# Journal of Terrorism Research

# Contents

## Articles

# Parochial Altruists or Ideologues? An Agent Based Model of Commitment to Self Sacrifice

## by Giti Zahedzadeh

*Abstract*

*What motivates suicide attackers remains an open question. Commitment to suicide missions is puzzling since such behavior is fitness reducing. We model suicide terrorism by drawing on two fundamental human motivations: altruism and selfishness. Martyrdom can be viewed as altruistic- benefiting group members at a cost to oneself, as well as selfish- ideological belief in a profitable afterlife. Our simulations identify that some degree of both behaviors are essential in order to facilitate a commitment to sacrifice. Thus, manipulations of ideology and altruism can tip the threshold and set the agents on the path of martyrdom.*

Key words: Terrorism; Altruism; Ideology; Agent-based Modeling; Parochialism; Martyrdom.

## *Introduction*

Suicide terrorism is a violent, politically motivated attack, which is carried out in a deliberate state of awareness (Bloom, 2006: 25). The "strategic logic" of the organizers of suicide missions can be explained in rationalist terms (Pape, 2003; Benmelech & Berrebi, 2007; Fierke, 2009), however, the choice of suicide volunteers remains problematic since there is a high premium tag on survival (Fierke, 2009). If the projected survival of an act is zero, the expected participation in such an act should also be zero (Ferrero, 2006). Yet throughout history several men and women have made a deliberate choice to end their lives to achieve a perceived public good. What motivates individuals to commit to suicide missions? Martyrdom volunteers exhibit no social dysfunction and do not appear to be discernable from non-martyrs (Margalit, 2003), nor do they express a sense of nothing to lose for lack of life alternatives (Atran, 2003; Horgan, 2005; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2007). Why individuals sacrifice themselves remains poorly understood, and while there exists a multitude of theories (Interdisciplines 2006), there is no consensus around them (Qirko, 2009).

Major analyses of suicide terrorism have devoted considerable effort to motivations (Bloom, 2005; Pedahzur, 2004; Sageman, 2004; Stern, 2003; Kruglanski et al., 2009). However, they have differed in the motives identified as relevant and proposed a broad heterogeneity (for a concise review see Kruglanski et al., 2009). For instance, some authors have highlighted the importance of singular motives (Sageman 2004, Pape 2005), while others have listed a multitude of motivating factors (Stern 2003; Bloom 2005). One method in dealing with such heterogeneity is to partition the flood of motivations into fewer categories (Kruglanski et al., 2009). Indeed, the motives for suicide terrorism can be anchored on the two faces of human social behavior- *selfishness and altruism* (Wilson et al., 2009). Both motivations concern evolutionary origins, social relations, and the organization of societies (Fehr and Fischbacher, 2003). Altruism, aims to increase another's welfare,

and is juxtaposed to selfishness, where the ultimate aim is to maximize one's own (Batson, 2010). Selfishness and altruism are both motivational states, and each is concerned with an ultimate goal- to increase someone's welfare (Batson, 2010). The question remains as whose welfare is to be maximized.

In this study we anchor suicide terrorism motivations' on selfish and altruistic drives. The organization of this paper is as follows. We first introduce the concepts of altruism and selfishness as the two overarching motives propelling suicide terrorism. We then propose a generalized model of suicide terrorism and run the simulations of our propositions. Finally, we explore the implications of our analysis.

*The Selfish Martyr*

Ideology is a belief system centered upon some collective ideal and its power resides in its identifying a discrepancy from an ideal state with the aim of removing the discrepancy (Kruglanski et al., 2009) or at the least narrowing the gap. Terrorist recruitment may be more "ideologically driven than grievance-driven" (Atran, 2004). The significance of ideological motivations is highlighted in Kruglanski et al. (2009) analysis of seven farewell videos of suicide terrorists from MEMRI (Middle East Media Research Institute), which found that 5/6 of the terrorists mention religion, 4/6 reaching paradise, and only 2/6 name nationalism (liberation) as their main motivation.

It has been widely speculated that devotion to certain religious beliefs may facilitate support for suicide attacks (Harris, 2005), provide martyrs the reward of an afterlife (Hoffman, 1998), an eternal place in heaven (Rubin, 2002) or contain narratives that glorify acts of combative martyrdom (Rapoport, 1990; Gambetta, 2005). Iannaccone (2003) notes that when a terrorist group locates itself within a sectarian group, it gains access to its social network where members are immersed in a shared set of supernatural beliefs. The religious foundation of martyrdom is the covenant of allegiance that the martyr contracts with God to pave his way toward paradise (Maarouf, 2013). While religion is not the cause of all conflicts involving suicide terrorism, religion is the means by which terrorists may translate a local political struggle into a cosmic war (Juergensmeyer, 2003) and is capable of offering benefits in the afterlife that can hardly be matched in this world (Sosis & Alcorta, 2008). Suicide terrorism can be motivated by selfish ideology, with religious after-life at its core, and once violence becomes the chosen path, religious radicals can prove to be extremely effective (Berman & Laitin, 2006).

When suicidal acts stem from strong religious convictions in a glorious destiny from martyrdom and vast rewards in the afterlife, we assume that the perpetrator is motivated by individual benefits. In other words, the advantages of martyrdom, which will be conferred to those who sacrifice themselves, are perceived to be large enough to outweigh the loss of life. In fact, ideology itself removes the cost of martyrdom by providing eternal life. As Kruglanski et al. (2009) note whether "reflecting symbolic immortality and a place in the group's collective memory or concrete immortality as denizens of paradise, paradoxically, the willingness to die in an act of suicidal terrorism may be motivated by the desire to live forever." In a sense then, if a person is truly ideologically engrained, then there is no expectation of death from martyrdom- but a firm belief in future rewards. We call this general class of explanation, *selfish ideology*.

While these beliefs may seem improbable and dogmatic (Wiktorowicz, 2004), they suggest that individuals have a logical argument in their decision-making portfolio: loyalty to cherished beliefs (Caplan, 2000, 2001). This is while, within a religious-ideological context, emotions can be further manipulated in order to solidify commitment promising future heavenly rewards (Atran, 2003), getting close to God and the desire to enter paradise (Hassan, 2001; Stern, 2003: 125), achieving honor (Bloom, 2005: 87, 145), social status (Stern, 2003:

51, 22, 54, 282; Bloom, 2005: 65), personal significance (Bloom, 2005: 88), attaining respect (Crenshaw, 2007), glamour (Stern, 2003: 51) or becoming "special" such as the case of Black Tamil Tigers who treat martyrs as elite immortals (Kruglanski et al., 2009). Nevertheless, adherence to specific religious ideologies will not explain all human bombing and as Argo (2006) notes, "half of the suicide missions in the three decades before 2003 were carried out by secular rather than religious organizations".

*The Altruistic Martyr*

Suicide terrorism may be empowered by evolutionary forces (Abed, 1997; Trivers, 1985) where sacrifice may serve the individual' s gene pool and/or value system shared by kin (Krugalski et al., 2009). According to Durkheim ([1897] 1951), altruistic suicide may occur when a person becomes deeply integrated into a social group and suicide becomes a duty for the members with the aim of satisfying group objectives. Altruistic dispositions can evolve if the costs they generate provide benefits to an altruist's genetic relatives, as explained by inclusive fitness (Grafen, 2009; Hamilton, 1964). Johnson (1979) argues that people who commit altruistic suicide perceive their own lives as secondary to the interest of the collective. Suicide bombing can be viewed as a strategy to increase inclusive fitness (Rushton, 2005).

Altruistic motives, either alone or in conjunction with others can play an important role in constructing motivations (Pape 2005: 184). However, a particular form of altruism is at work here, which emerges in the context of inter-group conflicts (Bornstein, 2003) and is shaped by parochialism (Choi & Bowles, 2007). Parochialism refers to a preference for favoring the members of one' s ethnic and/or racial group (Bernhard et al., 2006). Parochial altruism is based on the idea that human altruism evolves through the selective (cultural or biological) extinction of groups in inter-group conflicts (Gintis 2000; Henrich & Boyd 2001; Bowles et al., 2003). Choi and Bowles (2007) suggest that parochial altruism could have emerged and proliferated among early humans because competition for resources favored groups with substantial numbers of parochial altruists willing to engage in hostile conflicts with outsiders on behalf of their group. Further, as Bloom (2006: 28) notes, suicide terrorism plays a greater role in ethnic conflicts when the perpetuators and victims belong to different groups.

Human awareness of mortality can lead to martyrdom when there is a severe threat to group survival (Kruglanski et al., 2009). As one's personal identity is meshed with that of the group (Post et al., 2003), collective survival becomes inseparable from one's own (Kruglanski et al., 2009). Wintrobe (2006) suggests that merging self with the group (leader), referred to as solidarity, can bypass extreme negative costs to the self. In a sense then, the need for emotional and social support when experiencing alienation (Sageman, 2004), group pressure (Bloom, 2005: 85), honor (Bloom, 2005: 87, 145), dedication to the leader (Bloom 2005: 64), pain and personal loss (Bloom, 2005: 35, 86-87, 145), moral obligation, need to belong, financial support for family, friendship (Stern, 2003: 47), occupation (Stern, 2003: 57, 59, 136), and furthering the interests of the group (Gambetta, 2005) can serve parochial altruists where disputes serve as motivators for aggressive traits.

*Can dissatisfaction motivate commitment to suicide missions?* Dissatisfaction with the status quo such as resistance to foreign occupation (Pape, 2005), personal loss or trauma (Spekhard & Akhmedova, 2005), vengeance and humiliation from suffering injustice (Bloom, 2005; Ricolfi, 2005; Stern, 2003), and significance loss (relative deprivation) (Kruglanski et al., 2009) can serve as precursors for suicide terrorism. In a sense, if an individual is satisfied with the status quo there should be no reason to volunteer for suicide missions in

order to change the status quo. By the same token, dissatisfaction without the necessary ingredients- selfish ideology or parochial altruism- cannot compel commitment to suicide missions.

We model suicide terrorism by drawing on parochial altruism and selfish ideology. Our aim is to simulate a ruled-based computational model of commitment to suicide missions. Agent based models (ABM) simulate real-world systems with a group of interacting agents modeled as computer programs to study the interactions of the agents and/or emerging behaviors (Chan, 2008). We will consider agents' level of dissatisfaction with the status quo and discuss preliminary findings, as well as implications for future research. Details of the model are provided in the next section.

### Generalized model

ABM represents a novel approach to investigate emerging behaviors under certain parameters. ABM is a natural method for describing and simulating a system composed of real-world entities (Gilbert & Terna, 2000) and is more akin to reality than other modeling approaches (Crooks & Heppenstall, 2010). Thus, our simulations will provide an opportunity to represent and test propositions, which cannot easily be described using mathematical formulae (Axelrod, 1997) nor tested in non-simulated life.

Implemented in Netlogo (5.0.5), our model[1] involves one category of agents ($A$) who are members of the general population. We consider a population in which agents live, gain their energy from available natural resources (grass represented by green patches) and reproduce (see supplemental material). Agents are heterogeneous in one respect- their level of dissatisfaction with the status quo ($D_{SQ}$). The attributes and behavioral rules of the agents are as follows.

### Agent specifications

The model includes a representation of each agent's possible motivations (*parochial altruism, selfish ideology*) and $D_{SQ}$. Group motivation ($M_{Group}$) is partitioned into two components: $D_{SQ}$ and parochial altruism ($I_a$). Their definitions are as follows: $D_{SQ}$ is the agents' perceived dissatisfaction with the status quo and is assumed to be heterogeneous across agents. Each individual value is drawn from U (0,1), the uniform distribution on the interval (0,1). $I_a$ is parochial altruism. $I_a$ is exogenous and equal across agents, and in the runs discussed below, will be varied over arbitrarily defined range of 0 to 1. Thus, $M_{Group}$ is the product of $D_{SQ}$ and $I_a$. The intuition behind this formulation is the following: $D_{SQ}$ and $I_a$ are expected to produce the motivation to mobilize agents to serve the group. We assume:

$$D_{SQ} * I_a$$

Ideology generally means a belief system centered upon some social or collective ideal (Kruglanski et al., 2009), and may be explained in terms of the emotional motivations of its adherents. Motivation and ideology are separate concepts, however as they play out in the model they are intertwined. This is because without ideology there can be no motivation from that ideology. It is possible that people vary in their belief in "benefits" of martyrdom but for this model we will keep it constant, assuming that low motivation is reflecting low belief. Thus, we incorporate $I_s$ in the model, representing selfish ideology. $I_s$ is exogenous and equal across agents, and will be varied over its arbitrarily defined range of 0 to 1. We have now captured the motivation to commit to missions ($M_{Mission}$). We assume:

$$(D_{SQ} * I_a) + I_s$$

The model will not be complete without some representation of cost ($C$). Since we are modeling an extreme behavior where the probability of survival is near zero. $C$ is the agent's perceived cost of committing to a suicide missions. $C$ is exogenous and equal across agents, and will be varied over an arbitrarily defined range of 0 to 1. Thus, we assume:

$$[(D_{SQ}*I_a)+I_s]-C$$

If for the agents, the difference $[(D_{SQ}*I_a)+I_s]-C$ reaches the threshold ($T$), then the quiescent ($Q$) agents will commit to the path of martyrdom and become active ($A_{Active}$). Otherwise, they stay quiescent. The threshold is usually set at some small (0.1) positive value (e.g. see pstein (2002) for threshold setting). Hence, the agents' simple rule-based model is the following Rule $M_{Rule}$:

$$[(D_{SQ}*I_a)+ I_s]-C \geq T$$

Agent $i$ evaluates her level of dissatisfaction and then calculates her level of commitment to the mission. We intentionally constrain the values for $C$, $I_a$ and $I_s$, since we are interested in capturing the behavioral outcomes under controlled conditions.

Although our model is preliminary, it does produce interesting phenomena and therefore, can be used to explore sacrificial behavior. Since the run-time visualization of model output is useful, our graphic strategy is as follows.

*Graphics*

Events transpire on a lattice. Agents move around this space. Values for $C$, $I_a$ and $I_s$ are set by the user and drawn from $U$ (0,1). Initially, all agents appear on the lattice as red circles ($A_S$). After the initial tick, agents, whose $D_{SQ}$ reaches a 0.5 cutoff point will turn blue otherwise they remain red circles. Even though blue circles are dissatisfied ($A_D$), their calculation does not reach the threshold and fails to set them on the path of martyrdom. Instead, these are the type of people that may provide other support for terrorist organizations (e.g. financial support, message propagation). However, those who commit to martyrdom missions transform to triangles and turn black ($A_{Active}$ or active cells). The agents also build links with those in their proximity (same patch) only if their level of dissatisfaction is shared with nearby others. The model simply iterates this procedure until the user quits. The aim of addressing these spheres is to permit illustration of core areas in suicide terrorism research with regard to motivations. Thus, our simulations explore the properties of our model under a range of propositions.

*Runs*

To begin each run of the model, the user sets $C$, $I_a$, $I_s$ and the initial agent density. To ensure replicability of the results, input assumptions for all runs are provided in Table 1. All runs have the following configurations: lattice dimensions (16_16); initial population (25), and patch-size (9.24). R is random. Initial agents choose their values for $D_{SQ}$, and are situated randomly on the lattice. The model then simply spins forward and agents move to random sites, where they act in accordance with $M_{Rule}$. The model simply iterates this procedure until the user quits. To explore how the dynamic relationship affects the evolution of commitment to missions, 10,000 simulation runs—each initialized using the same set of standard variable values were executed for each combination of the experimental variables.

| Variable | Run 1 | Run 2 | Run 3 | Run 4 | Run 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $D$ | R | R | R | R | R |
| $I_a$ | 0.20 | 0.90 | 0.56 | 0.80 | 0.10 |
| $C$ | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| $I_s$ | 0.90 | 0.20 | 0.56 | 0.80 | 0.10 |

*Table 1. Input assumptions for runs*

*Propositions*

We state several propositions and then run the computational model to explore the emerging behavior of the agents. The parameters of each proposition are detailed below to ensure replicability. Since successful martyrdom missions end with the death of the bomber, we assess the model at Cost$_{max.}$ First, we study highly ideological agents and set parochial altruism at some low value. This is idealized, however, it allows an investigation of the strength of $I_s$.

*Proposition 1: If $I_a = 0.20$, $C = 1.0$, $I_s = 0.90 \geq T$*

*Run 1-* We run the model and find that under these conditions agents do not commit to missions (Figure 1). We increase $I_a$ slightly (by 0.01), and rerun the model. This time we observe that a few agents commit (Figure 2). While, ideology is a strong facilitator of commitment, from an agent's point of view, some parochial altruism is necessary to reach the threshold. Under these conditions, parochial altruism must be higher than 20% in order to push a few to commit. Since the number of $A_{Active}$ is low at the initial tick (n = 2; and the number may vary at each initialization), the probability of survival of like-minded agents decreases as time advances.
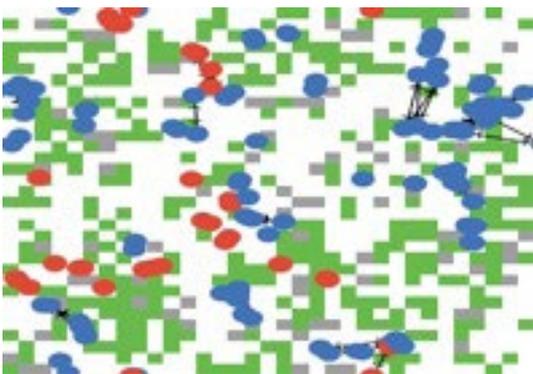


*Figure 1. (a) None of the agents commit.*
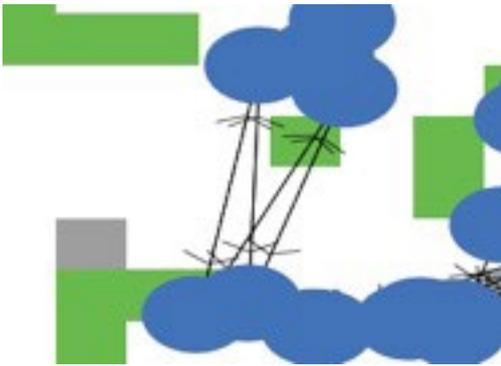
*Figure 1. (b) Enlarged section shows agents who have built ties.*
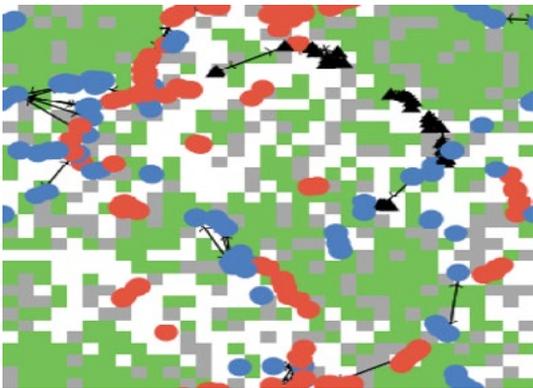


*Figure 2. Some agents commit ($A_{Active}$ = 39). The model is paused at 18 ticks.*

We are now interested to know whether parochial altruism can produce similar results. We assume agents are high parochial altruists.

*Proposition 2: If $I_a$ = 0.90, $C$ = 1.0, $I_s$ = 0.20 ≥ T*

*Run 2-* After the initial tick, the model produces no martyrs. As in the previous proposition, we increase ideology by 0.01 and then observe that some agents commit to missions (Figure 3). The simulation show that neither $I_s$ and $I_a$ in isolation can produce commitment to a mission when success is fitness reducing. Thus, in order to recruit successfully both elements need to be entertained.
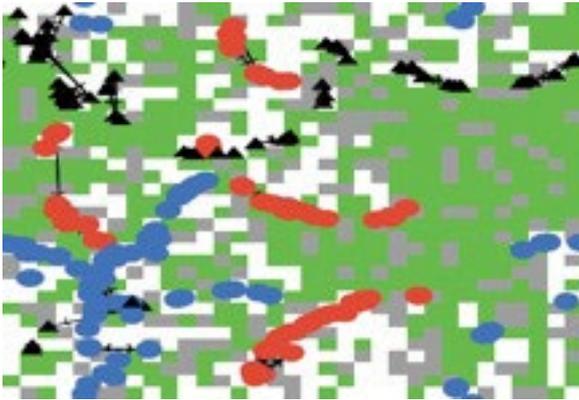
*Figure 3. Some agents commit ($A_{Active}$ = 96). The model is stopped at 16 ticks.*

Next, we are interested to know the minimum $I_s$ and $I_a$ values necessary to compel agents' commitment. We set both $I_a$ and $I_s$ at 0.5 while keeping *C at its max*. We find that none of the agents commit. Thus, we propose the following proposition:

*Proposition 3: If $I_a$ = 0.56, C = 1.0, $I_s$ = 0.56 ≥ T*

*Run 3-* While the model does not always produce agents who commit, it does so at random intervals (Figure 4). Agents cluster with those who share their level of dissatisfaction and ties are directed towards those who share agent's evaluation of the status quo. While agents build ties with those who share their $D_{SQ}$, the ties do not constrain movement. The ties break once an agent dies.
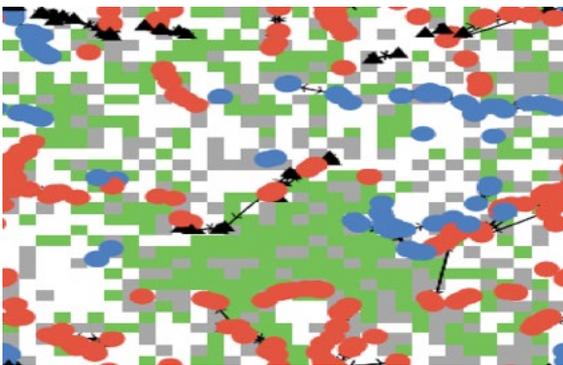


*Figure 4. The model is paused at tick 15. $A_M$ = 46.*

In all the propositions so far we have observed groups of dissatisfied agents who have remained quiescent. By setting both $I_a$ and $I_s$ at 80 %, we expect to see a decline in the number of dissatisfied agents. Thus, we introduce our final proposition.

*Proposition 4: If $I_a$ = 0.80, C = 1.0, $I_s$ = 0.80 ≥ T*

*Run 4.* We pause the simulation at tick 300 ($A_S$ = 102, $A_M$ = 80, $A_D$ = 0). As expected, we observe that only two categories of agents emerge: $A_{Active}$ and $A_S$. Regardless of their initial level of satisfaction, high values of $I_a$ and $I_s$ can instigate more committed agents. Thus, high manipulations of selfish ideology and parochial altruism

can induce agents who otherwise would not have committed to sacrificial missions. Agents are either satisfied or committed to self-sacrifice. We derive two conclusions: First, this sheds light on the phenomenon of lone wolf terrorists or those who self select to join terrorist networks while committing to distant causes. While lone wolves may not directly be impacted by distant causes, manipulations of ideology and altruism can transform otherwise quiescent individuals. Second, the model explains the existence of a collective action problem and free riding. At low values of $I_a$ and $I_s$, agents remain satisfied/dissatisfied but quiescent. They may agree with the few active agents but do not self-sacrifice (free riding). Thus, manipulations of $I_a$ and $I_s$ pushes the limits of tolerance where self-sacrifice becomes the preferred option resolving the collective action problem.
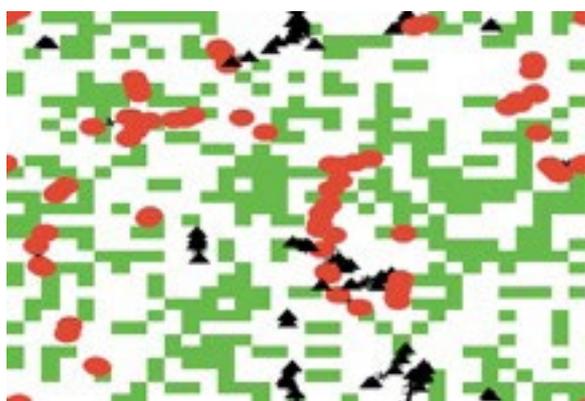


*Figure 5. There are no dissatisfied agents.*

*Proposition 5: If $I_a$ = 0.10, C = 1.0, $I_s$ = 0.10 ≥ T*

*Run 5.* Finally we run the model at low values of $I_a$ and $I_s$. As expected only satisfied and dissatisfied agents are observed on the lattice. $I_a$ and $I_s$ can not overcome the high cost of self sacrifice, and thus, agents calculation do not reach the threshold.

## Conclusion

Although our model is exploratory and preliminary, it does produce interesting phenomena. First, we find both selfish ideology and parochial altruism to be strong facilitators of commitment to martyrdom missions. However, they do not force engagement in complete isolation of one another and some degree of ideology and altruism is necessary to motivate commitment. Thus, the model shows that extreme sacrificial behavior can be elicited under an ideological veil (e.g. Atran, 2003) and/or altruistic motives (Pedahzur & Perliger, 2003). It explains why terror organizations need to frame martyrdom as beneficial to the group (community) in order to override the cost burden introduced to the volunteer's decision-making calculations. Indoctrination and manipulation of beliefs by the recruiters serve this goal and prepare the next generation of suicide terrorists. Second, in the first three propositions, we observed dissatisfied agents who nevertheless remained quiescent. However, at high values of selfish ideology and parochial altruism, we observed a dramatic decline in the number of dissatisfied agents. Thus, manipulations of ideology and altruism introduced in individuals' calculations can tip the threshold and set the agents on the path of martyrdom. People that may have otherwise provided other support for terrorist organizations (financial, message

propagation) would now commit. Third, as the number of agents at each level of satisfaction increases (overtaking other groups in terms of number), so does that group's chance of survival. Halverston et al. (2013: 313) explain this in terms of a *master narrative* where contemporary events are understood through a pre-existing framework, and the individual's personal narrative is woven throughout. Hence, suicide terrorism may be viewed as an inter-generational investment (Azam, 2003). Finally, the model shows clustering of similar agents as like-minded others stay close together and build networks with those who share their evaluation of the status quo.

The model introduced here aims to address a principal question, which serves as the focus of this paper. Given certain assumptions, does parochial altruism or selfish ideology facilitate commitment to suicide missions? This is an important question since recruiters and trainers can manipulate emotionally driven commitments to inspire action in otherwise paralyzing conditions (Atran, 2003). The model simulates this phenomenon where increasing the values of ideology and altruism can transform- dissatisfied but quiescent agents- into committed cells. Terror organizations can perpetuate altruistic behavior through manipulation of kinship-recognition cues intended to maintain and reinforce commitment (e.g. see Quirko, 2009). On the other hand, ideology is a powerful facilitator where promises of afterlife rewards are perceived as large enough to outweigh personal disadvantages accrued- providing a selfish reason to pursue a sacrificial venture at a cost. We agree with Atran (2003) that in order to fight terrorism effectively, we need to investigate which configurations of psychological, religious, and cultural relationships lure individuals into martyrdom-making networks. Thus, in future studies we aim to address how these pathways can be manipulated in order to reconfigure recruitment strategies to advantage counterterrorism policies.

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### Notes

[1] For an introduction to agent-based modeling, see Epstein and Axtell (1996; also see Epstein's *Computational Model of Civil Violence*, 2002).

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# Authority and Hierarchy within Anonymous Internet Relay Chat Networks

**by Stewart K. Bertram**

*Abstract*

*The protest group Anonymous has emerged as one of the most significant social movements of recent years, announcing their arrival as a globally recognized brand with regular disruptive cyber attacks and the leak of large volumes of sensitive data. Despite the obvious significance of Anonymous, to date, little academic research has been focused on what role hierarchy and internal authority play (if any) within the group. Bespoke software was used to structure over 5000 examples of IRC log files, so that a base line descriptive statistical picture could be drawn, as well as a more granular enumeration of the privileges associated with individual users.*

**Keywords:** Anonymous, Social Media Monitoring, Internet Relay Chat, Online Community, Leaderless resistance movement, Online protest group

*Introduction*

The close of 2012 saw Anonymous named by Time magazine as one of the top 100 most influential people active within the world today (Time, 2012). The Time magazine article is the culmination of the events of the past three years that has seen a string of high profile hacking exploits by the Anonymous Collective. Incidents such as the mass Distributed Denial of Service (DDOS) attack on PayPal in response to the suspension of financial services to Wikileaks in 2010 and the numerous incidents of the unauthorized release of gigabytes of sensitive data, has changed the perception of Anonymous, from puerile pranksters to serious political actors (Chomsky interviewed by McGrain circa 2012)

As the Anonymous Collective have developed from a minor special interest group into a global protest group so their use of technology has kept pace with their social evolution. From localised pockets of Anonymous members, confined to obscure Internet bulletin boards like 4 Chan, evidence of Anonymous activity is now obvious on more mainstream sources of social media like Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. Conjoined within this increasing record of Anonymous activity is the assertion that Anonymous is leaving behind its minority routes and fast becoming a fully-fledged social movement (Halupka, 2011).

Despite the fact that Anonymous has always disavowed the existence of any kind of leadership structure within the Collective, there has often been an innate assumption within those examining the group that both explicit, and more suitable forms of hierarchy exist within Anonymous. Certainly, studies such as Olsons *We Are Anonymous (*2012) showed a body of evidence that Anonymous has a strong (if unconventional) hierarchy active within it.

The primary focus of Olsons work was the Internet Relay Chat(IRC) *[This and other common terms used within hacking circles are defined in Annex B]* servers that provide a peer-to-peer, instant messaging service that acts as a hub for many Anonymous members to socialize and coordinate their actions. The Anonymous IRC has been used on numerous occasions to launch and coordinate DDOS attacks on multiple targets

and investigation by law enforcement agencies within the IRC and has led to a number of convictions of Anonymous members (Leyden, 2012). With the use of emotive language such as *"ring leaders"* (Parish, 2011) and *"driving force"* (Cockerton, 2011) being used by the Western legal system to describe convicted Anonymous members apprehended for their actions on IRC, the IRC is an obvious place to look for the possible existence of a hierarchy within Anonymous.

The main object of study of this paper is the Anonymous IRC, with the objective of gaining an insight into if there is a hierarchy active within Anonymous, and if there is how users exercise power over other users and if the majority of IRC users observes hierarchy.

### *Literature*

This is not the first work to focus on either the social networks of computer hackers (Holt, *et al,* 2012) or Anonymous IRC as the main article of study. Olson (2012) examined in great detail the history, social dynamics and the wider lives of the actors involved in the IRC subculture of Anonymous. Olson's work although complete, is exclusively qualitative in nature, and although there are examples of quantitative studies being applied to socially deviant groups use of social media (Décary-Hétu *et al*, 2011), there is a well-defined gap within the literature for a study that examines Anonymous IRC in a quantitative way. Gabriel Colman's work into hacker communities, also stands as a notable corner stone for this project, however, much like Olson's work, Colman's work is exclusively qualitative in nature and does not explicitly examine the presence of authority within Anonymous IRC.

Debate is fast developing surrounding the presence of hierarchy within Anonymous. Early and with hindsight, flawed analysis by some cyber analysts (Barr referenced in Olson, 2012 page 4) concluded that Anonymous was a classic hierarchy, within which a small group of leaders leveraged the power of a much larger group of supports. The assumptions made concerning Anonymous's organisational form and the presence of a tangible leadership element with the group has most sharply manifested itself in the direction US and UK law enforcement has taken in prosecuting Anonymous members.

Despite the actions of the policing practitioner base, consensus opinion on the existence of hierarchy within Anonymous has by no means reached consensus, with events such as the Arab Spring (Ghonim, 2013) and the Occupy Movement (Chomsky, 2012) challenging the assumption that mass cyber protest movements necessitate overt hierarchical leadership. As Rid observes

> *"…the more a subversive movement relies on technologies and networked communication, the more difficult it will be to establish an internal coercive order." adding that "it is this internal order that differentiates a movement from a group."* (Rid, 2013 page 131)

What distinguishes Anonymous from other protest groups is its almost zealous rejection of authority. Shown below is a typical statement common to many pieces of propaganda associated with Anonymous

> *"You cannot join Anonymous. Nobody can join Anonymous. Anonymous is not an organization. It is not a club, a party or even a movement. There is no charter, no manifest, no membership fees. Anonymous has no leaders, no gurus, no ideologists. In fact, it does not even have a fixed ideology (sic)."* (Harriswow, 2012)

Anonymous is certainly not alone within the list of social movements who state a rejection for the need of hierarchy (Pearce 1980, Brown 1989, Lichterman 1995: 196). However, studies into social movements

have long identified the need for some kind of internal organization to maintain cohesive collective action (Melucci, 1996: 344–7).

Possibly a better model for interpreting the social structure of Anonymous than the conventional concepts of social organization is to look at the commitment of Anonymous members to the activities of the Collective (commitment in this case being defined as the time invested in group activity). Broadly speaking the most prominent Anonymous members are the most committed members, spending hours of time in IRC chat rooms and generally getting deeply involved in the culture of Anonymous (Stryker, 2011 page 60).

## Method

Technology is the lifeblood of computer hackers, as Castelles comments

> "…*serious hackers, primarily exists as hackers on-line*" (Castelles, 2001).

As such the primary focus of the research revolved around adding structure to 5355 IRC logs collected from the Anonymous IRC server within the data range of January to October 2012. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the data. Quantitative methods provided the base descriptive statistics that allowed a comprehensive visualization of the IRC landscape. Two sets of data were analyzed during the quantitative phase of research to derive statistical measures. Set One comprised the 5355 logs of the IRC, from which baseline descriptive statistics were drawn, while a smaller subset of 1104 logs (three consecutive months worth of data) were used to derive statistics on hierarchy. The subset of 1104 logs was used due to the greater volume of individual measures that the software produced when examining hierarchy, with the rational that a smaller set of variables would allow dependencies and relationships between variables to be seen more clearly. Qualitative methods were used to add analytical depth to the statistics.

The justification for confining the scope of the study to the Anonymous IRC, was that taken collectively, the Anonymous social media landscape sprawls to the extent that gathering each of the possible sources together, in a representative way, is beyond the capabilities of all but the most resourced research projects. Instead this study focuses on Anonymous IRC as it acts as a bounded medium, which is anecdotally credited with being the centralised command and control loci for the Anonymous Collective (Khumar, 2012). As such the assumption of the research is that by focusing on the IRC as one key aspect of Anonymous, a meaningful analytical result regarding the groups social dynamics could be derived.

A cursory examination of the IRC shows evidence of the possible presence of hierarchy in the form of *privileges,* which are assigned by channel administrators to channels users. A privilege manifests itself in a graphical form with a symbol displayed in front of the nick (shown below)
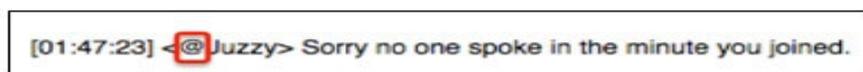


Figure 1: Example of privilege in IRC chat (the highlighted @)

Initial test analysis of the data showed that there were six levels of privilege observable within the IRC (including non privilege), they are shown below

| Privilege | Example | Associated Graphic |
|---|---|---|
| ~ | <~U> |  |
| & | <&plumber3> |  |
| @ | <@Fish_man> |  |
| % | <%nix> |  |
| + | <+Egg> |  |
| No Privilege | <BurnedFlag> | NA |

*Figure 2: Privileges within the IRC forums*

Additionally it was obvious that not all privileges are equal and an automatic hierarchy is hard coded into the technological architecture of IRC. Shown in Figure 3 is an example of privilege ordering within IRC.
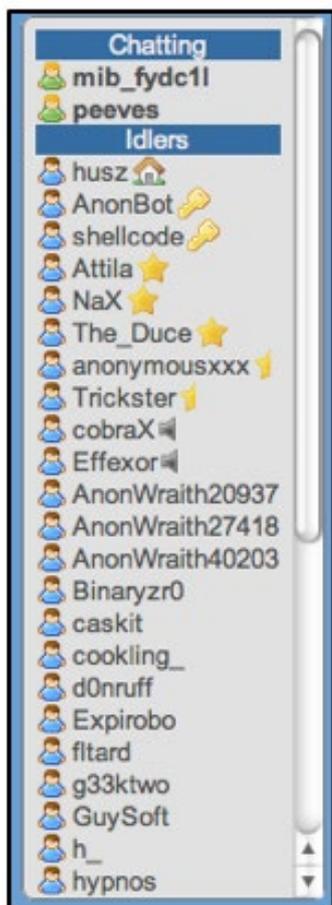
*Figure 3: List of users active within an IRC channel and ordered according to privilege (represented by icons next to name). Most senior at the top, user with no privileges listed below*

The image shown in Figure 3 is the display that a user sees when accessing the IRC and is a fixed feature of the technology.

Based upon examples such as the one shown in Figure 3, a working theory was developed that the privilege system was a substitute for authority within the IRC and it was this privilege structure that formed a hierarchy within the IRC. Based upon this assumption, software was developed that would structure the IRC logs so that key aspects of the data set could be enumerated, such as the number of privileges active within certain channels.

### Results

Aside from the statistics concerning privilege some base line statistics concerning the data set are shown below (all statistical measures based on the larger set of 5355 logs)

- The mean average number of nicks per IRC log was 242

- The mean average number of posts per IRC log was 1592

- The greatest number of nicks recorded in one channel, in one 24hr period was 6043 - *megaupload. Anops.20120119* (All dates YYYY/MM/DD format)

- The greatest number of posts recorded in one channel, in one 24hr period was 31938 - *Vox. VoxAnon.20121014*

- The greatest post per hour rate in one channel, in one 24hr period was 3319 - *Megaupload. Anops.20120119*

- The greatest post per user in one channel, in one 24hr period was by AnonmyousWiki, in the channel opnewson.Vox.20120526, with over 26828 posts (all statistical measures taken from Bertram, 2013)

Aside from the basic descriptive stats shown above the principle objectives of the research was to understand how the privilege structure outlined earlier affected the social dynamic within the IRC. The first step in this process was to innumerate the presence of privilege within the data set. The two essential questions that this strand of the research sought to answer were

1.  How is the hierarchical structure of the privilege system deployed across the IRC? i.e. what is the ratio of IRC channels that have fully developed privilege systems compared to those that have none?

2.  How widespread are privileges across the Anonymous IRC? i.e. what are the ratios between nicks with privileges and those without?

Turning to the first question, shown below in Figure 4, is a break down of a sample of 1104 logs taken from the main data set. Each log has been scanned for the presence of nicks with privileges and scored accordingly. A score of 1 represents a log where no nicks with privileges are present, 6 represents a log were a full range of nicks with privileges are present (~, &, @, %, +, those with no privileges are also counted) the other scores represent various graduations of the presence of privileged individuals. The percentiles represent the number of logs showing a privilege grade in relation to the wider data set i.e. 11.6% (127 logs) had three levels of privilege evident within them of the 1104 logs.
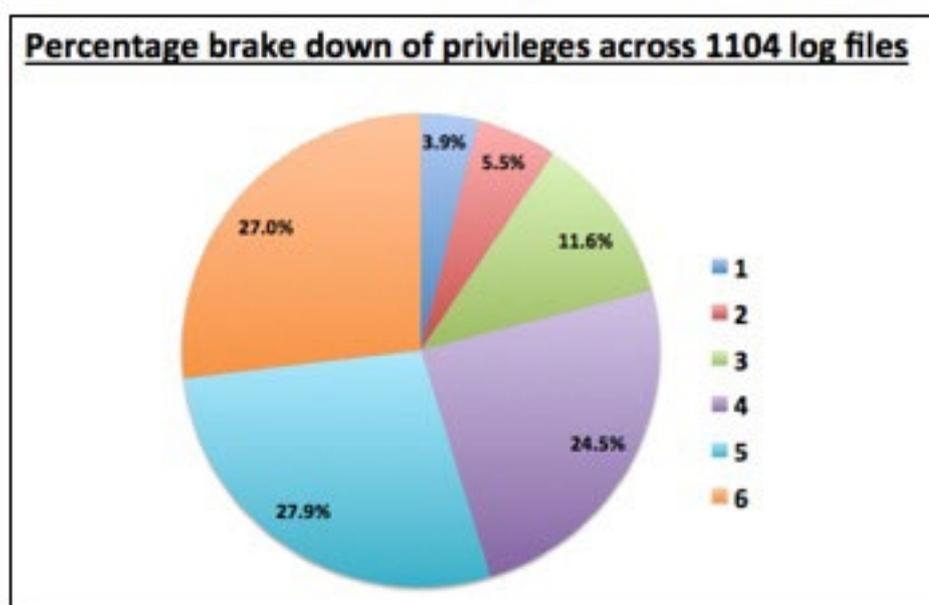


*Figure 4: Privileges brake down per log file*

The clear conclusion that can be drawn from Figure 4 is that over half the logs within the sample data set have well-developed system of privilege evident within them, with only 3.9% (42) logs showed a completely

flat privilege structure. The logs that had no privilege structure were generated from channels for the most part that were transient within the IRC, had little posting activity or developed a privilege structure after a few days of inactivity.

Adding context to the results present in Figure 4 is the bar graph displayed in Figure 5, which shows the number of nicks active within the data set, segregated by the privilege score of the IRC log they were active within e.g. 298 logs had a score of 6 (full privilege structure) and 100692 nicks were associated with the 298 logs.
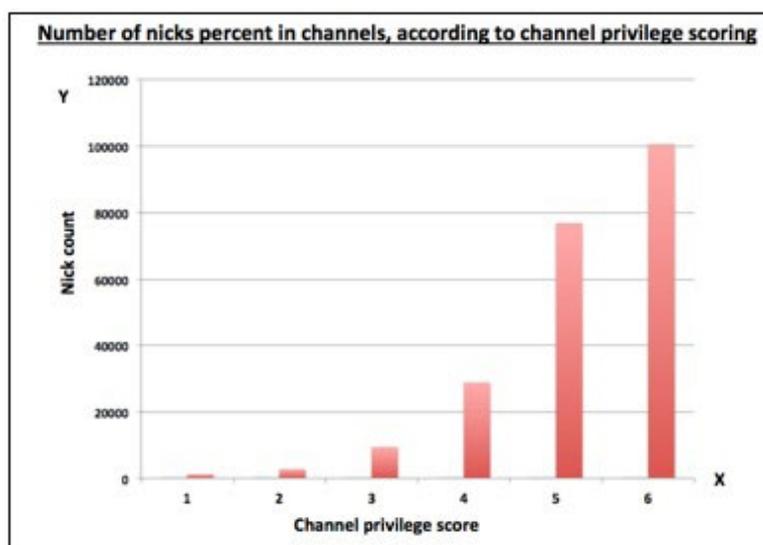


*Figure 5: nick to privilege score*

Taking the results of Figure 4 and 5 together there is a strong suggestion that where Anonymous members cluster they create a system of privilege and the more members there are active within a channel the more fully developed the privilege structure becomes.

An analytical step further than looking at the distribution of privilege over the IRC is to examine how privileges relate to each other within different channels. Shown below in Figure 6 is a graph showing average count of privileges within a selection of randomly selected channels taken from the data set (the nick count for the actors with no privileges was removed from this visualisation due to size issues).

*Figure 6: nick to channel count, broken down by assigned privilege*

The chart shown above gives a number of insights into the relationship between privileges within Anonymous IRC.

Somewhat expectedly the highest rank in the privilege structure (~) is typically the least common in most channels, with the other subordinate privileges (&, %, +) roughly trending upwards in number in accordance to the ~ count. This pyramid form of privilege distribution, mirrors the form of a conventional hierarchy based organisational structure (Itoh, 1992).

There are a number of surprising anomalies regarding privilege within the data set, two of which are apparent in Figure 7 (below) namely, the huge spike in the @ privilege within the *IRC.Hardchats* channel and the spike in the ~ privilege in the *Vox.Voxanon* channel. This led the researcher to consider if some channels are acting as more centralised command and control hubs for the wider IRC or if certain channels were conducting specific activities that attracted a specific concentration of privileged individuals. Both of these concepts are explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Another highly surprising trend within the data regarding privilege was the relationship (or lack thereof) between the number of privileged nicks within a channel and the count of nicks with no privileges. Shown below are two visualisations of the nick count of the privileged (left) compared to the count of the nicks with no privileges (right).

*Figure 7: Two visualisations of the average privileged and non-privileged nicks active within the same channels (note the scale shown in blue on each graph)*

Clear from Figure 7, is the huge disparity between privileged and non-privileged nicks within the same channel. A more formal R(squared) plot of the relation between *privileged and non-privileged nicks*, shows none or a loose correlation between overall number of nicks active within a channel and the number of privileged individuals active within that channel.

Based on the data shown in Figure 7, the obvious question arises: *if one conceptualizes Anonymous IRC as a classic hierarchical structure of command and control, how much influence could such small numbers of privileged nicks have over the wider community?*

### Transient nicks, static hierarchy

With the above question in mind, the data was analysed with the intention of discovering how static nicks with privileges were, in relation to individual IRC channels, compared to the nicks with no privileges.

The data used for this section of the research was created from samples taken from four date ranges from three IRC channels. The data sampled focused on nicks and their attached privileges and if they posted to any of the three channels on any of the date ranges.

The analytical method applied to the data was Social Network Analysis, with the objective of quantifying how fixed privileged nicks were within the IRC landscape. A sample of the results generated from this effort are shown below in Figure 8
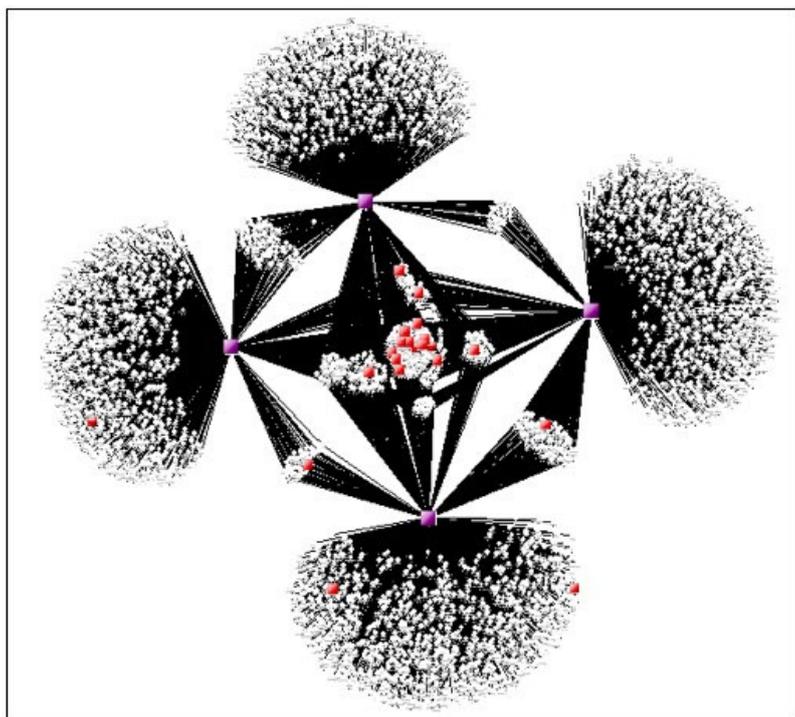
*Figure 8: Social Network Graph, showing nicks active in the Vox.VoxAnon channel on four separate dates 1,7,14,21 October (dates represented by pink squares). White dots represent nicks with no privileges; red dots represent nicks with privileges.*

The points that Figure 8 demonstrates is that while non-privileged nicks are highly transient within the channel (shown by the lack of interconnectedness between the four dates), nicks with privileges within the channels are far more static (demonstrated by their high degree of connectedness within the four dates).

The other two channels within the data sample set showed a similar pattern of fixed privileged nicks and transient non-privileged nicks.

Rid observed the "*membership mobility*," (Rid, 2013 page 150) of online groups adding that *"the more a subversive movement relies on multiple causes, new technologies, and networked communication, the more likely it is that this movement will be characterised by high membership mobility"* (Rid, 2013 page 127/128).

Looking at the results presented by the analysis thus far, the data would appear to confirm Rid's assertion regarding the transient nature of membership of an online group and suggest that the relationship between privileges and non-privileged nicks plays an important part in IRC life.

However, conceptualizing IRC privilege as a manifestation of traditional rank is misleading, instead the results of Figure 8 suggest that the privileged nicks in the Anonymous Collective act more as showmen attempting to attract support from an ever changing crowd, rather than commanders leading an army of followers. Additionally, it is incorrect to assume that all privileged members are ideologically aligned; instead at any one time there are a multitude of different privileged individuals advocating different (if not competing) causes within the IRC.

### Qualitative Analysis Results

Rid observed that *"The more technologically sophisticated a subversive movement…the more cause driven it is likely to become"* adding that *"Rather than grand narratives, it is highly specific issues that are likely to mobilise a critical mass of enraged activists"* (Rid, 2013 page 123)

The cause, or the *operation* as it is more commonly termed within Anonymous, is the cornerstone of many Anons engagement with the group. Anonymous operations such as Operation/ Project Chanology (anonbase, 2011), Op Avenge Assange and Op PayPal (Correll, 2010) have gained near legendary status within the cyber security world and the concept of an operation has become so central to Anonymous culture that the form of the IRC is structured around operations (only two of the channels recorded within the data set of this study (#DDOS and #Journalist) were not themed around an operational concept).

Statistics alone do not reflect the passion for the cause and sheer exuberance in their actions that many Anons feel towards their engagement with Anonymous, as such in contrast to the initial stages of the research this stage adopts an alternate view on the data by applying qualitative methods to portions of the data set.

Adopting a case study approach, the research profiles two specific IRC channels, Op Green Rights and Op Australia. These two operations were chosen as they stand at the poles of the Anonymous IRC culture with one being small scale and highly regional (Op Australia) and one being far more mainstream and globally based (Op Green Rights).

### Operation in Profile One – Op Green Rights

Op Green Rights is an IRC channel and Anonymous operation that focuses exclusively on environmental issues. The channel is popular within the wider context of the IRC landscape and the data shows that the Op Green Rights IRC channel is always within the top five most visited Anonymous channels and frequently in the top three most visited channels within the IRC.

Op Green Rights averages 121 nicks visiting the channel per 24 hour period. Additionally, over 90% of the 52 Op Green Rights logs within the data set shows a fully or nearly a fully developed privilege structure. Surprisingly, given the previous statistical points, Op Green Rights has a low average posting number with just 129 posts per 24-hour period (other channels within the set of the top five most popular channels typically averaged between 800 and 1000 posts per 24hrs).

The unusual posting activity within the Op Green Rights channel was reflected in the unusual nature of the discourse, with records from the channel showing particularly large numbers of nicks entering the IRC room and then almost immediately exiting and engaging in no dialogue during their period within the room. Dialog that did occur within the channel was characterised by intense bouts of highly technical conversation, generated exclusively from privileged nicks. An additionally observation concerning the interaction between nicks within Op Green Rights, was that dialogue occurred almost exclusively between privileged nicks with the non-privileged nicks within the channel being almost spectators to the wider channel dialog.

The topic of conversation would typically take the form of exultations to the other user within the channel to conduct DDOS attacks on a chosen target, with the target being nominated by the privileged nick. An example of this dialog is shown below

```
[[09:22:55] <~Aken> -check www.monsanto.com
[09:23:03] <%Vots> It's not just you! http://www.monsanto.com looks down from here.
[09:23:12] <~Aken> come on ANON! little more
```

*Figure 9: example of Op Green Rights IRC dialog*

The example shown above is typical of the format of the wider dialog of IRC, with the initial observation that a web site is offline, followed by a conformation by another nick. As is typical with this type of dialog, the target web site (in this case www.monsanto.com) is not offline at all, merely under DDoS attack. *Akens* exaltation and encouragement of a *"little more"* is in reference to the need for more Anonymous members to participate in the DDoS attack to take the web site offline.

While many elements of the Op Green Rights dialogue were typical of the wider IRC landscape the dedication to a single target is unusual. Monsanto (a bio science company involved in the manufacture of Genetically Modified crops) was consistently targeted over a period of months by Op Green Rights, with many Monsanto web resources being successfully taken offline by Anonymous members working from the Op Green Rights channel.

Another aspect of the Op Green Rights channel that was immediately apparent was that almost all the nicks frequenting the channel were involved with a number of other Anonymous operations, and there seemed to be no identifiable group of nicks exclusively focusing on Op Green Rights as a cause. Even the most prolific posters such as *Vots* and *Aken* were more active in channels such as #DDOS.

It was also apparent that the majority of the nicks within the channel was engaged in conversation on other technical platforms and IRC channels and used the Op Green Rights channel to continue ongoing conversations.

```
[09:32:21] <%Xnonymouz> ACTA IS DEAD
[09:32:29] <%Xnonymouz> l3g10n 4 l1f3
[09:32:33] <%Xnonymouz> <3 u all
[09:35:22] <Tiferet> ??
[09:36:04] <%Xnonymouz> hi tiferet
[09:41:27] <~Aken> hi
[09:42:06] <%Xnonymouz> aken
[09:42:07] <%Xnonymouz> :D
[09:42:13] <%Xnonymouz> so glad 2 c u here
[09:42:19] <~Aken> mee too
[09:42:21] <%Xnonymouz> not talked much for time
[09:42:22] <%Xnonymouz> bro
[09:43:03] <~Aken> sorry ....many stuff coming in the same time
[09:43:05] <~Aken> ;)
[09:43:20] <%Xnonymouz> np
[09:43:24] <%Xnonymouz> i wasnt here much
[09:43:52] <%Xnonymouz> helping in opukraine
```

*Figure 10: further example of Op Green Rights IRC dialog*

Note in Figure 10, features such as the fact that dialogue is being engaged in almost exclusively by privileged nicks, the mention of a number of other operations (ACTA and OpUkraine) and the familiarity between nicks.

Op Green Rights is notable in that it is supported by an expansive blog that sits outside of the IRC landscape, and platforms such as this could act as meeting place for Anons interested in environmentalist issues.

Another aspect of Op Green Rights that is unique to this channel, is the overt focus on data leaks in addition to DDoS attacks as an effective means of protest, note the example below

```
05[09:53:24] -GreenBot:#OperationGreenRights- Channel Topic: 01Support 05#OpParaguay 01Senado Leaks 05http://pastebin.com/9Cx3d1Fu I 01Press Release
02http://bit.ly/MGs55c I 01DDOS 05www.monsanto.com I 03Opcoltan INFO: 02http://ow.ly/bEJN6 01PRESS: 02http://goo.gl/6dIzD I 03TWIT: 02http://ow.ly/bC8pp
01BLOG: 02http://ow.ly/bEsCu
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*Figure 11: Op Green Rights IRC dialog talking about data leaks*

The purpose of leaked data is to expose corporate malfeasance, and Op Green Rights shows a strong interest in not only stealing corporate data but analysing it and producing info graphics to more persuasively communicate the Op Green Rights message to the wider public.

Typical of almost all other Anonymous IRC channels was the persistent interest in social media, especially the micro blogging web site Twitter, with numerous examples of privileges members encouraging other Op Green Rights channels users to look at the Op Green Rights Twitter page. The curious situation of nicks encouraging other nicks to consume other types of social media, is an example of attempts by privileged Anons to network build in other areas of the social media space. Op Green Rights has a particularly strong presence in comparison to other Anonymous campaigns, on surface web platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and promoting these sites on IRC builds the support base when nicks "like" a page or web resource.

Qualitatively examining the Op Green Rights logs revealed a social structure that had little in common with any classic model of hierarchy. Instead privileged nicks seemed merely to be broadcasting suggestions to the wider IRC channel user group, with often little acknowledgment of their suggestions by other non-privileged Anons. Additionally the activities of the privileged would appear to be met with ambivalence rather than deference by the rest of the non-privileged IRC user group.

### Operation in Profile Two – Op Australia

Op Australia, in contrast to Op Green Rights, is a regional based faction of Anonymous that is made up of individuals based in Australia and New Zealand. Again differing from Green Rights, Op Australia has no single issue that it pursues, instead the channel serves as a meeting space for Anonymous members, who due to the dint of the time zone they live in are isolated from the main body of the predominantly US and EU based Anonymous Collective.

Rather than being a single campaign, Op Australia periodically adopts issues that the group pursues or rejects based on levels of support, in effect; Op Australia is a microcosm of the wider Anonymous Collective.

An examination of the data generated from Op Australia IRC channel revealed almost immediately, the presence of a strong system of hierarchy and overt social control within the channel. After a more detailed examination of the data, it would appear that the decision-making within Op Australia fell to a leadership core of as little as five people.

- **Juzzy** – was identifiable as the overall leader of the Op Australia channel, displaying obvious behavior of rank such as delegating authority onto other member of the channel i.e. *"Listen to Lorax and CiTRiX, [other Anons] they'll be in charge while I' am gone"* and kicking other nicks that did not conform to the channels social norms (specifically one nick that took great pleasure in persistently 'slapping' Juzzy). Juzzys leadership position owed much to his technical hacking ability and willingness to demonstrate the best way to pursue Op Australia goals. Not a charismatic leader (Juzzy

in fact rarely engaged in any form of extended dialogue), Juzzy effectively implemented the lead by example model of control within the channel.

- **Lorax** and **CiTRiX** – joint channel second in commands, with explicit authority delegated from Juzzy. This team were observably responsible for much of the day to day running of the Op Australia channel such as setting up social media outlets for the channel and conducting much of the cyber reconnaissance work that is required before the commencement of an attack. Lorax and CiTRiX also acted in a far more explicitly supportive way to other Anons than Juzzy, who openly directed technical questions away from himself and towards the pair.

- **Husz** – providing overt support in the form of consent to the leadership cabal of Juzzy, Lorax and CiTRiX, Husz was observed to follow the classic path of an aspirant Anonymous member. Initially developing a relationship with Juzzy, Husz in the end solidified his status within Op Australia by building a strong relationship with Lorax. Husz most often fulfilled to role of validating Juzzy's leadership though acts such as castigating the actions of nicks that Juzzy kicked.

While the author acknowledges that the organizational structures that were observed within the Op Australia logs, stopped short of the professional and bureaucratized organizational hierarchy that Zald (*et al,* 1973) identified as being key indicators of a mature social movement, there was a clear hierarchy active within Op Australia.

When examining the dynamics of authority within Op Australia's, a number of points became immediately apparent.

- The combined leadership group of Op Australia did hold sway over the flow of the discourse within the IRC channel. Collectively the leaders of Op Australia initiated and closed most conversations, enforced cultural norms and generally set the tone and pace of any cyber activity that Op Australia engaged in.

- Juzzy's leadership was not absolute, with regular challenges originating from other nicks to Juzzy's self-assumed status as operational commander. The two pillars that Juzzy's leadership was built upon were the continued support of his loyal lieutenants, Lorax and CiTRiX. The almost constant power struggle within Op Australia shows that any Anonymous operational commander can expect to have their authority challenged on a regular basis.

- In contrast to Juzzy's precarious situation as leader, Lorax and CiTRiX position within the Op Australia hierarchy seemed far more stable, with no apparent challenges to their social status being seen within the data.

### Conclusions that can be drawn from the Op Green Rights and Op Australia case studies

- Many Anons maintain long term fixed personas within the IRC – this particularly manifest itself within the strong interpersonal relationships within Op Australia and the less intense, but platform spanning familiarity evident between the nicks in the Op Green Rights channel

- Op Australia although seeming far more operationally coherent than Op Green Rights may have appeared so due to it being a much smaller scale operation involving fewer individuals. It would appear that the Op Green Rights IRC channel was just one aspect of a much larger movement

- It is obvious that authority is not automatically conjoined with privilege within Anonymous IRC. Adding to this statement are two sub observations concerning privilege and authority

    - Privilege represents different things in different channels – within Op Australia privilege represents the manifestation of a classic system of hierarchy, while in Op Green Rights privilege would appear to merely represents the continuing presence of a nick within that channel

    - Levels of Membership Mobility directly affects the levels of authority the privileged nicks can exert – within Op Australia, with its lower rate of Membership Mobility, the privileged nicks hold a greater sway over a more captive audience, while within Op Green Rights with its very high levels of Membership Mobility, privileged nicks are merely advocates for proposed actions rather than enforcers of cultural norms

Taking the above points together it is apparent that Membership Mobility and privilege are dependent variables when examining the role that the privileged play within an IRC channel.

Barr's research (summarized in Olson, 2012 page 5), conceptualized Anonymous as a purely hierarchical organization within which a handful (<30) individuals made the decision that influenced the wider Collective. The research presented within this paper, challenges this conceptualization of Anonymous as overly simplistic.

The two case studies show that the Collective is neither completely a classic hierarchy nor a fully leaderless group; instead social organization within Anonymous is analogous to the relationship between the customers and the showmen within a circus.

The customers are analogous to the nicks, a constantly changing group of transient users, swirling around the circus attractions (the IRC channels). The showmen are the privileged within the IRC and their power is derived from their knowledge of Anonymous, quick wit and occasionally, technical computing skills. It is the privileged nicks oratory skills that allow them to attract other unprivileged nicks into becoming involved in an operation, in much the same way a showman attracts customers to a sideshow.

Analogising Anonymous IRC in this way redefines the role of the privileged, from conventional leaders, to factional actors engaged in a classic model of resource competition, with the main resource for Anonymous being the support of the un-privileged multitude.

Within this context, the role of the privileged becomes clearer and explains the disparity in privileged versus non-privileged counts observed within earlier in the research. It would appear that just as in a circus whichever showman / privileged nick presents the best show attracts the most attention.

As Diani comments

> *"…leadership roles need not entail control over a unified organization... They may also, far less obtrusively, result from certain actors' location at the center of exchanges of practical and symbolic resources among movement organizations. This will not generate domination…but rather varying degrees of influence"* (Diani 2003: 106).

From the two case studies of Op Green Rights and Op Australia it would appear that some factions of Anonymous follows Dianis' model of hierarchy, while some lean far more heavily towards a more classic authoritarian model of authority. One possible explanation for this is the varying degrees of membership mobility that each IRC channel observably has.

Linking with the results of the quantitative study outlined earlier, it is possible that high membership mobility could actively inhibit the creation of hierarchy within Anonymous. As authority appears to be derived organically in a large part from the persistence of an identity in a channel and the familiarity of that identity with other persistent users, high membership mobility could actively inhibit the functioning of this process.

Turning to the results of the data set, Op Green Rights has high membership mobility and a hierarchy however, there is no authority being openly demonstrated within the channel. Conversely Op Australia has low membership mobility and defined hierarchy within which authority is clearly demonstrated. While not enough to create a rigorous exploration of the idea the concept suggested by the data is that high membership mobility inhibits the creation of hierarchy within a hyper-networked group like Anonymous.

### Conclusion

> "…the group mind does not think in the strict sense of the word. In place of thoughts it has impulses, habits, and emotions. In making up its mind, its first impulse is usually to follow the example of a trusted leader." (Edward Bernay's 1928 page Propaganda 73)

This study of the Anonymous IRC has both confirmed and challenged Bernay's statement about the role the privilege plays within groups such as Anonymous. This study has found that privilege is endemic across the IRC landscape, with the majority of IRC channels showing a well-developed privilege structure. This study has also observed the classic presence of authority, symbolized by privilege, active within certain channels. As such it would appear, on first impressions, that this study unilaterally supports Bernay's statement and challenges Rids assertion that "internet-driven subversion… is characterised by lower levels of organisational control" (Rid, 2013 page 150). However, closer inspection of the data has shown as many examples of leaderless masses as led masses.

While groups with established leaderships would appear to be common within the IRC (shown by the ubiquity of privilege structure), groups with hierarchical structures would appear more to share a common space with non-privileged nicks, than provide an overall leadership function within an IRC channel.

As such one of the main findings of this study is that an Anonymous IRC channel is analogous to a common public space within which a multitude of groups gather. Some of the groups within the IRC channels have privilege structures but just as many groups do not. Continuing the public space analogy, not all groups within the IRC space have an inter group dialog. As such it is a mistake to assume that the social dynamic of an IRC channel is that of a leadership group providing direction to the wider user group, this is an oversimplification of a more complex situation. Instead, privileged groups are a result of a subset of users within the IRC that desire to be part of a hierarchical structure. While privilege does translate into authority in some cases (shown by the Op Australia profile) it would appear that most of the time, the authority of a privileged user does not extend outside of a relatively small circle of nicks.

Referring back to Olson's (2012) work and her case study of the Anonymous subgroup, *Luzsec*, she observed that the members of the group were privileged individuals but who conducted their operations as a small unit. When the results of the Lulzsec group's activities were disseminated though the wider Anonymous

network, more support and abject pledges of allegiance to the original Lulzsec members soon followed. In effect the circles of influence within IRC that privilege extends to, varies hugely across time and the virtual spaces of IRC. While at some times (typically at the start of major operations) privileged nicks hold sway over large swaths of the nicks within the IRC, much of the time privilege within IRC is merely a demonstration of a persistent presence of an individual nick within an IRC channel.

This studies conclusion concerning privilege, re-orientates the model of social organization from the classic hierarchy to the more amorphous, self-ordering networks termed *Netwar* by Arquilla *et al* (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2000). This study has found that although *Netwar* was developed for non-state actor groups active within the physical world the model, with its leaderless, self-organizing networks is just as applicable to Anonymous. The main differentiator between a physical space Netwar group and a cyber space based Netwar group is the speed that the network changes, with cyber groups showing a far increased development cycle over groups occupying a purely physical space (the groups profiled in Kenny, 2008, showed maturation time scales of years being applies to groups active purely in physical space).

Perhaps it is hardly surprising that the ICT revolution, with its over focus on rapid communication, should facilitate groups like Anonymous and create its distinctive features of membership mobility (Rid, 2013) and leaderless organizational structure bound together by the so called 'strength of week ties' (Granovetter, 1973).

## About the author

**Stewart K. Bertram** *is an intelligence and security professional with a background in counter terrorism and military intelligence. Stewart specializes in analyzing the human factors associated with cyber security. Holding a Master of Letter in Terrorism Studies from St Andrews University and a Master of Science in Computing, Stewart combines both a social science and a hard science approach to cyber security.*

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*Annex B: Generic hacker terms used throughout the paper*

- Nick – short for nickname, a nick is the title that a user posts comments under within the IRC server. Interchangeable with "Handle" a nick is common terminology within cyber ethnographic literature

- User – behind each nick is a user i.e. a physical person typing on a keyboard. The term User is separated from the term Nick due to the fact that multiple nicks can be associated with a single user and within the context of this research it was not possible to fully map each Nick to a User

- Channel Admins – user that have overall power on a channel, who typically act as arbiters in disputes, set social norms and have the power to bar nicks and even shut the whole channel down if they desire

- Lurkers – nicks that sit in a channel but do not post

- Privilege – assigned to nicks by a Channel Admin a privilege is a graphical symbol that is attached to a user's nick. A privileged nick has no more power to effect the flow of conversation within a channel than any other users, a privilege is in effect an honorific badge that designates that fact the nick carries influence within the channel

- Anon – identifies a member of Anonymous i.e. *"I am an Anon."* Used by many within the Collective as a method of self-identification

- Anonymous Collective–*Anonymous* and *Anonymous Collective* are used interchangeably. Many individuals involved in Anonymous would most likely reject the term *Anonymous Collective however; the term has been used in many mainstream media article and has become standard phraseology when referring to Anonymous.*

- *Anonymous IRC* and, *IRC* are used interchangeable within this paper. The author acknowledges that there are many more IRCs than the ones associated with Anonymous however, within the scope of this paper the reader should infer that *IRC* refers to *Anonymous IRC.* (all definitions taken from Bertram, 2013)

# Urban and Rural Militia Organizations in Syria's Less Governed Spaces

## by Carl Wege

*Abstract*

*This paper contends decline of Bashar al-Assad's governing authority and the concomitant accretion of increasingly complex militia organizations suggests a future of petty militia fiefdoms affecting an Islamic veneer ruling the Syrian space. Geography, including its human domain, sustains the qualitative patterns of militia development and interactions across Syria's rural and urban spaces and defines the geographic areas of dominance of these militia fiefdoms. The concurrence of severe drought, the Arab Spring, and the availability of social media ignited the Syrian rebellion in 2011. The rebellion itself ultimately became a militarized arena for conflict between outside powers as foreign fighter enhanced Salafi Jihadist Organizations displaced aspirational moderates to dominate the armed opposition to the Assad regime. The civil war ultimately became demarcated by hundreds of militias separated generally into a three sided contest between Iranian, al-Qaeda affiliated and Islamic State affiliated militias establishing petty fiefdoms while attempting to govern the Syrian space.*

**Keywords:** Urban And Rural Militia Organizations In Syria's Less Governed Spaces

## Introduction

Syria's civil war can be viewed through many lenses. The shape of the Syrian civil war in one sense is a gauge of the contest between modernity and its antagonists. At another level the popular uprising against Syria's Alawite dictatorship anchored in Ba'athist ideology, even conceding Ba'athist Westernizing and secularizing pretentions, was a response to the democratic aspirations initially defining the Arab Spring.[1]The Assad government is frequently described as an "Alawite regime" but it is important to note that the dominance of the Alawite sect is less significant than the constellation of favored families and affiliates, often linked by marriage and including some Sunni's and other preferred family networks in the web of Assad's government. The core extended families include Bashar Assad's mother Anisa Makhluf (no longer living in Syria), his sister Bushra and the Shawkat family of her husband as well as the larger Makluf and Shalessh families. These families and some others generally but not exclusively Alawite ran Syria's government like a mafia fiefdom.[2] Politically the democratic aspirations firstly driving the popular revolt against the Assad dynasty are now washed away by a tide of Islamist and ethnic politics that is antagonistic to modernity and suspicious of democracy.

## Sparking The Syrian Rebellion

While the Syrian rebellion is thought of as part of the larger Arab Spring it is geography, including its human domain that is a significant dynamic igniting the fires of the Syrian civil war. A combination of drought and usually bad Syrian agricultural policies in the early 2000s created an environment ripe for rebellion. Following Bashar Assad's ascension to power in 2000 Damascus sought entrée into world agricultural

markets but badly mismanaged water resources by encouraging the production of wheat and cotton, both water dependent cash crops, concurrent with the beginning of a severe drought.[3] In what may be one of the first politically significant impacts of global warming a decade of extreme and unrelenting drought encompassed the al-Jazira desert straddling Iraq and Syria along with the adjacent marginal steppe lands (Badia) in eastern Syria. Consequently the underground aquifers across the region were ultimately depleted by roughly 60% through the digging of illegal wells.[4] This unusually punishing drought also displaced nearly a million Syrian farmers and herdsmen who migrated to towns and cities in search of work forcing approximately two or three million out of a population of twenty four million thrust into extreme poverty. [5] The intensity of economic deprivation was heavily focused in the eastern Governorates of Deir ez-Zor, Hasakah, and Raqqa.[6] In the words of Kilcullen and Rosenblatt this displacement "Fueled by economic necessity and a persistent drought, these villagers created vast, insulated neighborhoods of urban poor."[7] The Assad government was not expecting this influx of displaced persons and had no security infrastructure in place to monitor the displaced population. Urban Syrian social structure at the time was defined by family groups and family branches (Bayt) while rural areas immediately prior to the rebellion could still best be described in terms of tribal hierarchies.[8] Geographically these shantytowns surrounding the cities and towns where Assad's Political Security infrastructure was less well developed later directly correlated with areas of Sunni militia strength. Examples of this include the Baba Amr area of Homs subsequently controlled by the Liwa al-Haqq battalions; the Ghouta and Harasta region of Damascus later dominated by the Liwa al-Islam militia now part of Jaysh al-Islam; and the eastern shantytowns of Aleppo currently controlled by an array of Sunni militias encompassing Asala wa al-Tanmiya, Jaysh al-Muhajirin al-Ansar (mostly made up of ethnic Chechens), Suqour al-Sham (by 2015 absorbed into Ahrar al-Sham) and now Islamic State militia fighters.[9] Those internally displaced rural peasants pouring into Syria's secondary towns and cities as well as the urban areas of Aleppo and Damascus changed the human geography of Syria and provided a ready source of unemployed and desperate young men who could ultimately be mobilized in rebellion.

The seminal event giving rise to what was initially seen as a democratic revolt is usually described as a series of increasingly violent demonstrations in Daraa south of Damascus in response to the torture of several teenagers who were accused of writing anti-Assad graffiti at the Daraa headquarters of Atef Najeeb's Political Security Branch. Daraa is a relatively underdeveloped and heavily Bedouin town situated on the Hawran plateau and those first demonstrations organized by the al-Zu'bi and al-Masalmeh clans were as much protests against the thuggish response to teenage graffiti as they were aspirations for political change. [10] The human terrain of Daraa was demarcated by a clan structure of unusual depth which could sustain a popular response against the thuggery of Assad's Political Police. Clans including the Abu Zeid, Zu'bi, Harris, Masalmas, Muqdad, Jawabra, and Mahamid had relationships extending across the southern border into Jordan and into the Jordanian town of al-Ramtha.[11] When the revolt began in earnest these clan connections stretching from the Nassib-Jaber crossing to the Arabian Gulf would ultimately provide important smuggling channels for money and arms trafficking sustaining the rebellion.[12] Over the course of the uprising the relationship between the Sunnis of Daraa and their Druze neighbors east of Daraa who were ostensibly neutral but somewhat supportive of Assad became increasingly strained.[13]

Although the Daraa incident is as reasonable a starting point as any other the significance is that unlike other revolutions in what is now referred to as the Arab Spring the Syrian demonstrations begin in a fairly small agricultural hub rather than the capital city. Part of the explanation here may be in the economic plight of these secondary cities as compared to central Damascus and Aleppo. James C. Davies concept of relative deprivation also called the "J-curve" theory of revolutions provides some understanding as to the timing

as well as the geographic ignition points of Syria's rebellion.[14] Davies explained that economic progress followed by a sharp economic reversal can leave a population desperate for recovery and amenable to rebellion.

While Damascus and Aleppo were somewhat insulated from economic hardship because of their importance to the Assad regime the smaller agricultural cities bore the brunt of economic setbacks. Those farmers and herdsmen displaced by the severity of the drought and loss of their livelihoods and now in the shantytowns of Syria's secondary agricultural cities had known better times. The hopelessness of their economic circumstances still required what Martha Crenshaw referred to as an 'entrepreneur" to channel this hopelessness into open revolt.[15] In Daraa this role was played in part by Sunni Ulama as Ahmad al-Sayasne the Imam of the 'Umari Grand Mosque and the city's Mufti Rizq Aba Zayd joined the demonstrations.[16 ]

The outbreak of the Syrian Revolution thus has an identifiable geographic direction. The geography of the Syrian Revolution is initiated first in multiple secondary towns and cities and only thereafter moves into the shantytowns surrounding Damascus and Aleppo.[17] While Damascus and Aleppo had some demonstrations it would be a full year before these cities saw armed insurrection.[18] Shortly after the spark in Daraa for example the first "Day of Rage" demonstrations was in Hasakah in eastern Syria during early February of 2011 with its population swollen by despairing and impoverished farmers who had formerly produced nearly 50% of the countries wheat and cotton.[19] The Governorate of Deir ez-Zor so directly impacted by the drought along with its capital of Bu Kamal was "immediately and intensely mobilized" after Daraa with large and ongoing anti-Assad demonstrations.[20]

An ancillary political space affiliated with Syria's human geography permitted organizational activity later used to expedite rebellion was unintentionally created by Bashar Assad's wife Asma Assad. Asma Assad facilitated the creation of state sanctioned charities under the Union of Charitable Associations (itihat jamiat al-Kharia) that were allowed to network with minimal supervision by the security services. By April of 2011 local Coordinating Committees organizing demonstrations against Bashar Assad were exploiting these networks to mobilize the rebellion.[21] By the first week of May 2011 armed clashes were taking place in the Baba 'Amru neighborhood of Homs.[22]

As demonstrations spread to more cities and towns across Deir ez-Zor, Homs, Idlib and even Latakia Governorate the Assad regime's decision to crush rather than co-opt the demonstrations led to the Darwinian consequences where moderates were squeezed out and only the most radical anti-Assad actors survived. With moderates driven out, the popular counter narrative to Ba'athism was voiced through Salafi Jihadism at war with both modernity and, in Syria, at war with the House of Assad.[23] The uprising against Assad ultimately left the nominal government in Damascus spent with an unreliable Sunni dominated Syrian Arab Army (SAA), a wrecked national infrastructure, and major cities devastated by the Syrian fratricide.[24] The collapse of Assad's governing authority across Syria saw a rising era of militias establishing petty fiefdoms across Syria correlating with Syria's human geography. These militias acted as both proxies for external powers and as native participants in Syria's civil conflict.

The Syrian civil war is another arena for the larger contest in the region between Iran and Saudi Arabia who lead competing coalitions. The Iranian coalition on one side organizes both state and non-state actors to intervene in the Syrian civil war. Saudi Arabia confronts the Iranian coalition with a Saudi alliance of states, private donors from the Gulf and a secondary tier of Jordanian, Israeli, and Western participants of varying reliability.[25] Saudi Arabia and Iran who had supported their own favored proxies in Lebanon for decades now have expanded that conflict across Syria and ultimately into Iraq.[26]

## Urban and Rural Militarization of the Rebellion

Militia groups as they emerged across Syria during the middle of 2011 and 2012 followed a geographically discernable pattern generally correlated with the geographic patterns of the initial anti-Assad demonstrations. Militias tended to grow first in rural areas and secondarily in towns and cities. These militias initially aimed at merely protecting anti-Assad demonstrators and only later becoming dominated by Islamists bent on actually overthrowing the Assad government. Urban militias by contrast, first in Damascus and later in Aleppo, would evolve after the rural militias and following the disintegration of Assad's Syrian Arab Army in the middle to latter days of 2012.

The urban militias in their evolution were divisible into pro and antigovernment organizations. The rural militias developed first as spontaneous anti-government organizations only later were pro government rural militias conceived as part of Iran's strategy to save Syria. The pro government militias in the central cities began as reasonably spontaneous neighborhood self-defense organizations mobilized by fear of Sunni Jihadist and it was these militias that were later co-opted by the Assad government under the National Defense Forces (Quwat al-difa al-Watani) umbrellas. Particularly in Damascus and Aleppo the merchant class while socially conservative was also secular and disinclined to support Salafi Jihadism.[27] It was this generally Sunni merchant class that continued to support Assad if the alternative was a return to a romanticized vision of the 9th century. The anti-Assad militias made up of young men displaced by economic hardships would characterize organizations controlling the shantytowns surrounding these central city cores.

The rural divisions respecting support for the Assad government in Damascus were anchored in tribal division's resultant from decades of Ba'athist governing strategies. For example the Aneza tribal confederation in central Syria saw the Haddiyon tribe generally remain loyal to Assad, while the Turki, Fawa'ira, and Nu'im's mostly joined the revolution.[28] In some instances defections punctuated changing tribal alignments. The 2012 defection of the Syrian envoy to Iraq Nawaf al-Fares of the al-Jarrah clan for example helped to move the Egaidat tribal confederation into the anti-Assad column. The Hasanah, Bani Khaled and Aqaydat tribes all had had factions supporting both the regime and the opposition.[29] The Saudis whose Nejd tribes have historic linages with Syria's Anzea and Shammar tribal confederations have taken advantage of these tribal networks to provide material support to the anti-Assad rebellion.[30]

In Syria's geographically eastern Governorates of Hasakah and Raqqa local tribal leaders in the rural steppe country (Rif Badia) were initially opposed to the rebellion in contrast to the towns of those Governorates. [31] The Assad dynasty (Hafez and Bashar) had used Syria's tribal confederations over the years to balance any appeal of the Muslim Brothers (Ikhwan) so some of these tribes such as the Tay, Fad'an and al-Jabbur felt beholden to the regime and have generally remained loyal to Assad. Others such as the Shammar confederation made up of the al-Khursah and al-Aslam tribes have supported the rebellion.[32]

## Al Qaeda and Sunni Extremism in Eastern Syria

The Syrian civil war that shattered state institutions by 2013 also effectively highlighted overt sectarian geographies across the region.[33] The Sunni aligned communities that initially aspired to democracy and fought Assad in the north and south however were weakened by both internal divisions and Western dithering over arms. Several major Sunni formations coalesced and disintegrated until a reasonably coherent body began to fight the Assad regime under the moniker of the Islamic Front in November of 2013.[34] This front included Aleppo's Twaheed brigade under Adnan Bakkour and supported primarily by Qatar and the Jaysh al-Islam (Liwa al-Islam) in Damascus under Zahran Alloush and backed by Saudi Arabia.

[35] Abu Issa's Suqour al-Sham originating in the Jabal al-Zaqiya of Idlib fought in both the Aleppo and Idlib Governorates although it was ultimately weakened by clashes with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).[36] Some traditional Sunni Salafi organization's like Ahrar al-Sham (Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyah, HASI or Islamic Movement of Free Men of the Levant) incorporated fighters that could align with traditional ideologies along the lines of the Ikhwan who would theoretically participate in elections but also included more militant Salafi Jihadists who did not believe in Western style democracy.[37] Harakat Ahrar al-Sham was one of the largest organizations under the Islamic Front whose resilience was demonstrated in the organizations recovery following the assassination of its entire first and second tier leadership by an Islamic State suicide bomber in September of 2014.[38] The Syrian Branch of the Ikhwan led in 2014 by the elderly and weak Mohammed Riad al-Shaqfa never successfully rebuilt the Brotherhood infrastructure eviscerated by Hafez al-Assad in 1982.[39] The Brothers have made some half-hearted attempts to engage the Revolution but do not have enough fighters or organization to be serious actors. Those organizations are now overshadowed by the black banners of al-Qaeda (Qa'idat al-Jihad) related Jihadis rising across Syria's east.[40] The rise of these Salafi Jihadist Organizations whose numbers are strengthened by foreign fighters changed the nature of the war as they displaced Assads' moderate opposition. The largest concentration of Salafi Jihadists in the world are now fighting from Syria to Iraq with tens of thousands of men under arms.[41] The regional and to a limited extent global impact of these Salafi Jihadist organizations and their fighters forged in the fires of the Syrian civil war will be felt for decades.

The creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Dawlat al-Islamiyah fi Iraq wa'l-Sham, DAESH, or ISIS) under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Abu Duaa)[42] in the spring of 2013 contesting the battlefronts of Syria incorporated a wide range of both indigenous and foreign Jihadists under the black banners of ISIS[43]. There are several instances of ISIS simply absorbing similar militant groups such as Jamaat Ansar al-Islam.[44] These actors absorbed into ISIS range from Westernized 'war tourists' of Muslim extraction to thousands of Sunni prisoners freed from Syrian and Iraqi jails in ISIS raids. Many of these prisoners were genuine criminal sociopaths using the ISIS rubric to mask criminal enterprise leaving a heterogeneous range of Jihadi types fighting across the theater.[45] Additionally al-Baghdadi demonstrated some regional influence by requesting and receiving both trainers and fighters from the Pakistani Taliban (Movement of Pakistani Taliban, Tehrek-e Taliban Pakistan, or TTP). Taking an approach similar to the Islamic State (IS) the Pakistani Taliban facilitated a prison break in northwest Pakistan's Dera Ismail Khan Prison which freed several hundred Taliban prisoners who were then moved to Syria to fight with the IS.[46] The breadth of eastern and northern Syria by 2014 then became Salafi badlands where Sunni militias were directly impacted by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's Salafi ISIS fighters[47]

The geographic focal point of these Sunni badlands was the eastern Governorate of Hasakah in the epicenter of the Syrian drought. Hasakah links the corridor between ISIS controlled cities of Raqqa and Mosul as well as the Kurdish lands straddling Syria and Iraq. Hasakah city itself is divided between Assad regime National Defense Forces and Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) ruling competing districts of the city while surrounded across the rural spaces of the Governorate by ISIS and affiliate Salafi Jihadist fighters.[48] By the early summer of 2014 these Sunni badlands in Syria's east and the Sunni towns in western Iraq were subsumed under the *Islamic State* (IS) rubric as ISIS renamed itself following a series of victories across the Syrian and al-Jazira desert and into the central provinces of Iraq dramatically changing the nature of the war. [49] Operationally IS fighters did not try to overwhelm militarily the more populated cities and towns it conquered. Rather they would penetrate the security infrastructure from within exploiting local corruption to dominate local criminal enterprise.[50] IS thereby created revenue streams to the organization and used

local criminal talent to identify politicians and security officials who could not be intimidated and assassinate them.[51] When IS did overtly overrun a given town or city there was less active resistance to the IS as local authorities by then were essentially collaborating with them.[52] The IS, even with several thousand men under arms, has relatively few heavy weapons and fights with fairly small formations and would have great difficulty overrunning any large town or city that was actively resisting. In the Sunni areas of Iraq the IS has been strengthened by making common cause with secular Ba'athists remnants of Saddam's army some of whom are calling themselves the Naqshbandi Army (Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshbandi or JRTN).[53] This marriage of convenience is playing a significant role sustaining the IS in Iraq's Sunni regions. The alliance is not a natural one however and it is a point of cleavage in the IS.[54]

The IS is manifesting some characteristics novel to the Syrian War and lacking in the first incarnation of Al-Qaeda in Iraq or the Islamic State in Iraq. The IS is now demonstrating some ability to govern. They chose Azhar al-Obeidi for example, a Ba'athist ex Iraqi army General who is a respectable figure and certainly no Sunni extremist as Governor of Mosul.[55] That ability to govern and hold territory is critically important if the effort to overthrow Assad is to ultimately be successful. Al-Baghdadi's command structure has now expanded and includes a three man military council now led by Omar al-Shishani and a set of twelve deputies and regional commanders including Ali al-Anbari responsible for Syrian territories under ISIS control. They apparently operate with some autonomy but coordinate through some shared networks.[56] It is in Raqqa however that IS governance is most well developed. According to the *Institute for the Study of War* the IS is dividing Raqqa's government into two categories; Administrative and Muslim Services and they are in fact running municipal government.[57] The IS also seems to be intentionally separating local police from religious police (al Hisba). The religious police look to have a mission of promoting virtue and preventing vice that at least takes inspiration from the Saudi religious police with a comparable mission.[58] While mocked in many quarters by Sunni religious authorities for its pretensions the Islamic State's declaration of a Caliphate under al-Baghdadi, now referring to himself as Caliph Ibrahim, may have an unappreciated inspirational value to potential Jihadis. Sayyed Qutb argued that Islam could not be fully practiced without a Caliphate and young Jihadis looking for a cause may be unpersuaded by the scholarly and jurisprudential shortcomings of a self-proclaimed Caliph.[59] The desire of young Jihadists to be part of something historic and bigger than themselves and the inspiration of a Caliphate to those young Jihadists should not be underestimated.

The Islamic State's Syrian branch was able to develop in part because the Assad regime focused its military efforts in western Syria on the relatively more moderate opponents of the regime. The Assad regime's master narrative argued for a choice between Assad or al-Qaeda affiliated Sunni extremists.[60] Trying to destroy the moderate opposition while more or less ignoring al-Nusra and the then ISIS furthered that narrative since the moderates were the real and immediate political threat to the Assad dictatorship. The inability of the moderates to organize themselves into a credible army and the failure of Western powers to provide genuine support for the moderates on the ground have probably doomed any prospects of regime change that is not antagonistic to Western interests. Now that the IS has emerged as a more credible entity both governing and holding territory is has come to the attention of outside powers including the United States which is making limited kinetic efforts to contain it.

The creation of the IS means that Sunni Salafi fighters from Iraq which heretofore had to move into Syria through formal border crossings in addition to the informal trade and smuggling routes can now move as if there were no border at all.[61] This was facilitated in part, by common tribal affinities as the Aneza, Shammar, Aqaydat and al-Jabbur tribal confederations span both sides of the former border between Syria

and Iraq.[62] Iraq's Shi'a dominated nominal government allied with Assad, is now limited to the south of Iraq and unable to prevent Iraqi Sunnis from joining the fight in Syria.

In early 2014 the al-Qaeda core leadership in Pakistan speaking in the name of Ayman al-Zawahiri had attempted to renounce ISIS as an al-Qaeda affiliate knowing that ISIS and its precursor entity the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), had a history of alienating local Sunni populations. This renunciation received less attention than it probably deserved in that there are not prior instances of al-Qaeda overtly renouncing initially affiliated organizations.[63] Salafi notables including Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada al-Filistini both denounced the Caliphate of Abu Ibrahim and other al Qaeda affiliates have generally refused to enter into a *bayat* with the IS.[64] The rival Jabhat al-Nusra (the Victory Front sometimes called al-Qaeda in Bilad al-Sham) with more native Syrian fighters under Abu Muhammad al-Julani is al-Qaeda's preferred associate militia in Syria.[65] Al-Nusra was nominally populated by native Syrian Jihadis known locally as *muhajereen* yet they also contain some ethnic or nationally characterized formations. Libyan Jihadists for example, organized under Mahdi al-Harati's Military Umma Brigade and Sefian al-Kumi's Abu Salim Brigade have fought with Jabhat al-Nusra.s Ongoing friction between native Syrian Jihadists and foreign fighters within al-Nusra may become increasingly significant.

The emergence of the Caliph Ibrahim's Islamic State however may be an argument that the idea of al-Qaeda itself is outdated. Al-Qaeda was born as an administrative and logistical shell originally organized by Abdullah Azzam as a "Services Office" (Maktab al-Khidamat) to facilitate Jihadist resistance against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan thirty years ago. It may be less a matter of al-Qaeda as an organization factionalizing but more the concept of an al-Qaeda that factionalized with multiple Salafi related Jihadi organizations claiming piety representing Companions of the Prophet while fighting one another.

The rebellion is still aimed at the Assad regime but much fighting occurs between the militia fiefdoms created by rebel formations as a result of intra Salafi disputes particularly in the northern tier northeast from Aleppo and along the Turkish border where the IS has tried to extend its influence.[67] The Border between southeastern Turkey and northeastern Syria is quite porous and has been one of the major regions for entry for foreign fighters moving into Syria. Geographically northeastern Syria is also the area where we are seeing the emergence of a viable Kurdish state. The Kurdish Peshmerga heretofore have been content to defend their town territories from the IS and use the opportunities presented by the Syrian war to build Kurdish national infrastructure. The predominately Sunni Kurds, although they have been betrayed repeatedly by Western powers over the last century, are playing a role quite similar to Jordan in their amenability to Western interests.[68] That role includes affiliating the Kurds with other 'at risk' local minorities. The Kurdish Peoples Protection Units (YPG) therefore historically facilitated alliances with local militias defending minority communities in northeastern Syria even before the civil war. The Kurds, for example, supported the creation of the Kings Peacock (Malik al-Tawus) militia in 2007 to protect the Yazidi community and in 2008 across the border in the Nineveh Governorate in Iraq Sabah Behnem working with the Kurdish Asayish developed a Qaraqosh Protection Committee to defend local Assyrians.[69] In the current rebellion the Kurds helped propagate the small Syriac Christian militia Sutoro founded in Qamishli during March 2013.[70] Kurdish actors then generally remain in their historically defined territories while assisting and / or affiliating with adjacent ethnic minority militias to secure their geographic space. Unlike the Salafi Jihadi Organizations the Kurds are better understood in terms of establishing national infrastructure than creating petty militia fiefdoms.

The various formations within al-Nusra may become more enamored with the vision of the IS if the territories under Caliph Ibrahim's control continue to expand. In practice however an interlocking matrix of Salafi groups on the ground in Syria coalesce and disintegrate as local truces and alliances between Salafi are made and broken.[71] One of the characteristics of militia formations, both urban and rural across the Syrian space, is the creation and disintegration of truce arrangements between rival formations. Since all of the militias have intrinsic military weakness as compared to regular army formations the truce has become the vehicle to most effectively use the military capacity of a militia organization allowing them to focus their military efforts on targets left out of the truce arrangement.[72] It is also this process that is the basis for creating the transient militia fiefdoms.

### Southern Syria

The war in southern Syria with its more compact geography is characterized by a different militia dynamic than other parts of the country. Geographically the wheat growing Hauran plateau and the three provinces of Deraa, Quarteira and the Druze province of Sweida define southern Syria.[73] The Amman – Damascus highway that transects the region was well known for smuggling before the Syrian civil war and served a similar function following the outbreak of the rebellion. In some areas near Daraa al-Julani's al-Nusra is established and other Salafis' are trying to become established although Islamic State fighters have so far been unsuccessful in creating a significant presence. There is considerably less Salafi influence in the Sweida region of the south where Syria's Druze live. The Druze Jaysh al-Muwahideen (Army of Monotheists) militia has been generally neutral in the conflict preferring to protect their own mountain communities rather than taking sides[74] The Druze share some analogs with the Kurds in that they are content to defend their own region although unlike the Kurds the Druze have no interest in creating a state. Israel, Jordan, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia also cooperate in this region to support rebel operations with semi-vetted pro-western militias such as the Liwa Yarmouk under the Zu'bi Bashar al-Zu'bi against Damascus and to move war material and fighters across the border.[75] Unfortunately the political theater of multiple re-organizations of Sunni fighters from the more democratically oriented Free Syrian Army (FSA) to the Syrian Revolutionary Front in futile efforts to exclude al-Qaeda related Salafi extremists have proven fruitless in a war where the Salafi Jihadists are the most effective combatants.[76] Nonetheless Assad's Syrian Arab Army formations out of Nawa sporadic attempts to hold the motorway running between Damascus and Sunni controlled Daraa have been less than successful.[77] The SAA struggles to do anything beyond trying to secure portions of the highway for the Assad regime having lost the balance of the adjacent territory to the Druze or to Sunni rebels.[78]

### Shi'a Militias and their Affiliates in Western Syria

As the Syrian civil war has now evolved into a generalized Sunni revolt the shape of todays' conflict against the House of Assad is affected by the decision of Damascus to ally itself with Iran a generation ago. The ostensively secular but now shattered Syrian Ba'athist regime originally made common cause with Iran in the 1980s and in the years after the death of Hafez al-Assad in 2000 Syria effectively became an Iranian dependency.[79]

While Khomeini's concept of *Velayat-e Faqih* governance is challenged domestically by Iran's own struggle with economic and social modernity the Syrian civil war, which is now engulfing Iraq, directly confronts Iran's Supreme leader Khamenei with a looming catastrophe.[80] Tehran is facing in Syria something close

to an existential threat to its vital national interests. The rivers of Sunni blood flowing from Assad's efforts to crush the rebellion means any successor Sunni government in Syria must be hostile to Tehran. A hostile Sunni government in Damascus along with a fractured Iraq endangers the totality of Iran's *Resistance Axis* (Jabhat al-Muqawama) from the Levant to the Persian Gulf. "Saving Syria" then has become second only to the acquisition of nuclear weapons in Tehran's hierarchy of needs lest Iran lose the regional influence it has gained since the 1979 Revolution.[81] Tehran's ability to "Save" Syria however is complicated by the complex intra-Iranian political matrix of relationships between clerics, the *bonyad* (controlling various economic assets), the Revolutionary Guard (Pasdaran or IRGC) and other Iranian security organs that compete for influence in an ever changing constellation of conflicting interactions. The politically contradictory aspects of this system are illustrated by Iran's incongruous relationship with al-Qaeda. Tehran simultaneously hosts numerous al-Qaeda facilitators who have used safe haven in Iran to move al-Qaeda money and fighters across Pakistan[82] while at the same time Tehran's Revolutionary Guard battles al-Qaeda linked fighters in both Syria and Iraq.[83]

The collapse of the Assad government has effectively left a Russian supported and Iranian dependent Alawite ruled canton originating in Latakia, abutting Lebanon and running south to Damascus.[84] Bashar al-Assad while feigning a role as President is in fact merely leading the largest militia in Syria and is little more than the local face of a larger Iranian occupation. The collapse of Assad ruled territories in Syria's east has enhanced the already existing concentration of internally displaced minorities including most Alawite, Christians, and some clans of neutralist Druze into areas of western Syria controlled by the Assad government.[85]

The resources needed by Tehran to save its Syrian dependency increased exponentially after 2011 as it became clear that Damascus could not contain the rebellion. Therefore what was initially Iranian intelligence and law enforcement assistance rendered through Syria's General Intelligence Department (GID) quickly developed into a military campaign directly managed by Iran's Revolutionary Guard.[86] This campaign relied on the targeted use of both expeditionary Quds personnel along with the limited deployment of IRGC Ground Forces experienced in internal Iranian security operations.[87 The question then becomes how long an Iranian government significantly weakened by Western economic sanctions can afford to support this Syrian adventure before the flames of rebellion begin to smolder in Tehran.

Following the initial effort Iran's Revolutionary Guard changed tactics and attempted to fortify the Assad regime by organizing an array of praetorian auxiliaries built on a coalition of Shia affiliated militias.[88] Geographically these militias are intended to protect Syria's western urban centers and the internal lines communication that connect them. These Shia formations were organized by Iran's Revolutionary Guard and Lebanon's Hezbollah and incorporated the existing Alawite Jaysh al-Sha'bi (Quwat al-Difa'a al-Watani) built by local Alawite Popular Committees during 2012 in urban core of Damascus.[89] While initially fairly unstructured the ongoing development of Jaysh al-Sha'bi was funded by Tehran as Pasdaran Quds seized on this opportunity to establish control over these local urban militias and use them as proxy forces supporting the Assad regime.[90] Called the National Defense Forces by the Assad regime the Jaysh al-Sha'bi worked with a variety of other lesser known pro-regime militias. The Ba'ath Battalions for example appear to have originated in Aleppo under the auspices of a local Ba'ath party leader Hilal.[91] Like the Jaysh al-Sha'bi it is lightly armed and looks to merely relieve the army by manning checkpoints and the like. The Ba'ath Battalions militia idea has expanded now to several thousand fighters although good portions of those fighters are serving in the less dangerous coastal regions around Latakia and Tartus[92] Some Ba'ath

Battalions have been directly involved in fighting in Aleppo and elements seem to be now emerging in the Alawite neighborhoods of Damascus also hosting Jaysh al-Sha'bi militia groups.[93]

Urban organizations like the Ba'ath Battalions are distinct from Jaysh al-Sha'bi in that they are less affiliated with the IRGC and articulate at least the pretentions of Bashar Assad's ideologically secular Ba'ath Party.[94] In 2014 the popular narrative defines this conflict as Shi'a affiliated pro-government militias versus Salafi Sunni anti-government militias but there remain a few ostensively secular formations on both sides such as the aforementioned pro Assad Ba'ath Battalions and the secular Iraqi Sunni Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshbandi (JRTN) fighters allegedly aligned with the Islamic State.

Hezbollah is of course the most important of the Shi'a militias attempting to "Save Syria" for Tehran as well as itself.[95] Hezbollah is organized and operates differently than the Iraqi Shi'a militias fighting on behalf of Tehran in Syria. In southern Damascus for example a number of Iraqi Shi'a militias and Hezbollah fighters occupy the ground around the Sayyidah Zaynab and Sayyidah Ruqqaya Shrine complexes in Damascus, Bab Saghir Cemetery (also called the Sayyida Sukayna or Small Gate Shrine), and the Damascus Umayyad Mosque. These positions simultaneously hold territory in the capital while protecting the regimes air bridge to Iran via the Damascus airport.[96] One of the largest mixed Shi'a formations fighting in south Damascus is the Abu Fadl al-Abbas Brigade using a common moniker to aggregate several distinct Shi'a militias with roughly 10,000 fighters from Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq.[97] This Sayyidah Zaynab region facilitates local support for both Hezbollah and Iraqi Shi'a militias as it is also the region of Damascus settled by Shi'a refugees from earlier wars in Iraq so may constitute an identifiable Shi'a militia fiefdom as the war drags on.[98]

The Lebanese Hezbollah deployment aimed at saving Hezbollah as well as saving Syria is focused in the spaces abutting eastern and northern Lebanon in Syria.[99] The Hezbollah militia fighters are definable as a hybrid between special operations type groups and neo-guerrilla groups configured in a way approaching conventional military formations and meant to buttress the Syrian army on the ground.[100] In this sense Hezbollah is functioning as neither an urban nor a rural militia but something more akin to a small but more traditional military formation acting under Iranian command. Hezbollah's geographic deployment in Syria's western spaces supports a range of configurations. In and near Lebanon proper Hezbollah deploys in defined operational units. In the Qalamoun region it operates in tandem with the Syrian Arab Army while in other areas Hezbollah cells are embedded with Iraqi Shi'a militia formations. Hezbollah's initial deployments focused on efforts to secure Hezbollah's own historic arms supply route through Zebdani on the western side of Damascus which had been under effective rebel control for some time.[101] In western Syria when significant elements of the Syrian army are arrayed for particularly important battles Hezbollah appears to form what have been called "corseting" forces on the Syrian army flanks to strengthen the mediocre ability of the Syrian army to take and hold ground.[102] A Syrian army that is wanting in its ability to take territory is likewise middling in administering the territory it occupies. In the case of Qusayr for example the Syrian army's political unreliability means it is Hezbollah and not the Syrian army is really administering a militia fiefdom in the town.[103] Administration of Qusayr was important to Hezbollah because families from one of the organizations founding Hammadi clans lived there but it is also geographically important to the Assad regime as it links Damascus with the Orontes river valley through the Qalamoun Mountains into the coastal Alawite regions.[104] Although Hezbollah in theory controls Qusayr and, along with the Syrian army, the Qalamoun in fact there are still some thousands of rebel Sunni fighters operating in small bands harassing both Hezbollah and the SAA across that region.[105]

Hezbollah's intervention in Syria in 2012 at the behest of Iran and to protect its own interests in Lebanon fundamentally altered the character of that organization.[106] Politically Hezbollah's resistance narrative is no longer tenable since Hezbollah is now party to a major war outside Lebanon in which Israel is not even an overt participant. Militarily Hezbollah is engaged in extensive counterinsurgency operations in a neighboring country defending an Alawite dictatorship against a popular uprising by a majority Sunni population.[107] The course of the Syrian civil war has also seen an historic expansion in the size of the organization as veteran fighters become casualties and less seasoned fighters replace them.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard while genuinely allied with Hezbollah are by contrast utilizing Iraqi Shi'a militias differently in their efforts to save Syria. Whereas Hezbollah has a hierarchy almost comporting with that of a conventional army operating under Iranian command the Iraqi Shi'a militias are much less coherently organized.[108] The Iraqi Shi'a militias also lack the experience and training of the original Hezbollah cadre who cut their teeth against the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in south Lebanon. Many in the Iraqi Shi'a militias fighting in Syria have minimal training and their only advantage over Assad's Syrian Arab Army is that the Iraqi Shi'a are politically reliable unlike Assad's supposed army.[109] They often fight under the name of the Abu Fadl al-Abbas Brigade as an umbrella organization for Iraqi Shi'a militias in Damascus.[110] Cadre from these Iraqi Shi'a militias were initially organized under the Iranian Special Groups fighting Americans in Iraq before the U.S. withdrawal in 2011.[111] They were first deployed across Syria in 2012 at Iran's directive but are now stretched as the Salafi Islamic State has split Iraq in half. This has relieved some of the pressure on Sunni Salafi Jihadists fighting in western Syria as some Iraqi Shi'a fighters return to Iraq to fight the Islamic State. Having said that Iraq's Iranian controlled Asa'ib al-Haq organization under Qais al-Khazali[112 ]and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis's Kata'ib Hezbollah (Jaysh al-Mukhtar) still send fighters to Syria.[113] Kata'ib Hezbollah founded by Watheq al-Battat and deploying fighters in both Iraq and Syria is relatively more significant organizationally in part because al-Muhandis has an especially close relationship with Pasdaran Quds chief General Suleimani.[114] Asa'ib al-Haq (League of the Righteous) was founded about 2005 but has a growing expeditionary footprint in Syria.[115] Pasdaran Quds has deployed these Iraqi Shi'a militias fighting in Syria primarily to Damascus and Aleppo as these cities are most important to the outcome of the war. The Haidar al-Karar Brigade, for example, is deployed in west Aleppo with about 800 fighters under the leadership of the military chief of Asa'ib al-Haq Akram Abbas al-Kabi.[116] Asa'ib al-Haq has sent the greatest number of Iraqi Shi'a fighters to Syria[117] although Kata'ib Hezbollah has sent about 1500 fighters in three Brigades to Syria al-Hamd, Hassan Mujtaba, and Ammar Ibn Yassar.[118] Iran's objective is to use these Shi'a militias to push the Sunni fighters out of Damascus and Aleppo relegating the rebels to the eastern wastelands of Syria.

### Lebanon's Discontents

Lebanon has historically been integral to Syria and so is inevitably engaged in the struggle for Syria. The petty fiefdoms being established by contending militias in Syria are beginning now to be reflected in Lebanon. While not entirely merging with the Syrian conflict the Syrian war is now directly impacting Lebanon with nearly a million Syrian refugees in the country and Sunni Salafi Jihadists initiating operations against Hezbollah in Lebanese territory.[119] This influx of Syrian Sunni refugees is demographically making Lebanon more Sunni and less Shi'a. The Bekka Sunni town of Arsal for example, now swollen from 40,000 to nearly 100,000 people has become one nexus for the spillover. The Sunni inhabitants provide significant logistical support for the anti-Assad rebels opposite Arsal and Tfeil in the Qalamoun region of Syria despite

the efforts of the Lebanese Army and Hezbollah to prevent it.[120] There a potential for a Salafi salient to develop anchored in Arsal and creeping south on the western side of the Bekka.

Although there is not a significant militant Sunni tradition in Lebanon that is now changing as some segments of Lebanon's Sunni community become radicalized and Sunni Syrian refugees in Lebanon remain actors in the Syrian civil war. That radicalization is most pronounced in the rural areas of Lebanon particularly the northern Bekka although it is happening to a lesser degree in urban settings as well.[121]

In the fall of 2013 for example, ISIS car bombs struck Hezbollah facilities in Haret Hreik in south Beirut while the Salafi Abdullah Azzam Brigades directly attacked the Iranian embassy in the Beirut's Jnah area.[122] The northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, always divided from the time of Lebanon's civil war, is now witnessing an emergent kinetic struggle between various Salafist supporters of the Syrian rebels in the Bab al-Tabbaneh quarter and their Alawite neighbors abutting Jabal Mohsen.[123] The Lebanese Army deployed in Tripoli during April of 2014 as part of a security plan but the Lebanese army is itself now coming under fire. Likewise Sidon in Lebanon's south now sees regular fighting between Sunni Salafists and Hezbollah supporters.[124] The real danger from Hezbollah's point of view would be Salafi Jihadists from the Ain al-Hilwah refugee camp near Sidon developing modalities for Salafi Jihadi safe passage through the Iqlim al-Kharroub where there is significant Sunni population and then move north through the Sunni villages on the western side of the Bekka up toward Arsal.[125] The danger for Lebanon is this could create a band of Sunni zones from Arsal in the north, down the western side of the Bekka then cutting further west to Sidon on the coast. This would essentially split Lebanon in half with a zone of potential refuge for Sunni Salafi Jihadists.

The modus vivendi between the Lebanese Army and Hezbollah following the 1989 Ta'if accords had been predicated on the army limiting its activities to maintaining security over the various Palestinian camps in Lebanon. Those Palestinian Camps were inadvertently destabilized by Bashar Assad himself when he placed Syrian Jihadist fighters returning from operations in American occupied Iraq in the Lebanese Palestinian Camps to prevent them from threatening his government.[126] In 2005 Syria had been forced to withdraw its occupation army from Lebanon and placing these returning Jihadist fighters in Lebanese Palestinian Camps seemed like a way for Bashar Assad to maintain influence in Lebanon. However Fatah al-Islam (in Nahr al-Bared Camp) and Usbat al-Ansar (in Ain al-Hilwah Camp) became the nucleus of a Salafi Jihadi network now facilitating operations in Syria against Assad and creating space in Lebanon for Sunni Salafi Jihadists to grow.[127] Consequently the Ta'if understanding is now secondary as the Lebanese Army attempts to suppress Sunni militants in Tripoli and Sidon while avoiding involvement in the larger Syrian conflict. Nonetheless the Lebanese Army's 2nd and 6th mechanized infantry brigades and 1st and 2nd border regiments deployed in northeastern Lebanon are slowly becoming belligerents supporting Hezbollah and the Assad government against the Sunni rebellion[128]

### Conclusions

When Syrians first rose up in search of democratic reforms as the Arab Spring moved across the Levant the country was not a failed state. Bashar al-Assad's thuggish attempt to bludgeon into silence the moderate Syrian cry for freedom did however succeed in destroying the Ba'athist state his father built. The ethnic and religious geographies that characterized twentieth century Lebanon's civil war had their analogs in Syria but the Syrian experience is not merely reflective of Lebanon. Historically Lebanon has been the economic driver of commerce in Syria and western Syria will remain dependent on Lebanon for economic viability whatever the ultimate permutations of Syria's civil war.[129] Syrian ethnic and religious geographies were animated

by a Salafi Jihadism at war with modernity and the determination of imperial Iran to hold the gains of its twentieth century revolution.

Syria's democratic revolutionaries themselves fell victim to men more ruthless in political ambition. The disciples of Syrian democracy saw their revolution hijacked by Salafi Islamists seeking not only the destruction of the Ba'athist state but the restoration of a version of Islam allegedly followed by the Companions of the Prophet. The battle in Syria grew into one between Salafi Jihadism and Iran's local procurator in Damascus Bashar al-Assad. The Western powers stepped back and contented themselves with allowing sufficient support to reach the Salfists and the smattering of democratic fighters to bleed Tehran and its allies on the battlefield but not aid sufficient to defeat Assad and allow the Salafists to come to power.

It is now possible to articulate some observations about the qualitative pattern of militia development and accretion of militia dominated petty fiefdoms across the geography of Syria. In the timeframe since the outbreak of the rebellion in 2011 we have seen an emergence of increasingly complex relationships between anti-Assad militias. The raw number of militias fighting the Assad regime increased dramatically in 2012 along with a slower increase in their military capacity and growth of spaces dominated by militia fiefdoms that continued into 2013 and 2014. A shifting constellation of alliances and truces particularly between various Salafi militias and the geographic areas they controlled characterized inter militia relations. The cumulative breakdown in Assad's governing authority across the country provided less governed spaces conducive to both militia growth and the petty fiefdoms. The involvement of external powers also followed this general trend with greater and greater involvement from 2012 forward.

While there are literally hundreds of militias across the Syrian battle space coalescing and disintegrating as truces and alliances change all the militias are not equally relevant. Major Casey Mills of the U.S. Army created an approach for assessing terrorist threats relevant to understanding Syrian militias with focus on scale, scope, and salience. Mills argues that scale defines the size and capabilities of the organization, scope looks at the ability or desire of the entity to extend its area of operations and salience examines the importance and resonance of the groups' message and objectives.[130]

The anti-Assad militias with their focus in rural spaces appear to be coalescing into three general groupings. The first grouping consists of the so-called moderate militias whose fiefdoms exist in pockets of north central Syria and in the south adjacent to Jordan. These militias have been marginalized with much of their leadership outside the country and compromised to Western powers not much interested in a military victory over Assad. These militias are small and are intentionally limited in their capabilities as their Western sponsors are not seeking an outright military victory over Assad. The ability of these groups to expand their area of operations is limited secondary to the minimal support delivered from those sponsors. Their salience is problematic because their lack of military capacity makes them irrelevant. The second major grouping is defined through the Islamic Front coalition now defined primarily by Ahrar al-Sham and affiliated factions ruling multiple petty fiefdoms immediately adjacent to the Syrian rump state from Latakia south along with Jabhat al-Nusra abutting Lebanon and terminating in Damascus. These militias are Salafi Jihadist in orientation but sympathetic to the ideology of Hasan al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood in terms of their willingness to engage non-Islamic elements to reach an ultimate goal of Islamic governance.[131] While these groups generally have no frank affiliation with the Ikhwan they do adopt Hasan al-Banna's thought as distinct from Sayyed Qutb's Leninist Vanguard Party approach in compromising with the modern world on the way to Ummah.[132] These militias are large and reasonably capable. They are sympathetic and / or affiliated with al-Qaeda but it is somewhat unclear whether they have any intentionality to expand operations outside

Syria. They are more salient now than they were two years ago because the Salafi Jihadists have proven most relevant and most effective on the battlefield. The third grouping consists of Islamic State affiliated Jihadists whose fiefdoms govern in the eastern Syrian space while competing with Islamic Front formations in some northern regions. These Islamic State affiliated Jihadists incorporate transnational Jihad into their ideological worldview and for them the Syrian war is merely part of a larger struggle. Islamic State and affiliated Jihadi militias are large and reasonably capable although they rely on battlefield recovery for most of their arms and ammunition but have created their own revenue streams. They do, and in fact are, expanding operations outside Syria. The expansion is principally in Iraq with some efforts aimed now at Jordan. The message of a restored Caliphate clearly resonates with many impressionable Jihadist sympathizers outside Syria. It is the second and third groupings in Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State that have attracted the greatest numbers of foreign fighters.[133]

An era of militia dominated petty fiefdoms covered with an Islamist veneer then is likely to emerge across the whole of the former Syrian state with the political orientation of the various self-proclaimed Islamist Emirs dependent on the major sources of their political and material support as well as the audience to whom they are speaking in a given moment.[134]

In the western Syrian rump state defined by the Tartus Latakia Damascus axis these militia fiefdoms will likely be characterized by territories ruled through Shi'a affiliated militias of different configurations united principally by faux allegiance to Iran's Revolutionary Guard through the figure head of Bashar al-Assad. Here Assad is essentially another militia chief, albeit the largest one, beholden to a foreign patron. The threat in western Syria succinctly defined by Aaron Lund is the gradual disintegration of Iran's ability to exercise much authority through Assad.[135] Lund foresees the gradual unraveling of central authority even on the pro-regime side as the concurrent rise of local rulers operating with independent resources in ostensive regime controlled areas furthering a likelihood of militia dominated fiefdoms in western Syria. In the eastern expanses of Syria militia fiefdoms with a Salafi face will be more pronounced and adhere to disparate ideological currents flowing from Caliph Ibrahim's *Islamic State* and united in their rejection of modernity.

The trend over time mirroring Lebanon's experience will be towards consolidation and a re-emergence of a Syrian state but an era of militia fiefdoms will likely precede it.

### About the author

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### Notes

[1]The general description of Bathism is an authoritarian ideology originated by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-bin al-Bitar deriving from fascist political ideologies in Europe. Ba'athists ostensively sought a "renaissance" of Arab culture and a single state under what Lenin would call a vanguard party. Sunni militants often refer to Alawites as "Nusairis" after the Alawite founder Abu Shuaib Muhammed Ibn Nusair an-Numairi (d. 868). The French renamed the Nusairis as Alawites during the Mandate period to emphasize their connsection to Ali and the larger Muslim community in an attempt to enhance political stability. Syrian Alawites divide into roughly four tribal groupings: the Haddadun, Khayyatun, Kalbiyyah, and Matawirah, with the Assads from

the Numilatiyya clan of the Matawirahs. See Mahmude A. Faksh, "The Alawi Community of Syria: A New Dominant Political Force," *Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 2 (April 1984): 133–135.

[2] Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio and Ignacio Gutierrez de Teran "The Syrian Ruling Elite and the failure of the repressive trend" in *Political Regimes in the Arab World: Society and the Exercise of Power*. Ferran Izquierdo Brichs ed. (Routledge, 2012), p. 189. Also included are the al-Hassan, Najib, Hamsho, and Hambouba, clans. See Bassam Haddad "The Syrian Regime's Business Backbone" *Jadaliyya* 22 March 2012.

[3] "Drought helped cause Syria's war. Will climate change bring more like it?" *Washington Post* 10 September 2013.

[4] "Drought called a factor in Syria's Uprising," *Voice of America,* August 20, 2013.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Rural Poverty in Syria," Rural Poverty Portal http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/home/tags/syria Accessed 20 May 2014.

[7] Kilcullen, David and Nate Rosenblatt, "The Rise of Syria's Urban Poor: Why the War for Syria's Future Will Be Fought Over the Country's New Urban Villages," *PRISM Syria Supplemental* Center for Complex Operations Volume 4, (2014), 33.

[8] "Urban and Rural Geography in Syria" Geographic Services Inc., 2011, www.geographic-services/net/index.php/download_file/view/112/210 Accessed 1 May 2015.

[9] Jaysh al-Muhajirin al Ansar (Army of Immigrants and Supporters) though Chechen has been publically supported by Saudi scholar-jurist Abdullah Muhammad al-Muhaysini. "Al Qaeda-linked Saudi cleric in Syria praises fighters from Islamic Caucus Emirate," *Long War Journal,* March 2, 2014. JMA originally affiliated with al-Nusra but later became part of the Islamic State. In addition to Chechans there are a significant number of Muslims from Western countries.

[10] Haian Dukham "Tribes and Tribalism in the Syrian Uprising" *Syria Studies Journal* (Volume 6 Number 2), pg. 8

[11] Nicholas A. Heras "A profile of Syria's Strategic Dar'a Province*" CTC Sentinel* Combating Terrorism Center 30 June 2014.

[12] Reinoud Leenders "Social Movement Theory And The Popular Uprising In Syria," *Arab Studies Quarterly* Volume 35, number 3, 278.

[13] The Druze generally maintain what can be described as an "active neutrality" theoretically acquiescing to the national authorities who theoretically exercise dominion over their territories while actually concerned primarily with the integrity of their own communities.

[14] James C. Davies, "Toward a Theory of Revolution," *American Sociological Review*, 1962, 27(1): 5–19.

[15] Martha Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach To The Analysis Of Political Terrorism," *Orbis* 29 (Fall 1985): 465-489.

[16] Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, Sao Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City: Oxford University Press, 2013, 216.

[17] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi and Oskar Svadkovsky, "Demography Is Destiny in Syria," *The American Spectator* February 6, 2012. The first protest in Damascus was also in February 2011 near the Souk al-Hamidiyah in the central city.

[18] Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution*, 217.

[19] Carole A. O'Leary and Nicholas Heras, "Syrian Tribal Networks and their Implications for the Syrian Uprising," *Terrorism Monitor,* Volume X, Issue 11, 1 June, 2012. "Earth Is parched Where Syrian Farms Thrived" *New York Times* October 13, 2010.

[20] Concomitant with the aforementioned is a correlation, if not a causal relationship, between most of the Governorates that were the first to rebel and pre-revolutionary crime rates. The Governorates first involved in the rebellion Daraa, Idlib, Homs and Deir ez-Zor excepting Homs but in particular Daraa had the highest criminal conviction rates in Syria. See Reinoud Leenders and Steven Heydemann "Popular Mobilization in Syria: Opportunity and Threat, and the Social Networks of the Early Risers," *Mediterranean Politics,* Volume 17 (2), 149 and 151.

[21 Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant* (Adelphi Books 2013), 69. Pro]testers also used smuggled cell phones and internet chat rooms to organize demonstrations in the name of Local Coordinating Committees about this time. See Fred H. Lawson, *Global Security Watch: Syria*, Santa Barbara California, Denver Colorado, and Oxford England: Praeger Press, 2013, 83.

[22] Lawson, *Global Security Watch Syria*, 84.

[23] Syrian Ba'athism is as outdated as Marxism in the Near East as the most powerful dynamics sweeping the region are now ethnic and Islamist. Democracy, Socialism, and Ba'athism have just failed politically and economically in most of the region. Democracy promotes social insurgency in the face of dictatorship but has not really survived as an end in itself. Democracy combined with Western style nationalism has functioned only in Israel where it is joined with ethnicity and, to a lesser extent, in Turkey. Egypt's experiment with socialism died forty years ago with Nasser and is a model for no one. Ideological Ba'athism with its Westernizing and material affectations have been obliterated in Iraq, failed in Syria, and exists only in the political margins of Lebanon and Jordan.

[24] Even setting aside the sectarian make-up of the Syrian Arab Army it was still ill-equipped to suppress a massive popular revolt. The Syrian Army consisted primarily of heavy divisions intended to fight Israel in a conventional war and was neither trained nor prepared to fight a widespread counterinsurgency campaign within Syria proper. The formations of the SAA that remained most loyal to Assad were the 4th Armored Division nominally commanded by General Mohamed Ali Durgham but de facto commanded by Assad's brother Maher al-Assad and the Republican Guard Division under Geneeral Shoaeb Suleiman headquartered at mount Qasioun west of Damascus. Now Syria's national infrastructure has been reduced to ruin the only thriving economic activity seems to be the local production of the illegal amphetamine called *captagon*.

[25] Charles Lister and William McCants "The Syrian Civil War: Political And Military State Of Play" *War On The Rocks* 14 February 2014. http://warontherocks.com/2014/02/the-syrian-civil-war-political-and-military-state-of-play/ Accessed 12 May 2015.

[26] The Saudi Intelligence Service (al-Mukkabarat al-A'amah or GIP) is the Government of Saudi Arabia lead organization in this effort. See also "Lebanon Caught in Middle of Iranian-Saudi 'Cold War'" *Al Monitor* 22 August 2013.

[27] "Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamentalist Opposition" *International Crisis Group*, Middle East Report Number 131, October 2012, 7.

[28] Haian Dukham "Tribes and Tribalism in the Syrian Uprising" *Syria Studies Journal* (Volume 6 Number 2), 15.

[29] Dulhan, "Tribes and Tribalism in the Syrian Uprising," *Syria Studies*, 15. Syrian tribes are organized as national or transnational tribal confederations called Qabila and individual tribes called Ashira. The Ashira are divided into clans called fukhud, linages called Khums, and extended families called al-Bayt or aa'ila. See Nicholas A. Heras and Carole A. O'Leary, "The Tribal Factor in Syria's Rebellion: A Survey of Armed Tribal Groups in Syria," *Terrorism Monitor,* Jamestown Foundation volume 11, Issue 13, June 27, 2013.

[30] Dulhan, "Tribes and Tribalism in the Syrian Uprising," *Syria Studies*, 17.

[31] Syrian tribes divide into clans (asha'ir) and lineages (afkhed).

[32] Dulhan, "Tribes and Tribalism in the Syrian Uprising," *Syria Studies*, 15.

[33]Blowback from the Syrian war is also undermining Lebanon's fragile peace with the Oxford Research Group estimating that country to have absorbed nearly one million Syrian refugees.

[34] In 2014 the Islamic Front seemed to disintegrate although Ahrar al-Sham continued to use the moniker. The largest organizations in the Islamic Front included Ahrar al-Sham, the Twaheed Brigade, and Jaysh al-Islam. See Aaron Lund "Islamist Mergers in Syria: Ahrar al-Sham Swallows Suqour al-Sham" *Syria In Crisis* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 23 March 2015

[35] Lisa Lundquist "Analysis: Formation of Islamic Front in Syria benefits jihadists groups" *Long War Journal* 23 November 2013.

[36] Suqour al-Sham was effectively aborbed by Ahrar al-Sham in early 2015. See Aaron Lund "Islamist Mergers in Syria: Ahrar al-Sham Swallows Suqour al-Sham" *Syria In Crisis* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 23 March 2015.

[37] Abu Khalid al Suri (Mohamed Bahaiah) was an al-Qaeda member who led Ahrar al-Sham until his death near Aleppo in early 2014 attack. Khalid did know Abu Mus'ab al-Suri thought to have been rendered from Diego Garcia back to Bashar Assad some years ago. Abu Mus'ab was an intellectual driver of the Islamist movement having penned several seminal treatises on resistance. See "Al Qaeda's chief representative in Syria killed in suicide," *Long War Journal* February 23, 2014. Ahrar al-Sham received significant financial support from Qatar which facilitated weapons purchases in Libya for the group and from Kuwait.

[38] Thomas Joscelyn "Head of Islamic Front, other senior leaders killed in explosion" *Long War Journal* 9 Septermber 2014.

[39] Raphael Lefevre "New Leaders for the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood" *Carnegie Middle East Center* 11 December 2014. Recently there have been efforts to re-establish Ikhwan as significant actors in Syria but those efforts are having only a marginal impact.

[40] Pro-Western groups including Bashar al-Zoubi's *Liwa al-Yarmouk* in Derra and Jamal Maarouf's *Shuhada Souria* in Idlib simply do not command enough fighters to be relevant any more. The recently created Saudi and Qatari funded *Islamic Front* incorporating *Jaysh al-Islam* which operates primarily in Damascus, *Ahrar al-Sham* one of the more directly Salafist factions with a history of cooperating with al-Qaeda, *Suqour al-Sham* active primarily in the Idlib region and *Liwa al-Tawhid* fighting in Aleppo allegedly exclude the overtly al-Qaeda affiliated *Jabhat al-Nusra* and initially declared al-Qaeda oriented *Islamic State*

*in Iraq and Syria* but that is unlikely to prove any more successful than previous efforts to segregate Salafi Jihadists from al-Qaeda factions.

[41] The increasingly sectarian nature of the war has led to "dueling fatwa's" issued by prominent scholar-jurists. Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi based in Qatar issued a fatwa in the spring of 2013 supporting a Sunni Jihad against the Assad government. Grand Mufti Abdul-Aziz ibn Abdullah Al ash-Sheikh of Saudi Arabia supported al-Qaradawi. Ayatollah Kazim al-Heri now in Iran countered with a fatwa giving approval for Shi'a to fight on behalf of the Assad government. The recruitment networks for these fighters appear to be fairly informal. While informal networks of facilitators are involved in transporting housing and fighters once they arrive in Turkey the structure is not centrally administered. Jihadis often intend to fight with one organization and then find themselves associated with another once they are in Syria. As the Salafi Jihadists came to dominate the anti-Assad factions across the east of Syria both the native Syrian and foreign Salafi Sunni fighters were driven by the usual mix of political motivations to join a Jihad. In Syria however there is the additional subtext of the *Sufyani* narrative predicated on a claim of a Muslim tyrant arising in Damascus and ultimately being defeated by the Mahdi (an Islamic deliverer prophesized to defeat the enemies of Allah and rule for a period of years immediately before the Day of Judgment). While not a major stimulus it is relevant in actuating the desire of some young Jihadists to engage the fight against Bashar Assad as the archetype, if not the person, of that *Sufyani* (Islamic eschatology facilitates utilization of prophesy for politics whether there is a consensus among the scholar-jurists or not).

[42] Al Baghdadi was seriously injured in drone strike in early 2015 and designated Abu Alaa al-Afri as his successor in the event of al-Baghdadi's death. See "Isis leader incapacitated with suspected spinal injuries after air strike" *The Guardian* 1 May 2015. Al-Afri has himself been reported killed but the relevant point is that al-Baghdadi is arranging a succession.

[43] The IS is a new incarnation of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) headed by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi until his death in 2006. Al-Baghdadi began building his organization anew in May of 2010. Some groups within ISIS are more cohesive fighting as distinct entities such as Abu Hanif's Jamaat made up primarily of fighters from Dagestan. The strength of ISIS is in the Anbar and Nineveh provinces of Iraq where it runs training camps. It also maintains a presence in Nineveh, Fallujah, and is now in control of Ramadi. Between 2012 and 2013 more than 600 Sunni militants escaped Iraqi prisons in a series of jailbreaks that buttressed the number of ISIS fighters. See "Anatomy of militant groups reveals Iraq's different challenges," *The National UAE,* 12 February 2014. See also "Escaped Inmates From Iraq Fuel Syrian Insurgency," *New York Times,* 12 February 2014.

[44] Michael Knight "ISIL's Political-Military Power in Iraq," *CTC Sentinel,* Volume 7, Issue 8, August 2014.

[45] "Self-funded and deep rooted: How ISIS makes its millions" CNN 7 October 2014, see also "ISIS making millions daily off crime, terror" CBS News 23 October 2014, and Yochi Dreazen "ISIS Uses Mafia Tactics to Fund Its Own Operations Without Help From Persian Gulf Donors" *Foreign Policy* 17 June 2014.

[46] Farhan Zahid and Mohammad Salman Foreign Analysis Number 1 "The Tehrek-e Taliban Pakistan In Syria" *Centre Francais de Recherche Sur le Renseignement* Paris 1 February, 2014.

[47] Salafi dervies from "Salaf al-Saleh" referring to the Righteous Companions of the Prophet and fall under the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. In the Syrian civil war the Sunni *Ulema* initially split with some like Grand Mufti Ahmad Hassan and Muhammad al-Bhuti supporting the Assad regime while Ulema in

smaller cities were more sympathetic to the rebels. See "Syrian Baath Party and Sunni Islam: Conflict and Connivance," *Middle East Brief* 77, Crown Center of Middle East Studies Brandeis University, February 2014.

[48] Nicholas A. Heras "The Struggle for Syria's al-Hasakah Governorate: Kurds, the Islamic State and the IRGC" *Terrorism Monitor* Volume XIII Issue 7, 4 April 2015. The YPG is locally supported by an allied Sutoro militia made up of ethnic Assyrians. The frontier Kurdish city of Qamishli, sitting directly opposite Nusaybin Turkey, within Hasakah Governorate has the airport (along with the border crossing and a few neighborhoods) under Assad regime control with IRGC-Quds moving Iraqi Shi'a fighters from Najaf to the Qamishli airport to maintain a nominal Assad government presence.

[49] While the first iteration of ISIS then called the Islamic State in Iraq were characterized by quickly alienating local Sunnis the newer Islamic State appears to be a learning organization and appears to implement the rigors of Salafi tradition in a more staged manner.

[50] Christoph Reuter "The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State" *Spiegel Online International* 18 April 2015.

[51] Ibid.

[52] The IS is generally following the process outlined in Abu Bakr Naji's treatise *The Management of Savagery* (Ida'rat al-Tawahhush).

[53] "The Islamic State's Baathist roots" *Al Monitor* 24 April 2015.

[54] A second weakness is that the IS is not an integrated army so much as it is a coalition of Islamist factions. The factions could hypothetically be targeted as distinct entities.

[55] "The Re-Bathification of Iraq" *Foreign Policy* 21 August 2014.

[56] "Military Skill and Terrorist Technique Fuel Success of ISIS," *New York Times,* 27 August 2014.

[57] Administration contains Sharia Courts, religious and local police, Sharia Institutes, Recruitment and Tribal Relations. Muslim Services apparently includes bakeries, water, and electricity.

[58] Charles C. Caris and Samuel Reynolds, "ISIS Governance In Syria," *Middle East Security Report 22*, Institute for the Study of War July 2014, 14 – 16. The Iraqi Shi'a Asa'ib al-Haq had an operational presence in Tal Afar in Nineveh Province which may have left a stay behind network as the IS took over.

[59] Dareed Gartenstein-Ross and Thomas Joscelyn, "Zawahiri's Revenge: Why al-Qaeda, not the Islamic State, is still the most dangerous terrorist organization on Earth," *Foundation for the Defense of Democracies,* July 31, 2014.

[60] "How Syria's Assad Helped Forge ISIS" *Newsweek* 21 June 2014 See also "Assad regime set free extremists from prison to fire up trouble during peaceful uprising" *The National* 21 January 2014. Islamist prisoners were released from among the political prisoners Sednaya prison who later rose to the top of multiple Salafi Jihadist organizations including Hassan Abboud (Ahrar Al-Sham), Zahran Alloush (Jaysh al-Islam), and Ahmad `Aisa al-Shaykh (Suqour al-Sham).

[61] The Iraqi government previous attempts to seal the border against Sunni fighters moving into Syria met with mixed effect. For example at the Rabia-yaa Rabiya crossing one of the local tribal confederations the Shammar has many of its clans in Iraq and provides many of the fighters for the Free Jazira Brigade despite Baghdad's efforts.

[62] Haian Dulhan, "Tribes and Tribalism in the Syrian Uprising," *Syria Studies,* Volume 6, Number 2 (2014), 18.

[63] Dareed Gartenstein-Ross and Thomas Joscelyn, "Zawahiri's Revenge: Why al-Qaeda, not the Islamic State, is still the most dangerous terrorist organization on Earth," *Foundation for the Defense of Democracies,* July 31, 2014.

[64] Thomas Joscelyn "Al-Qaeda jihadists celebrate release of anti-Islamic State Ideologue" *Long War Journal* 2 February 2015.

[65]Jabhat al-Nusra is said to have originated from al-Zarqawi's Syrian network of "guesthouses" for Jihadists transiting Syria to fight in Iraq following the American invasion. Bashar al-Assad had calculated it was to his political advantage to allow Syrian Jihadists to fight in Syria after the U.S. invasion in 2003. A Salafi cleric in Aleppo Abu al-Qaqaa coordinated with Zarqawi. Al-Nusra was formed between October of 2011 and January of 2012 as a result of meetings in Damascus and Homs. The organization mustered roughly 5000 fighters in 2012-2013 under Abu Mohammad al-Julani. Much of the core leadership apparently originated with Syrians who worked with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Herat Afghanistan. Zawahiri apparently planned the creation of specific cells in the al-Nusra organization tasked with identifying and recruiting Islamist fighters from European countries for future terrorist operations in Europe. See Norman Benotman and Roisin Blake, "Jabhat al-Nusra," *Quilliam*, 8 January, 2013.

[66]Waleed al-Rawi and Sterling Jensen, "Syria's Salafi networks More Local than you Think," *PRISM A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations,* Syria supplemental, Vol 4, 2014, 50 – 51.

[67] Directly west of Aleppo in Turkey's Hatay province U.S. interlocutors both in a Military Operations Center in Hatay city and in a U.S. facility in Reyhani on the border work with some pseudo-vetted rebel fighters such as Harakat Hazm (Movement of the Steadfast) and the Syrian Revolutionary Front although both were overwhelmed by Jabhat al-Nusra.

[68] This betrayal began with the 1920 Treaty of Sevres supposedly allowing for an independent Kurdistan and goes right up to 1975s when the Shah of Iran and the U.S. abandoned the Kurdish rebels fighting against Sadddam.

[69] "Qaraqosh Protection Committee" *Wikipedia* last updated 29 March 2015 and "Local Struggles in Syria's northeast" *Washington Post*, September 9, 2014. There is a larger Syriac Military Council operating in Hasakah under Gewargis Hanna.

[70] Ibid.

[71] It should be noted that smuggling and other criminal organizations are likewise actors in the conflicting alliance matrices.

[72] See "Research Summary Report: Local Truces in Syria" *Integrity Research and Consultancy* London June 2014.

[73] "The Last Bastion of the Syrian Revolt" *ISN Swiss Federal Institute of Technology* 17 February 2015. Also it was in Quarteira at Tel al-Hara the Russian Military Intelligence 6th Directorate Signals Intelligence Osnaz unit operated a regional listening post. See Carl Wege "Iran and Assad Are Not Winning" *Fair Observer* 1 April 2015.

[74] Aymen Jawad al-Tamimi 'The Druze Militias of Southern Syria" *Middle East Forum* 13 November 2013. http://www.meforum.org/3668/druze-militias-syria Accessed 10 May 2015. Hezbollah recently attempted

to create a pro-government Druze "Lebayk Ya Salam" militia with little success. See "A Druze Conundrum: Suwayada, Jabhat al-Nusra, and the Syrian Civil War" *Telaviv Notes* Moshe Dayan Center, Volume 9, Number 8, 26 April 2015.

[75] The Ramtha border crossing where Syria, Jordan and Israel meet was seized by the rebels in September of 2013. The north and east of Jordan is defended by the 2nd Royal Guard Mechanized brigade under the Jordanian Eastern Command. CENTCOM Forward Jordan (CF-J) also supports a Military Operations Center north of Amman that acts as a logistics and supply hub for approved rebel fighters.

[76] Aaron Lund has discussed the amorphous and ever changing nature of the Free Syrian Army idea. See Aaron Lund "The Free Syrian Armies: Institutional Split" *Syria In Crisis* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 25 March 2014.

[77] See Jonathan Dupree, "Syria Update: The Southern Battlefronts," *Syrian Assistance Blog,* 6 April 2013.

[78] "Israel's Growing Role in Southern Syria," Policy Watch 2201, *Washington Institute for Near East Policy,* 29 January 2014.

[79] Bassam Barabandi and Tyler Jess Thompson "A Friend of my Father: Iran's Manipulation of Bashar al-Assad" MENA Source *Atlantic Council* 28 August 2014 http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/a-friend-of-my-father-iran-s-manipulation-of-bashar-al-assad Accessed 10 May 2015. See also "Eye of the Storm: The 'Iranization' of Syria" *Jerusalem Post* 1 November 2006.

[80] Khomeini's concept of *Velayat-e Faqih* was a departure from Iranian history where clerics had never ruled directly. See Azar Tabari,. "The Role of the Clergy in Modern Iranian Politics," in *Religion And Politics In Iran*. Nikki R. Keddie ed., New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983, 72. It is believed that Khomeini was inspired to this idea from the works of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in the nineteenth century who called for an undefined revival of Islam along with Ali Shariati and Allama Iqbal.

[81] It is also worth noting that Iran had significant economic assets in Syria. Iran used Syrian development projects as a way to circumvent western economic sanctions in the 2000s. These development projects ranged from the Iranian Saipa Auto manufacturing plant to joint projects run by Bank Saderat Iran and the Commerical Bank of Syria. See Nadia von Maltzahn *The Syria-Iran Axis: Cultural Diplomacy and International Relations in the Middle East* I. B. Tauris:London, New York, et. al., Library of Modern Middle East Studies, 2013.

[82] "Al-Qaeda facilitator "back on the street" in Iran," *Long War Journal* 31 January 2014. These would include Ezedin Abdel Aziz Khalil (Yasin al-Suri), Mushin al-Fadhli and his deputy Adel Radi Saqr al-Wahabi al-Harbi. Al-Suri was then detained by the Iranian authorities and succeeded by al-Fadhl until recently when al-Suri was released and al-Fadhl moved to Syria to work with Jabhat al-Nusra. See also "Long War Journal Report: Former head of al-Qaeda network in Iran now operates in Syria," *Long War Journal,* March 25, 2014. See also Paul Hastert, "Al Qaeda and Iran: Friends or Foes, or Somewhere in Between?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* (30), 2007.

[83] Some have suggested this is an intentional effort on the part of Iran to make real the Damascus government narrative that Assad's opponents were Islamic terrorists rather than democratic reformers. In this view such an effort would also cause the West to cut off support for the rebels allowing Assad to win.

[84] Russian support of the Assad government is particularly relevant in keeps Assad's Air Force operational. See Christopher Kozak ""An Army In All Corners" Assad's Campaign Strategy In Syria" Middle East Security Report 26 *Institute For The Study of War* April 2015, 19.

[85]Even western Syria is not immune from Sunni Jihadist infiltration however as thousands of foreign fighters including Libyans, Tunisians, and European Islamist fighters are crossing everywhere from Lebanon to Turkey. Some European Salafi sympathizers are going to Sidon, transiting to Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian camp and from there into Syria. "Syria's Saudi Jihadist Problem," *The Daily Beast,* December 16, 2013. The logistics of the arms flow supporting the rebels appears organized, in part, under the auspices of U.S. contractors managing funds supplied by Saudi Arabia and Qatar and using Syrian Ikhwan as interlocutors in Turkey. "Syrian opposition receiving arms through countries neighbors. Clans organize smuggling routes in Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon." *Jerusalem Post*, July 18, 2012.

[86] "Inside the Octopus: Unraveling Iran's terrorist Quds Force," *Israel Hayom,* September 24, 2013. In 2012 when the armed revolt against Assad began to seriously threaten the regime in Damascus the Pasdaran in Syria was under the command of IRGC General Mohammed Reza Zahedi with General Ibrahim Jabri of the Revolutionary Guard's Lebanon Corps coordinating Iranian interests in Lebanon and protecting Iranian and Hezbollah assets in Syria proper.

[87] These included elements from the 14th Imam Sadegh Brigade and the 33rd al-Mahdi Brigade used in suppressing the "Green Movement" following Iran's contested 2009 elections and while the Basiji were given the more public role in repressing dissent in Iran they were operating under the administrative control of the Pasdaran. At the government to government level the major liaison between Bashar Assad and Tehran was Mohammed Nasif Kheirbek the one time head of GID internal security and later Special Assistant to President Assad for Intelligence and Security. It is problematic however at this point whether Kheirbek answers to Assad or Tehran. Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday and Sam Wyer, "Iranian Strategy In Syria," A Joint Report By *AEI's Critical Threats Project and Institute For The Study Of War*, May 2013, 11 and 15.

[88] This became more complicated in the early summer of 2014 as Iraqi Shia militia were also confronted with the need to protect the Shia populations in the south of Iraq.

[89] See "Syria Pro-Government Paramilitary Forces" The Carter Center 5 November 2013, p. 7.

[90] Jaysh al-Sha'bi were originally built on what were called *Popular Committees* (Lijan al-Sha'bia) that were reasonably spontaneous organizations of local militias who attempted to provide security in their own neighborhoods and were at first under the control of local notables and had no relation with the Shabiha thugs operated by the Assad's prior to the civil war. Country wide the NDF are now supposed to be organized in the various Syrian Governorates through a Governorate Security Committee nominally commanded by a retired Syrian Arab Army officer. The Assad government prefers to co-opt men who have completed their military service and can be re-trained quickly in one month courses in areas of the various Governorates still controlled by the regime.

[91] Aaron Lund "The Baath Battalions Move into Damascus" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* 13 January 2014.

[92] Latakia airport is seeing major Iranian funded expansion as an alternative to Damascus international airport should that eventually fall to the rebellion. Tartus by contrast is an ethnically mixed city now filled with Sunni and Christian regime supporters who are refugees from Homs, Aleppo, and even Damascus.

[93] Nicholas A. Heras, "The Potential For An Assad Statelet In Syria," *The Washington Institute For Near East Policy*, Policy Focus 132, December 2013, 19.

[94] Aron Lund, "The Baath Battalions Move Into Damascus," *Syria In Crisis,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 13 January, 2014.

[95] Nasrallah has publically stated that the fall of Assad would lead to the decline of Hezbollah. See "Nasrallah: Downfall of Assad would mean fall of Hezbollah" *The Jerusalem Post* 8 May 2015.

[96] Examples of these smaller militias include Iraq's Badr Organization posting about 1500 fighters in Damascus, the Sarriya al-Talia al-Khurasani under Sayyed Ali al-Yasseri with 600 fighters tasked by Iran's Revolutionary Guards to protect the Damascus airport. http://revoultionsyria.blogspot.com/2014/06/shiite-militias-in-syria.html Accessed 9 May 2015.

[97] Christopher Anzalone "Zaynab's Guardians: The Emergence Of Shi'a Militias In Syria" *CTC Sentinel* Combating Terrorism Center 23 July 2013.

[98] Nicholas Heras "A Shadow of Iraq's Sectarian War in Damascus' Suburbs" *Fair Observer* 24 October 2012.

[99] Hezbollah of late has apparently been facilitating European mercenaries recruited through M Security Group to fight on behalf of the Assad regime. The mercenaries appear to be recruited in Eastern Europe and flown to Rafik Hariri airport in Beirut and transferred to the Damascus area. The numbers appear relatively small and it is likely funded via Iran perhaps with Russian acquiescence. However the resources necessary to manage the logistics of such and endeavor indicate the effort is not merely incidental but has some intentionality.

[100] With hundreds dead the Hezbollah deployment into Syria is not without controversy. Sheikh Subhi Tufalyi a founding member who left the organization in the late 1990s has articulated those doubts and the financial cost of the Syrian war is likewise bleeding Iran and Hezbollah white. Hezbollah has been forced to create two war councils, one for Lebanon and one for Syria to manage the spillover from Syria in addition to the historic Jihad Council Hezbollah has had since the early 1990s.

[101] Kozak ""An Army In All Corners" Assad's Campaign Strategy In Syria" *Institute For The Study of War* April 2015, p. 28. The configuration of Hezbollah's pre civil war Syrian logistics train was anchored in units 100, 108, and 112. Unit 100 managed the particulars of transferring both Hezbollah fighters and Iranian advisors between Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. Hezbollah Unit 108 managed weapons transfers from storage areas in Syria to Lebanon. Weapons storage facilities in Adra near the Damascus International Airport and in Duma were under administrative Unit 108 control. Unit 108 also maintained reserve storage sites in Tartus and in both the Aleppo and Homes regions. Once in Lebanon Unit 112 dispersed the arms to logistics centers in the Bekka. See "In secret caches of weapons of Hezbollah" *Le Figaro* 25 October 2010

[102] Jeffrey White "Hizb Allah at War In Syria: Forces, Operations, Effects and Implications" *CTC Sentinel* Combating Terrorism Center 15 January 2014.

[103] "Iran dials Up Presence in Syria," Online *Wall Street Journal,* 16 September, 2013. Hezbollah is also using the ruins of the town as a facility for urban warfare training.

[104] Carl Wege "Syria's Loyalist Archipelago" *Fair Observer* 7 May 2013.

[105] Kozak ""An Army In All Corners" Assad's Campaign Strategy In Syria" Institute For The Study of War April 2015, p. 27.

[106] Hezbollah had actually signed a document called the *Baabda Declaration* in 2012 with other Lebanese parties pledging non-interference in Syria.

[107] The Syrian war is stimulating the growth of the Hezbollah infrastructure as well. It has been reported, for example, that Hezbollah built an airfield about seven miles west northwest of Baalbek from which it flew

Mohajer (sometimes called Mesad) drones. Although these are technologically antiquated it does illustrate Hezbollah's evolution into a semi-conventional military force. See "Hezbollah built an airport, secret tunnels near Baalbek," *YaLibnan,* 4 March, 2014.

[108] Prior to the Syrian civil war Hezbollah had a thirty year development curve while the Iraqi Shi'a militia have a much more limited development history and less organizational coherence.

[109] "Iran dials Up Presence in Syria," Online *Wall Street Journal,* 16 September, 2013. Iran is attempting to quick train these Iraqi Shi'a in short courses are reported conducted as 15 or 45 day cycles incorporating the usual low intensity operations training provided in terrorist training camps. The training venues appear to include Sanandaj and Varamin, as well as at the al-Momenin ballistic missile facility.

[110] The al-Abbas Brigade sent a symbolic contingent of fighters to deploy south of Baghdad in solidarity with Iraq's Shi'a now threatened by the Islamic State.

[111] The majority of those organizations developed from the Badr Corps later Badr Organization in coordination with the Revolutionary Guards Ramazan Corps. The Badr Organization currently has direct ties to Iraq's Internal Security Forces and Badr veterans populate Kata'ib Hezbollah and other Shi'a militias. Badr has also created a militia called Martyr Baqir al-Sadr now deployed in Syria. Fadl al-Abbas alludes to a warrior martyred while supporting Imam Husayn at Karbala.

[112] Qais al-Khazah now also claims a political wing called al-Sadigun (Honest Ones).

[113] These organizations both sometimes fight under a combined name of the Abu al-Fadl Al-Abbas Brigade under Abu Ajeeb. See Michal Harqi, "Status Update: Shi'a Militia's in Iraq" *Institute for the Study* of War, August 16, 2010. The Abu Fadl al-Abbas Brigade is part of the Kata'ib Hezbollah. There are more than a dozen identifiable Iraqi Shi'a factions now fighting in Syria with several thousand Iraqi Shi'a fighters in Syria. These factions are sometimes splinters from existing groups Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada under Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani for example is little more than a group from Kata'ib Hezbollah operating in Damascus.

[114] "Abu Mahdi and Iran's Web in Iraq," *United Press International,* October 7, 2010. Iran's interests may be served by these Shia affiliated auxiliaries coalescing into a coherently organized and centrally commanded military network managed under the auspices of the IRGC supporting Tehran's interests in a Shi'a allied Syrian rump state in western Syria. These designations are somewhat ambiguous because frequently the militias adopt local monikers defined by geographic area for example, Kata'ib Hezbollah fighters located in southern Damascus appear to operate under the name of Kata'ib al-Shuhada. See Phillip Smyth, "Hizballah Cavalcade: Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada: Another Supplier of Iraqi Shia Fighters in Syria," *Jihadology,* June 3, 2013.

[115] Lebanon's Hezbollah through the efforts of Ali Mussa Daqduq directly guided the formation of the organization in Iraq as it splintered from Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army (Jaysh al-Mahti). Sam Wyer notes that Asa'ib al-Haq probably operates a jihad council similar to that of Hezbollah and has divided its militia operations in Iraq into functional "battalions" organized along regional lines. See Sam Wyer "The Resurgence of Asa'ib Altl Al-Haq," Middle East Security Report 7, *Institute for the Study of War,* December 2012, 13. What is likely operating in Syria is a specialized element of the organization now called Liwa Kafil Zaynab See also See Smyth "From Karbala to Sayyida Zaynab: Iraqi Fighters in Syria's Shi'a Militias," *CTC Sentinel* Vol 6 Issue 8, August 2013. In 2014 Asa'ib al-Haq also deployed in Iraqi Anbar to confront the Islamic State. Parallel to that confrontation a splinter organization of Asa'ib al-Haq called Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba is kinetically engaging the Kurds because of their alliance with the United States and other Western powers.

[116] "Iraqi Shiites join Syria War, *AL-Monitor,* 29 October 2013. Asa'ib al-Haq coordinates some activities through a Asa'ib al-Haq Center for Studies in Beirut funded through Afif Nabulsi with Sheikh Ammar al-Delphi liaising with Lebanon's Hezbollah.

[117] Stephen Wicken, "New War, Old Faces," *The Majalla*, 23 April 2014.

[118] See http://revoultionsyria.blogspot.com/2014/06/shiite-militias-in-syria.html Accessed 9 May 2015.

[119] The Tripoli based Sheikh Hussam al-Sabbagh for example appears to be acting as a Lebanese representative for Jabhat al-Nusra. The Taamir quarter in Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian camps is becoming a nexus for Abdullah Azzam Brigade fighters and appears to have operatives from both al-Nusra and ISIS present.

[120] "The Threat of the "Salafi Crescent," *Arutz Sheva,* January 23, 2014. The Sunni Alfawwara, Turki, and Bani Khaled clans on the Lebanese side have been particularly active. See also "Free Syrian Army gets tribal support in areas bordering Turkey, Iraq," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring Service,* June 21, 2012.

[121] This corresponds in some ways to what happened across Syria where Salafi radicalization was initially more prominent in rural areas and secondarily in urban areas.

[122]Isabel Nassief , "Hezbollah And The Fight For Control In Qalamoun," *Institute for the Study of War,* November 26, 2013. Majid al Majid the Saudi born leader of the Azzam Brigade was arrested in the Yarze area of Beirut and died in Lebanese army custody in January 2014.

[123] "Tripoli Clashes: Keeping Conflict Alive" *Alakhbar English* 14 February 2012. Tripoli is home to most of Lebanon's 90,000 or so Alawites settled in the suburban Jabal Mohsen area along with scattered Alawite villages in the northern Akkar region. It is also worth noting that for many, perhaps most, Alawites their identification as Alawi is cultural more than religious. Unlike many Salafi Jihadists whose religiosity is quite real many Alawites appear analogous to secular Jews with self-identification anchored in culture and kinship more than actual religious faith

[124] These were precipitated in part by Salafi preachers like Sheikh Ammad al-Assir known for personally mobilizing a militia he called the Kata'ib al-Muqawama al-Hurr to fight in Syria "Lebanese Salafist Cleric Organizes Militia Forays into Syria," *Terrorism Monitor,* Vol II, Number 10, 17 May, 2013.

[125] Lucas Winter "Al-Qaeda's Road To Damascus? Syria and the Abdullah Azzam Brigades" *Foreign Military Studies Office* Leavenworth 2012.

[126] Robert Rabil "Salafism in Lebanon" *The Washington Institute* Policywatch 2375, 20 February 2015.

[127] Peter Newmann "Suspects into Collaborators" *London Review of Books* Volume 36 (7), 3 April, 2014.

[128] Aram Nerguizian "Lebanon At The Crossroads" *Statement before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs* 25 February 2014.

[129] The integration of the Syrian and Lebanese economies has been discussed the Washington Institute's Andrew Tabler. See Andrew Tabler "The economic relationship: Beyond all political fallout the economies of Syria and Lebanon remain deeply intertwined and complementary" *Executive Magazine* April 2005, Number 70.

[130] Major Casey Mills, U.S. Army "S3 – Scale, Scope, Salience: A New Model for Evaluating Terrorist Threats" *Special Warfare* October – December 2014, Volume 27, Issue 4, 14.

[131] John L. Esposito and John Obert Voll *Islam and Democracy* Oxford University Press: New York, Oxford, et. al. 1996, 180.

[132] Kenneth M. Pollack *A Path Out of the Desert: A Grand Strategy for America In The Middle East* Random House Trade Paperback: New York, 2008, 150.

[133] Richard Barrett "Foreign fighters in Syria" *The Soufan Group* June 2014, 6.

[134] Consequently Turks, Qataris, and Saudis hear different things from the same people.

[135] Aaron Lund, "Gangs of Latakia: The Militiafication of the Assad Regime," *Syria Comment,* 23 July, 2013.

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# State Cyberterrorism: A Contradiction in Terms?

**by Lee Jarvis, Stuart Macdonald and Lella Nouri**

*This article explores findings from a global survey of the terrorism research community to explore whether states may be deemed capable of conducting cyberterrorism. The article begins with a brief review of recent literature on state terrorism, identifying empirical and analytical justifications for greater engagement with this concept. Following a discussion of our research methodology we then make two arguments. First, that there exists considerable 'expert' support for the validity of the proposition that states can indeed engage in cyberterrorism. Second, that whether states are deemed capable of cyberterrorism has implications for subsidiary debates, including around the threat that cyberterrorism poses.*

## Introduction

Violence conducted in cyberspace presents important challenges for academic disciplines such as International Relations and Law which traditionally work with a state-centric ontology. Two of the most obvious of these challenges are the reduced significance of national boundaries within cyberspace – which encourages a rethinking of the importance of territorial entities – and the anonymity this offers would-be belligerents, which requires new forms of knowledge about security threats. This article contributes to contemporary debate on a particular category of violence in cyberspace – 'cyberterrorism' – asking about the significance of actor and non-actor based definitions of this phenomenon. In so doing, it aims to connect these debates to the recent upsurge of interest in the concept of 'state terrorism' in order to ask whether or not states may be deemed capable of committing cyberterrorism, and what might be gained (and indeed lost) in such judgements.

In order to do this, the article introduces original empirical data drawn from a survey of the global research community on cyberterrorism. The survey was designed to chart areas of disagreement, consensus and ambiguity in relation to this term, and received responses from 118 researchers working across 24 different countries. In this article we report on findings relating specifically to the question of whether or not states can engage in cyberterrorism. These are then connected to researcher views on the threat posed by cyberterrorism, and accounts of whether or not cyberterrorism has ever taken place that were given within the same survey.

Our engagement with this research question is driven by two dynamics. The first is the continuing contestability of the term 'cyberterrorism' within academic, legal and other debate (Jarvis and Macdonald 2014). Establishing – or enquiring into – *who* can commit cyberterrorism here offers potential for taking stock of the state of current opinion on an important generative characteristic of this term. The second driver is the rise of recent scholarly research on the nature of 'state terrorism' more broadly. Exploring whether researchers believe states can commit *cyber*terrorism might, we suggest, tell us something important about the distinctiveness of this phenomenon.

The article begins with a review of relevant academic literature on state terrorism. Here, we identify two arguments for taking the notion of state terrorism more seriously than is sometimes the case. First, is a relatively straightforward empirical argument which justifies increased attention to state terrorism due to the higher human costs that result from state based violences. Second, is an analytical argument which insists that greater attention should be paid to state violence in order to achieve greater consistency in the application of existing definitions of terrorism. These arguments, this article suggests constitute a powerful attempt to broaden the agenda of terrorism studies. The article's second section then details our research methodology, reflecting on the sampling strategy, distribution of respondents and formulation of our questions. A third section introduces qualitative and quantitative data from answers to the three questions on which we here focus. The article concludes by pointing to the importance of these findings for the state terrorism debate, and more specifically for a (re)thinking of the rationale behind the state/non-state actor divide in terrorism studies.

### State Terrorism: Issues and Debates

Recent years have witnessed a fairly dramatic growth of interest in the concept of state terrorism. This has been driven, in part, by a series of explicit and powerful critiques of the historical disengagement with the state within terrorism studies; a field of research which, for many, has too long prioritised the violences of non-state actors (see, for example, Blakeley 2007; Jackson et al 2010). These arguments have drawn stimulation from two contemporary developments in particular. The first is the recent 'critical turn' in terrorism studies (see, for example, Gunning 2007; Jackson 2007; Egerton 2009; Jackson et al 2009; Jackson et al 2011) and its attempt to deconstruct this field's established theoretical and methodological assumptions. The second is a concerted hostility toward contemporary counter-terrorism practices associated with the post-9/11 'war on terrorism' and its violent excesses. Although this momentum within state terrorism research is, therefore, comparatively recent, such work builds on a small number of important earlier attempts to re-centre the study of terrorism around the violences of states (see, for example, George 1991; Claridge 1996; Chomsky 2001; Chomsky 2002). For new and old alike there are at least two powerful reasons for so doing.

The first, and perhaps most common, justification is a simple empirical calculation of the human costs of state and non-state violence. State or 'wholesale' terrorism, in this line of argument, has brought far greater harm to humanity than have the activities of non-state groups; a trend widely acknowledged, if not necessarily prioritised, within scholarship on terrorism (for comparison, see Blakeley 2008; Horgan and Boyle 2008). As Michael Stohl notes, "the number of victims produced by state terror is on a scale exponentially larger than that of insurgent terrorists" (Stohl 2008: 6). Goodin, similarly, in a discussion of 'revolutionary terrorism', argues that, "…state terrorism is an enormously important subject; it is incontestable, for example that state terrorism has claimed many more victims than has terrorism as I define it here" (Goodin 2006: 2027). What is important to note, however, is that – for these authors – the liberal democracies of the 'global North' have been as culpable as the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth-century to which we might instinctively turn upon hearing the phrase 'state terrorism' (see, for example, Blakeley 2007; Blakeley 2009; Primoratz 2004; Gareau 2004). In short, there is, for some, a tremendous disconnect between research priorities and empirical realities within scholarship on terrorism.

A second set of arguments for taking state terrorism more seriously are more strictly analytical. In the first instance, there are arguments for greater consistency in the *application* of existing definitions of terrorism

(see, for example, Chomsky 1991; Jaggar 2005; Blakeley 2007). Such definitions, approached from this perspective, are, in essence, adequate for the capture of a multitude of violences. It is their usage in practice – by policymakers and 'terrorologists' alike – that limits discussion of state violences within the language of terrorism. Here there is much to be gained – in analytical as well as political terms – for refusing the temptation toward definitional flexibility (for contrasting perspectives see Richardson 2006; Crenshaw and Robinson 2010). In Chomsky's description of what he terms the 'literal' approach to the study of terrorism, for example, "…we begin by determining what constitutes terrorism. We then seek instances of the phenomenon – concentrating on the major examples, if we are serious – and try to determine causes and remedies" (Chomsky 1991: 12; see also Chomsky 2001).This argument for greater consistency is pertinent to many, perhaps most, understandings of terrorist violence. A strategy favoured by many working in this area, indeed, is to juxtapose official US definitions of the term with its historical engagements in Nicaragua, Chile, Cuba and beyond. The argument's value is more limited, however, where actor-specific clauses are built into particular definitions of terrorism such as that employed by the US State Department in which terrorism is approached as, "…premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetuated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience" (cited in Whittaker 2003: 3; see also Stohl 2006). In response to actor-specific understandings of terrorism such as these, an alternative argument is often made on behaviouralist grounds: one that suggests that terrorism is a form of violence which is separable from its practitioner. Hence, for Jackson et al, for example:

> *To suggest when state agents engage in the very same strategies as non-state terrorists, such as when they blow up civilian airliners (the Lockerbie bombing) or a protest ship (the Rainbow Warrior bombing) or plant a series of bombs in public places (the Lavon affair), it ceases to be terrorism is effectively the abandonment of scholarly research principles* (Jackson et al 2010: 3).

For Teichman, similarly:

> *….we have to acknowledge that governments often do things, both to their own people, and against enemies in peace and war, which share the features of the worst types of revolutionary terrorism. State terrorism is characterized by such actions as the kidnapping and assassination of political oppo-nents of the government by the police or the secret service or the army; imprisonment without trial; torture; massacres of racial or religious minorities or of certain social classes; incarceration of citizens in concentration camps; and generally speaking government by fear* (Teichman 1989: 509).

If we take them together, these arguments constitute a powerful (if still nascent) attempt to broaden the agenda of terrorism studies (Jarvis 2009). Minimally, the aim is to extend the study of terrorism beyond its traditional, narrow, parameters in order to facilitate the analysis of certain state violences under this rubric (for example Gunning 2007). Maximally, where articulated most ambitiously, the ultimate aim is the advancement of emancipatory political projects predicated on a refusal to remain silent in the face of any (terrorist) violences, whoever their authors (see Blakeley 2008; McDonald 2009; Toros and Gunning 2009). Thus, for Jackson *et al,* for example:

> *…there are important ethical-normative reasons for retaining the term 'state terrorism'. For example, due to the powerful connotations of the 'terrorism' label, its retention as a descriptor of certain forms of state violence could be an important means of advancing a progressive political project aimed at protecting marginalized and vulnerable populations from indiscriminate and oppressive forms of state violence, whether they occur under the rubric of war or counter-terrorism* (Jackson et al 2010: 5).

With the ground thus prepared for greater engagement with state terrorism, the research agenda of this literature to date has focused on attempting to define and typologise this form of violence (Jarvis and Lister 2014). Engagements with definitional issues often lead to reflection on the core characteristics of state terrorism, with the following themes particularly dominant therein: the involvement of state representatives in the commission or practice of violence; instrumental or purposive behaviour where acts of violence and their victims function as means to future ends; an identifiably communicative or symbolic function; and, the experience of terror in a broader population (compare Blakeley 2010 and Raphael 2010). Such reflection leads some to define state terrorism as a distinctive form of violence, for example:

> …the intentional use or threat of violence by state agents or their proxies against individuals or groups who are victimised for the purpose of intimidating or frightening a broader audience (Jackson et al 2010: 3).

Or:

> Terrorism by states is characterized by official support for policies of violence, repression, and intimidation. This violence and coercion is directed against perceived enemies that the state has determined threaten its interests or security. Although the perpetrators of state terrorist campaigns are frequently government personnel, and directives do originate from government officials, those who carry out the violence are also quite often unofficial agents of the government (Martin, cited in Jackson et al 2011: 178).

Others prefer instead to define 'terrorism' more inclusively before applying this understanding to the actions of states as appropriate. The following, for instance, is the definition employed in Gareau's account of US involvement in state terrorism:

> Terrorism consists of deliberate acts of a physical and/or psychological nature perpetrated on select groups of victims. Its intent is to mould the thinking and behaviour not only of those targeted groups, but more importantly, of larger sections of society that identify or share the views and aspirations of the targeted groups or who might easily be led to do so. The intent is to intimidate or coerce both groups by causing them intense fear, anxiety, apprehension, panic, dread, and/or horror (Gareau 2004: 14).

Typologies of state terrorism seek to differentiate the various forms that this phenomenon can take. Michael Stohl, for example, distinguishes between overt engagements in coercive diplomacy; covert participation in assassinations, coups, and the like; and, surrogate activities, whereby assistance is offered to a secondary state or insurgent organisation engaging in terrorist violence (Stohl 1984). Blakeley, more recently, separates state perpetration and state sponsorship of terrorism (Blakeley 2009). She also, moreover, distinguishes "limited state terrorism" which is targeted at a specific, narrow audience, from "generalised" state terrorism, which works to target entire populations (Blakeley 2009: 44). Although (as we might expect) no single, universally accepted typology of state terrorism exists (Primoratz 2002), these discussions do remind us that the terrorism of states can take myriad forms, and use myriad techniques and technologies. With this in mind, we proceed now to our discussion of whether states can commit cyberterrorism and what responses to this may mean for the literature discussed in this section. First, however this article outlines the methodology used to collect the empirical data on 'expert' opinion on cyberterrorism.

## *Methodology*

Our attempt to contribute to these ongoing discussions around the phenomenon of state terrorism draws from a recent empirical research project on cyberterrorism. This research made use of an 'expert survey', which was distributed to over six hundred members of the global research community between June and November 2012. Respondents to the survey were identified using a purposive – hence non-probabilistic – sampling strategy with four primary strands. The first of these was a targeted literature review search to identify researchers who have published on cyberterrorism within peer-reviewed journals, monographs, edited books, or other literature. This was completed using the main catalogue of the British Library, as well as 47 other online databases[1]. Our search was limited to outputs that had been published on or after 1 January 2004.

The second strand was to target active researchers within the terrorism research community more widely. Whilst these individuals may not have published on cyberterrorism specifically, their knowledge of the major debates around terrorism meant they would be well-positioned to contribute to this research. Thus, individuals that had published in any of the following four journals since January 1st 2009 were added to the sample: *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, and, *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Members of the editorial boards of these journals (as of August 1st 2012) were also added, given their similarly prominent standing within terrorism research.

The third strategy was a 'snowball method' in which we contacted potential respondents who were explicitly identified to us by individuals who had already completed the survey. The fourth was via two mailing lists maintained by British academic associations: the Terrorism and Political Violence Association[2], and the British International Studies Association Critical Terrorism Studies Working Group[3]. Although there was, of course, overlap in the individuals identified in our four strategies, these latter two methods engendered far fewer responses than did our initial literature review searches.

The use of a purposive, non-probabilistic, sampling strategy was, we argue, appropriate to the survey's ambitions. Whilst it involves sacrificing any strict claim to statistical representativeness, this may be defended given the nature of the population in whom we were interested: the terrorism research community. Where the boundaries of this community lie, and who may be considered a legitimate member of it, are, of course, entirely contestable. Moreover, as with any epistemic community – indeed, perhaps more than many – the field of terrorism research is, by its nature, fluid and porous. Individuals enter and leave according to their evolving research interests, and any effort to capture opinion therein can offer only a brief and temporary snapshot of a dynamic enterprise. In this sense, the sacrifice of strict representativeness in our study of researchers is justified given that no discernible, definitive, population could reasonably be said objectively to exist.

A total of 118 responses from researchers working in 24 countries across six continents were generated by our survey. Of the 117 responses that provided geographical information to us, our sample had a majority of respondents working in the United States of America and the United Kingdom: 41 (35% of the total) and 32 (27%) respectively. The next largest sites were Australia (7 respondents, 6%) and Canada (4 respondents, 3%). This weighting toward anglophonic countries is unfortunate, but unsurprising, given the traditional anglocentricism of terrorism research (Stump and Dixit 2013). In terms of professional status, the distribution of our respondents was skewed toward permanent and temporary academic staff as follows: Academic Staff (Permanent): 75 (64%); Academic Staff (Temporary): 16 (14%); Research Student: 9 (8%); Independent Researcher: 11 (9%); Retired: 2 (2%); and, None of the Above: 5(4%). In terms of disciplinary

background, finally, our sample described themselves in the following way, with several researchers self-identifying with more than one academic discipline: Political Science/International Relations: 69 (50%); Psychology/Anthropology: 20 (15%); Engineering/Computer Science/Cyber 17(12%); Law/Criminology: 15 (11%); Literature/Arts/History: 9 (7%); Independent Researchers/Analysts: 5 (4%); and, Economics/Business: 2 (1%).

Our survey employed a combination of open-ended and closed questions designed to generate quantitative and qualitative data. Twenty questions were included in total. These focused on the following: demographic information; definitional issues around terrorism and cyberterrorism; the cyberterrorism threat; countering cyberterrorism; and, views of current research on this phenomenon, including the major challenges facing contemporary scholars. To encourage as high a completion rate as possible, the questionnaire was made available in two formats: an online survey and a word processing document. In the following section, this article turns to the findings of the survey in relation to the concept of state cyberterrorism and the impact this has on responses to questions on the significance and existence of the cyberterrorism threat.

## Findings and Analysis

The first question of relevance from our survey – numbered Question 13 – asked respondents, 'In your view, can states engage in cyberterrorism?' A free text box was provided for responses, in order to allow respondents to develop and explain their answers. In total, the question was answered by 109 respondents (response rate: 92%). Answers were subsequently analysed and coded using the following five categories: yes (unqualified); yes (qualified); other; no (qualified); and, no (unqualified). As chart 1 demonstrates, a total of 83% of respondents agreed that states can potentially engage in cyberterrorism. Moreover, the vast majority of these respondents offered unqualified agreement.

*Chart 1: Can states engage in cyberterrorism?*
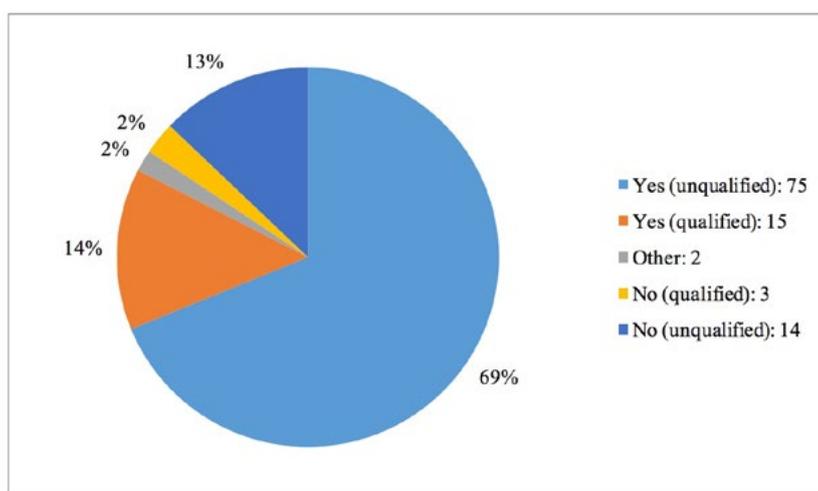


When explaining their view that states can engage in cyberterrorism, several respondents explicitly rejected any attempt to distinguish between state and non-state actors. One respondent, for example, argued that: 'Any social actor with sufficient knowledge, means and intent can utilise any particular tactic, be it cyberterrorism or anything else, be they states or any other social entity'[4]. Another, drawing on similarly behaviouralist reasoning, stated: 'By definition all forms of terrorism are a tactic open to all and therefore no individual or entity is exempt from the option of using this tactic'[5]. Others still drew analogy with alternative forms

of terrorism, arguing that since states can engage in offline terrorism there is no reason why states cannot also engage in cyberterrorism[6]. In fact, one respondent went so far as to suggest that, without state involvement, the technological complexities render cyberterrorism impossible[7]. By contrast, there were other respondents who – whilst agreeing that states can engage in cyberterrorism – described states' potential involvement in more limited terms. In their opinion, a cyber-attack would only constitute cyberterrorism if state actors played no more than a supporting or facilitative role. For example, one respondent answered: 'Only as state sponsors of terrorist groups'[8], whilst others referred to the role of the state as a place to 'harbour'[9] or 'support'[10] non-state actors who launch cyberterrorist attacks.

There were other respondents who answered affirmatively to this survey question, yet qualified their answer by querying whether cyberterrorism is the most appropriate label for cyber-attacks perpetrated by state actors. Like some of the respondents mentioned in the previous paragraph, some of these individuals drew an analogy with traditional forms of terrorism. But unlike those mentioned above, these respondents asserted that offline terrorists are conventionally regarded as non-state actors. Hence one respondent answered: 'Yes [states can engage in cyberterrorism], although the standard definition of terrorism rules out state action (so Hiroshima isn't formally an act of terrorism)'[11]. Similarly, another answered: 'Yes, just like states can engage in terrorism, however the standard definition of terrorism does focus on non-state armed groups only, leaving terrorist behaviour of states out of the equation'[12]. This respondent went on to suggest that state cyberterrorism should instead be labelled as a crime against humanity. Others also suggested alternative labels. One commented: 'In effect [states can engage in cyberterrorism], even if it should be more carefully labelled as espionage/sabotage'[13], whilst another observed that: 'States can engage in the act of terrorism, including cyberterrorism (though we still call them states, not terrorists)'[14].

A further significant finding from our survey is that a number of respondents drew on empirical reasoning similar to that discussed in the above literature review to argue that there exists a greater threat of state cyberterrorism than non-state cyberterrorism. One went so far as to suggest that: '[state cyberterrorists] are the greatest threat, and make non-government sources of this threat nearly inconsequential in comparison'[15]. The most common reason respondents offered for this view was that states have access to far greater resources and capabilities than non-state actors[16]. Others pointed out that cyberterrorism is likely to prove attractive to states because of the difficulties of attribution and concomitant potential for anonymity. As one respondent remarked, states engage in cyberterrorism 'because of the ease with which a state operator can mask itself online'[17]. In fact, several respondents claimed that states already engage in cyberterrorism[18], with a number of examples being offered in support of this assertion. The most commonly cited of these was Stuxnet[19] with other suggested examples including the cyber-attacks on Estonia[20] and Georgia,[21] attempted attacks on the US by China and North Korea[22] and 'acts perpetrated by Russia and China'[23].

As chart 1 showed, there were a total of 17 respondents (15%) who said that states cannot engage in cyberterrorism. In the opinion of a number of these respondents, the concept of state cyberterrorism is simply a misnomer. Different reasons were offered in support of this view. The most common reason was that terrorism is, by its very nature, a non-state activity[24]. If the perpetrator is a state actor, then the conduct is cyberwarfare[25] or cyber espionage[26], not cyberterrorism. Second, one respondent suggested that cyber-attacks orchestrated by state actors may not be terroristic in nature. Using Stuxnet as an example, this respondent argued that it 'was not used in a way that appears intended to create terror. These acts are probably best thought of as politically or strategically motivated sabotage'[27]. Lastly, one respondent argued that it is mistaken to talk of state cyberterrorism because cyberterrorism itself is a misnomer, despite the

fact that, 'Cyberattacks and espionage which originate from states certainly do exist'[28]. Meanwhile, there were other respondents that were willing to accept the concept of state cyberterrorism in principle, but who nonetheless answered no to the survey question on the basis that it is preferable to use a different label[29]. As one explained, 'actions by states are best viewed in terms of warfare/coercive foreign policy. Reserving the term [cyberterrorism] for non-state actors (even if sponsored by states) affords a certain degree of analytical clarity'[30].

Finally, it is important to note that respondents' views on the state cyberterrorism question had a discernible impact on their answers to other important questions, particularly surrounding the significance of the cyberterrorist threat. Chart 2 shows the answers to question 10 of our survey – 'In your view, does cyberterrorism constitute a significant threat?' – for three groups: all respondents; those respondents for whom states can engage in cyberterrorism; and, those respondents who argued that states cannot engage in cyberterrorism. 60% of researchers who said that states can engage in cyberterrorism also believed that cyberterrorism poses a significant threat. This figure was considerably lower for those who said that states cannot engage in cyberterrorism, at 47%. Similarly, only 15% of those who said that states can engage in cyberterrorism opined that cyberterrorism is not a significant threat, compared to 41% of those who said that states cannot engage in cyberterrorism.

*Chart 2: Does cyberterrorism pose a significant threat?*
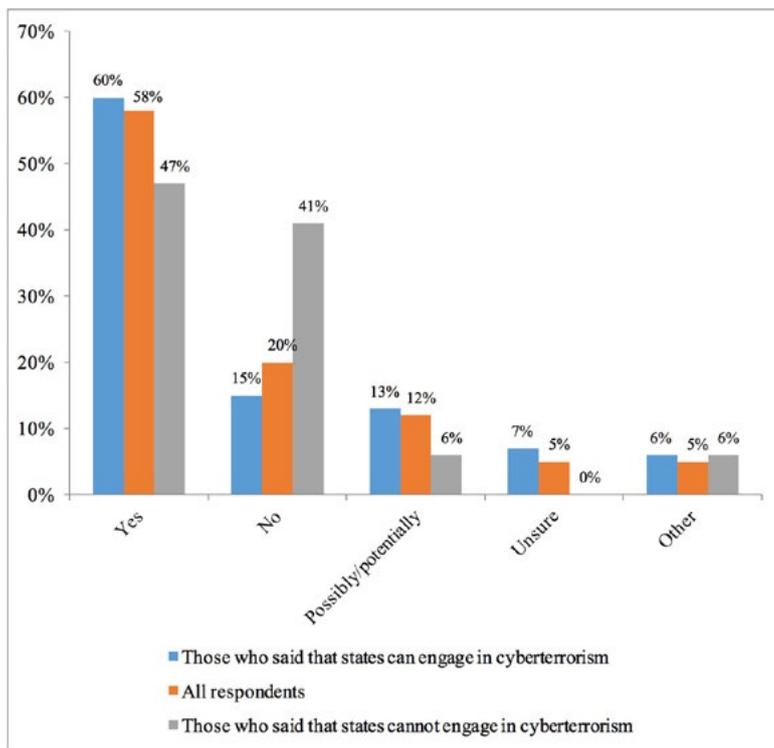


A similar pattern is evident in chart 3, which shows the answers of the same three groups of respondents to question 11 of our survey: 'do you consider that a cyberterrorism attack has ever taken place?'. 69% of those who said that states cannot engage in cyberterrorism believed that no cyberterrorist attack has ever occurred – compared to 44% of those who said that states can engage in cyberterrorism.

*Chart 3: Do you consider that a cyberterrorist attack has ever taken place?*
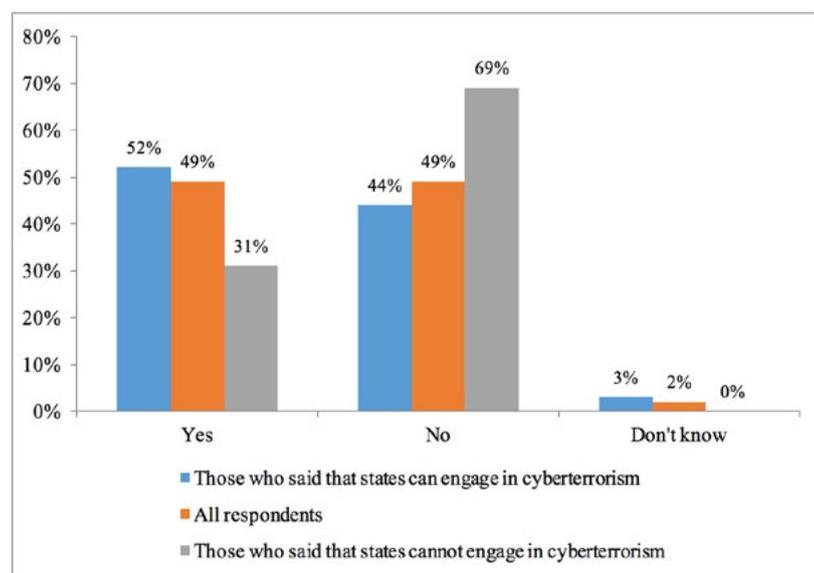


So, just as an individual's view on whether cyberterrorism should be conceived in narrow terms (as a terrorist attack which has computers as its means and/or target) or broad terms (as any form of online terrorist activity) affects that individual's assessment of the cyberterrorism threat (Jarvis et al 2014), so too does an individual's view of whether states can engage in cyberterrorism.

### Concluding Remarks

Our survey revealed general agreement that states have perpetrated cyberattacks, with respondents offering a number of examples including Stuxnet and the attacks on Estonia and Georgia. This article has raised the question of how we should conceive of these attacks. Should they be understood as instances of cyberterrorism perpetrated by state actors? Or should we employ a different label, and reserve the term cyberterrorism for non-state actors? Answering these questions requires consideration of two issues. First, is it possible to speak of state cyberterrorism, or is the term oxymoronic? And, second, if it is possible to speak of state cyberterrorism, should we do so?

As explained previously, perhaps the most common justification for employing the term state terrorism in discussions of offline violences is the empirical claim that historically states have inflicted more harm than non-state actors. The same appears to hold true in the cyber realm, in that a number of our respondents pointed out that most or all of the large-scale cyberattacks to date have been perpetrated by state actors. In fact, it has been argued that from a cost-benefit perspective it is unlikely that non-state terrorists will attempt to launch Stuxnet-like cyberattacks at any point in the foreseeable future (Conway 2014; Al-Garni and Chen 2015). But whilst the majority of our respondents suggested that states can commit acts of cyberterrorism, there were also dissenting voices. In fact, even some of those that said that states can commit acts of cyberterrorism qualified their answers by suggesting that another label might be more apt.

The second set of arguments that we outlined previously for engaging with the concept of state terrorism were analytical in nature. Our findings suggest that, as noted above, the argument that existing definitions of terrorism should be applied with greater consistency is of limited utility. The argument presupposes that definitions of terrorism are not actor-specific. But whilst a number of our respondents explicitly rejected any attempt to distinguish between state and non-state actors, there were others who insisted on the importance of this distinction, claiming that terrorism is by definition a non-state activity. For the same reason, the alternative argument – that terrorism is a form of violence which has nothing to do with its practitioner – is, for these respondents at least, equally problematic.

In summary, the diversity of opinions offered by our respondents demonstrates that there is nothing inherent in the concept of terrorism that requires a particular answer to the question of whether states can commit terrorist acts. The choice of definition, and of typology, is a political one. Our findings do suggest, however, that the dominant view within the research community at present is that states can commit acts of cyberterrorism. The cyber realm thus presents a challenge to the traditional view that emphasises the distinction between state and non-state actors and lends weight to the growing interest in the concept of state terrorism.

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### Notes

[1] The complete list is as follows: ACM Digital Library; Anthropoligical Index Online; Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts; Bibliography of British & Irish History; BioMed Central Journals; British Humanities Index (CSA); British Periodicals (XML); Business Source Complete (EBSCO); CINAHL Plus (EBSCO); Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (Wiley); Education Resources Information Centre; Emerald; HeinOnline; HMIC (Ovid); IEEE Xplore; INSPEC (Ovid); International Bibliography of the

Social Sciences; IOP Journals Z39; JISC Journals Archives; JSTOR; Kluwer Law Journals; Lecture Notes in Computer Science (Springer Link); Lexis Library; MathSciNet (AMS); Medline (EBSCO); MLA International Bibliography; Oxford Journals; Periodicals Archive online; Philosopher's Index (Ovid); Project Muse; Proquest Business Collection; PsycARTICLES (Ovid); PsycINFO (Ovid); PubMed; Royal Society Journals; SAGE Journals Online; Scopus (Elsevier); Social Care Online (SCIE); Springer Link (Metapress); Taylor & Francis Online; Web of Knowledge (Cross Search); Web of Knowledge (ISI); Web of Science (Cross Search); Web of Science (ISI); Westlaw; Wiley Interscience; and, Zetoc.

[2] For further information on the association, please see: http://tapva.com/.

[3]For further information on this working group, see: http://www.bisa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=93&catid=37&Itemid=68.

[4] R65.

[5] R8.

[6] R6, R62.

[7] R31.

[8] R49. Similarly, R90 stated: 'If states sponsor non-state groups to do cyberattacks, then that could easily be described as states (indirectly) engaging in cyberterrorism'.

[9] R59.

[10] R33.

[11] R75.

[12] R106.

[13] R99.

[14] R78.

[15] R15.

[16] R30, R45.

[17] R20. R10 also commented, 'Of course [states can engage in cyberterrorism], but they are likely to have their participation hidden'.

[8] In response to the survey question, R111 wrote 'Most terrorism, including cyberterrorism, is conducted by states', whilst R102 simply wrote 'They already do'.

[9] R16, R27, R45, R80.

[20] R51, R69.

[21] R69.

[22] R85.

[23] R37.

[24] R3, R9, R52, R55, R71, R83, R87, R108.

[25] R3, R9, R52, R71, R83.

[26] R26, R83, R87.

[27] R87.

[28] R26.

[29] R1, R63, R64, R73.

[30] R1.

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# A Social Identity and Social Power Perspective on Terrorism

**by Joshua D. Wright**

*Abstract*

*This article presents a theoretical framework for understanding terrorism that is grounded in experimental work on social identity and social power. It is suggested that social identity salience and social power may be harnessed to reduce terrorist activity by reducing perceptions of threat from the view of terrorist organizations, by reducing perceived threat of terrorist activity from the view of potential targets, and by addressing distributions of and susceptibility to social power as it relates to acceptability of parochial altruism.*

**Keywords**: social identity, social power, terrorism, counter-terrorism, religious terrorism, parochial altruism

Formal theory building in the field of terrorism studies appears relatively absent. This is unfortunate within the social psychological perspective that "nothing is so practical as a good theory" (Lewin, 1943, p. 35). The reciprocal relationship between theory and practice allows for the extraction of intergroup theories from the social sciences, and in particular the field of social psychology, to the field of terrorism studies. Once extracted, theory guides practical solutions and allows for field-testing, a necessary evaluation for the efficacy of counter-terrorism policy. However, without formal theoretical frameworks within the field of terrorism studies it is difficult to examine efficacy in research paradigms or to develop rigorous approaches to policy.

Within terrorism studies, religious terrorism is a popular concern as evidenced by articles in the New York Times addressing religious terrorism (Hinnant et al., 2015; Sayare, 2011), and ISIS (Schmitt, 2015), despite that the majority of terrorism is not of a religious nature (Piazza, 2009). Religious terrorism is the primary concern of Western governments, especially the United States, and also of countries in the Middle East, which are currently struggling with the Islamic State. Religious terrorism is unique in that religious appeals may resonate with large masses of people given the current state of religion in the world (Pew Research Center, 2012). Likewise, religion and terrorism are international in scope, crossing national boundaries, and in the case of the Islamic State, attempting to create new boundaries. Social identity theory and theories of social power have strong support within psychology and intergroup relations, have theoretical use in understanding terrorism, and may be used as frameworks for counter-terrorism policy. Both theoretical frameworks may inform strategies for reducing religious terrorism. Three particular implications are discussed: reducing threatening circumstances that elicit terrorist actions, reducing out-of-proportion aggressive responses to terrorism that spur a cycle of violence, and eliminating the prevalent view of parochial altruism.

## Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory is a broad theory of intergroup relations, which suggests that our social categories help determine our perceptions of events and determine our social actions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When conflicts

are considered between two or more distinct social categories, or membership groups, this has implications for whether a person perceives stressors as threatening (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Haslam & Reicher, 2006). Because social categorization acts as a cognitive mechanism that helps determine perceptions and social actions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), an activation of cognitions relevant to a person's social category can drive behavior according to what is defined as the intergroup continuum of behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This means that behavior is guided by factors of social identity (i.e., beliefs and values derived from group membership) rather than interpersonal factors. Some evidence suggests that when social identity is salient, perceived threat will more likely result in aggressive and retaliatory responses (Fischer, Haslam, & Smith, 2010) and this has been applied to religious identity (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011). The cognitive mechanism of social identity lends itself to both reducing threatening circumstances that may heighten terrorist organizations' desires for devastating action and for reducing retaliatory responses to terrorist action that may be out of proportion to actual events. The former can be accomplished by policy that reduces the perception of forced western culture on the Middle East and reduces perceptions that the West is using its military power to unfairly extort resources from the Middle East. The latter may be accomplished by the leadership of those targeted by these acts of terrorism through deemphasizing in-group homogeneity.

### Intervening in Perceived Threat

One implication of social identity theory to understanding terrorist activity is perception of threat. Perceiving actions as threatening, especially when perceived as intentional and malicious can cause reactive aggression (Geen, 2001). When a social identity is salient, perceptions that an action is threatening will be enhanced. Evidence for this phenomenon can be seen through two experimental studies. Fischer, Haslam, and Smith (2010) conducted an experimental study on women in Britain in which symbolic threats were presented as news articles to participants and social identity salience was manipulated experimentally. Participants were split into two groups; half listed three things they have in common and three things they do not have in common with other women (i.e., gender identity salience). The other half listed three things they have in common and three things they do not have in common with British people in general (i.e., British identity salience). Participants were then presented with photographs and a statement related to either the July 2005 London bombings (i.e., national identity threat) or with photographs and a statement related to the Taliban's treatment of women (i.e., gender identity threat). Participants were then measured on aggression and attitudes toward retaliatory actions. Results indicated that perceived threat was highest when the salient identity corresponded with the threat (e.g., gender identity salience and presented with the article about the Taliban's treatment of women). Additionally, results suggested that aggression and support for retaliatory reactions were both highest when the salient social identity corresponded with the threat.

Religious identity is a particularly powerful social identity because it is built upon fundamental beliefs and values and anchored within a sacred and eternal worldview (Beit-Hallahmi, 2015; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Religious identity should help shape social-psychological processes and guide behaviors according to religious group norms and beliefs (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2013; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). Ysseldyk et al. (2011) extended the findings of Fischer et al. (2010) by testing its predictions specifically with religious identity. In a sample of Christians and Muslims, participants were presented with a fictitious article suggesting that the majority of the population felt coldly toward participants' respective religious group and suggesting that the government was going to use this information to reduce resources available to

participants' respective religious groups. Following, participants were assessed on negative emotions and confrontation intentions. Results suggested that participants with an intrinsic religious orientation (i.e., those looking to religion for spiritual guidance and meaning) expressed increased anger and increased intentions for confrontation. Ysseldyk et al. (2011) suggest that, "threats directly targeting one's religious group may evoke more active responses from those for whom the belief system is central to their identity" (p. 140).

To summarize, if religious identity is central to the identity of religious terrorists and the religious identity is salient, threats may be perceived as more relevant to the activated and important identity, resulting in increased anger and more support for retaliatory or confrontational interactions. This suggests that one method of reducing terrorism may be through reducing perceived threat that highly religious groups perceive from the West. The mechanism suggests that this may be accomplished through eliminating the threat or reducing the salience of or importance of religious identity to terrorist group members. While the empirical studies discussed above measure support for retaliation and confrontation intentions at the individual level, an aggregation of these reactions in large groups has the potential to be particularly devastating. Changes at the national level (e.g., framing political discourse), may go a long way in reducing individual level reactions. A few general suggestions are provided for discussion. First, the West needs to redefine its perceived role in the Middle East away from protecting the interests of the West and toward a definition that places the people of the Middle East as the purpose of the West's involvement. When Western involvement is framed as war (i.e., the "war on terror"), this may increase perceived threat by Islamic organizations, who may perceive this discourse as a "war on Islamic tradition" or as implicated by George W. Bush, a crusade (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2001). Determining means of increasing perceptions of this redefinition would be a future avenue for communication and policy oriented research.

As a second general suggestion, the importance of religious identity should be de-emphasized. The media and politicians have emphasized the Islamic nature of terrorism (despite this connection being out of proportion within the context of international terrorism), which may continually enhance perceptions of threat through the process of social identity salience. A clear example is the case of the terrorist attacks against Charlie Hebdo, in which the newspaper ran cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad, which are viewed as highly defamatory to the Muslim community. Within a radical view of Islam in which Islam is not only religion, but also theocracy, this defamation requires punishment and radical Islamists delivered their interpretation of punishment in 2011 (Sayare, 2011) and 2015 (Hinnant et al., 2015). The root cause can be viewed as perceptions of threat being enhanced through a correspondence between the threat and the relevant social identity, being Muslim.

What has been presented is a reflection of theoretical developments in social identity processes, perceptions of threat, and responses to perceived threat. However, there is a cycle of threat to consider, in which perceived threat by Islamic organizations enhances retaliatory responses, followed by increased perceived threat by the targets of the terrorism, enhancing perceptions of threat by the targets, and leading to further retaliatory action. Thus, another point of intervention is through reducing social identity salience in the target population following a terrorist attack.

### Reducing Social Identity Salience

As Fischer et al. (2010) describe, "psychological and behavioral responses to terrorism depend on both the salient social identity of potential targets as well as the perceived social aims of the terrorists" (p. 148). Thus those in positions of power can redefine acts of terrorism for purposes of either increasing support for

retaliatory action (e.g., the emphasis of the Bush administration following 9/11) or can be redefined for the purposes of reducing retaliatory action by downplaying the shared social identity of the targets (Livingstone, Gilbert, Haslam, & Sweetman, June, 2010). Shaw, Quezada, and Zárate (2011) evaluated Christian participants in the extent to which their religious identity defined who they were. Participants were then randomly assigned to conditions in which they read an adapted version of a real letter written by Osama Bin Laden describing the reasons behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In one condition this letter expressed that the attacks were committed for religious reasons. In a second condition the attack was framed as committed for geopolitical reasons. A control condition read about the drug war in Mexico. Results indicated that when the 9/11 attacks were framed as a religious conflict, the more strongly participants identified with their Christian identity, the more strongly they expressed support for violent warfare against the Middle East. The framing of terrorist action matters with regard to the extent that people evaluate threatening circumstances and the extent to which retaliation is supported.

A relevant example of politics enhancing social identity salience in order to promote support for retaliatory action can be seen in the case of the weeks and months following September 11, 2001. The Bush administration consistently used the process of social identity salience by emphasizing the shared attributes of the social group (i.e., emphasizing a solidified and homogenous America) which focused attention to the relevance of the threat to all members (Fischer et al., 2010; Reicher, Haslam, & Platow, 2007), and generated immediate large-scale support for retaliatory action as evidenced by gallop polls demonstrating a 93% approval by January 2002 (Gallup, 2014). It must be noted that social identity salience in the American population, especially of the populations' "American" identity would have been enhanced with or without the Bush administration's framing of events. However, I argue that the particular framing of the discourse further enhanced social identity salience, especially with regard to religious identity through the administration's use of religious language (Edgerton, Hart, & Hassencahl, 2007). Additionally, realpolitik and theory often diverge. The theories explored here focus on the processes at work within the dynamic interplay between terrorism, society, and politics, enlightening these processes. The exploration of these processes in line with current experimental work in social psychology does not imply prioritizing any particular political goal (e.g., involvement in Afghanistan), but only enlightens the processes underlying the decisions with regard to political goals related to terrorism and the support for these positions within a social identity framework.

Social identity salience has the potential to be altered by both politicians and the media. A focus on reducing salience of the threatened social identity (e.g., American identity) in the immediate aftermath of terrorist action may reduce retaliatory action, which in some cases may be out of proportion to the reality of particular threats. The majority of terrorism is not religious in nature and the majority of terrorists, including religious terrorist groups, are primarily targeting other Muslims in Muslim dominated regions, not Westerners (LaFree & Dugan, 2007). However, American media has solidified the fear of terrorism through homogenizing the targets (i.e., Americans), increasing social identity salience, increasing the perceptions of threat, and increasing hostility to the Middle East and Muslims (Choma, Hodson, & Costello, 2012; Helbling, 2013).

### Social Power and Parochial Altruism

Social identity salience is one mechanism and theoretical perspective that easily adapts itself to terrorism studies. However, changing social identity salience and reducing perceptions of threat on part of the terrorist group or potential terrorist group may require the use of social power. As in the case of the targets of

terrorism, this requires action on part of the leadership. Those with social power have the greatest ability to make changes to social identity salience. Furthermore, social power can be used to alter the perceived notion of parochial altruism.

Altruism is often defined in relation to terrorism as extreme altruism or parochial altruism (Choi & Bowles, 2007), and usually manifests itself in the form of suicide attacks or martyrdom. This method of terrorism is new, only becoming prominent during the current wave of religious terrorism (Rapoport, 2002). Parochialism—hostility to out-group members, and altruism—sacrificing benefits to the self for the in-group, combine to be extremely devastating, and partially explains why religious terrorist attacks have casualty rates more than four times any other type of terrorism (Piazza, 2009). The parochial altruism hypothesis that religious terrorists engage in violence out of moral obligations to the in-group, rather than cost-benefit analysis, has empirical support. Palestinian adults with ties to Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad rate delaying a planned suicide attack as more acceptable if it is for the purpose of looking after an ill family member than for the purpose of protecting the family from death by retaliation (Ginges & Atran, 2009). Additionally, the same participants overwhelmingly rated it unacceptable to ask for compensation following martyrdom (Ginges & Atran, 2009). This appears to support the notion that suicide attacks are carried out for reasons of moral obligation rather than for instrumental, rational reasons.

Being motivated by moral reasoning over instrumental reasoning may be further supported by evidence suggesting that terrorism is generally not productive as measured by terrorist organizations achieving their goals (Abrahms, 2006). Parochial altruism does not appear to be about increasing success rates toward political goals, but rather about upholding perceived moral obligations. If moral obligations, rather than instrumental reasoning, primarily dictate religious terrorism then social power can be used to intervene.

Parochial altruism needs to be redefined by the power structure in societies where terrorism is nurtured. Power is succinctly defined as potential control over others outcomes (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007), but power can take a number of different forms. French and Raven (1959) described five bases of power: *reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. Reward power* is based upon the perception that an "other" can mediate rewards. For example, religious leaders have the power to define and mediate access to spiritual realms. The Catholic Church historically used its control of the afterlife to encourage payments to the Church through the guise of indulgences (i.e., selling access to heaven). Similarly, the power structure of Islam controls mediation between Allah and the spiritual world, defining what actions inherit access to the spiritual world. *Similar to reward power is coercive power,* or the ability to mediate punishments. In the same manner that religious leaders can mediate access to spiritual rewards, they can mediate avoidance of spiritual punishments.

*Legitimate power* refers to the perception that an "other" has the right to prescribe behavior. This can be wielded indirectly. For instance, believers may perceive Allah to have divine right to dictate behavior and Islamic clerics have authority to prescribe behavior on Allah's behalf. *Referent power* simply exists through a shared identification, in this case Islam. And finally, *expert power* describes a perception that one has special knowledge or insight. For religion, power often comes in the form of control of the afterlife. When forms of power are combined with spiritual rewards and punishments, power can become intensified. With social power comes social responsibility, and the power structure of Islam needs to enforce its religious power (e.g., spiritual rewards for martyrdom) to downplay terrorism as an act of parochial altruism or martyrdom. Perhaps, this is easier described theoretically than in practice, but it leaves open the role of the Muslim world to condemn altruistic parochialism in the form of suicide terrorism as an action deserving of spiritual

reward. This can theoretically be accomplished in two ways: altering the acceptability of behavior through the power holders or through re-distributed power. How might power be re-distributed in the religious community?

One notion stems from the evidence that most religious terrorists connected to the Jihad movement or to Al-Qaeda networks are not particularly knowledgeable about Islam, nor do they generally come from religious backgrounds (Bakker, 2006; Stern, 2010). In fact, some samples estimate that only about half are from religious backgrounds (Bakker, 2006). This suggests a divergent power between potential terrorists and the religious power holders, in which *expert* and *legitimate* power are comparatively enhanced by the lack of knowledge of potential terrorists, and thus a need to rely on interpretations provided by the power holders. Terrorism and counter-terrorism research may find that French and Raven's taxonomy of power lends itself to identifying potential terrorists by studying what types of people are susceptible to those forms of power most intimately tied to the supernatural. Bertram Raven suggests that levels of complexity in moral reasoning may be one such useful approach (Raven, 1999).

### Conclusion

This brief perspective presents a theory driven approach to terrorism and counter-terrorism, suggesting that social identity theory and social power can inform investigation of the causes of terrorism, while providing insight into avenues for terrorism reduction. Theoretically, social identity salience enhances perceptions of threat and this lends itself to approaching counter-terrorism through reducing the focus on shared social characteristics in order to reduce perceptions of threat by terrorist organizations, and subsequently, reducing willingness to engage in terrorist action against civilian targets. This may take the form of encouraging restraint in purposefully ridiculing deeply revered figures and beliefs of religious groups. However, it is not plausible that all terrorist activity will be prevented, nor is it plausible or desirable to overly restrain free speech in attempting to do so. Certainly, a balanced approach between safety and free speech is necessary. Social identity salience also lends itself to the same process of threat reduction and reduced desire for retaliatory action within the social groups targeted by terrorist action.

Those with social power can most appropriately access mechanisms by which social identity salience can be enhanced or reduced (e.g., leadership and social media). Social power also has implications for understanding why parochial altruism has become a powerful form of terrorist activity primarily in the wave of religious terrorism. Research and policy may focus efforts on identifying factors that cause people to be susceptible to forms of social power, such as lacking proper knowledge of religious principles, or particular levels of moral reasoning. In conclusion, applying social identity theory and theories of social power to discussions of religious terrorism may increase the field's understanding of causes of, responses to, and solutions to terrorism.

### About the author

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## Book Review

# Gary J. Bass (2014); The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger and a Forgotten Genocide; Hurst & Co: London

**reviewed by Christiana Spens**

It is often said that 'history is written by the winners', though there is some room for challenge to that truism it would seem, given the publication of Bass' recent exposé of the role of Nixon and Kissinger in the massacre of hundreds of thousands of (mainly) Bengali Hindus in 1971. Whether power can be won in retrospect with critical historical research is a topic for another essay, another book even, but certainly we see in Bass' astounding volume a shifting of perspective and understanding of a previously hidden chapter of American as well as Pakistani, Bengali and Indian history. Specifically, *The Blood Telegram* exposes the manner in which Nixon and Kissinger, during the Cold War, illegally and covertly supported Pakistan's assault on East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), which killed hundreds of thousands of civilians and displaced around ten million more, putting huge strain on India, where most were taken in.

Bass focuses on the American role in this story, and specifically the diplomat whose outrage at the massacre was most vocal: Archer Blood, the US consul general in 1971 in Dhaka, the principal city of East Bengal. His dealings with, and protestations of the behaviour of the higher American administration are telling, certainly, and to focus on this diplomat's place in the unfolding atrocities and related political manoeuvres is, in itself, a clever choice on the part of the author. An underlying understanding of what makes a good story, and what makes history readable, is key to the book's wider appeal and effect in communicating a brutal and complex report in a compelling fashion. Learning the details of the massacre and the role of Nixon and Kissinger in its unfolding violence, through Blood's cables and telegrams (which reported the gruesome reality of the genocide to those in DC), as well as new interviews and previously unheard White House tapes, provides a gripping narrative and sense of urgency that is eminently readable. The story exposed remains as shocking as it did at the time: "At the White House, Kissinger's aides were shaken by Blood's reporting. "It was a brutal crackdown," says Winston Lord, Kissinger's special assistant, who says he read some of the cables. "In retrospect, he did a pretty good reporting job," says Samuel Hoskinson, about Blood. "He was telling power in Washington what power in Washington didn't want to hear."" (73) Those reports were damning and provocative then, and form the skeleton of *The Blood Telegram,* in which Bass harnesses the momentum of the original cables (which were of course covered up subsequently by Nixon, Kissinger, and aides), and uses it to fuel a fresh reflection not only on that period, but also on the effort to conceal it.

First describing the personal and political context (on the American side) that paved the way for Pakistan's brutal crackdown on East Pakistan, Bass explains the prejudices of Nixon and Kissinger against India (and its leader, Indira Gandhi) and the Bengali people, and suggests that those personal, emotional impressions made possible an excessively lax view on the consequential mass casualties and political upheaval that their involvement caused. The role of emotion in these political and military decisions is particularly interesting, and by telling the story in a way that is perceptive of the characters involved, and sensitive in their portrayals, Bass brings a rare emotional intelligence and insight into charting the escalation of violence.

This perceptiveness in identifying the personal prejudices involved also adds weight to the assertion that the mass killings constituted a 'genocide', a term which obviously implies a racist motivation or undertone to the decision to kill hundreds of thousands of people (as opposed to 'mass killing', which need not have such motivation).

As Bass points out, these personal prejudices were inappropriate given America's own political principles, not to mention the expected professionalism and lawfulness of its leaders; the contradiction betrays an interesting tension between the personalities in power and the structure and laws they were supposed to protect and promote. The pronounced conflict between Archer Blood and his staff, and their superiors in the White House is not only interesting as a thorough description of that pivotal moment in history, but also as a symbolic struggle between American principles and the preferences of particular leaders. In this case, of course, the dissenters were silenced. Despite Blood's reporting of the genocide, his linking of it to American sponsorship and weapons, and then his outright protest (together with other staff in the consul, via a "dissent cable" which explicitly spoke out against the "moral bankruptcy" of Nixon and Kissinger's policy), the genocide, and its American support, persisted.

Both Nixon and Kissinger flouted US law, knowingly, by allowing the transfer of American F-104 Starfighter jet interceptors to Pakistan, and rather than be deterred by Blood (et al)'s protestations, they were irritated by them, and only strengthened their military sponsorship in an attempt to hit India by proxy. The conflict also served as a cover for their clandestine communications with Mao Zedong's China, and Kissinger's trip there, to secure Chinese support against the Soviet Union (as well as further isolation of India). This type of struggle has repeated itself, on some level, many times over since. The use of proxy wars and parallel covert operations was hardly limited to the Cold War, let alone this particular period of it, and this exploration of these military behaviours has implications for more recent manifestations of the same tendency. In that sense, learning about this chapter in history is a useful tool for anyone interested in parallel issues in international relations since. As well as identifying a general pattern in US foreign policy, and its inherent problems, Bass also illuminates a time in American and global history that has had lasting implications, not least for the region itself, where the 1971 genocide only worsened relations between India and Pakistan, and goes some way to explain the complicated complicity, to this day, between the US and Pakistan.

Perhaps the most fascinating element of this story, however, is its previous concealment, and the subsequent uncovering that this book represents. Bass explains meticulously the efforts that Nixon and Kissinger went to in order to conceal their culpability in genocide, and to present, instead, images of themselves as good and law-abiding statesmen. The levels of manipulation and deception involved in that cover-up, not only by Nixon and Kissinger, but in their various aides and supporters, is a compelling subject indeed. The gulf between real actions when in office, and reputation is pronounced here, and the ambitiousness required to attempt to gloss over that guilt and hypocrisy is quite astounding. Bass exposes an awful period of American foreign policy and personal ruthlessness, and in so doing leaves lingering some profound and timely questions and ambiguities concerning rogue leaders, illegal proxy wars and the heavy human price paid for underhand military coups. He also raises to prominence the (until now) silenced voices of dissent within the US foreign office, their principled struggle to act in accordance with American laws and ideals, and their personal sacrifices in doing so. *The Blood Telegram* is a brilliant account, therefore, of bravery as well as hypocrisy, and principles despite realpolitik.

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## About JTR

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