be some “dual purpose” recruiting.<sup>6</sup>

**Reduced Inhibition/Lower Threshold.** Extending convergent recruiting, the same factors that may predispose an individual to criminal behavior also may predispose them to terrorism. Desire for excitement, a lower threshold for or willingness to violate social rules and norms, including the rule of law can be common attributes of individuals attracted to crime and/or terrorism. Similarly, terrorism and related attacks may provide meaning to and/or an outlet for individuals with an innately violent interactional style or those otherwise predisposed to violence by providing outlet or meaning for violent acts.

**Skill Transfer.** Skills used to commit crime also may translate to skills required for material support to terror. For example, document forgery and some economic crimes may be beneficial as relates to the ability to generate funds to support terrorism, which may explain at least some of the overlap. Even sale of illegal narcotics provides revenue and also supports leverage and associated exploitation of apostate behaviors. Similarly, revenue emanating from illegal activities is relatively fungible and can easily move into and out of other illegal activity given the lack of accountability of funds.

**Financial Crimes to Finance Terrorism.** Again, some traditionally white-collar and related financial crimes can be used instrumentally to economically support terrorism. These may include document forgery, credit card fraud, illicit supply chains, and other criminal enterprise used to support terrorism.<sup>7</sup>

**Instrumental Use of Existing Criminal Enterprise.** Financial requirements necessary for material support of terrorism also may include contracting or otherwise securing desired skill sets, particularly as relates to illicit supply chains and trafficking, forged documents, procurement of weapons, securing clean vehicles, and safe houses. While these individuals may or may not support the ideology or agenda, or may not even be witting, their material

support to terrorism may provide valuable insight regarding the attack planning process and local facilitation. Depending on their level of knowledge, involvement, and desire to protect their ongoing criminal activity (i.e., their criminal day job),<sup>8</sup> they may represent a critical weakness in the terror network.

**Social Rules and Norms.** Social rules and norms regarding crime, particularly against nonbelievers, likely influence the crime-terror nexus. Criminologists have described the tension between legal and illegal enforcement elements, particularly as relates to the enforcement of social rules and norms in illegal networks and criminal enterprise denied access to formal institutions designed to enact the rule of law.<sup>9</sup> Extending this model of systemic criminal activity,<sup>10</sup> some patterns of crime are not only acceptable, but actively encouraged through explicit messaging and social learning, particularly if perpetrated against *kuffar* or unbelievers.<sup>11</sup> Again, the exploitation of vice through the sale and distribution of illegal narcotics underscores this activity as undesirable, creating both personal and social vulnerability, while also providing funding to support terrorist activities.

**Prison Networking and Recruiting.** Prisons have long been known to be criminogenic environments. Often serving as finishing schools for many patterns of offending, it is not unusual for inmates to leave the correctional environment with a broader criminal skill set than they possessed on entry.<sup>12</sup> Prison census data document an increased presence of Muslims among prison populations. Whether this is cause, consequence or correlate is unknown at this time and the subject of active debate.<sup>13</sup> Active gang recruiting and radicalization in particular have been associated with the correctional environment, creating significant challenges to those attempting to prevent growth of these groups within prison walls, while also trying to deradicalize known gang members or terrorists in prisons. Efforts to mitigate the impact that these individuals may have on the larger population are similarly challenging given opportunities for networking within the correctional environment, and associated challenges in segregating specific populations. Finally, the redemptive narrative described later in this paper in the review of direct recruiting strategies may be particularly difficult to distinguish from faith-based rehabilitation efforts given its ostensibly prosocial themes.

**Criminogenic Environment: Micro-Diaspora Communities.** The role of diaspora communities in terrorism has been described previously and includes direct recruiting, as well as the use of organized crime and related criminal activity to provide financial support to terrorism.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the role that environment plays in the enablement of radicalization is gaining significance. These environmental factors include elements associated with the conflict zone and micro-diaspora communities that result in incomplete or failed assimilation.<sup>15</sup> This may be particularly true for second or third generation migrants who perceive themselves as belonging to neither the old nor the new society and as a result are disenfranchised from the majority culture.<sup>16</sup> The sense of camaraderie and belongingness offered by some criminal groups, and the alignment with a cause promoted by a terror group may be especially attractive to individuals looking for a connection and meaning. Therefore, understanding the unique challenges associated with migration and immigrant enclaves, particularly as it relates to access to economic, educational, and vocational opportunity—real or perceived—may provide some insight regarding the role of environment and associated microcommunities in radicalization and enablement of external operations. Moreover, this understanding may provide the context necessary to inform anticipation and influence in support of novel approaches, including non-kinetic opportunities for disruption.

**Criminogenic Environment: The Conflict Zone.** The multifocal criminogenic aspects of the conditions in the caliphate to include maternal, familial and community factors are outlined, below. These conditions parallel those known to set the conditions for criminal behavior—particularly violent behavior—and have the potential to create a “perfect storm” of consequence and influence that will be associated with fighters qualitatively more lethal than those currently encountered.<sup>17</sup>

**Maternal.** Women fill a uniquely important role in the lives of their children. Women who chose to bring their children to the caliphate and directly expose them to the conflict, as well as jihadi role models and other predators represent the first level of impact. Related, there is strong encouragement for women to have babies, thereby populating the next generation and ensuring continuity if not aggressive growth of ISIS.<sup>18</sup> This may represent a marked increase in original estimates regarding a

pending “youth bulge” in many Arab states that may further exacerbate conditions known to drive radicalization and recruiting. Finally, women in ISIS are explicitly encouraged to not only support, but also actively enable indoctrination, radicalization and recruiting; delivering their sons “Patiently to Death.”<sup>19</sup> Criticism of their role in exposing their children to risk is anticipated and proactively countered by ISIS propaganda authors.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, women may represent an especially vulnerable population in ISIS, unable to protect or effectively advocate for their children given their lack of influence and frequent marginalization, as illustrated explicitly by ISIS propaganda.<sup>21</sup>

**Familial.** Overall, the shortage of men related to disproportionate representation of males in migrant flows<sup>22</sup> and losses due to battle deaths<sup>23</sup> has likely altered demographics in the region. Moreover, and given their active involvement in terrorism, many of the males that remain are fighters, caliphate leaders, or other supporters of ISIS, and are not good role models. Directly illustrating this point, adult males in propaganda videos and other ISIS media can be observed engaging in battle, executing prisoners, and supporting indoctrination and training of so-called “Cubs of the Caliphate”—images designed to influence and shape young boys’ behavior. Similarly, ISIS recruiting videos illustrate boys and young men joining the fight, with scenes portraying the camaraderie and esprit de corps that would be particularly attractive.<sup>24</sup> Other videos depict age appropriate play (e.g., running races, “capture the [ISIS] flag”), in addition to other training activities (e.g., firearms training) that would resonate with boys. In these propaganda materials, the boys participate in activities with adult males in the community and are portrayed as equal to or a peer of the adult males in some scenes. Again, this will appeal to young boys seeking acceptance of and approval from adult males in the community. Fighters are seen smiling, and there are cheers and fist pumps at the end of action sequences. On closing what appears to be a training exercise, adult fighters remove their facial coverings and masks, and one adult male can be seen putting his arm around a young boy. The attention paid by the adult trainers in these materials will be particularly attractive to young boys seeking approval from adult male role models (e.g., apparent encouragement, putting his arm around the shoulder of the boy); scenes expected to be especially compelling for the young men and boys who

might otherwise be deprived of adult male role models and/or attention from adult males given demographic changes associated with battle deaths and migration out of the region.

**Community.** Additional parallels between current conditions in ISIS and the academic literature on illegal narcotics markets include the normalization, expectation, and glamorization of violence. Media reports from ISIS reveal increased frequency of and associated community tolerance to public executions and torture, including direct exposure of children and other sensitive members of the community to intensely violent imagery and acts as this behavior becomes part of the “new normal.”<sup>25</sup> Extending the comparison, open social media, recruiting materials and martyr testimonials are replete with references to the expectation, prestige and glamour associated with dying in support of jihad. Community acceptance of or even promotion of violence and radicalization can be especially damaging to young children. This is particularly consequential during critical periods of emotional and moral development when young people are acquiring behaviors and judgments relating to the value of human life, including their own; social responsibility; and the ethics of harming others.<sup>26</sup> Erosion of social rules and norms, and diminished perception of collective efficacy can further limit the ability of a community to effectively police itself and enforce the rule of law—a situation that may set the conditions for the replacement of the legal enforcement structure with illegal enforcement elements.<sup>27</sup> For example, in communities taken over by ISIS, *hisbah*, or accountability police, have been emplaced as the illegal enforcement network. Moreover, acceptance of and aggressive promotion of participation in jihad also can be seen in the promulgation of textbooks and other educational and training materials being disseminated within ISIS. Underscoring the potential consequence of these behaviors, previous research on other patterns of high risk or criminal behavior indicate youth perceptions that adult members of the community participate in these activities is associated with an increased likelihood that they also will choose this pathway. For example, research on communities associated with open air, illegal drug markets revealed increased participation in illegal activity on the part of children. In these communities, drug selling was perceived as a viable career choice and young people saw roles like lookout and runners as entry level positions.

Exemplifying this perception, young children could be heard calling out, “five-oh!” when police cruisers entered a neighborhood, alerting the dealers of law enforcement presence.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, elevation of jihadi fighters and caliphate key leaders in the community as role models, tacit approval of jihad and related activities from significant people (mother, family, community), also positions jihad and other positions in ISIS as viable life choices, particularly for young men and boys in the community.

The “loner/loser” model of recent attackers aligns with the model described almost ten years ago,<sup>29</sup> which anticipated the current attacker typology, including links to criminal groups and general patterns of anti-social behavior. Underscoring the behavioral cadence and predictability generally associated with “bad” behavior,<sup>30</sup> the behavioral typology of future fighters and their origins outlined in the original research has proven to be accurate regarding the roots and general behavioral typology of foreign fighters, as well as for terrorists electing to carry out attacks in their home locations. It is important to note, however, that this work was not novel. Rather, the analysis was based on a solid foundation of earlier social science research and represented a direct extension of a model developed to describe young violent offenders associated with illegal narcotics markets in the U.S. in the late 1990s.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, the paper has been relatively prescient in predicting the emergence of the new wave of violence, including offender typologies and the link to criminal groups and general patterns of antisocial behavior that the community is seeing in some of the recent attackers. It also indicates that while the recent wave of immigrants may include some individuals of concern, many more future attackers likely are already in place and just need to be activated. Again, behavioral typologies of recent attackers align well with the model outlined, underscoring the resilience of the derived behavioral typologies and highlighting the value of deeper analysis in support of meaningful insight and related action in response to a truly complex environment.

## **Direct Recruiting**

Basra and Neumann<sup>32</sup> document the increased prevalence of criminals among ISIS fighters, but suggest that ISIS is not recruiting explicitly for criminals. Rather, the increased prevalence of criminals noted among ISIS fighters and attackers and associated overlap in population is coincidental

and associated with the other recruiting themes they propose. While it is likely that there is some coincidental recruitment or convergent targeting of specific but common groups for both crime and terror, analysis of recruiting themes, including open social media, suggests at least some intentional microtargeting of criminal groups for terrorist organizations and/or attacks. The recruiting themes identified parallel and extend the radicalization pathways identified previously and include “jihadi cool,” “super predators,” and the redemptive narrative. Again, the population segments identified and described by Basra and Neumann,<sup>33</sup> and the associated recruiting pathways and themes are similar. The difference resides in the inferred intentionality on the part of ISIS as it relates to the desirability and potential role of criminals in their organization.

**Direct recruiting: Jihadi cool.** “Jihadi cool” was described as a recruiting pathway prior to the establishment of ISIS in 2014.<sup>34</sup> Lifestyle factors, not ideology, represent the attractive hook. By way of example, members of al-Shabaab indicate promises of a girl, a gun, and a motorbike as key incentives for joining the group.<sup>35</sup> ISIS has leveraged and extended this recruiting channel, actively promoting the jihad lifestyle as cool, edgy, and something to be emulated. Recruiting materials and propaganda emphasize camaraderie, fellowship, and esprit de corps; packaging and promoting conflict as a team sport.

Consistent with the group’s attention to their brand,<sup>36</sup> ISIS-branded spirit wear to include t-shirts, beanies, jewelry, and other accessories are increasingly prevalent on the open internet. Moreover, propaganda materials and other media include content apparently designed to shape jihad as a lifestyle. Assuming the role by adopting the lifestyle and look frequently is the first step in a conversion process. This will be particularly true for those exploring or otherwise testing the boundaries of established social rules and norms, risk takers, disaffected or disenfranchised youth, or those incompletely assimilated who are caught between old and new worlds and are simply looking for an identity, as is increasingly described.<sup>37</sup>

**Direct recruiting: “Super Predators”.** Experience with juvenile murderers suggests some young people have an apparently internally motivated, inappropriate interest in violence.<sup>38</sup> These super predators have been described as “aggressive, violent and remorseless,”<sup>39</sup> frequently seeking out opportunities and environments that will not only tolerate but support their violent

interactional style. Research on juvenile murderers suggests that potential recruits already experiencing violent urges, behavior, or other antisocial tendencies may be attracted to ISIS as a possible avenue through which to explore these urges and execute desired behaviors. With this model in mind, the extremely violent content offered by ISIS likely would be exciting and may serve as facilitators for young people predisposed to violent behavior. Juveniles predisposed to serious patterns of violence who had considered, or even articulated to others, “I wonder what it would be like to take a life,” may find a conflict zone particularly attractive.

In reviewing propaganda materials and other content, ISIS has demonstrated an ability to actively reach out, connect with, and activate the “shadow” in the virtual environment.<sup>40</sup> In other words, they have been able to identify, actively engage, and connect with individuals predisposed to violence, exhibiting an inappropriate interest in violence, or otherwise comfortable violating social rules and norms. This may include direct outreach through first person shooter games, recruiting videos and related propaganda material utilizing mounted GoPro cameras providing the first person shooter perspective popularized in video games, as well as explicit outreach and related narrative, e.g., content using the theme “This is our call of duty.” Video content in particular has been identified as preferred and particularly effective facilitators for youthful violent offenders and juvenile murderers.<sup>41</sup>

**Direct Recruiting: Redemptive Narrative.** The “redemptive narrative” as a recruiting theme is increasingly prevalent in the literature. Whether this reflects an actual increase overall, or merely increased interest on the part of researchers is unclear, but it is emerging as a powerful theme for Muslims and non-Muslim converts alike. It is important to note, however, that this is not a new theme. Participation in a holy war as a means by which to receive redemption for sin goes back at least a thousand years. In contrast to faith-based approaches to prisoner rehabilitation, however, the “redemption narrative” involves the use of religion and associated religious themes to redirect or otherwise channel criminal behavior in support of terrorism and related terrorist objectives. This approach may be particularly effective in its ability to leverage critical incidents or inflection points in the life trajectory, including consequence associated with criminal activity or other patterns of antisocial behavior.<sup>42</sup>

**Direct Recruiting: Cubs of the Caliphate.** Given the clear intentionality of the effort, while not directly linked to the crime-terror nexus, the Cubs of the Caliphate are important to note. In contrast to forcible conscription often associated with child soldiers, Cubs training involves the intentional exposure to, forced participation and immersion in violence in support of the active development of future fighters as part of the ISIS “long game.”<sup>43</sup> Incorporation of the intentional exposure to violence and incremental indoctrination further exacerbates the environmental consequence, setting the conditions for a transgenerational challenge that will be extremely difficult to mitigate or reverse.

**Marketing ISIS.** In parallel, with efforts to better understand and characterize ISIS fighters, it is becoming increasingly clear that ISIS is similarly sensitive to different radicalization and recruiting pathways, and is actively marketing itself, including campaigns explicitly targeting criminals and other socially deviant or disenfranchised individuals. Industry analysts describe the successful use of “earned media” by ISIS as a means by which to optimize limited advertising spend and reach; noting that “terrorists now inhabit a world where all the tools of contemporary marketing and advertising are at their disposal.”<sup>44</sup> As a lifestyle brand, ISIS is reaching out to “young men who feel like their current life is purposeless,” providing an opportunity to “be someone and play a meaningful role in a glamorized apocalyptic battle” with a “community of like-minded individuals looking to be part of something greater than themselves;” an approach that proactively and very effectively undermines counter narrative.<sup>45</sup>

Consideration of recruitment from a marketing perspective, “conversion” is defined as a “marketing tactic that encourages a customer to take specific action.”<sup>46</sup> This process has been referred to as nurturing, a prospect down the marketing conversion funnel in recognition of the incremental process and associated attrition in numbers during conversion. Actions can range from forwarding a tweet to joining the fight or perpetrating an attack. Within this construct, purchasing and wearing an ISIS t-shirt or other spirit wear may represent an early step in this incremental conversion process. Moreover, it also sets the conditions for evolution in affiliation to avoid cognitive dissonance, i.e., “I am wearing the t-shirt, therefore I must approve of the message.”

Analysis of ISIS open social media and related content reveals sophisticated use of various, intersecting and complementary media channels in support of common, reinforced themes. Moreover, as content is repeated across multiple channels, it begins to compel its own influence.<sup>47</sup> In addition, attention to and evolution of their “brand” through slick marketing and tightly controlled messaging in their “official” publications further highlights parallels to sophisticated, commercial marketing concepts;<sup>48</sup> evoking comparison between ISIS magazine *Dabiq* to an in-flight magazine in recognition of its production quality and professional look and feel.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, ISIS recruiting videos, while presenting the first person shooter perspective that reinforces the gaming aspect of conflict, also illustrate death in a peaceful manner; highlighting tenderness and care that the other fighters pay to the deceased. Again, these scenes do not represent realistic portrayal of conflict. Rather, combat is depicted as a team sport, as a lifestyle or brand.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, action sequences in these propaganda videos parallel popular YouTube video themes, including activities that mimic parkour (e.g., jumping between buildings, rolling falls).

## Implications

While interesting from a social science research perspective, what does this mean and why is it important? Insight regarding radicalization and recruiting lines of effort can be used to inform options, including non-kinetic options for disruption. Moreover, knowledge of historical patterns and trends can provide a framework for understanding that can be used to generate these options. Being able to develop a useful model for at least some of the recruiting narratives also provides insight regarding the attacker typologies in support of informed anticipation and influence. While prediction does not always translate directly to prevention, it can be used to reduce the search space geospatially and demographically, providing understanding and insight regarding the target audience for recruiting.

**Reduction of the Search Space.** Location matters. Different people radicalize and join the fight for different reasons in different locations. Geospatially, deeper understanding regarding place preferences of U.S. adversaries and the role that enabling environments may play in facilitating their actions can support informed approaches to anticipate and influence, including

information-based area reduction in support of informed allocation and optimization of limited resources.

Research on European micro-diaspora communities, and related analysis of jihadi fighter and attacker typologies has provided invaluable insight regarding enabling factors for radicalization and recruitment.<sup>51</sup> With that research in mind, a quick back of the envelope calculation illustrates the potential operational use of these data: Males account for approximately 50 percent of population. While females are increasingly being recruited for action, this allows an initial reduction in the demographic search space by half. A very generous, yet informed guesstimate suggests that adjudicated criminals may account for as much as 10 percent of the population,<sup>52</sup> although the actual rate likely will vary based on demographics and socioeconomic status. It is important to note these data reflect only known, formally adjudicated criminal offending, which may underrepresent actual involvement in criminal activity.<sup>53</sup> This, however, yields another significant reduction in the sample of interest. Moreover, additional data indicate an over representation of second or third generation emigres<sup>54</sup> from North Africa,<sup>55</sup> resulting in the “not here, not there” challenge with failed or otherwise incomplete assimilation. While North Africa generally accounts for a large percentage of migrants in the EU countries of interest, this demographic segment still reflects only a portion of the total population, which would concomitantly reduce the demographic cohort of interest, as well as provide insight regarding possible location given known patterns of demographic clustering/geographic self-segregation (i.e., the microcommunities).<sup>56</sup> Again, this yields additional reductions in the sample of interest and associated refinement of location. While not perfect, data-based approaches to demographic and geospatial area reduction can be used to provide novel insight and understanding regarding possible adversary recruiting pathways, including market analysis and segmentation, and associated lines of effort; guiding informed resource allocation and optimization, as well as anticipation and influence.

**Remote Activation and Guidance.** Given the lack of identifiable links between attackers and terrorist networks, the increasing use of a disconnected model for activation and guidance is proving to be especially challenging particularly a priori links that can be used to identify and prevent or thwart attacks.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS routinely provide training, direction, and guidance through their media publications. Recent examples include the AQAP after action report (AAR) of the Orlando nightclub attacks,<sup>57</sup> and ISIS notes in their publications called “Just Terror Tactics.”<sup>58</sup> By way of example, *Inspire* magazine Orlando attack AAR includes a detailed analysis of the attack<sup>59</sup> including explicit guidance regarding target selection based on preferred victim demographics and desired narrative, timing to increase the likelihood that victims would be impaired due to alcohol consumption, physical attributes of the location facilitating victim control and confinement in a planned kill zone, and recommended tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) improvements to increase the percentage of victims targeted. The authors also captured performance metrics, establishing a baseline casualty rate of 33 percent that could be used as a benchmark for future attacks. Social science researchers and intelligence analysts have seen numerous indicators of a long game in propaganda materials and media associated with both AQ and ISIS. Similarly, the use of the AAR process to identify elements of the TTP that worked and those that did not, as well as the identification of performance metrics and establishment of benchmarks indicates an interest in improving performance in anticipation of a long game that includes future attacks. Again, the redemptive narrative provides some insight as it relates to the opportunity to derive some meaning and associated attention, even if from an untimely death. Just as impromptu shrines mark the locations of street violence, slick reporting on “martyrs” may represent a particularly attractive option for a young person with perceptions of limited opportunities for success.<sup>60</sup>

Several repetitive themes throughout the JSOU symposium<sup>61</sup> were related to the requirement for novel approaches to transdisciplinary collaboration that transcend geographic boundaries and professional domains in order to effectively respond to an increasingly agile, transregional threat that is evolving within the U.S. decision cycle. The importance of increased understanding in support of truly informed response was emphasized. While there are historical cadences that may provide useful models for framing and understanding current events, the current threat is evolving so rapidly that the academic story has not yet been written or even understood in many cases.

Again, the authors have seen these themes in public facing social media going back at least three years, underscoring the insight of ISIS regarding their “market” and patience in executing the long game.<sup>62</sup> The increased

prevalence of known criminals among attackers is consistent with these recruiting efforts. The narrative themes used to attract and recruit can be subtle, and likely to pass many of the filters designed to flag “offensive” content. In fact, the redemption narrative in particular likely would be viewed as prosocial to uninformed observers. These messages also appear to transcend culture and national boundaries, as exemplified by Western fighters responding to the call; offering ISIS a unique opportunity to reach well beyond their current terrestrial boundaries in support of mobilizing a globalized cadre of self-initiators. The ability of ISIS to effectively activate this group represents a unique challenge to us given the lack of obvious pre-attack indicators. In addition, for the individuals involved, global TV coverage is infinitely more attractive than having your sneakers tossed over the phone lines or an impromptu memorial on a street corner in your neighborhood. This is the ultimate glamour play for individuals so inclined.

Moreover, meaningful incorporation of the unique authorities and capabilities of law enforcement partners affords new opportunities for disruption. Exploiting existing knowledge in new ways, our law enforcement partners bring novel insight, access, and understanding to the fight through their prior, primary experience with almost half, if not more of these individuals, as well as the associated criminal enclaves and microcommunities. Their experience can be used to increase understanding and build options, including non-kinetic opportunities for disruption.

## Options

A full review of counter radicalization and deradicalization options is well beyond the scope of this paper; however several key themes were repeated throughout the Symposium<sup>63</sup> including the importance of novel, transdisciplinary approaches and the need to proactively establish what success looks like in support of meaningful evaluation of effort. Echoing his comments from the Symposium, Lieutenant General Nagata noted recently, “There are going to be some instruments that we attempt that will not work, but the only way we will know they don’t work is if we attempt them, and once we realize they do not work, we persevere and try the next idea.”<sup>64</sup> Criminal justice research supports the necessity of rigorous, unflinching evaluation of effort to identify what works, for whom and under what conditions, because as Lieutenant General Nagata indicated, some things work, some do not, and

some make the problem worse.<sup>65</sup> Just as the law enforcement community could not arrest its way out of violent crime, options for meaningful, sustainable solutions to the challenge of radicalization will be similarly complex and challenging. Getting in front of the radicalization, indoctrination, and recruiting pipeline promises better outcomes, and meaningful, sustainable solution to this challenge. Therefore, within those constraints, two lines of effort with relevance to the crime-terror nexus will be considered: deradicalization programs, and Jigsaw's "redirect" method.<sup>66</sup>

**Deradicalization.** As outlined above, radicalized individuals frequently by definition pose a significant threat to society and are not easily accommodated within the current correctional environment, where efforts to deradicalize are complicated significantly by concerns regarding within prison radicalization and recruiting. Results to date, particularly as it relates to long term outcomes, are not promising.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, these results were not surprising given extensive experience in correctional programming. Key lessons learned from the criminal justice literature include the following:

- Patterns of offending perceived as prestigious and/or programs associated with differential treatment often attract offenders who may have no prior involvement (but learn when group housed). In one recent case study, the level of actual participation in terrorist acts, planning, or even terrorist ideology was questionable, with one program participant advising she had pursued entry into the deradicalization program as a means by which to "escape her 'family cocoon' and get some 'fresh air.'"<sup>68</sup> While this likely will not be true for all programs, experience in the criminal justice arena indicates that some individuals will "fake bad" in an effort to enter programs that are perceived as prestigious or that provide some other type of secondary gain, including better accommodations or even shelter and sustenance. Of particular concern, outcome data indicate that at least some of these individuals may "learn" in these settings, and go on to engage in this new pattern of offending.<sup>69</sup>
- The proliferation of junk science is endemic in counter radicalization and deradicalization programming. Similar to criminal justice programs, people just seem to know what will work. A good idea presented well frequently will be implemented, regardless of whether the program is based on sound clinical judgment or peer-reviewed

research. There is science to behavior change and associated programming that rarely makes it into these “treatment” programs.”<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, the consequence of these failed programs is diminished public safety.<sup>71</sup>

- Lack of meaningful, rigorous outcome evaluation. This is common in correctional programming, as well as many models for counter radicalization and deradicalization. Good ideas abound, but programs are rarely evaluated. In many cases, program developers and advocates have an inherent confidence in the efficacy of their program despite the lack of supporting outcome metrics, which often is sufficient to keeping them running and even replicated. It often takes years to demonstrate stable outcomes by which time many programs, including those that do not work have become institutionalized, thereby perpetuating ineffective or even criminogenic programming. Just as with criminal justice programming, the consequences of ineffective or deleterious deradicalization programming are far too serious to leave to chance. Rigorous, unflinching outcome evaluation is key. Some things work, some do not, and some make the problem worse. Without rigorous outcome evaluation, however, it is difficult, if not impossible to know what works, for whom and under what circumstances.<sup>72</sup>

At this point in time, while there are promising concepts and programs, there are no deradicalization programs that have been demonstrated to be effective using meaningful outcome metrics. In many cases, it is just too soon for even the most promising programs to say anything definitive about long term, sustainable outcomes. Probably the biggest concern regarding the opportunity for successful deradicalization relates to the fact that these individuals by definition already

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*As the law enforcement community learned from violent crime, locking them up—even with intensive rehabilitation programming in place—generally results in less than satisfactory outcomes.*

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have crossed boundaries related to social rules and norms, as well as the established rule of law in some cases. As the law enforcement community learned from violent crime, locking them up—even with intensive rehabilitation programming

in place—generally results in less than satisfactory outcomes. Therefore, while removing fighters from the battlespace may prevent future attacks,

identifying individuals before they take that first action provides a far greater array of options, including non-kinetic opportunities for disruption. The key is prevention. As the U.S. considers options, the military brings unique understanding and insight given its mission and direct exposure to captured enemy material, and can play an important role in this particular line of effort.

**The “Redirect” Method.** Social science researchers and intelligence analysts have seen direct marketing campaigns by terrorists to susceptible groups, including criminals, via open social media and digital marketing. In response to this, Jigsaw—Google’s research arm—leveraged their expertise in support of a novel, innovative approach to countering ISIS’ use of YouTube content to advance their radicalization and recruiting effort.<sup>73</sup> In their report, Jigsaw confirmed what people knew;<sup>74</sup> ISIS is effectively leveraging the online environment for radicalization and recruitment, particularly as it relates to the use of keyword searches and extremist YouTube content designed to radicalize and recruit. Moreover, they believed they had effectively identified a group already well along in the radicalization and recruitment process, including those who were “ideologically committed” and in “ISIS’ orbit,” possibly already in the caliphate<sup>75</sup>—a group of high interest to the community.

Two of the stated goals for the redirect method developed by Jigsaw included “Get the bad stuff down” and “Make counter-narrative more accessible.” Analysis of their metrics reveals they achieved a “click through” rate (i.e., the user clicked on the content presented to them as part of the campaign) that performed three to four times better than a normal ad campaign. Moreover, people spent more than twice as long viewing the Jigsaw content as compared to YouTube averages during their two-month pilot study. These results supported robust performance of the Jigsaw redirect method using standard digital marketing benchmarks.<sup>76</sup> Review of the redirect method, however, reveals focus on process metrics from a marketing perspective rather than actual outcomes. In response to this important distinction, the Counter Extremism Project<sup>77</sup> conducted additional analysis of the redirect method and found that not only are Google’s efforts to divert users away from radicalization and extremist content not working, but the prevalence of the material actually may have increased in both frequency and relevance in search results. Despite Google’s active and ostensibly very well informed

efforts to minimize it in search, this finding suggests that the content might have been intentionally optimized.<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

ISIS and others' online radicalization and recruiting are gaining importance as external attackers can be identified, groomed, and activated through virtual coaching onto the "target." Conversion from aspiration to action, radicalization to movement, is becoming progressively more rapid and opaque. Plots are increasingly simple involving limited planning and participants, simple TTPs and a quick flash-to-bang, which makes them more difficult to detect and prevent. Approaches designed to counter the group's efforts need to be similarly well informed, precise, and agile.

The convergence of crime and terror underscores the transdisciplinary nature of the current threat and need for novel responses, particularly those that get us in front of the problem by enabling informed anticipation and influence. Activation of criminals and other marginalized individuals trying to identify a cause or meaning, rather than ideological affiliation, represents a particularly danger. The role of law enforcement, including the growing relevance and importance of finish options outside traditional military lanes, is becoming progressively more important. The complex interaction between crime and terrorism likely represents the future fight.

While it may be true that the academic community is creating the science as the U.S. works this problem set, the military has unique access, insight and understanding through primary source data (including adversary media and propaganda, as well as other sources of captured enemy material). In addition to honoring the sacrifice of blood and treasure required to acquire this valuable information, military access to primary sources affords the understanding necessary for meaningful, sustainable approaches. As the U.S. explores opportunities to move from counting and reporting, chasing problems to get in front of them, understanding history and temporal cadences in similar behavior may provide models for current understanding, particularly if they provide insight regarding effective approaches to prevention, thwarting mitigation and response, including non-kinetic opportunities for disruption.

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## Chapter 5. Transnational Criminal Organizations as a Social Phenomenon

*Paul S. Lieber*

Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) have increasingly been able to use the global economic environment to their advantage. TCOs have grown more complex over time, and so has our ability to defeat them, however, this complexity has challenged our ability to access and use collective information available.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In an interconnected world, it is unsurprising that transnational organized crime is thriving. Criminal networks now possess unparalleled mechanisms to collaborate toward common outcomes with organizations that span states, regions, and even the entire globe to enable successes. Despite common perception, research finds that criminal networks—not law enforcement—are driving technological advancements. In the cat and mouse game that is countering globalized criminal activity, international law enforcement and its supporting interagency are persistently in reactive mode. Criminal networks—rooted in sophistication, diversity of organization, lack of legal restraint, and endless flexibility—are more agile than legal authorities designed to stop them.

Social media only exacerbates this problem. The multitude of available correspondence mechanisms facilitate a communication and currency flow so vast it's impossible to truly gauge possibilities and reach. Long gone are the days of smoky backroom meetings and dark web message board chats, they've been replaced with an array of collaboration possibilities so extensive

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that even the most sophisticated data scraping and/or analysis tools will miss them.

Moreover, and via global migration, defined boundaries and actions for criminal actors are likewise a thing of the past. Partnerships can and will emerge out of convenience, marriages where a chain of illicit activities will naturally form and strengthen. While transnational criminal organizations still recognize territorial strongholds, they are keen and willing to include other actors when actions are mutually beneficial. Yesterday's competition can be today's business partner.

Still, it isn't motivation for profits primarily behind the success of transnational criminal networks. While mutual financial gain can induce collaboration, dollars alone do not forge relationships and/or maintain them. Nor do they substantiate longer term partnerships, especially into places ripe with risk for those unfamiliar with new entities or territories. Even the most sophisticated transnational organized criminal network can quickly crumble thanks to but one actor who fails to respect and protect the interests of all involved.

Despite this nuance, there is almost no research on the social variables that drive transnational organized crime networks. Knowledge of these variables could produce a better understanding of how and why these organizations grow and thrive, likewise provide law enforcement and partners a means to reduce their reactive posture. Toward this end, this chapter explores three key aspects of transnational crime within North America: international gangs, human trafficking, and trafficking.

## **Transnational Criminal Networks**

To begin, research indicates that despite tales of deliberate, tangled webs of calculated criminal collusion, transnational criminal networks are more matters of convenience versus meticulous alignments.<sup>2</sup> TCOs will seek out others of like mind to extend the length of a criminal chain and into sister efforts and territories. When opportunities present themselves, transnational criminal networks may simultaneously explore means to expand capabilities and geography. Still, inquiries into this topic uncover, in most instances TCOs join with others for reasons rarely excessively strategized or considered well in advance of an opportunity.

Data on transnational criminal networks operating within North America, however, often depicts them as a defined nexus with fluid routes. Numbers of illicit activities and actors are grouped together to highlight trends, potency, and challenges. Trend reporting, however, lends itself to countermeasures favoring attacking a network at large. Meaning law enforcement and sister interagency allies are funded to address the data which lies before them. In this instance, a monolithic transnational criminal beast featuring seemingly tight collaboration toward combined regional effect and chaos. In actuality and aforementioned, these actors are simply aligning and then de-coupling, informally, as opportunities emerge.

Nearly 20 years ago, the United Nations defined transnational organized crime as “a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences [...] in order to obtain, directly, or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.”<sup>3</sup> This definition speaks to the convenience factor of these networks, also the potential benefit of assessing individual network nodes. Jamieson confirmed this nuance, finding that while transnational organized crime is now more transnationally organized, it has also deregulated and delocalized.<sup>4</sup> This translates to more opportunity and reach for a TCO, but also less rigidity in how a network structures themselves—also geographic identification and supporting restrictions. Moreover, a combination of blurred boundaries, deregulation, and informal arrangements is a formula ripe for influence from external actors. As evidenced by the diverse array of criminal activities ISIS incorporates to fund their activities worldwide, the allure for terrorism to intermingle with transnational organized crime is certainly present and worrisome.<sup>5</sup>

Jamieson deemed TCOs as a social phenomenon, a network of relationships rooted in reciprocal benefits that extends to the heart of society and institutional and economic life.<sup>6</sup> Meaning, transnational criminal networks are a great deal more than like minds exchanging money. They are attached to the foundational core of the communities in which they reside, so much so they can be intertwined with governance, and capable of setting the economic tone for all activities in a region to include legal ones.

Therefore and perhaps not surprisingly, TCOs can see themselves as simply another business sector in a landscape of other industries within a region. United Nation analysts concluded:

What is at work is no longer individual illegal markets but a systemic, transnational, multisectoral ‘parallel economy,’ comprised of networks of mutually supporting ‘submarkets.’ This ‘parallel economy’ often has its own labor exchange, distribution methods, and networks. In addition, it also has its own financial and banking system, as well as its own firms, which display a degree of entrepreneurial flair, managerial, skill, and organizational adaptability that matches or even surpasses that of many licit transnational businesses.<sup>7</sup>

TCOs function in the same way legitimate business operate: they recruit and constantly network to identify top talent from legitimate industries and business.<sup>8</sup> This talent may perceive little difference between criminal networks and their above board counterparts. Similarly, these recruits—compensated better (noting risk factors inherent in joining a TCO)—are motivated by and subsequently marketed to via a lens of challenge and/or thrill seeking that this employment genre provides.

Akin to other industries, competing TCOs may become partners as mutually beneficial opportunities arise. Also, and with limited organizational restrictions on how they operate, TCOs are often on the bleeding edge in the use of technology.<sup>9</sup> With enormous flexibility in what solutions they can adopt and how to enact them, TCOs have the luxury to quickly implement new innovations sans legal and authority restrictions.

## Transnational Gangs

Perhaps the most well-known TCO element is based on its size—transnational gangs are a global phenomenon only growing in number. To provide some sense of scale, in the US alone there are 731,500 gang members across 21,500 different gangs.<sup>10</sup> Still, and contrary to what some may believe, only a small portion of these gangs have any ties to drug trafficking and/or sister drug related activities.<sup>11,12</sup> For transnational gangs, their preference is to commit “cafeteria style,” smaller and impromptu crimes.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly enough—and despite strong branding and cohesiveness—few gang members rely on internet-based communication mechanisms to solidify their network and affiliations.<sup>14</sup> Research on transnational gangs reveals that international presence stems from increased global mobility versus attempts to recruit in other regions.<sup>15</sup> This contradicts findings that nearly half of those surveyed perceive transnational gangs to possess

a formal, deliberate international presence. Also, what presence does exist is more wannabees versus actual gang members. While these individuals create personas and web landing spots to signify desired affiliation with a gang organization, there is often no evidence they are formally linked to a gang in any way, shape, or form.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, transnational gangs—while vast in numbers—are more regionally aligned. In Mexico, social and cultural identity, and community networks effectively place limits on gang activity trying to permeate the country.<sup>17</sup> These networks limited gang penetration into particular areas and/or set boundaries on what actions they could conduct. As globalization produces increased mobilization, one can only speculate if such localization effects strengthen (as a defensive mechanism) or ameliorate (as a natural side effect).

## Human Trafficking

Akin to transnational gangs, human trafficking is perceived to be linked to wider TCOs as a logical way to fund activities. As human trafficking networks are purposefully designed to transcend geographic boundaries, it stands to reason they would be intertwined with larger networks in North America. As stated earlier, this research explored transnational criminal networks from a North American perspective, with the majority of research therefore conducted on human trafficking originating in Mexico. Specifically, on the migrant and/or asylum seeking function of Mexican citizens attempting to illegally enter the United States for employment or nefarious means.

Research, however, reasons for a more personalized approach to human trafficking of Mexicans. Sanchez argues that for these individuals, human trafficking is a family arrangement, comprised of trusted networks.<sup>18</sup> Within the communities in which trafficking originates—such activities and their facilitators are well known and have been established for potentially decades—this is anything but an undesirable activity. Select families, transcending generations, are known and arguably respected for their ability to human traffic, and are seen as trusted agents to move individuals across difficult locations. Smuggling tasks are a family affair—ones logically assigned

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*Select families, transcending generations, are known and arguably respected for their ability to human traffic, and are seen as trusted agents to move individuals across difficult locations.*

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by gender. While men will handle more of the physical and protection-based nuances, women will execute financial and logistical steps needed to facilitate the smuggling.<sup>19,20</sup> Not surprisingly, smugglers tend to be migrants or asylum seekers themselves, as they possess both the social ties and needed awareness to effectively move others along paths they themselves may have traveled prior.<sup>21,22</sup>

This is not to insist human trafficking in North America is anything short of illegal or something to be condoned. While Sanchez argues that the trafficking of Mexicans is intentionally over-simplified to present worst case scenarios,<sup>23</sup> deadly crimes are occasionally committed. On the U.S.-Mexico border, kidnapping acts are sometimes conducted by crews who rob smugglers of the migrants<sup>24,25,26</sup> and can result in death. In some instances, these kidnappings can be supported by State actors, making prevention and prosecution difficult.

## Drug Trafficking

Perhaps no transnational criminal activity is more reliant on social capital than drug trafficking. In contrast to slews of movies celebrating elaborate drug trafficking networks that conspicuously span the globe, drug trafficking is actually a highly fragmented activity based on dynamic supply and demand at a given time.<sup>27</sup> It therefore comes as a surprise that there is but one study to date on how drug trafficking network, social structures operate. There are none specific to North America.

Echoing both transnational gangs and human trafficking, Yeslyurt<sup>28</sup> argued that social networks are the lifeblood in the success of any drug trafficking network. Specifically, he uncovered a system comprised on three distinct types of social capital required for it to thrive. The first emphasizes *relational ties*—social commodities vital to ensure open channels for the flow of resources to operate in and through. Second, those with strong *relational bonds* help sustain needed conduits to move goods across locations and through said channels.

Similarly and third, *network structure* can identify new opportunities when said structures are well formed. Conversely, a weaker network will introduce constrains upon individual actions. Combining all three concepts, formalizing relational ties into a reliable network structure featuring tight relational bonds can help alleviate operational deficiencies while locating

efficiencies. Network configuration will also determine how long a drug trafficking network can sustain. Research finds that the smaller the network structure the better (i.e. less redundant or only those essential to the operation are featured within), likewise it best succeeds when non-hierarchical in nature. Such networks feature only essential individuals, and responsibilities and rewards shared.

In essence, drug trafficking is arguably more a social arrangement with financial gains versus the reverse. Cross, Parker and Sasson echoed these sentiments, finding that social structures of drug trafficking entities—not product discrepancies—will ultimately drive prices for goods.<sup>29</sup> Related, they pointed to “natural qualities—charm, health and intelligence” of an actor as the most important social currency in drug trafficking.

## Conclusion

To summarize, despite common perceptions of a vast, TCO network in North America comprised of sophisticated collaborations between individuals and entities, collusion is a seeming fallacy. While vastly under-researched, what was examined uncovered social networks as the most prominent factor in determining the success of three aspects of transnational crime (transnational gangs, human and drug trafficking) in the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

While international gangs are alive and well, their penetration across borders remains more about convenience than planned. Localized social capital reigns supreme, so much so it will resist influence from external actors into a region. The internet serves little purpose in changing this nuance, and acts as advertising versus actualization. This trend may continue, lessen, or even disappear of time.

Family is most important to the success of human trafficking, especially in Mexico and when the United States is the intended destination. Trusted agents and individuals—many whom experienced this on the other side of the business exchange—are behind this illicit activity. So much so, scholars such as Sanchez question whether it should be viewed under a negative lens.<sup>30</sup>

Last, drug trafficking may be the most social of all these core transnational criminal activities. It is heavily reliant on relational ties, network structure, and individual personality. Most importantly, it requires a level playing field by all involved to sustain.

Combined, this cursory analysis of these three core aspects of transnational criminal activity produce a like hypothesis: they are social activities and require social actors to sustain and grow. With this being said, more research is sorely needed to better examine how these social activities are conceptualized in actual communication, also a closer look at the North American continent is needed to truly understand how TCOs within operate.

This research argues for at least consideration of re-conceptualizing ways to address TCO activity in the areas of transnational gangs, human trafficking, and drug trafficking, respectively. As billions of dollars derived from transnational crime flows across borders each year, it is imperative for those seeking to limit effects of this movement to rethink their approaches. Tracking goods or networks will not necessarily yield insights on the potency of an illicit route and/or one's commitment to sustaining it. Similarly, technological solutions designed to combine versus better explore data on this topic will only confound. This research snapshot points to a social driven phenomena; countermeasures must reflect this reality.

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## Chapter 6. Women of the Caliphate: Fighting for the Narrative

*Lindsay M. Coombs and Howard G. Coombs*

Strategic narrative expresses strategy as a story, to explain one's actions. - Emile Simpson<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Simpson, a former British Army officer and a junior fellow at Harvard University, describes a strategic narrative as aligning one's own forces through the creation of common understanding and shared purpose, to convincing opponents and others of one's policy goals or ends.<sup>2</sup> It is the latter idea that underpins this chapter, which focuses on the gendered dimensions of the Canadian 'fight for the narrative' against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Comprehending the importance of the narrative as strategy will enable those combating radicalization to create narratives that negate the insidious impact of messaging that moves Westerners,<sup>3</sup> including Canadian women, to travel abroad to support causes like ISIS.<sup>4</sup> In these cases, it is necessary to provide narratives that overwhelm those of your opponent. It

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must be a counter-message that serves the interests of those exposed to it, more so than those offered by extremist organizations.<sup>5</sup>

Since the conflict in Syria began in 2011 there has been a massive influx of Westerners traveling to the region in support of ISIS. These migrants include a historically unprecedented number of Western women.<sup>6</sup> Accord-

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*While exact demographics on this cohort are not available, radicalized Western women are typically second or third generation Muslim immigrants—a group similar to the profiles of Western males who become extremists.*

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ing to a 2016 Government of Canada (GoC) Public Safety report, at that time 36,500 radicalized travelers had gone to Syria since the beginning of that conflict. This number included 6,600 Westerners and approximately 180 Canadians. Estimates suggest that 36 Canadian women are included in this cohort.<sup>7</sup> While exact demographics on this cohort are not available,

radicalized Western women are typically second or third generation Muslim immigrants—a group similar to the profiles of Western males who become extremists. However, in some cases, women of other cultural backgrounds who have adopted Islam travel to pursue a path of radicalization that leads them to joining extremist groups like ISIS.<sup>8</sup> These and other issues have led to an introspection on the radicalization of these women.

As a signatory to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178, Canada is committed to condemning violent extremism and working to prevent the “recruiting, organizing, transporting or equipping of individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning of, or participation in terrorist acts.”<sup>9</sup>

Despite pursuing a number of initiatives to achieve these goals, the aforementioned 2016 GoC Public Safety report also indicates that the number of women who were extremist travelers has increased since the establishment of the ISIS “Caliphate” in June 2014.

The participation of women in terrorist organizations and activities is not new. What is new is the number of women who have subscribed to Daesh’s ideology and traveled, or attempted to travel, abroad to join Daesh. Women now constitute approximately 20 percent of total extremist travelers from Canada. In some cases, women have taken their children to conflict zones.<sup>10</sup>

Although one could argue that the numbers of radicalized Canadians may appear minor, their influence is disproportionate to this number.

Extremists abroad utilize social media and other digital outlets to create their own narratives and to bolster radicalized messaging. Moreover, the presence of women among these radicalized travelers helps to create an impression that ISIS is an Islamic proto-state, attracting women who will contribute to the strengthening of its population through various state-building initiatives.<sup>11</sup> The result is that these extremist Canadians assist in bringing more radicalized recruits from Western nations into the fold of ISIS. In addition, these and other extremist travelers tend to exacerbate the security situation in the conflict area and have demonstrably posed threats to their countries of origin when they return.

Although women of the caliphate are often depicted on social media and in ISIS propaganda as mothers and wives, they are also fierce enforcers and supporters of the organization. Like their male counterparts, these women have complex motivations for taking part in the terrorist organization, motivations that are hardly as simple as wanting to become a 'jihadi bride.' As noted by Eric Hoffer, in *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, there are several reasons that may explain why individuals embrace various ideologies, like those espoused by ISIS. However, for Hoffer, such radicalization is stimulated because there is a perceived need for change among discontented individuals who feel powerless in their current society or culture. To address this need for change, individuals or communities may look beyond their current environment. Such individuals are willing volunteers for mass movements that are perceived to address their wants.

Interestingly, Hoffer also argues that while mass movements may have widely differing belief systems, there is a certain uniformity in the factors that may create their discontent.<sup>12</sup> While Hoffer does not address the idea of gender in his writing, it certainly can be connected to this discussion. For example, recent research led by Canadian sociologist Lorne Dawson tends to suggest the same logic from interviews with radicalized Islamists who become foreign fighters. Dawson suggests that for these extremists, terrorist activities are an outlet for needs that cannot be satisfied through legitimate means.<sup>13</sup>

Based on these ideas and extant research, one can argue that the narratives produced by ISIS provides women with a coherent message: the life they will lead in regions dominated by ISIS will be better in most aspects than the life they are leading today.<sup>14</sup> ISIS seems to understand this and plays on the factors that lead to these individuals' discontent, marketing itself as an

organization that supports women in the pursuit of their goals. In the case of radicalized women, ISIS messaging suggests that by joining the organization women will fulfill a sense of religious duty, garner a feeling of belonging, reject Western perceptions of feminism, and can pursue a quest for romance and adventure. Taken as a whole, ISIS utilizes a craftily constructed gendered narrative to inspire these women to support the group's violent cause.

Although Canada and other coalition members have undertaken various national and international level counterterrorism (CT) and counter-messaging initiatives, the overarching nature of the narrative is still evolving. Arguably, in the case of radicalized women, creating a strategic narrative necessitates the application of a gender perspective.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, Canada—and allied nations such as the United States—must create a strategic narrative that forces ISIS to react to Western messaging, rather than vice versa.

### **Constructing a Strategic Narrative: The Importance of Employing a Gendered Lens**

Strategy formulation involves taking the exigencies of policy and matching them to ends (objectives), ways (options), and means (resources) to create a strategy, which in turn results in concrete actions by alliances and nations. Strategy evolves as ends, ways, and means change. According to Simpson, the strategic narrative is an explanation of this constantly shifting relationship. The strategic narrative takes the abstract ideas of strategy and makes them understandable to audiences.

While strategy and narratives should intertwine in a complex discourse, at the most basic level the strategic narrative is a story in which the complex ideas incorporated in strategy are simplified and made easily understandable for the audience.<sup>16</sup> It should be tailored as needed to reach those for whom it is intended. There are four main elements: (1) a protagonist and an antagonist—people, (2) a world view or perspective, (3) an objective, which provides a purpose, and (4) a manner of achieving the goal, thereby defining a process. The story allows people to identify with the strategic narrative and, in turn, the strategy.

The strategic narrative that ISIS utilizes to recruit women is multidimensional and appeals to a broad spectrum of individuals. In terms of messaging, it is evident that ISIS is very agile and able to transition quickly when reacting to external organizations and institutions that attempt to provide

counternarratives. ISIS does so through various social media websites and social networks.<sup>17</sup> Thus, a Western strategy ought to be based on a better narrative designed to cause, as Hoffer might say, discontented women to question the messaging provided by ISIS, and to do so in a rapid and flexible fashion using analogous modes of transmission.

### **A Narrative for Radicalization: The Recruitment of Women by Isis**

At the outset, ISIS discouraged women from migrating to support their cause. As a militant Salafi group, it believed that there was no place for women in war. Instead, ISIS members active on social media urged their female followers to support the group's efforts by fundraising, as well as by asking their husbands, brothers, and sons to join the fight.<sup>18</sup> When, however, ISIS began claiming territory in 2013—thereby moving closer to their goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate—the group began to see women as necessary for the establishment of a functioning proto-state. The group required female police officers to inspect women passing through checkpoints. Its strategy necessitated female security forces to enforce Islamic laws of dress and conduct on women in ISIS-held territory, and women to create households where they could raise the next generation of fighters.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, when the leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared the birth of the caliphate in the summer of 2014, he also called for women to migrate to its territories in Iraq and Syria to assist in the building of an Islamic proto-state. Therefore, in addition to simply attracting male fighters, ISIS prioritizes the recruitment of women to provide the caliphate with a semblance of stability.

Women are strategically recruited by ISIS to enhance the perceived legitimacy of the proto-state.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, requests for women to perform traditional household roles, as well as fill skilled or auxiliary positions like doctors, nurses, and engineers, have become a central component of the group's recruitment efforts. Scholars Anita Peresin and Alberto Cervone suggest that women in terrorist organizations like ISIS play important roles not only in "raising their children in the path of jihad," but select women are also given authority over "managing the finances and the logistics of operations, recruiting new fighters and female companions, collecting and disseminating intelligence, providing medical care, glorifying the struggle, and spreading the jihadist ideology through [the] Internet."<sup>21</sup> Although the

roles women are allowed to perform within ISIS territory are limited, with both their activities and physical mobility highly restricted, it is evident that women are an integral component of their state-building efforts.

With the group's increased desire for women to join the fight, ISIS has recognized the need to develop strategies and disseminate narratives explicitly designed to recruit women. Although the reasons men and women choose to join terrorist organizations often overlap, both genders tend to be motivated by distinct driving forces. As such, ISIS has constructed different narratives for each gender; while men are encouraged to fulfill their religious duty by joining the fight, women are promised spiritual fulfillment, a sense of belonging, a deep bond of sisterhood, romance, adventure, and the ability to raise children committed to ISIS ideology.<sup>22</sup> As a terror group of a contemporary nature, ISIS capitalizes on modern technology and social media to disseminate these messages.<sup>23</sup> Through its extensive online presence, ISIS is capable of distributing polished propaganda materials to audiences across the globe. While ISIS recruitment efforts are perhaps most notable on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Tumblr, the group has also created its own online magazine. Thus, ISIS is not only waging war on the ground, but also online through its virtual presence.<sup>24</sup>

ISIS has become infamous for the decentralized aspects of its communications strategy. Indeed, the importance of social media in recruiting new members to the terrorist organization has been widely recognized by academics, news outlets, and policymakers. By operating on various social media platforms, followers and supporters of ISIS have become independent media outlets. These followers propagate ISIS messages by posting online, creating online groups, re-posting official propaganda, and by producing their own content.<sup>25</sup> Through these methods, ISIS supporters form communities that engage in real-time discussions online. Figures show that in the fall of 2014 there were approximately 45,000 Twitter accounts used by supporters of ISIS.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, of these supporters, "73 percent had an average of 500 followers, others had up to 50,000 followers."<sup>27</sup> These supporters and sympathizers are capable of disseminating ISIS propaganda from anywhere in the world, thereby enabling them to tap into diverse audiences and networks.

Women who have already traveled to ISIS-controlled territories are given the important role of recruiting others online. These women spend significant time online each day, disseminating ISIS propaganda and communicating

with potential new recruits. These female recruiters present idealized images of life in the caliphate, as noted by scholar Mah-Rukh Ali:

[Women] post online idyllic pictures of a fun, harmonious life within the Islamic State. They tell stories of happy families, post pictures of cats on Twitter, and share recipes. They use social media to express their grievance at the treatment of Muslims across the world, and their perception of ISIS as a truly Islamic society, built on sharia law. They spread the belief that it is a feminist duty of all female Muslims to travel to ISIS areas. They believe that in this world they will get everything they need, not only a man that loves her, children, a beautiful house, but also recognition as women warriors fighting alongside men on the battlefield for a just cause.<sup>28</sup>

Through their online communications, these women provide a channel of intimate information for the recruitment of new women. They humanize, personalize, glorify, and distort the experiences of traveling to and living in ISIS territory, breaking down conceptions of fear and mystery that typically surrounds terrorist organizations.<sup>29</sup> In doing so, it greatly reduces the anxiety and hesitation that could prevent a potential recruit from joining ISIS.<sup>30</sup>

Among some of the most prominent female ISIS recruiters are “[W]estern women,” such as British national Sally Jones who operated under the online pseudonym Umm Layth. On her social media accounts and blogs, Umm Layth presented a romanticized version of life in the caliphate and referred to it as “paradise.”<sup>31</sup> She also urged her thousands of online followers to migrate to Iraq and Syria without delay, and provided them with detailed instructions for women who wish to travel to ISIS-held territories. On her Tumblr page, titled “Diary of a Muhajirah,” Umm Layth posted about daily life, marriage, martyrdom, religion, and answered anonymous messages about ISIS with reassurances and advice.<sup>32</sup> To her female followers, she promised personal power within a society that is united by a common cause.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, women like Umm Layth are invaluable to ISIS because they act as decentralized messengers, able to spread the group’s propaganda in accessible and colloquial terms to women in their countries of origin. In turn, their propaganda reaches a wider audience, appeals to a range of desires, and enables recruiters to establish common ground with potential new recruits.<sup>34</sup>

ISIS also produces centralized propaganda initiatives that comprise the core of its official communications, including the group’s online publication

titled *Dabiq* magazine. First issued in July 2014 and released in several different languages, *Dabiq* echoes the official views of ISIS and calls for its readers to undertake acts of terror across the globe.<sup>35</sup> With its well-edited articles and high-definition illustrations, it is evident that this publication plays a critical role in both spreading the ISIS ideology and recruiting new members.<sup>36</sup> Initially, women were included in *Dabiq* magazine as being a part of the larger Muslim community, incorporated in terms like “all Muslims,” but were rarely addressed specifically.<sup>37</sup> However, as the role of women in establishing a functioning caliphate increased in importance, women became more visible in *Dabiq* magazine. Since the seventh issue—produced in 2015 when ISIS had begun to consolidate territory across Iraq and Syria—women have been featured prominently in the magazine, both authoring articles and as the subjects of interviews.<sup>38</sup> Using *Dabiq* as a platform to address women directly, female authors have written about “marriage, the taking of female slaves, family life and female migration,” and frequently make promises “relating to issues of religious duty, state building, belonging, sisterhood, adventure, romance and influence.”<sup>39</sup>

While it is clear that women are being actively recruited by ISIS, this does not mean that the radicalization of women occurs as a passive process; these women make conscious and intentional decisions to join extremist groups. Studies which suggest that women are lured or have been groomed

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*Studies which suggest that women are lured or have been groomed by recruiters who employ tactics similar to those used by pedophiles in order to ensnare their unsuspecting prey, seriously misrepresent the radicalization of women.*

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by recruiters who employ tactics similar to those used by pedophiles in order to ensnare their unsuspecting prey, seriously misrepresent the radicalization of women. By framing the radicalization of women in such terms, it infantilizes women by implying that they are incapable of making their own decisions or asserting their own agency, that they lack the political engagement necessary to make such choices, and that they are the innocent victims of their

circumstances. Moreover, it grossly overestimates recruiter’s powers of seduction and persuasion.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, arguments that women travel abroad to join ISIS primarily with the goal of becoming a ‘jihadi bride’ are reductionist as they oversimplify the diverse range of multi-causal factors that lead to women’s radicalization.

By focusing on women as victims rather than as active perpetrators and decision-makers, these studies deliver a skewed representation of women's radicalization. For many women, joining ISIS is perceived as a form of empowerment, liberation, and the opportunity to live in a society that reflects their belief systems and worldviews.<sup>41</sup> Typically, these potential recruits actively seek out both the messages and messengers of ISIS and, for those who choose to travel to join the group, tend to be inspired by the propaganda and narratives that they find.<sup>42</sup> As noted in a recent report by the International Centre for the Study of Violent Extremism, "while propaganda in itself seldom radicalizes or recruits a person to an organization, it catalyzes radicalization and consolidates already held sympathies."<sup>43</sup>

### **Canada's Whole-of-Government Approach to Counter-Radicalization**

Canada has adopted a multifaceted whole of government, or interagency, approach to address counter-radicalization. Public Safety Canada is the lead government department, with the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness responsible for leading CT initiatives and related matters pertaining to national security. Within this context, community initiatives to contact social networks, especially within the Canadian-Muslim community, have been undertaken, as well as counter-messaging initiatives.<sup>44</sup> Of note is that Canada and allies are participating in a coordinated fashion to devise measures for counter-messaging. The Global Counter ISIS Coalition Communications Group is a primary vehicle for these efforts. Its February 2017 meeting in the United Kingdom attracted 38 countries.<sup>45</sup> Although counter-messaging is active, it is doubtful that it is occurring through a gendered lens.

In 2015, The Standing House Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development raised a number of observations concerning the need for vigorous Canadian counter-ISIS activities.<sup>46</sup> As part of its response the GoC stated:

Canada is also developing a counter-narrative approach which involves targeted support of influential local actors best positioned in communities to deliver messages countering ISIS's narrative that resonate, and is looking at ways to prevent Canadians from being radicalizing to the point of violence.<sup>47</sup>

The GoC also laid out Canadian interests in this sphere:

Advancing core Canadian values such as democracy, transparency and accountability, pluralism, and human rights—including women’s rights and respect for religious freedom.<sup>48</sup>

Initiatives to engage community leaders and groups who are the targets of extremist narratives in order to neutralize negative social messaging seem to have had some degree of success. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of efforts to produce an appropriate strategic narrative or the use of social media to promulgate those messages.<sup>49</sup> In 2015, despite the clearly articulated strategic goals, there was a paucity of gendered perspectives in Western narratives to counter ISIS messaging.<sup>50</sup> Sadly, despite the many efforts of multiple agencies, attempts to advance a coherent international strategy have not achieved many positive outcomes.<sup>51</sup>

Simpson clearly articulates that strategic narratives must be tailored for specific audiences. In the case of women at risk of radicalization, there is little evidence that a gendered strategic narrative, acceptable to all agencies, will be devised in the near future. To capture this script, it is necessary to utilize a gendered perspective in messaging. First, one ought to acknowledge the idea articulated by Hoffman et al.—that women are seeking something which they cannot achieve in their place of origin.<sup>52</sup> However, these women do have a myriad of reasons for becoming ‘women of the Caliphate’ which range from desire, to belonging, to the support of a Muslim community, through a need to practice Islam in a welcoming environment, to a belief that this is the equivalent of a pilgrimage. Arguably, Western strategic narratives have been hindered not only by a rejection of gender-based concepts, but also the refusal to acknowledge radicalized women as active decision makers who may intentionally choose to travel abroad to join extremist organizations.

In order to create a comprehensive strategic narrative, Western societies must address this negative thinking. To do so, however, they must increase the number of women, including Muslim women, who work and serve in the security sector countering extremism. As policymakers, advisors, teachers, and community activists, women have a significant role to play in the creation of a dominant strategic narrative that addresses the gendered dimensions of ISIS recruitment strategies. Not only will this continue the trend of engaging the Muslim diaspora and its leadership within Canada, but it will also ensure that women’s voices are heard; one cannot create effective

policy without women's engagement throughout each stage of crafting and employing a strategic narrative.<sup>53</sup>

Canadian national leaders and opinion makers must comprehend this strategic objective so that a higher-level narrative can be coherently constructed in Canada. They might use the Canadian interests so clearly laid out by The Standing House Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development in 2015 as a starting point because they are still applicable today, perhaps even more so. A Canadian strategic narrative should examine and emphasize the brutal realities of living in ISIS controlled territory. Moreover, that the proto-state is inimical to Western conceptions of feminism and women's rights, and uses women in ways that are not tolerated in Western countries like Canada. ISIS propaganda, such as *Dabiq*, concerning life for women of the caliphate does not match reality. Gender progressive dialogue espousing strategic ideals that simultaneously respects Muslim ideals, needs to be created and encouraged to neutralize the ISIS narrative. Additionally, Canada and other Western countries should engage with women who have been involved with ISIS, but who have become disillusioned with the organization through their negative experiences, by having them speak out in public forums.<sup>54</sup>

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*A Canadian strategic narrative should examine and emphasize the brutal realities of living in ISIS controlled territory.*

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Another area that could be explored and linked to Canadian interests as part of the strategic narrative is the idea of reformist or moderate Islam. Canada must encourage critical Muslim dialogue concerning extremist conceptions of jihad, or "struggle," and the repressive ideologies associated with them, as well as emphasize the deleterious impact on women.<sup>55</sup> These discussions will attract devout Muslims who disagree with these radical concepts and assist Muslim leaders who fight against terrorism. In addition, creating gender strategic narratives in the education process and encouraging activism is key to negating the early radicalization of young women.<sup>56</sup>

A Canadian strategic narrative ought to reflect Canadian goals and values while also addressing the hopes, needs, and beliefs of its female audience. It is evident that the creation of a gendered strategic narrative must incorporate all aspects of this in order to neutralize the radical narratives of groups like ISIS. Only by doing this will Canada be able to operationalize a strategic narrative that appeals to Western women and minimize the catalyzing

effects of extremist recruitment efforts. One could opine that other Western nations could adopt a similar perspective in countering attempts to radicalize women.

## Conclusion

A complete strategic narrative tells a story that is convincing to those who are exposed to it. It is not separate from strategy but reflects its ends, ways and means, in a fashion nuanced for the audience for which it is intended. The female audience, once mostly disregarded by ISIS, is now actively sought to create legitimacy as a proto-state. These ISIS narratives target Western Muslim women in a variety of roles from skilled professions through mothers to fighters, with messaging emphasizing their importance to the caliphate. While the reality is different from the content of these ISIS narratives, it does attract women with a variety of motivations. Reductionist interpretations of women as jihadi brides, or as having been lured or groomed to join ISIS oversimplify the complex motivations behind women's radicalization, creating an image of innocent women enslaved by issues outside their control. These explanations are inaccurate and do not assist with resolving the problem posed by increasing numbers of women attracted to ISIS.

The means of communicating these ideas are varied but largely involve direct contact with Western Muslim communities and presenting a strategic narrative over social media. The latter messaging is pervasive, adaptive and agile, able to respond quickly to Western attempts to negate its content. Canada participates in coalition activities to create counter-narratives and propagate Western narratives. Concomitantly, Canada conducts a multifaceted national campaign under the guidance of the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, along with Public Safety Canada, using a whole of government approach. Unfortunately, these efforts lack a gendered perspective and, as such, are unable to address the complex motivations that inspire Western women to join ISIS.

Peace and success can only be developed if it is fully inclusive and involves more women, particularly Muslim women, in a variety of roles within GoC departments, both as policymakers and advocates, and to establish community engagement in other official capacities. Furthermore, the strategic narrative must be tailored to reveal the reality of life for women who have joined ISIS. Canada must encourage moderate female Muslims and others

to engage a reformist debate that not only reinforces Islamic values, but does so in the context of Canadian strategy and strategic narration. Only in this fashion will Canada, and other Western countries like the United States, be able to create a gendered strategic narrative that discursively reflects desired goals and values.

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## Chapter 7. Origin and Epidemiology: Extremism and Radicalization<sup>1</sup> are Psychological Processes, not Religious Beliefs

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### Introduction

This chapter addresses the challenge of young-adult and refugee vulnerability to the spread of violent extremist ideology, subsequent radicalization, and devolution into violence-related behavior. The authors' approach is characterized by grounded theory drawn from extensive field research in South America, Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia. The research concludes that extremism and radicalization originate

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from profound psychosocial crisis rather than religious belief or unmet physical needs. Based on these findings, the authors advocate for designing and implementing clinical countering violent extremism (CVE), radicalization intervention and prevention programs that operate far forward of local and national security interdiction points. The authors' CVE research and development uses a community clinical engagement approach to repair damaged psychosocial and emotional refugee populations' social tissue to build resiliency against virulent extremist ideology and violent extremist organization (VEO) recruitment. Simultaneously, this approach introduces advanced psychosocial-emotional analytical frameworks to government agency employees responsible for refugee services administration, including health and welfare. Community clinical engagement and government services training and advising efforts work collaboratively to identify and disrupt lines of extremism and radicalization within the vulnerable young-adult and refugee populations.

## **The Challenge of War Refugees**

Worldwide, the flow of war refugees has now exceeded 60 million human beings.<sup>2</sup> This is the highest level ever recorded. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres,

We are witnessing a paradigm change, an unchecked slide into an era in which the scale of global forced displacement as well as the response required is now clearly dwarfing anything seen before.<sup>3</sup>

The scope and volume of war refugees now threatens political and social destabilization in the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas. The destabilizing effects of the war refugees on the host populations receiving them can best be understood within human psychology concepts of trauma, transference, and countertransference (see fig. 3), through which virulent strains of violent ideology spread into vulnerable populations.<sup>4</sup> These little understood social psychological processes present the possibilities of tremendous damage to the social fabric with attendant political upheaval to both refugee and host populations. The effects of these three processes can be managed and mitigated with early diagnosis and treatment. Left untended, the Arab Spring of violent revolutions and their descent into anarchy may yet spread westward with the flow of refugees and displaced persons.

## The Origin of Violent Extremism and Radicalization: Psycho-social-Emotional Damage from Trauma

The authors propose a psychological definition of extremism as the effect on a traumatized human being trying to reestablish a cognitive thought-relationship to reality and their susceptibility to ‘totalization’ of cause and effect.<sup>5</sup> This type of totalizing thought is especially prevalent when it involves the nature of their emotional pain and psychological suffering from profound loss and alienation.<sup>6</sup> Violent extremism is a psychological totalization of thought regarding the effects of emotional pain and psychological suffering that overwhelms the cognitive thought process. To restore connection with reality, the cause of these effects are attributed to an ‘other’ group because of that group’s actions, policies, or physical presence.<sup>7</sup> Said differently, extremism is the mind’s errant attempt at establishing meaning to suffering by assigning an antagonist to its internal protagonist. This creates a narrative that provides grounding structure of cause and effect.<sup>8</sup> While extremism is a cognitive (conscious) thought process, extremism is driven by the subconscious’ ego requirement for meaning-of-suffering, without which the ego is destabilized and the identity that it supports (or represents) begins to devolve in a process of self-loathing that can threaten psychic annihilation—a common basis for suicidal terror participation.<sup>9</sup>

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*Violent extremism is a psychological totalization of thought regarding the effects of emotional pain and psychological suffering that overwhelms the cognitive thought process.*

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Traveling within the 16 million war refugees is a collective memory of profound terror and reality shattering losses of children, family, home, and an ancient historical narrative that carried generational remembrance and existential meaning. Behind the seemingly calm faces of the refugees lays a vast invisible psychological trauma of a social reality broken under armored tank treads, bombing, rape, or brutal beheadings. The surviving families that are filling the growing Lebanese/Turkish/European refugee camps are likely suffering from a collection of conflicting cognitive thoughts of survival and alienation; raw emotions of unintegrated grief, shame and rage; and subconscious ideations of hope, despair, and terrorized anxiety.

By most accounts, the physical needs of war refugees in Europe and the United States are being met by a combination of services provided by

governmental and nongovernmental organizations, especially in comparison to those remaining in Lebanon and Syria. Even as the most life-threatening basic survival needs (food, shelter, medicine, and physical protection) are met, the deeper, psychological needs that were previously submerged, begin to surface and destabilize families and individual members of such psychologically traumatized refugee communities. In the hierarchy of human needs, all are required to sustain life. Human needs are organized into a hierarchy because extreme cold kills before thirst which kills before hunger, and so on. At the deep end of the human needs hierarchy lies the psychological, sociological, and emotional needs that sustain cognitive reality and provide purpose for human life. Adding to the difficulty of care and administration of traumatized refugees, are trauma effects such as irrational phobia, interpersonal guardedness, increased social distance, and relational ruptures.<sup>10</sup>

Traumatized individuals, while needing an emotionally safe and secure environment can frequently be prone to intense mistrust of not only other refugees but service providers of host nations. They may be overcome by fears of emotional closeness and may present resistance to necessary interpersonal attachments/reattachments which they perceive as harbingers of further loss.<sup>11</sup> These are classic symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder made more complicated by their socio-centric psychological organization (see fig. 3).

**Psychosocial-Emotional Human Security Analytical Framework** © Valka-Mir<sup>®</sup>

Security Type	Vulnerability	Needs	Capacity & Resilience Strategies
Identity (individual & family)	Failing archetypes	Adaptation (to new surroundings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Population Reconnaissance</li> <li>✓ Psychosocial Civil Engagement</li> <li>✓ Narrative Conflict Mediation</li> <li>✓ Refugee Acculturation Intervention</li> <li>✓ Cultural Identity Mediation</li> <li>✓ Participatory Action Research</li> <li>✓ Community Trauma Intervention</li> </ul>
Belonging (individual & family)	Boundary Definition	Redefinition	
Trauma (individual & family)	Damaged Psycho-Social Reality	Restoration	
Sociological Structure (family +)	Sociocentric/Collectivist	Restoration & Adaptation	
Memorialization (family +)	Historical Narrative	Preservation & Revision	
Cultural Expression (family +)	Identity Displacement	Acculturation & Acclimatization	

Figure 1. Human Security Analytical Framework.  
SOURCE: VALKA-MIR/USED WITH PERMISSION

The human security analytical framework (fig. 3) is a primary clinical assessment and engagement tool for the cultural conflict psychologists and sociologists researching violent extremism and behavioral radicalization.<sup>12</sup> For most war refugees, the psychological structure of their personal and



Figure 2. Large Group Identity Construct.  
SOURCE: VALKA-MIR/USED WITH PERMISSION

family identity has become unstable from failing archetypes (such as heroism, sacrifice, and masculinity) that essential components of a group identity and necessary to sustain a psychological organization of a patriarchal society (see fig. 4).<sup>13,14</sup> As the sociological structure of family, ethnic, and cultural kinsmen within the larger community collapses with the destruction of their homes, farms, and towns, their generational transmission of historical narrative that memorializes their past, connects to their present, and prepares their children for the future is at imminent risk of obsolescence with the loss of so many members of family and ethnic kin.

Furthermore, the war refugees find themselves in camps or towns within the hosting nations whose psychological organization, sociological structure, and emotional expressions are vastly different than the refugees own rapidly failing group identity. As individuals, and as a body of humans, they are in a profound psychological and emotional crisis.<sup>15</sup> Their primary loss of home, rootedness, the sense of self and place is now vanquished and made worse by the day-to-day meaninglessness of routinized camp experience lived within a

grid environment in a new (host) cultural context. In this state, the refugees are extremely vulnerable to damaging transference and countertransference exchanges with their host population. These 'psychological transfers' of roles, feelings, and meanings between refugees and hosts establish the basis for extremism and radicalization that requires early intervention.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Epidemiology of Extremism and Radicalization: The Relationship Between Trauma Transference, Countertransference and Extremism**

The cognitive and subconscious minds of traumatized refugees continuously seek to reestablish their relationship with reality. Unaided by supportive intervention that needs to utilize and apply psychological and emotional issues of conflict trauma, the refugees' thought patterns desperately attempt to seek out explanatory meanings to relieve their suffering. Two common modes of transference entail the psychic extremes of idealization and devaluation. For example, many find that their suffering is relieved by meanings/explanations that are based on safety/security, where the host population takes on the role of idealized savior or rescuer. For others, suffering is relieved by affixing responsibility for their suffering, often as a relief from unbearable survivor guilt. In this version of transference, the host population takes on the role of betrayer and devalued, because they were a culpable witness to the death of their families without intervening to save them. These two examples illustrate the vulnerable state of mind of the refugees as they search for meaning/explanations that support the reestablishment of their personal and family relationship with reality.

Figure 3 illustrates in detail the ebb and flow of transference and countertransference processes between the refugees and their host community, where the refugees reassign meaning and feelings onto their new surroundings within their host benefactor community.<sup>17</sup> It is this process of transference and search for meaning/explanations that is highly susceptible to interference by terror/criminal ideologues who work to reshape meaning for the traumatized refugees as anti-modern, anti-Western, anti-host government and call for mental and physical resistance.

The call to assign responsibility onto the host population for refugees suffering affects only a percentage of the traumatized population. As well, many traumatized refugees are able to recover their relationship to their

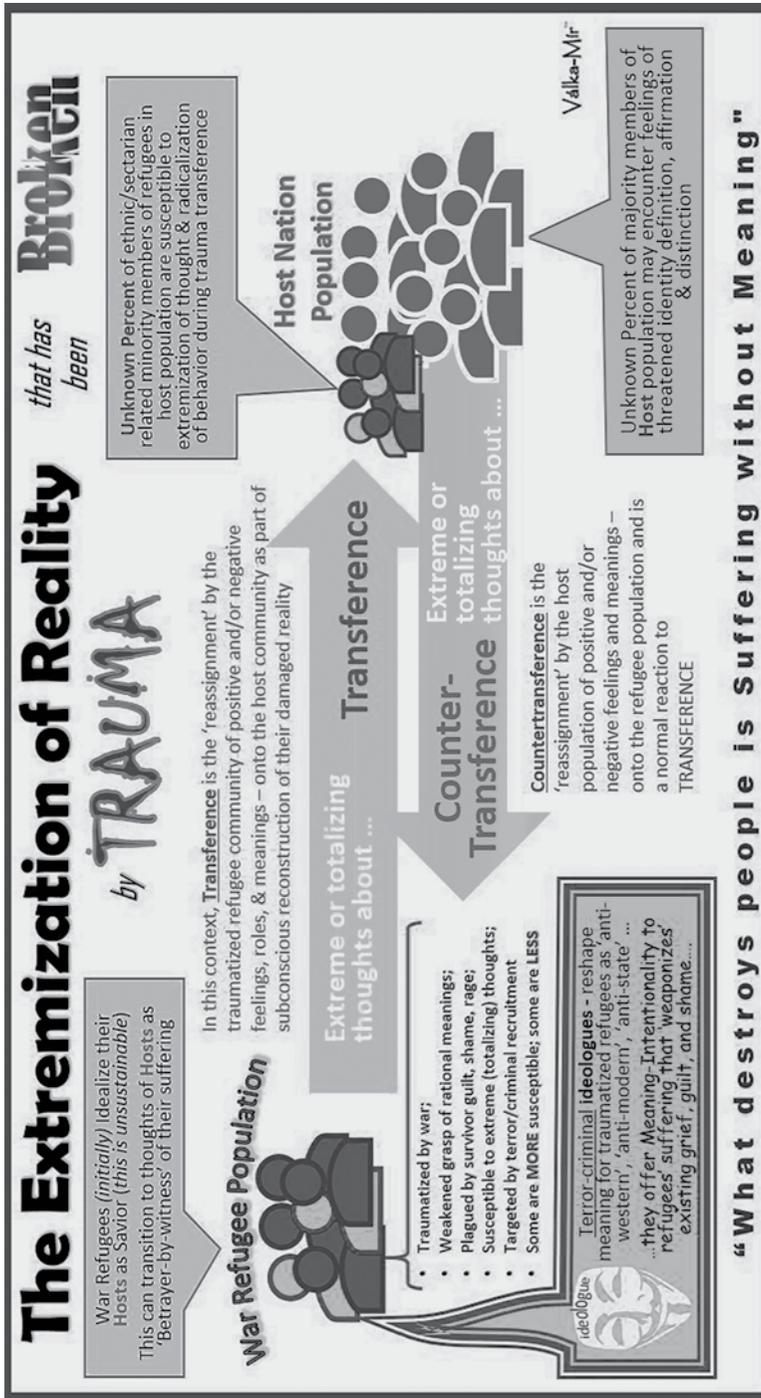


Figure 3. Transference/Countertransference of Trauma: Psychological Extremization, Radicalization and Weaponization Process. SOURCE: VALKA-MIR/USED WITH PERMISSION

new reality without succumbing to totalization of thought necessary for extremism and subsequent radicalization. However, those who are unable due to a host of internal psychological reasons are vulnerable to extremism/radicalization and could become a serious danger to themselves and their host community.<sup>18</sup>

For those members of the traumatized refugee community whose affected psychological-emotional state remains vulnerable to extremism, additional supportive intervention is required to prevent their descent into radicalization and subsequent recruitment by terror/crime organizations. The patterns of psychological and emotional traumatization and the ideologue involvement within the transference, countertransference, and secondary trauma constitute the extremism health event that the authors refer to as the epidemiology of violent extremism. The epidemiology of violent extremist ideations show how traumatized thought is influenced as a pattern towards the host population as a causative agent of suffering and how that thought pattern is transmitted between traumatized and non-traumatized populations.

Refugee transference in this context involves the (mostly) unconscious redirection of feelings and attitudes about their suffering/condition/plight onto a more accessible representation of their tormentor or savior—the host population. These transference reactions include both rational and irrational themes. The representation of the host population as tormentor is a common ideation pushed by terror/criminal ideologues, and the representation of the host as savior is viciously attacked by those same ideologues at each setback suffered by the refugee.<sup>19</sup> What is important to remember is that the traumatized refugees' minds are attempting to reconstruct a reality damaged by violent loss and unresolved terror. Their fixation on the host-population as either tormentor or savior through this transference of meaning and feeling is not based on reality, but an attempt at realigning a damaged reality.

Countertransference on the other hand, is often a reaction to transference, where those in that power position (host population) develop conscious or unconscious positive or negative feelings about the refugees. Countertransference is based not on reality but often on, unconscious effects that the presence of refugees have on the group identity definition of the host population.<sup>20</sup> As with transference, countertransference attitudes also include both rational and irrational themes. Countertransference effects of alienation, exclusion, or revulsion can have powerfully radicalizing effects on the traumatized refugees, fueling powerful ideological narratives of the host

population as tormentors and causative agents of their suffering and loss. To this end, countertransference process creates secondary trauma—when there is sufficient intermingling of psychological-emotional narratives from the traumatized refugees to the host population, to the point where elements of the host population begin to suffer trauma (breaking of reality) on behalf of the refugees. Secondary trauma within members of the host population that are related (real or perceived) to the refugees can create equal levels of totalizing thought within this part of the host population despite the fact that they may never have even visited the conflict zone.

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*Countertransference effects of alienation, exclusion, or revulsion can have powerfully radicalizing effects on the traumatized refugees, fueling powerful ideological narratives of the host population as tormentors and causative agents of their suffering and loss.*

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## **Psychological Organization and Sociological Structure as Inhibitors to Effective Refugee Adjustment and Acculturation**

Psychological organization of identity and sociological structure of society are the underlying inhibitors for effective refugee adjustment and acculturation into their new surroundings.<sup>21</sup> These are aided by differences in cultural/emotional expression which are often overlooked by those helping the refugees resettle, host nation community, or the refugees themselves. This inhibition of refugee adjustment and acculturation is not to be confused with integration, but merely an ability to sustain psychological, emotional, and physical life cycles within a new social environment. The inability of refugee families and individual members to successfully adjust and acculturate into their new host environment creates and sustains conditions of alienation, shame, and ultimately rage that can be redirected by ideologues into radicalization and terror/crime recruitment, specifically toward the host-nation population.

The two most important inhibitors of refugee adjustment and acculturation are psychological organization and sociological structure. Figure 4 illustrates the differences between sociological structures that are characteristic of the refugees' norm versus the sociological structures characteristic of their new host benefactors.<sup>22</sup>

Central to the refugees' discomfort will be the normative and expected behavior of school aged children and young adults. In egocentric (individualistic) societies, the locus of internal member control is inculcated into children from the earliest possible age. The egocentric child is taught independent thought, responsibility for their actions, their success, their failure, and ultimately their life destiny, separate from the destiny of siblings, parents, and extended family.

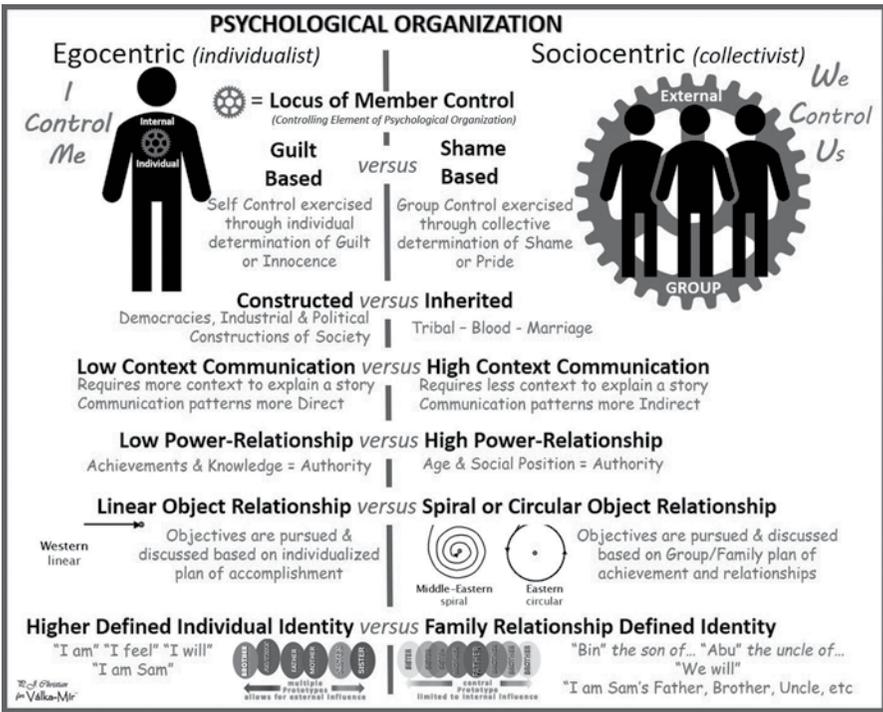


Figure 4. Sociocentric (Collectivistic) and Egocentric (Individualistic) Cultural Groups. SOURCE: VALKA-MIR/USED WITH PERMISSION

By contrast, in sociocentric (collectivistic) communities, the locus of taught/learned member control is external to the individual. Family members are inculcated with the idea that they as primary and extended family, are responsible for the behavior or control of each other. The sociocentric child is taught collective thought/decision making with shared responsibility for their actions, success, failure and ultimately, their interrelated life destiny.

Western social structures are oriented around individual agency, where the self is conceptualized and practiced as an independent entity of other 'selves' and as such, it requires children and adults to continuously move between situations with varying normative behavioral expectations (social rules) such as school, clubs, play, jobs, and so on. This can present the socio-centric family with quite a dilemma. The basis of sociocentric (collectivist) social order involves a different psychological organization of the family and community, one that is based on merged family identities with a central prototype that is limited to internal influence.<sup>23</sup> Essentially, the concept and understanding of self in egocentric society is independent from others in the family, community and society, whereas the concept and understanding of the self in sociocentric society is interdependent on other selves in the family, community and society.<sup>24</sup> Refugee families can and do adapt. But when this important inhibitor to acculturation is combined with war trauma, their ability to adjust and adapt to their new found sociological structure that is based on a different (individual-egocentric) psychological organization, becomes very difficult indeed.

Traumatized families are already dealing with tremendous psychosocial/emotional issues, and when confronted with a clearly alien version of social order, their ability to recover and adapt becomes seriously degraded. The resulting enhanced psychological crises for the group means that more members will become vulnerable to extremist, totalizing thoughts as they struggle to reconnect their traumatized lives to the new meanings of their host environment. This increase in members' extreme thought/meanings of their situation can in turn lead to increased opportunities for extremist ideologues to shape their thought-meanings into political, weaponized radicalization. This serves to increase the overall recruitment base for violent terror or crime organizations.

### **The Solution: Intervening Forward of State and Federal Security Interdiction Points**

As events have demonstrated in the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, governments' reliance on local and national security interdiction points places the burden of effort towards the end of the security spectrum where the host population is most vulnerable to attack. This arrangement also requires the state to increasingly advance its domestic intelligence

apparatus into the refugee and host populations in a manner that reduces civil liberties and undermines human rights protection and the rule of law. The solution is to ensure counter violent extremism and radicalization intervention and prevention programs, operate far forward of both local and national security interdiction points.

There is a critically needed focus on human security, forward of and in support of, state security. Counter violent extremism clinical engagement can operate within the refugee community to repair damaged psychosocial and emotional tissue sufficient to build resiliency against virulent extremist ideology and VEO recruitment. This engagement can help community members learn to separate out the intense currents of opinionated feelings regarding the terrifying events in their home country from the new reality of their host benefactor communities. While these opinionated feelings emerge as various strains of political dialogue, underlying these opinionated feelings are threats to large group identity definition, distinction, affirmation, and the meanings that directly sustain their conceptions of reality as Arab, Muslim, and the various tribal/nationalist identities of the refugees and their host populations. The goal is to build human security directly within refugee populations and/or in support of government/state agencies:

- Through the stabilization of large group identity at the family, family member, and cultural identity community;
- Through tribal/nationalist identity mediation that reassures family lines of origination with present day belonging. These lines of origination and belonging tend to fray and collapse in the extreme violence in northern Iraq and Syria;<sup>25</sup>
- Through mediation of meaning that conforms to reality that meets their underlying psychosocial-emotional needs, rather than the ideologues' political cause;
- Through translation assistance of their sociocentric psychological organization to the new egocentric organization within their host benefactor community.

Simultaneously, this engagement introduces advanced psychosocial/emotional analytical frameworks to government agency employees responsible for refugee administration, health and welfare. Such a program should equip the community clinical engagement and government services training and advising to work collaboratively to identify and disrupt lines of

extremism and radicalization within the vulnerable young adult and refugee populations.

## Endnotes

1. Epidemiology is the science of studying the factors determining and influencing the frequency and distribution of a health-related event and their causes in a defined human population. Used in this context of mental health, epidemiology of violent extremism and radicalization deals with the origination, influence, transmission, and effects of totalizing cognitive thought that lead to violent extremism.
2. “Figures at the Glance” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), accessed 9 March 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.
3. “Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase” UNHCR, 18 June 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2015/6/558193896/worldwide-displacement-hits-all-time-high-war-persecution-increase.html>.
4. Sigmund Freud, *Observations on Transference-love* (London: Hogarth Press, 1915). Transference and countertransference were first articulated by Sigmund Freud, and involved psychological interaction between a therapist and his/her patient. The vast majority of war refugees however, are from socio-centric or collectivist societies which are differentiated from individualist or egocentric societies by the locus of member control. In the latter, the locus of member control is external to the individual and rests with the collective of family and ethnic cultural kin and requires therapeutic treatment regimens that are group centric. In the former, the locus of member control is internal to the individual allowing for more individual therapeutic treatment as a successful treatment regimen.
5. Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1936). Anna Freud describes trauma as a “piercing” or breaking of a person’s psychological understanding of reality.
6. Douglas Bremer and Charles Marmar, *Trauma, Memory and Dissociation* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1998). For clinical treatment, it is important to differentiate between two sources of trauma, and associated reactive rage that are often conflated in both the clinical literature and in discussions of violent extremism. They are interrelated with the loss of meaning, and sense of alienation described in this section. The two modes of reactivity include primordial “reactive rage” towards the perpetrators of traumatic experience(s), and “abandonment rage” towards the failure of perceived protective agents to provide security (host government, foreign internal defense forces, or culture of refuge).
  - a. The first entails abandonment to the world, the second abandonment by, or from, the world. Etiologically, these sources of rage can be differentiated. Experientially, they are often fused, and undifferentiated. Each of these

- sources of rage, and modes of reactivity become fused in the described “totalization” of thought and affective response referenced.
- b. Assessment and treatment requires assisting victims with differentiating between their: (1) primary emotional pain, and loss; (2) reactive rage towards perpetrators; (3) abandonment rage towards those perceived as having a duty to protect them from the fates suffered; and (4) those perceived as having a humanitarian responsibility to respond to their plight, after the fact.
  7. Kjetil Søreide, “Epidemiology of Major Trauma,” *British Journal of Surgery* 96, no. 7 (2009): 697–698. Because of their perceived culpability as passive witnesses (i.e., by-stander apathy), as emotionally indifferent observers, or as active contributors to further abandonment, host nations become the targeted ‘other’ for the ‘totalized’ rage of the violent extremist. It is an overdetermined response: (1) partial reality (the equivalent of an iatrogenic or induced transference resistance); (2) partial displacement within the transference (affectively correct, but interpersonally misdirected); and (3) a target of convenience (chosen for its proximity in time and place, and symbolic value).
  8. Gershen Kaufman, *The Psychology of Shame: Theory and Treatment of Shame-Based Syndromes* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1996). The rage itself serves cathartic, retributive, and defensive functions. The defensive component is the turning of passive suffering and existential despair, feelings of meaninglessness, powerlessness, and loss of any sense of participation in family/group locus of control; into what is experienced as a more tolerable, active, empowered, though transient and illusory sense of empowerment and purpose. When that purpose orients towards ideations of punishing the perceived responsible agent, the affected refugee member reaches his/her most likely recruitment point, whether that be self-recruitment or external recruitment.
  9. Thomas Scheff and Suzanne Retzinger, *Emotions and Violence: Shame and Rage in Destructive Conflicts* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Company, 1991). It establishes the archetypal dynamic of victimization and vilification. The most at-risk refugees suffer from extreme self-punitive super-ego pathology - often having its genesis in rational and irrational guilt, related to the trauma(s) experienced, and which is enacted at the interpersonal level (physical and/or emotional sado-masochism). These individuals as a subtype of refugees also frequently exhibit control sensitivity and sensitivity to guilt, making them a higher than normal candidate for meaning manipulation and subsequent recruitment.
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14. Figure 2 is adapted from the following publication: *The Foundations of the Human Domain in Unconventional and Irregular Warfare*, used by the Special Warfare Education Group, Language Regional Expertise & Culture department, U.S. Army, John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center of Excellence, Ft. Bragg, NC.
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17. Figure 2 is a graphic illustration created by Valka-Mir Human Security research team of the process of extremization of an individual's mental reality that has been broken by trauma. The concepts of psychological trauma, transference, and countertransference, are all consistent with the 5th Edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the American Psychiatric Association, Arlington, VA (2013).
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## Chapter 8. Countering Transregional Terror: A Canadian Perspective

*Peter Dawe*

Since the attacks of 9/11, enhanced globalization spurred by economic, political, social, and especially technological developments has created a confluence of factors that have transformed the international security landscape. Competing states wrestling for advantage within an established internationally recognized—albeit at times informal—set of norms and rules has been supplanted by a chaotic world order that now includes rogue nuclear states, shifting alliances and economic blocks, and non-state actors that have access to increasingly lethal weaponry, including weapons of mass destruction.

Terrorism, although not a new phenomenon, has also significantly evolved. The left-wing anarchist movements and liberation organizations vying for publicity in the 1960 to 1980s have given way to ideological and religious extremist groups whose intolerance of those deemed to be non-believers is equaled only by their apparent lust for violence. This modern battle of ideology has become the catalyst for mass casualty attacks most often targeting innocent civilians. Today's terrorist organizations have perverted the advantages of globalization, which have led to the empowerment of non-state actors and the democratization of technology, thus granting these groups the ability to communicate, innovate and wreak havoc on a scale never before seen. Terrorists have exploited globalization to strengthen their ability to develop networks, plan operations, communicate between cells, organizations, and networks (with encryption), raise finances, access

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weapons, and lessons learned, collaborate with criminal organizations, as well as recruit and radicalize individuals across the globe.

Consequently, countering transregional terrorism has become a truly international undertaking shared by the majority of law abiding nations. As a result, the problem requires a global approach. In this fight, Canada is prepared to do its part. In fact, the newly released Canadian Defence Policy specifically noted, “Canada must address the threat stemming from terrorism and the actions of violent extremist organizations, including in ungoverned spaces.”<sup>1</sup> The Canadian response is a whole-of-government approach that mobilizes its national security agencies as well as its military, particularly the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM).

## The Threat

Despite the fact that terrorist attacks and fatalities have declined for the last two years, terrorism remains a pervasive concern for the international community.<sup>2</sup> Organizations such as Daesh, al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Boko Haram, to name a few, have demonstrated the ability to exploit ungoverned spaces, and at-risk states, as well as extend their reach to industrialized Western nations through the radicalization of individuals via the internet. These terrorist organizations have shown themselves able to compete with states in the ability to cause large scale destruction and violence. Whether through the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), firearms, vehicles, or even knives, they have been able to spread panic and chaos throughout much of Western Europe.

The ability to radicalize individuals through the internet and social media has provided another means by which terrorist organizations can extend their reach. These indoctrinated individuals can sometimes go on to conduct lone-wolf attacks, yet, they are often coached and enabled by terrorists providing instruction and material aid. A recent undercover study revealed that the terrorist organizations are most concerned with obtaining video footage of the attacker’s pledge of allegiance and suicide video for propaganda purposes. Moreover, they prefer the attacks to be done as quickly as possible with minimal planning. As one terrorist handler advised, “Don’t plan too much. I mean, once the basic idea is made, the important thing is that you put your trust in Allah.”<sup>3</sup>

The emphasis on quick, simple attacks carried out by radicalized individuals has had a significant impact. These types of terrorist attacks in public places have resulted in mass casualties. For example, in Nice, France, a Daesh-inspired individual drove a 19-ton cargo truck through crowds celebrating Bastille Day, killing 86 and injuring hundreds before police were able to neutralize the threat. Similarly, in Berlin, Germany, another Daesh inspired attacker using a commercial truck killed 12 in a crowded Christmas market. And on two separate incidents in London, England, vehicles were used to run down pedestrians in March and in June of 2017. In each case, the vehicular attacks were followed by assaults using knives. Both attacks resulted in numerous dead and wounded.

Nick Rasmussen, the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center captured the trepidation felt by governments and their publics when he stated the following:

One of the concerning things about London and Manchester is that these have not necessarily involved large cells with months and months or years and years of preparation, but individuals with relatively modest capability who are able to mount these kinds of terrible attacks on their own. We worry about the idea of a copy-cat attack—someone jumping into a car and driving into a crowd or using a knife or a firearm in an indiscriminate way.<sup>4</sup>

Further amplifying the concern was the fact that in May of 2017, Europol was tracking 173 potential suicide bombers in Europe alone.<sup>5</sup>

The threat of transregional terrorism is heightened even more by the return of foreign fighters, who according to Dr. David Malet, an internationally recognized expert on the subject, can best be described as “non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflict.”<sup>6</sup> These foreign fighters pose a significant threat because not only are they increasingly radicalized, they are also trained and experienced in combat. These same fighters create a “blowback effect” by returning home, or traveling to a third country and committing violent acts, often in the name of jihad. A research study revealed that between 1990 and 2010, one-in-nine returned foreign fighters were involved in domestic terrorist plots. The study concluded, “these plots tended to be more effective and lethal, thanks both to the skills learned and the indoctrinated zeal provided at radical training camps.”<sup>7</sup> To put this threat in scale with an example of a single country, France’s interior minister

revealed that an “estimated 271 radical Islamists who fought for militant groups have returned [to France] from war zones after being members of the Islamic State militant group [Daesh].”<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, the threat is further exacerbated by the deep and dark web that provides a vehicle for terrorist networks to conduct their nefarious business. Sites, such as the recently dismantled AlphaBay and Hansa sites, provide access to illicit material such as weapons, toxic chemicals, malware, stolen data, and illegal drugs.<sup>9</sup> The growing criminal nexus with terrorist organizations allows for financing, as well as access to smuggling “rat-lines,” or in simpler terms, networks. Recent incidents such as the theft of a veritable arsenal of grenades, small arms ammunition and various explosive components from a military installation in Portugal in June 2017, as well as the theft of a van loaded with nitroglycerin two days later in Spain only add to the terrorist / criminal threat facing European security services.<sup>10</sup>

As of July 2017, 39 people had been killed in 11 terrorist attacks in Western Europe, while seven individuals were killed in the United States in five attacks.<sup>11</sup> Although these numbers are, objectively speaking, negligible relative to other causes of fatalities, the psychological impact of terrorist attacks are entirely disproportionate. The immediacy of modern communications due to a pervasive media, where anyone with a cell phone can become a purveyor of events, has created a reality where single incidents can have a very broad and deep impact within societies. As Henry Kissinger once observed, “events whose effects once would have taken months to unfold, ricochet globally within seconds.”<sup>12</sup>

As a result of the ongoing threat of transregional terrorism, countries are forced to remain vigilant, proactive, and invest substantial resources to defend their citizens at home and abroad. For example, France mobilized more than 10,000 soldiers to increase security in the aftermath of the Paris attacks in November 2015, which represented the deadliest terrorist attacks in France in half a century.<sup>13</sup> And the French are not alone in deploying military forces domestically to assist with the maintenance of security against the threat of terrorism.

## **The Direct Threat to Canada**

Canada is in no way immune from the scourge of terrorism. The issue of foreign fighters poses a clear and present danger to the nation. University of

Waterloo professor Lorne Dawson, co-director of the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security and Society asserts that the foreign fighter issue is the “most serious threat Canada has faced.” He explained that not only are individuals returning with training and experience, they also often exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and are therefore more prone to violence.<sup>14</sup> The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization estimates that by the end of 2013, up to 100 Canadians may have been involved in the conflict in Syria.<sup>15</sup> And, in February 2014, the Director of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS), Michel Coulombe, testified in front of the Senate National Security and Defence Committee that 130 Canadians went overseas to fight in Yemen, Somalia, and North Africa. This number also included 30 individuals who have either fought in Syria and returned or are still there. Of note is that these same security agencies readily admit that the actual number of Canadians traveling overseas to engage in terrorist activities is likely higher. Among those 130 Canadians being tracked by the Canadian Government, 80 are known to have returned to Canada.<sup>16</sup>

Not surprisingly, Canada has faced a robust domestic terrorist threat. In 2006, a group of Canadian homegrown terrorists, who would eventually become known as the Toronto 18, set about plotting to terrorize and intimidate (with the hope of eventually dissuading) the Canadian government from maintaining its military commitment in Afghanistan. The plan called for targeting the Toronto Stock Exchange with vehicle-borne IEDs, thus paralyzing Canadians with fear and destabilizing the economy. Although the attacks were thwarted, a test of the terrorist plans demonstrated “the blast effect from the bomb was equivalent to 768 kilograms of TNT, and would have caused catastrophic damage to a multi-story glass and steel frame building 35 meters from the bomb site, as well as killing or causing serious injuries to people in the path of the blast waves and force.”<sup>17</sup>

In April 2013, “Project Smooth Arrests” resulted in the apprehension of two Canadians who conspired to attack a VIA Rail (national Canadian railway) passenger train traveling between New York and Toronto. Chiheb Essegheier and Raed Jaser were arrested and charged. Months later, in July 2013, John Nuttall and Amanda Korody were charged with conspiring to use improvised explosives built using pressure cookers to bomb the British Columbia legislature building during Canada Day festivities.<sup>18</sup>

The following year, in May 2014, as a result of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Operation “Samossa,” two Canadians were

convicted of possession of explosives and intent to do harm. The RCMP arrested three individuals who embraced a “radical Islamist Jihadist ideology” and planned to detonate IEDs at repatriation ceremonies for deceased Canadian soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

Five months later, in October 2014, Martin Rouleau, a 25 year-old radicalized Muslim convert who was identified by the RCMP as a “high-risk” traveler, ran over two military personnel with his car as they walked across a parking lot, killing one and seriously injuring the other. Weeks later, on 22 October 2014, another radicalized Muslim convert, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, struck in the nation’s capital. He first shot and killed Corporal Nathan Cirillo, who had been standing guard at the National War Memorial, and then quickly moved to Parliament Hill where he entered the House of Commons, penetrating deep inside until he reached the party Caucus rooms, which were in session. Fortunately, Zehaf-Bibeau was gunned down by security forces before he could do further harm.

The prevalence of the above-mentioned attacks prompted Prime Minister Stephen Harper to assert that the threat posed to Canada and the U.S. by this most troubling trend had become “very, very real.”<sup>20</sup> The RCMP commissioner further reinforced the gravity of the situation by stating that his force was at that time dealing with 63 active national security investigations on 90 individuals who either intended to go to fight with terrorist organizations like Daesh in Iraq and Syria or had returned from a similar experience.<sup>21</sup> Shortly thereafter in 2015, the director of the CSIS added, “in the last three to four months numbers of Canadians traveling for extremism in Iraq and Syria has increased by 50 percent.”<sup>22</sup>

“The phenomenon of Canadians participating in extremist activities abroad,” Tahera Mufti, a CSIS spokeswoman, voiced, “is a serious one.”<sup>23</sup> Her statement is not surprising. Within the last few years alone, Canadian terrorists have been implicated in attacks in Algeria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Somalia and South East Asia, as well as Syria and Iraq. In addition, Canadians have been implicated in planned attacks in Austria and Saudi Arabia.<sup>24</sup> For instance, Hassan El Hajj Hassan is wanted by Bulgarian authorities in connection with a bomb attack, on behalf of Hezbollah, on a bus that killed six people and injured 35 in July 2012. Additionally, two Canadian extremists participated in the January 2013 terrorist attack on the Algerian gas plant near Amenas, Algeria; a Canadian was involved in the April 2013 attack on the Supreme Court of Somalia, which killed more than 35 people

and injured dozens more;<sup>25</sup> a Calgarian, Salman Ashrafi, conducted a suicide bomb attack in a Daesh operation in Iraq in November 2013 that killed 46 people;<sup>26</sup> and Tamim Chowdhury, killed by Bangladeshi security authorities during a raid, was the apparent mastermind behind a deadly attack in Dhaka that left 20 dead.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in April 2017, the U.S. added Canadians Farah Mohamed Sirdon and Tarek Sakr to their list of “most-wanted” terrorists.<sup>28</sup> Most recently, a Canadian, Amor Ftouhi from Quebec, stabbed an officer at Bishop International Airport in Flint, Michigan on 21 June 2017, in yet another terrorist related attack.<sup>29</sup>

In sum, the threat of transregional terrorism to Canada’s security is real, whether most Canadians are prepared to admit it or not. To that end, Canada’s national security community is heavily engaged in countering domestic threats, preventing Canadians from committing terrorism abroad, or assisting in the international fight to counter transregional terrorism.

## The Canadian Approach

The release of the most recent Canadian Defence Policy (*Strong, Secure, Engaged. Canada’s Defence Policy*) in April 2017 marks a major step in the Canadian Government’s campaign against transregional terrorism. Importantly, the policy asserts that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) “will work with allies to identify, confront and defeat transregional threats, including from violent extremist organizations.” It clearly articulates that “successfully disrupting terrorist networks requires a multifaceted approach, including efforts to stop the flow of terrorist financing and counter the communication strategies employed by violent extremists” and identifies that “countries, like Canada, that are committed to combating terrorism will require sound intelligence on potential threats.” Importantly, it also explains that “traditional concepts of deterrence may also not apply to non-state actors who calculate risks and rewards in radically different ways and do not ascribe to the universal values enshrined in the United Nations Charter.”<sup>30</sup>

The policy does more than just identify the problem, it spells out tangible and meaningful steps that will enhance the CAF’s ability to contribute to the global counter-Violent Extremist Organization campaign. The policy includes increases to both the CAF personnel strength, as well as its funding levels. In fact, the Regular Force will grow from 68,250 to 71,500 members and the Reserve Forces will expand from 27,000 to 30,000 members. Defense

spending, in turn, will increase from \$18.9 billion (2016/2017) to \$32.7 billion in 2026/27. This represents a 70 percent increase in funding, or \$497 billion over the next 20 years.<sup>31</sup>

The policy also unveils important advancements in capabilities relevant to addressing the current threats. For example, investments in equipment, research and manning will be made in the areas of cyber operations, space, joint intelligence surveillance & reconnaissance (ISR), and enhanced defence intelligence. This focus includes an emphasis on defence innovation to ensure the CAF maintains its competitive advantage over its adversaries. In addition, it also includes the commitment to modernize warships and fighter jets, as well as confirming Canada's commitment to working with the United States to modernize North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and the Northern Warning System.<sup>32</sup>

For CANSOFCOM specifically, the Defence Policy provides for the growth of our Force (approximately 600 positions, or roughly 30 percent) and it affirms the Command's Strategic Plan. It further enables the Command's efforts to strengthen its methods, structures, procurements, and culture. For example, the Policy confirms the Government will invest in critical "shoot, move, communicate" capabilities that we require, including manned airborne ISR platforms, armored SUVs, command & control backbone infrastructure and "soldier systems." Of particular importance in the context of combating transregional terrorism is that the Policy enhances the manner in which the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) can employ CANSOFCOM to become better oriented to potential trouble spots in a more timely and substantive manner for the benefit of Canada's national interest.<sup>33</sup>

The Government's national counterterrorism (CT) strategy is another major factor in the Canadian role in countering transregional terrorism. The Canadian Government has a broad whole-of-government approach that has been designed to tackle the problem and its related issues. For instance, the RCMP leads a High Risk Travel Case Management Group, which involves a number of other government departments and law enforcement agencies. The group examines cases of extremist travelers and works to find the best tailored response to the most pressing cases through a continuum of actions.

The RCMP created the National Security Joint Operations Centre (NS JOC), which was originally established to allow for a whole-of-government approach to High Risk Travelers but also serves as a vehicle for collaborative work on counter-terrorism writ large. The NS JOC includes members from

across the national security landscape, specifically CSIS, CAF, Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Border Services Agency (CBSA), Passport Canada, Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA), Communications Security Establishment (CSE) and Public Safety.

The Canadian Government is equally committed to working with international organizations such as the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, G-7, the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum and Interpol, as well as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to CT. Additionally, the government has leveraged the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada (FINTRAC) to great effect, having released more than 200 financial intelligence disclosures to authorities relating to terrorist financing.

In 2012, then-Public Safety Minister Vic Towes unveiled Canada's first comprehensive CT strategy, which includes response plans in the event of a major attack and strategies for de-radicalizing homegrown terrorists. Entitled *Building Resistance Against Terrorism*, the strategy encompasses a four step methodology that includes preventing, detecting, denying, and responding to possible threats.<sup>34</sup> Linked to the government's strategy was the implementation of Bill S-7, the *Combating Terrorism Act*, which came into force in July 2013. This legislation created four new offences intended to prevent and deter persons from leaving Canada for certain terrorism-related purposes. Specifically, an individual commits an offence by leaving or attempting to leave Canada for the purpose of:

1. Knowingly participating in or contributing to any activity of a terrorist group for the purpose of enhancing the ability of any terrorist group to commit a terrorist activity. This categorization includes providing training, receiving training, or recruiting a person to receive training;
2. Knowingly facilitating a terrorist activity;
3. Committing an indictable offence on behalf of, at the direction of or in association with a terrorist group; and
4. Committing an indictable offence that constitutes a terrorist activity. The offences described in the first bullet carry a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment. The remaining offences carry a maximum penalty of 14 years.<sup>35</sup>

Reflecting a desire to continue to enhance national security legislation, the Canadian government tabled Bill C-51, (Anti-Terrorism Act) in January of 2015, which facilitates information sharing among a large number of federal departments and institutions; provides enhanced police powers that would allow them to detain or restrict terror suspects in a preventative manner; bans the “promotion of terrorism;” allows the Minister of Public Safety to add individuals to Canada’s “no-fly list;” and it enhances the powers of CSIS.

More recently, the current liberal government has enhanced the CT program with its Bill C-59, the new National Security Act, which provides CSIS with the ability to disrupt threats in a proactive, rather than reactive manner. It also gives the CSE—Canada’s electronic spy agency—the power to engage in offensive cyber strikes. Bill C-59 also calls for the creation of an umbrella watchdog agency that will oversee 17 federal agencies and departments.<sup>36</sup>

Of note, Canada has successfully tried Ismael Habib, the first adult to proceed to trial on charges of attempting to leave Canada to participate in the activities of a terrorist group. He now faces a maximum 10-year sentence under the Anti-Terrorism Act.<sup>37</sup>

## **CANSOFCOM’s Role**

Given its mandate and structure, CANSOFCOM is uniquely positioned within the CAF to serve as the interface between national defence and the government’s national security apparatus, and is therefore a key contributor to the national campaign to counter transregional terrorism on a multitude of levels. In particular, CANSOFCOM delivers the following:

1. The maintenance of a very high readiness composite Special Operations Task Force (SOTF) postured to respond to and/or pre-empt domestic and global terrorist events. These SOTFs are tactically self-contained and task-tailored to operate across the spectrum of Special Operations Forces (SOF) tasks to include chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats;
2. The active maintenance of close partnerships with other Canadian national security agencies that facilitate sharing of intelligence and the coordination of activities;

3. Membership in the Global SOF network, which allows for collaboration on exercises, training and operations, as well as intelligence sharing and assisting in shaping the global security landscape;
4. Provision of SOTFs and SOF teams conducting military assistance to allies, friends and at-risk nations;
5. Participation in Coalitions to combat terrorist organizations; and
6. Provision of SOF educational and training material, as well as seminars, working groups and collaborative research. As a complement to training, exercises and operations, the educational component is seen as critical in preparing Canadian, as well as allied and friendly nations' SOF warriors with the knowledge and skill sets required to succeed in the ambiguous, complex and ever changing security environment.

## Conclusion

Transregional terrorism represents a threat to all nations. Its insidious, opaque and networked nature makes it a complex and difficult problem to solve. As has often been said, it takes a network to fight a network. As such, the international community must work together to disrupt, dismantle and destroy transregional terrorist organizations. In this difficult fight, Canada continues to show its determination and commitment to be a credible and reliable partner.

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## Chapter 9. SOF Success, Political Success and the Murky Middle: Potential Benchmarks for SOF in Countering Transregional Terrorism

*Bernd Horn*

Navy Admiral William (Bill) McRaven, a former commander of United States Special Operations Command, on retirement in 2014 declared that we are currently in the “Golden Age of SOF.”<sup>1</sup> It is hard to argue otherwise. In an era of shrinking military budgets and a reluctance to deploy military troops, Special Operations Forces (SOF) find themselves with an embarrassment of riches as their budgets and manning levels are left untouched or even increased. Their operational tempo remains high and politicians, strategic analysts, scholars and journalists speak of SOF in terms of “force of choice” and “SOF power.”<sup>2</sup> For risk averse politicians, SOF represent the “easy button” since they are rapidly deployable, work in relatively small teams, and operate in the shadows out of the media or public spotlight. They are seen as low risk both in fiscal and political terms.

Based on this narrative one could argue that SOF has been relatively successful. Its reputation, public image, often enhanced by Hollywood, literature and the media, as well as its continued favored deployment and resource

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allocations by political and military decision-makers, are arguably all indicators of its achievements. As such, it is not surprising that governments look to SOF to solve more and more of the complex problems that confront them, such as countering transregional terrorism.

However, not everyone agrees that the efforts of SOF have been unquestionably rewarding. Despite the continued global engagement and list of accomplishments of SOF, many critics question their level of success. These detractors argue that SOF at best has achieved tactical, perhaps at times operational, success. They contend that SOF largely practices “whack-a-mole” targeting and elimination of enemy leadership and combatants. These critics point out that SOF fail to achieve strategic objectives or national policy. As proof, they highlight that after more than a decade in Afghanistan and Iraq, despite the impressive kill/capture statistics, and the larger war against terrorism, that those respective countries—or the world for that matter—are no safer now than they were before the wide scale engagement of SOF.<sup>3</sup>

This quandary raises the question: how is success measured? Particularly, if SOF are responsible for countering transregional terrorism, how can we determine if SOF is having a positive effect? Whether it’s successful or not? How can one articulate what success looks like in the battle to counter transregional terrorism. After all, it is a multifaceted, complex problem that is contingent on a vast number of variables. And, the problem of how you measure success is fraught with a myriad of challenges, including the objectiveness of the assessor.

One major challenge is defining success itself. What does it actually look like? This is particularly difficult in light of the complex security operating environment that is contextual and fluid. Moreover, it is often difficult to identify the actual threat, or who exactly are the opponents? Or, their motivations, objectives, and methodologies?

As such, determining success begins with a sound understanding of the context and details of each particular threat stream. For example, who are opponents; what is driving their behaviour and decision-making (e.g. social, economic, political, ideological, religious factors); who is supporting their efforts and why? Once these dynamics are well understood it becomes easier to define what success or “victory” looks like, which in turn can drive the necessary national policy/strategy and the subsequent lines of operation. Once a strategy is undertaken, an assessment of factors can assist in providing benchmarks/pathways to measuring success in countering transregional

terrorism. However, the benchmarks themselves must constantly be weighed for utility and relevance. Throughout the process an agile and fluid approach must be taken that rapidly adapts to the ever-evolving security environment, as well as terrorist networks.

The tertiary problem is the objectiveness of the assessor. Those who see SOF as the force of choice for the contemporary operating environment will interpret the number of missions, personnel deployed, capture/kill numbers as evidence of its effectiveness. Conversely, those who are critical of SOF will see those results as meaningless tactical achievements that fail to contribute to the larger strategic goals set by political masters.

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## Defining Success

The Oxford Dictionary defines success as “the accomplishment of an aim; the attainment of wealth, fame, or position; a thing or person that turns out well.”<sup>24</sup> This definition is fairly straightforward and easily understood, but it does not necessarily capture the “intangibles.” From a military perspective, success can entail a wide range of outcomes that may not intuitively leap out as success, however, based on the circumstances and, at times an ambiguous security environment, may represent victory (of a sort). As such, the following are arguably factors that can denote success:

1. Achievement of a specific assigned mission/task;
2. Cost effectiveness (level/contribution/cost of resources versus desired/acceptable impact/outcome);
3. Minimization/avoidance of casualties;
4. Cause disruption to opponent(s);
5. Reception of favorable publicity;
6. Reception of accolades/awards;
7. Frustrate opponent intentions/freedom of maneuver/initiative;

8. Non-quantifiable—public morale, psychological dislocation of opponent, displaying support for allies and friends;
9. Contribution to the larger effort (national/international/joint/alliance/coalition);
10. Avoidance of failure;
11. Retention of favoured status e.g. force of choice; and
12. Provision of a wide range of options for political/military-decision makers/assist with achieving the national interest/objectives.

It must be realized, however, that this shopping list of factors that can signal success is often subjective. Using such a catalogue can allow interest groups/organizations to rationalize their contribution in a positive light and declare success. But, as in the current case of SOF, not everyone will necessarily accept the argument. By framing the definition of success, one can change the outcome of what has, or has not, been achieved.

## **The Difficulty in Defining Success**

A short historical analysis of examples of SOF performance in conflict provides insight into the difficulty of defining success. Some point to SOF contributions as major achievements, others deride them as misplaced resources.

For instance, WWII provides an excellent example to start. Throughout the conflict SOF arguably achieved great success. They killed and wounded, as well as tied down hundreds of thousands of enemy troops for defensive tasks; captured strategic materials such as German Wurzburg radar components, enemy codes and enigma encryption equipment; destroyed enemy material (e.g. vehicles, aircraft, ships, locomotives and railway cars) and infrastructure (e.g. factories, bridges, rail lines); shut down the German atomic weapon program; provided valuable intelligence and raised, trained, and equipped, as well as in some instances led, secret armies and resistance networks.<sup>5</sup>

These achievements did not go unrecognized in some camps. A report written by Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force staff at the end of the war noted, “SOE [Special Operations Executive] operations made a substantial contribution to the victory of the Allied Expeditionary Force.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, General Dwight D. “Ike” Eisenhower himself lauded the efforts of SOF

organizations and their resistance networks, writing in his memoir, “without their great assistance the liberation of France and the defeat of the enemy in Western Europe would have consumed a much longer time and meant greater losses to ourselves.”<sup>7</sup> Speaking only of the SOF resistance program in France, Eisenhower insisted it “shortened the war by nine months.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Lieutenant General F.A.M. Browning referring exclusively to the British Special Air Service (SAS), asserted, “It is considered that the operations you [SAS] have carried out have had more effect in hastening the disintegration of the German Seventh and Fifth Armies than any other single effort in the Army.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, another formal report assessed, “The SAS idea is as yet only in its infancy. The very fact that such operations have already paid dividends with the application of a very small allocation of troops, aircraft and naval craft should encourage us to enlarge the scope of this type of operation in the future.” It went on to add, “Our experiences in this war, prove that we shall want SAS troops from the very start of the next war.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite the achievements and testimonials, others have disputed the value of SOF in WWII. A war office study completed 10 July 1945, noted that most conventional organizations and their senior leadership disagreed with the SOF concept.<sup>11</sup> For these conventional military commanders SOF had no perceived role in the defeat of Germany or Japan. For example, Major General Julian Thompson, captured the essence of the traditional argument when he stated, “descending on the enemy, killing a few guards, blowing up the odd pillbox, and taking a handful of prisoners was not a cost-effective use of ships, craft and highly trained soldiers.”<sup>12</sup> Major General Orde Wingate agreed. He believed, “all evidence goes to show that well trained infantry units would be just as suitable as special troops.”<sup>13</sup> According to military historian Douglas Porch, “[Field Marshal Viscount William] Slim concluded that British special operations had become a cult, whose doctrinal proponents in mass persuasion evangelized their tactics as the path to strategic salvation, when in fact their modest achievements were bought at great cost to the rest of the army.”<sup>14</sup>

Significantly, a War Office study looking specifically at the Special Operations Executive (SOE) appraised, “the strategic effect of SOE operations was negligible.”<sup>15</sup> More recently, military historian Max Boot wrote that SOF had a negligible impact on the outcome of WWII.<sup>16</sup> However, the most compelling evidence of the perspective that SOF were less than successful is the fact

that almost all SOF organizations were dismantled or relegated to reserve status at the end of the war.

Importantly, WWII was a total war and the Allies achieved a clear victory in the end. As such, the SOF contribution vis-à-vis its conventional counterparts' efforts could be assessed in terms of its role in bringing the defeat of the Axis powers. Notably, depending on perspective, the contribution was seen as critical in shaping and facilitating conventional force success or as an unimportant side-show that was of negligible value. Nonetheless, for politicians it was a win and institutional infighting over who contributed what was of little interest. The only issue that mattered was the fact that the national interest/political objectives were achieved. This dichotomy of interpretations is not limited to WWII. Not all conflicts and wars, however, lend themselves to such decisive victories and clear winners and losers.

The conflict in Afghanistan is another insightful example. Arguably, SOF accomplishments were the catalyst for the current stature of SOF as the force of choice. Analysts, scholars, and politicians, including the American Secretary of Defense believed SOF, combined with technology and precision airpower, working with indigenous forces, represented a more efficient manner of making war. For instance, as part of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, it took only 49 days from the insertion of the first American special forces (SF) teams with Northern Alliance forces to the fall of Kandahar and the ouster of al-Qaeda and the Taliban.<sup>17</sup> This was achieved with U.S. SF, some operatives, and precision close air support.<sup>18</sup> The SF operators rallied and forged cohesive teams out of the unorganized anti-Taliban opposition groups and more importantly, using a small amount of sophisticated targeting equipment brought the weight of American airpower down on Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters.

Specific examples highlight why many became enamored by SOF accomplishments. Air strikes brought down by one of the first SF teams in the country, aided by a lone Air Force combat controller, are credited with killing as many as 3,500 fighters and destroying up to 450 vehicles.<sup>19</sup> Another Team, "Tiger Team 2," was attributed with 2,500 enemy killed, over 50 vehicles destroyed and over 3,500 prisoners captured, as well as the liberation of over 50 towns and cities.<sup>20</sup> At one time, a mere 10 American SF sergeants were responsible for 120 miles of battlefield.<sup>21</sup>

SOF action was also responsible for removing large numbers of leadership and gunfighters, disrupting enemy command and control, dismantling

improvised explosive device factories and networks, training and mentoring Afghan forces, conducting village security operations, and assisting other government agencies.

Once again, statistics can tell an impressive tale. In August 2011, the International Security Assistance Force Joint Command reported, “there were 675 [SOF] raids in 2009, 1,780 in 2010, and 1,879 by August 2011. In total, 49 percent of the raids captured or killed the principal target. The success rate was 45 percent in 2009/2010. In sum, 84 percent of the raids achieved some success, whether capturing or killing their target.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, in 2011 alone, Allied SOF mounted more than 1,600 missions in the first three months of the year. They captured and killed close to 3,000 insurgents. That same year coalition SOF conducted approximately 2,800 raids against insurgent targets. In 85 percent of the operations no shots were fired and civilian casualties were less than 1 percent.<sup>23</sup>

How can these results be ignored? Clearly, SOF was successful in Afghanistan. Its contribution is clearly documented by both tasks undertaken and results of its efforts. Yet, critics lament that despite assertions of success by SOF, Afghanistan, after more than sixteen years of conflict is more restive and arguably less secure and stable than it was immediately post 9/11. As of March 2017, the Taliban fully controlled 34 districts out of 400 districts in the country; contested another 167 (controlling between 40–99 percent of the territory) and had a significant presence in another 52 districts (controlling 10–97 percent of the territory). Furthermore, the Taliban controlled areas in 16 of the 34 provinces (controlling 10–97 percent of the territory).<sup>24</sup> Moreover, according to U.S. intelligence estimates, the Taliban’s strength in 2002 stood at 7,000 fighters. As of 2016, it was reassessed at 25,000.<sup>25</sup>

The questions become: despite impressive SOF statistics, how did SOF contribute to national policy? To national objectives? If SOF was so successful, why are we still at war in Afghanistan? Why have Taliban numbers and control of territory increased?

The obvious retort is that SOF can only achieve what is in its capacity and power to accomplish. Questions of governance, reconstruction, social justice, trust in host nation institutions, political leadership, are beyond the SOF purview of reach. Yet, not everyone sees it that way. Unlike WWII, there is no clear victory. Afghanistan is that ugly limited war that becomes a black hole for resources and public patience. With no clear victory, measurements

of success become muddy. How do you sell continuing efforts to an impatient and unforgiving voting public?

Moreover, as governments rely more and more on SOF to solve their complex problems, and, as SOF is given broader mandates to assist host nation countries achieve security and stability, the expectations of SOF will increase and the definitions of SOF success will expand. In essence, it is a case of perspective. As one American general observed, “the U.S. leadership is looking at SOF as a strategic solution to different policy problems.”<sup>26</sup>

A final example reinforces this issue. The war on terrorism is yet another perfect case of perspective and the difficulty with defining success. Since the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York City on 9/11, SOF has had tremendous impact disrupting and attriting terrorist leaders, organizations and networks throughout the world. Yet, individuals feel less safe now than ever before. A 2014 NBC poll revealed, “nearly half of Americans now believe their country is less safe today than before the 9/11 attacks.”<sup>27</sup> That number is almost double from a similar poll taken the previous year. Significantly, since then there have been a number of high profile terrorist attacks in Europe and North America. Predictably in the wake of this terrorist onslaught countries across the globe are increasing their security forces, infrastructures, procedures, powers for law enforcement and security agencies, as well as legislation to deal with the perceived spike in terrorism. Billions of dollars are being sunk in the fight to combat terrorism.

Yet, the fact is that terrorist incidents have actually declined. In 2014, there were 226 terrorist attacks (attempted/foiled/executed) and 774 terrorism arrests. In 2015, there were 193 and 1,077 respectively, and in 2016 the numbers dropped further to 142 and 1,002 respectively.<sup>28</sup> As one analyst noted:

In 2016, Western Europeans were 85 times more likely to die of a heat wave than from terrorism, 50 times more likely to die in a biking or water-sports accident and 39 times more likely to be killed by consuming a toxic product. They were 433 times more likely to die of suicide and 32 times more likely to die by homicide.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the statistical evidence, the actions of governments, the graphic and sensational reporting that saturates the media in the aftermath of an attack or attempted attack, has fueled the perception that terrorism is on the rise and that SOF and other law enforcement and intelligence agencies are

not successful. In fact, at a recent SOF conference a senior American commander lamented, “as impressive as the targeting process is, an incredible, agile and effective engine for dismantling and destroying terrorist organizations, how is it we can’t succeed?” The point is this, despite the accolades and the monikers of force of choice and golden age of SOF, not all are convinced of the record of SOF success. Moreover, perspectives driven by sensational media reporting support this assessment. Despite its increased budgets, global deployments and ceaseless raids, for many, the perception is that SOF has not been effective in countering transregional terrorism. If SOF are to lead and not only be successful, but be seen as being successful, what can it do to ensure its effectiveness, both in real terms and in the battle of perception?

### The Larger Problem

The pursuit of success, particularly in the nebulous concept of countering transregional terrorism, must be framed within a larger context of a political objective(s) and desired end-state(s), which then drives the creation of a strategy. A simple program of decapitation—namely removing the leadership of terrorist organizations—will never be successful. Terrorist organizations the world over have shown incredible resilience and the ability to grow both leaders and fighters at a rate equal to, or greater than, the ability to remove them from the battlespace. Furthermore, it does not address the root of what is driving their behaviour or support base.

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*A simple program of decapitation—namely removing the leadership of terrorist organizations—will never be successful.*

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As such, a political objective(s) that lays out what is the intended end-state is primordial. This can allow for the required strategy to be designed. Specifically, what resources are necessary? Despite the agility and breadth of SOF capabilities, is it realistic to expect SOF to deal with the issue on its own? If so, the political objective(s) and desired endstate(s) should coincide with the limitation of what SOF alone can achieve.

The political objective(s) and subsequent strategy must also allow for the complexity of the problem set. Defining and understanding opponents (both state and non-state, as well as homegrown lone wolves) and allies, specifically, their behavior/decision-making, objectives, agendas and interests, as

well as the threat they pose, is important. Moreover, their methodologies and alliances can evolve and change over time or as a result of circumstance/events. As a result, strategies must be equally nimble and agile to adjust and adapt to the changing threats, security environment, alliance structure, and methodologies.

As has become evident in the current security environment, globalization, a pervasive media, the cheap proliferation of technology, particularly information technology and encryption, as well the access to advanced weaponry and the impact of online recruitment and radicalization has changed the impact terrorist organizations can achieve. However, the greatest challenge still resides in the nature of transregional terrorist organizations. As journalist Rosa Brooks so eloquently observed, “When you wage war against a nameless, stateless, formless enemy—an enemy with goals as uncertain as its methods—it’s hard to see how that war can ever end.”<sup>30</sup>

## **Benchmarks to Measure Success?**

How can that war ever end? This is a very pertinent question. Particularly, since not all the opponents are similar; not all the allies have the same political objective(s) or endstates; each specific opponent/threat stream/region of interest has different cultural, geo-political, ideological context and drivers. As a result, the strategy must allow for a harmonized approach that allows for the necessary campaigns to be waged at the operational level.

However, this brings the issue back to the topic at hand. How can SOF know it is having success in achieving its assigned mission countering transregional terrorism in real terms and from the perspective of public perception? The author suggests a number of benchmarks that may assist in evaluating SOF success. Whether made public or not, these benchmarks reflect SOF success in the campaign to countering transregional terrorism:

- a. **Achieve assigned tasks (both direct and implied).** This assessment is simple enough for tactical missions such as a capture/kill mission. Either the target is achieved or not. However, it becomes more opaque when looking at the larger strategic picture. What does that actually mean? It is based on the particular region, opponent, and threat. Clear political direction is required;

- b. **Removal (kill/capture/convert) of leadership and gunfighters.** As noted earlier, this approach by itself is not necessarily successful as it does not address the resiliency of the organization or the foundational cause(s) of the organization. It does, however, weaken its leadership and the experiential base, which in turn can make the respective organization(s) less effective. In addition, promulgation of statistics can also provide confidence to domestic populations that something is being done and it may dissuade recruiting to the terrorist cause;
- c. **Dismantling networks.** This benchmark goes beyond decapitation and strikes at the root of an organizations' ability to operate and regenerate. By attacking every facet of its administrative, financial, operational and informational foundation, its ability to function effectively internally or externally (internationally) will be minimized;
- d. **Disrupt/shut down financing, planning, and communications.** Much like the previous benchmark any inroads should be assessed as a success if it slows down and limits the ability of an entity to operate or have a substantive effect;
- e. **Identifying and removing key facilitators (financiers, planners, strategists, propaganda disseminators, and recruiters).** This benchmark will have a direct effect on the ability of terrorist organizations to operate. As such, any headway made in removing these actors should be tallied as success;
- f. **Decrease in successful attacks.** Much like body counts and kill-ratios this benchmark has its limitations. For instance, what is defined as an attack? A lone extremist with a knife threatening a crowd? A vehicle attack killing x individuals? A suicide bombing/long gun attack? Regardless, it is a metric of success, although the opposite will definitely be seen as a metric of failure;
- g. **Number of thwarted attacks.** As above, although this benchmark is more substantive as it indicates an actual planned hostile intent was stopped prior to execution;
- h. **Decrease in directed, enabled, and inspired attacks.** From the domestic perspective this becomes important and is complementary

to some of the benchmarks above. In fact, many of the benchmarks are mutually supportive;

- i. **Increase in number of informants/converts.** This benchmark is self-explanatory. If the campaign is successful some followers will begin to desert what is seen as a lost cause/sinking ship;
- j. **Increased integration with Other Government Departments (OGDs).** This is an intangible. The battle to counter transregional terrorism cannot be waged by SOF alone as there are a complex array of social, political, economic, informational, etc. factors that drive the multitude of players involved. As such, if SOF can develop and maintain the close partnerships and cooperation of other OGDs to assist with the task, this is a measure of success;
- k. **Increase in coalition partners.** Same as above;
- l. **Increase in effective judiciary/professional law enforcement.** The development of an effective and credible judiciary and a professional, respected police institution in at risk countries is a definite success indicator as this is one of the fundamental drivers to setting the conditions for a stable state;
- m. **Increase in policy and more effective rule of law.** Same as above;
- n. **Increased ability to disrupt the deep/dark web.** Making strides in, and actually dismantling, the vehicle for terrorist related planning, recruiting, communicating, purchasing of illegal weapons, explosives, equipment, etc., should be a major benchmark of success;
- o. **Change in opponent methodologies.** The fact that an adversary has been forced to change their methodologies should be seen as a sign of success as well based on the fact that their existing methods have been thwarted;
- p. **Decrease ability to use criminal nexus.** Shutting down/disrupting the ability for terrorists to take advantage of criminal rat-lines, access to weapons, or other material or services will impact on terrorist effectiveness;
- q. **Decrease/elimination of foreign fighters.** Disrupting the ability of terrorist organizations to recruit, train and deploy foreign fighters is

- a major success criteria. This will impact on the number of gunfighters they have available, as well as their ability to deploy foreigners to conduct attacks in their home countries;
- r. **Disrupt the narrative.** Effectively challenging and disrupting the terrorist narratives by countering them with factual information and expert input will potentially impact recruitment and support. As such, any headway here is a win;
  - s. **Reduction of terrorist footprint on the internet/social media.** Locating, identifying, and shutting down/restricting terrorist access to these platforms is an important indicator of success as it limits the organization's ability to distribute their narrative and recruit supporters;
  - t. **Creation of a strong narrative (pervasive, relevant, consistent, and fluid).** One that provides a vehicle for individuals to understand their society and respective place within it will, as above, help deter recruitment to terrorist organizations; and
  - u. **Greater support for challenging extremists by moderates (domestically and internationally).** Mobilizing specific target groups to take a larger role in challenging narratives/creating counter-narratives, speaking out against violence, identifying radicalized or extremist individuals to authorities is an effective manner to counter terrorist organizations. Any ability to gain greater support should be seen as a win.

Importantly, as is evident from the benchmarks, they may not be indicative of a victory declaring moment. However, as Rosa Brooks expounded, based on the “formless enemy—an enemy with goals as uncertain as its methods,” there may never be a formal “victory.” It may be the “endless war.”<sup>31</sup> As such, it is important to be able to track accomplishments in order to determine whether the campaign to counter transregional terrorism is meeting with success.

## Conclusion

There will always be conflicting views on success. This reality is a function of perspective, bias and specific agendas. Nonetheless, it is critically important to ensure that conditions of success are defined up front. However, this

assessment cannot be accomplished until there are clear political objectives articulated, a strategy developed and lines of operations with endstates defined. Once this groundwork is laid, only then can criteria for success be developed. Benchmarks, as outlined above, can assist with laying out and measuring success criteria. However, importantly, much of the battle of defining success is perception based. As such, a conscious effort must be made to ensure that strategic messaging is done to share the narrative of success with others. Without a counter to that next sensational, violent, terrorist attack, the perception of failure will always be pervasive. ↑

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## Acronym List

<b>AAR</b>	after action report
<b>AQ</b>	al-Qaeda
<b>AQI</b>	al-Qaeda in Iraq
<b>AQAP</b>	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
<b>CAF</b>	Canadian Armed Forces
<b>CANSOFCOM</b>	Canadian Special Operations Forces Command
<b>CATSA</b>	Canadian Air Transport Security Authority
<b>CBSA</b>	Canadian Border Services
<b>CDS</b>	Chief of Defence Staff
<b>COIN</b>	counterinsurgency
<b>CSE</b>	Communications Security Establishment
<b>CSIS</b>	Canadian Security and Intelligence Service
<b>CT</b>	counterterrorism
<b>CVE</b>	countering violent extremism
<b>FATF</b>	Financial Action Task Force
<b>FBI</b>	Federal Bureau of Investigation
<b>FINTRAC</b>	Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada
<b>GSG9</b>	Grenzschutzgruppe 9 (Border Guard Group 9)
<b>GoC</b>	government of Canada
<b>IED</b>	improvised explosive devices
<b>IRCC</b>	Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

<b>ISR</b>	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
<b>JSOU</b>	Joint Special Operations University
<b>NGO</b>	nongovernmental organization
<b>NORAD</b>	North American Aerospace Defense Command
<b>NSJOC</b>	National Security Joint Operations Centre
<b>NSS</b>	National Security Strategy
<b>OGD</b>	Other Government Department
<b>RAF</b>	Red Army Faction
<b>RCMP</b>	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
<b>SAS</b>	Special Air Service
<b>SF</b>	special forces
<b>SOCNORTH</b>	Special Operations Command North
<b>SOF</b>	Special Operations Forces
<b>SOP</b>	standard operating procedure
<b>SOTF</b>	Special Operations Task Force
<b>TCO</b>	transnational criminal organization
<b>TSOC</b>	Theater Special Operations Command
<b>TTP</b>	tactics, techniques, and procedures
<b>USSOCOM</b>	U.S. Special Operations Command
<b>VEO</b>	violent extremist organization
<b>WMD</b>	weapons of mass destruction