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## Articles

### A Case Study of Anders B. Breivik's Intergroup Conceptualisation

by Mathias Holmen Johnsen



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#### Abstract

*This paper undertakes summative content analytical case study of Anders Behring Breivik's political manifesto, analysing Breivik's conceptualisations of social ingroup and outgroup, and how these concepts interact. Findings indicate that Breivik conceptualises his ingroup on a three-level scale, ranging from specific to general. The outgroup is conceptualised as twofold, seen as either originating inside Breivik's ingroup society or outside. A basic interaction pattern between the two group-conceptualisations was found, suggesting mutual reinforcement and a self-replicating pattern of radicalization and entrenched group-conceptualisation. Ingroup categories appeared to exist as hierarchical subsets, while outgroup categories were clearly differentiated as separate entities.*

**Keywords:** Lone-wolf terrorism; Social Identity Theory; Radicalisation; Social Psychology; Case Study; Breivik

#### Introduction

When Anders Behring Breivik opened fire at Utøya near Oslo on July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011, it can be said with confidence that he no longer considered the Labour Party youths he had chosen to attack as worthy of the sympathy or protection typically granted to one's social ingroup. Even though Breivik's victims were primarily fellow Norwegian citizens who shared his ethnicity and socio-economic background, Breivik had somehow developed a mental conceptualisation of this group of individuals as not only an outgroup, but existing in such stark opposition to him and his ingroup that he found it necessary to take personal, violent action to see their destruction.

It has not been difficult to obtain access to Breivik's own statements relating to how he viewed his targets: Both his publicly available manifesto and statements made in court refer to labels such as, but certainly not limited to 'traitors', 'elites' and 'Cultural Marxists', clearly articulated derisive outgroup-terms. Breivik's perceived ingroup has been similarly clearly articulated: 'The Knights Templar', 'Cultural Conservatives' and 'Ethnic Europeans' are only some of the labels openly and frequently employed.

However, with the insight given by Breivik himself regarding his ingroup/outgroup conceptualisations no significant effort has so far been made to thoroughly analyse how these were developed. This paper will attempt to expand on our understanding of Breivik's thoughts and motives by exploring his intergroup conceptualisation through the lens of psychological theory, specifically that of Social Identity Theory. Through looking in-depth at Breivik's Manifesto '2083 – A European Declaration of Independence', this paper will explore how Breivik articulates and conceptualises his social ingroup and outgroup, as well as exploring the extent to which these two groups are related on a conceptual level.



## **Literature Review**

This section will provide a brief overview of Social Identity Theory, as well as the form of terrorism perpetrated by Anders Breivik; so-called lone-wolf terrorism. These two areas will provide the majority of the theoretical-grounding for the subsequent analysis of Breivik's manifesto.

### **Social Identity Theory and Intergroup Relations**

Social Identity Theory assumes that social group membership and intergroup relations is based in the individual's self-categorization, constructed of ingroup defining properties (Hogg & Vaughan, 2011). 'Intergroup relations' can be understood as referring to interactions between individuals conducted "*in terms of their group identification*" (Sherif, 1966, p. 192). As such, one can understand Breivik's interaction with his victims as an example of *intergroup* interaction. Social Identity Theory can be used to understand how this intergroup conceptualisation was formulated by Breivik's construction of his own group-identity. Turner et al. (Turner et al., 1987) commented, "*ethnocentricity and group cohesiveness are... two sides of the same coin*"<sup>1</sup> (p. 62), suggesting that the closer one identifies with one's ingroup, the more one's behaviour will be affected by the relevant intergroup conceptualisation. From this, we can gather that even the most radical and complex intergroup actions can be traced back to the individual's conceptualisation of intergroup identity.

Henri Tajfel (1970) has presented evidence for the viability of such a claim with what become known as the Minimal Group Paradigm (Tajfel et al. 1971). He demonstrated that when individuals were divided into arbitrary groups and given a task that involved allocating insignificant but scarce resources between an arbitrarily assigned ingroup and outgroup, participants would consistently act "*in a manner that discriminates against the outgroup and favors the ingroup*" (1970, pp. 98-99). This illustrates how social group distinctions are formed very easily. Tajfel and Turner et al.'s ideas combine to suggest that action-patterns based on intergroup conceptualisation are formed just as easily as the concepts themselves.

### **Lone-Wolf Terrorism**

Breivik claims that he is part of a small organization of equally devoted political activists. However, no evidence has been found to prove this claim. As such, it would be presumptive to analyse Breivik's acts on the basis of conventional terrorism studies, as this field tends to "*focus predominantly on group dynamics and collective socialization to explain individual pathways into terrorism*" (Spaaij, 2010, p. 855), driving factors which might not be equally prominent in the case of lone actors. This case was further emphasised by The Dutch COT Institute for Safety, Security, and Conflict Management and their 2007 report on lone-wolf terrorism which including a basic definition underlining the way in which such acts varied from group-based phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> One cannot reasonably expect that an actor distanced from any explicit group context will follow the same patterns of social group identification as an individual who is located firmly within such a social group.

Moskalenko and McCauley (2011), identifies some important elements vital to the formation of driving factors of extremism in lone-actor terrorists. It is entirely plausible, they argue, for individuals to identify with a group that "*extends far beyond those near and similar to ourselves*" (p. 122), suggesting that explicit social exposure to the group is not necessary to conceptualise it as an ingroup. They further stress how even for lone-wolf actors it is possible for "*concern for the welfare of others [to go] beyond any economic value to the*



*self* (ibid). They suggest that lone-wolf actors take it on themselves to punish individuals or groups they see as breaking the norms of the ingroup, so as to protect it. The authors suggest that this drive can be so strong as to transcend the need for explicit group interaction (p. 120).

## **Methodology**

The exploration of Breivik's intergroup conceptualisations will be based on a basic content analysis of his manifesto. This paper will apply a very simple classification-scheme to the text, taking note of, and analysing text that displays Breivik's conceptualisation of 1) the Ingroup, and 2) the Outgroup. The variation of content analysis that will be utilized in this study is labelled by Hsieh & Shannon (2005) as 'Summative', an approach which "*attempt[s] not to infer meaning but, rather, explore usage*" and which "*focus is on discovering underlying meanings of the words or the content*" (pp. 1283-1284). This format fits together very well with the exploratory approach of this paper, relying on the meanings and usage found during analysis to assemble a theoretical construct useful in answering the research-question.

Anders Breivik's Manifesto is by his own admission only in part his own work. He claims to have written approximately half of the volume himself, with the remainder being copied from the work of other authors (Breivik, 2011, p. 5). Although he states simultaneously that the relevant authors will be credited when their text is used, making sure that this statement is true would take extensive cross-referencing of the entire manifesto with the relevant texts, a task beyond the scope of this paper. As such, this paper will base itself on two assumptions; that Breivik has either written the text being analysed himself *or* he is copying without citing, but in which case he is still adding content to his manifesto that *share his views*. As such, one can assume that the content of the manifesto reflects Breivik's attitudes and conceptualisations, even in the case where he has not written the text himself. Further, the attitudes expressed in Breivik's manifesto appear to be accurately mirrored in his own statements during his trial (Aftenposten.no, 2012).<sup>3</sup>

As Breivik's group-conceptualisations are explored, they will be classified and grouped in the manner that appears most consistent with the text. It is here important to remember that these classifications will not necessarily refer to genuine social groups, but rather the social environment as observed by Breivik. As such, the findings of this paper should be examined with an eye to whether or not they accurately illustrate Breivik's personal conceptions, rather than conceptualisations that can be objectively observed in the relevant social environments.

## **Analysis**

### **The Ingroup**

#### **Organisational–Knights Templar**

The most explicit of Breivik's ingroup conceptualisations is that of the Knights Templar. On the front Page of his manifesto is clearly printed a stylised St George's Cross, and a Latin inscription that translates as

*"In Praise of the New Knighthood*

*The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon"*

The second line is the original name of the Knights Templar order, while the first is taken from the title of a



book written in praise of the newly formed Templar Order by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux sometime in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century (Barber, 1994, p. 44). Writing under his anglicised pseudonym Andrew Berwick, Breivik styles himself “*Justiciar Knight Commander for Knights Templar Europe*” (Breivik, 2011, p. 9), and states that the purpose of the reborn order is “*servicing the interests of the free indigenous peoples of Europe and to fight against the ongoing European Jihad*” (p. 817).

Breivik comments on how he believes that Western schools have been subject to the falsification of information by the outgroup, resulting among other things in “[f]alsified information about the Crusades (it was a defensive campaign not offensive)” (p. 41). As such, one can observe that Breivik conceptualises his closest ingroup as defensive militaristic unit, reacting to the aggression of the outgroup in order to defend the wider ingroup.

Interestingly, a list of Templars is printed in the manifesto, taking note of those allegedly present during the re-funding of the organization (p. 817), including information on nationality and religion. Paradoxically, members listed as ‘atheist’ are *also* labelled ‘Christian’. This detail provides some preliminary insight into what values and ideals make up the fundamentals for Breivik’s perceived ingroup members and as a consequence the wider ingroup as a whole.

### **Political–Cultural Conservatives**

In terms of a political ingroup, Breivik utilizes the label of ‘cultural conservative’, which might be most accurately understood as fundamental conservatism. Breivik provides little specific detail about this label and its related values, but certain allusions are made, such as the statement “[m]ost Europeans look back on the 1950s as a good time” (p. 12), as well as an account focusing on how the typical societal ideals and traditions of that era were morally and objectively better for Europe and European citizens. What is clear, is that Breivik perceives his political ingroup as underrepresented, and at worst actively persecuted by the outgroup. For example, regarding journalist and media-attention to the ingroup, Breivik states that “[a]s cultural conservatives and anti-multiculturalists we are by default perceived as enemies” (p. 389), further commenting that “[n]eedless to say; the growing numbers of nationalists in W. Europe are systematically being ridiculed, silenced and persecuted by [the outgroup]” (p. 5). He further holds that active political participation of the ingroup is made impossible by the outgroup, stating that “[a]mong so called Western European ”conservative” parties the actual cultural conservatives are shown the door” (2011, p. 14).

While Breivik might conceptualise his outgroup as a political entity in terms of having a general political orientation, he is very clear about it not being an ideology, stating rather that “all ideologies are wrong” (p. 11), going on to claim that ideology adheres to a specific set of political principles independently of reality. This suggests that he considers the ‘political’ aspects of his ingroup as signifying a set of principles that are political only insofar as they are addressed in a *political setting*. This idea is interesting in that one can see parallels to Clausewitz’ idea that “*theory should be study, not doctrine*” (1976, p. 141). This is to say, Breivik appears to be entirely confident that his perspective is objective ‘theory’, and that as such it is not to be considered ‘doctrine’ but truth. Conversely, those who deny what Breivik observes as truth must be the victim of doctrine, ideology, which subverts and alters the truth that Breivik perceives as absolute.



## *Ethnic/Demographic–Native Europeans*

Breivik makes it very clear already from the first page that Europe and Europeans make up his wider ingroup. When he states that the outgroup “[DOES] NOT have the permission of the European peoples” to wield power (2011, p. 4), he sweepingly includes the European people in general as being in opposition to the outgroup. Indeed, Breivik states that the Manifesto is a “*personal gift and contribution to all Europeans*” (p. 5), and continues to refer to ‘all Europe’ or ‘all Europeans’ throughout the Manifesto as being victims of the outgroup. More exactly, the so named ‘jurisdiction’ of the Knights Templar is stated as including specifically Western Europe and the Balkans (p. 817), and Breivik appears to make a point to specify *ethnic or native* Europeans as belonging to the ingroup. It can be observed that he appears to limit his conceptualisation to a primarily European ingroup, although it seems likely that individuals from the other ‘Western’ nations fitting his ingroup criteria would be welcomed as a member of this ingroup.

One can observe a clear difference between types of ingroup Breivik Conceptualises: The ‘European’ ingroup is different from the ‘Culturally Conservative’ ingroup, insofar as the former is an ingroup on whose behalf Breivik is fighting, whereas the latter is the ingroup which is doing the fighting. He appears to conceptualise the wider ingroup as innocent bystanders in a war perpetrated by the outgroup. The repeated use of terms such as ‘genocide’ and ‘massacre’ to describe the behaviour of the outgroup towards the ingroup enforces this impression.

## *The Outgroup*

### *Cultural Marxists and Islam*

The main conceptualisation of Breivik’s outgroup is twofold, a division existing along the lines of whether the group is inside or outside Breivik’s wider ingroup society. Multiculturalists, labelled by Breivik as Cultural Marxists, are ‘inside’ European society, and so are conceptualised as a group made up of individuals who *should* be part of the ingroup, but who for one reason or another has chosen to oppose it. As he states “*You cannot defeat Islamisation or halt/reverse the Islamic colonization of Western Europe without first removing the political doctrines manifested through multiculturalism/cultural Marxism*” (p. 5). This statement presents the other outgroup section, Islam, an entity that Breivik sees as ‘outside’ European society, and seeking its destruction.

Looking first to the ‘inside’ outgroup, Cultural Marxism is conceptualised as a western ideology that has sabotaged and undermined the European system and identity in the name of ‘political correctness’, and as a result has left European society vulnerable to an ongoing “*Islamic Colonisation of Europe through demographic warfare*” (Breivik, 2011, p. 9). According to Breivik Cultural Marxists are responsible for historical falsification in pursuit of rewriting history to suit their ideological outlook. The concept of ‘political correctness’ is perceived as the main tool employed by the Cultural Marxists when it comes to changing society. Breivik holds that the term is one used by Marxists to denote “*the General Line of the Party*” (p. 11), and which is employed by the outgroup to condemn any undesirable action or statement made by the ingroup, making it impossible for it to express its views.<sup>4</sup> One can see the extent to which Breivik finds political correctness a threat when he laments “[p]olitical Correctness now looms over Western European society like a colossus. It has taken over both political wings, left and right” (p. 14).

In further detail, Breivik quite systematically labels politicians and journalists and academics of the outgroup





establishment as “*traitors*” of “*category A and B*” (p. 931) respectively, claiming that there are in Europe approximately 400,000 such individuals (p. 932). There are also ‘traitors’ in classes C and D, which are conceptualised as individuals who have in the past or are at present actively enabling categories A and B. According to Breivik, A and B traitors are the most hostile of the ‘inside’ outgroup, going so far as to label the class A individuals as war-criminals, liable to be ‘punished’ by death under the authority of the Knights Templar (p. 1407).

When it comes to the ‘outside’ outgroup, Breivik’s conceptualisation of Islam paints it as a more lethal entity than the ‘inside’ outgroup. He perceives the ‘Islamisation’ of Europe as part of an ongoing “*1400 year Islamic Jihad against non-Muslims and Europe*” (p. 38). Rather than distinguish between several sub-categories of this outgroup, Breivik states sweepingly that “[w]herever there is a presence of Muslims, Islamisation occurs” (p. 478), and that Muslims “*must be considered as wild animals*” (ibid). The further conceptualisation of this ‘outside’ outgroup similarly lacks nuance, positing Islam simply as inherently destructive and belligerent towards Europe and Europeans. Interestingly, this one-sided perspective is contrasted by a quite detailed, if skewed, retelling of the history of Islam, demonstrating that Breivik has spent some considerable time researching the outgroup.

An interesting distinction that Breivik makes when it comes to the question of outgroup *blame* can be seen when he states that one should “*not blame the wild animals but rather the multiculturalist category A and B traitors*” (ibid). As such, Breivik seems to have conceptualised the ‘outside’ outgroup as entirely incorrigible, having no interest in negotiation or any greater political or strategic goal than the annihilation of the ingroup. He appears to suggest that this group has no true agency beyond their inherent, destructive, nature, and so the blame falls rather to the ‘inside’-outgroup who has both agency and understanding, intentionally working to the detriment of Breivik’s ingroup when they should know better. This conceptualisation further adds to distancing the ‘outside’ outgroup from Breivik’s ingroup on a fundamental level.

### ***European Political Establishment***

Breivik appears to perceive the ‘inside’ outgroup as having a firm hold on the political system of Europe. He holds that throughout Europe there are 100 major political parties which “*indirectly or directly support the Islamisation of Europe through their support for European multiculturalism*” (p. 924). Further, Breivik conceptualises the European Union as an “*actively hostile entity run by a corrupt class of abject traitors*” (p. 313). One can see, then, that the outgroup is perceived as having obtained significant control over the political system, reiterating the point that was seen earlier that the ingroup has no hope of engaging in political discourse due to active exclusion. When Breivik’s does not conceptualise his political ingroup as a conventional political party-entity, one should ask if this is due to the perceived exclusive nature of the present European political system. The ingroup is conceptualised as consisting of the majority of European citizens, and so it follows that the only reason it is unable to engage in ‘legitimate’ political activity is that the outgroup denies it. Here again one can see how blame is attributed to the outgroup: Unacceptable actions committed by the ingroup is the fault and responsibility of the outgroup for excluding the ingroup from conventional political engagement.

The hold of the ‘inside’ outgroup on the ‘establishment’ is not only political, Breivik finds, but also by extension judicial. Speaking on the European Court of Human Rights he states that “*court rulings and principles are very often “ordered” by cultural Marxists to either be used against cultural conservatives directly or to systematically and gradually destroy European culture, traditions, our identities and to limit the sovereignty*



*of nation states*" (p. 338). Further, Breivik holds that "150,000 cultural conservatives or others" have been incarcerated by the outgroup "for *"resistance" and/or "defence" related acts*" (p. 772). Again we can see how Breivik has conceptualised the outgroup as persecuting the ingroup with means they have turned to their own purposes. The ingroup commits acts of "resistance" and "defence", which are morally justifiable reactions to the existential threat posed by the 'outside' outgroup, but the 'inside' outgroup persecutes these acts because the ingroup "doesn't support the cultural Marxist/multiculturalist stance" (ibid).

As social identity theory points out, a social system that is perceived as illegitimate and unstable but conceivably open to change through interaction will foster social competition, ranging from activism to terrorism (Hogg & Vaughan, 2011, pp. 418-419). It is quite clear that Breivik conceives of the European establishment as such, and when he then takes the most violent approach to social competition it is a further sign of how deeply ingrained his oppositional intergroup conceptualisations have become.

### ***Existential, Genocidal Threat***

Breivik is very clear in his conceptualisation of the outgroup as an existential threat to the ingroup. With regards to Islam, he holds that it has historically been the perpetrator of "countless genocides of more than 300 million people" (p. 41). He further claims that "what is happening to the indigenous peoples of Western Europe and our cultures—amounts to a merciless and bloody genocide" and that it is one "in which many members of the native Europeans [sic] are playing a willing and active part" (p. 390). This is a recurring theme through the manifesto, conceptualising the 'outside' outgroup as presenting an existential, genocidal, threat to the ingroup, while the 'inside' outgroup is actively working to promote and assist this threat by attempting to eliminate traditional European values and identities as seen above. As suggested by the Terror Management Theory, making one group out as an existential threat will further enhance the intergroup bias (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 9), feeding back into the intergroup rivalry-spiral suggested by Social Identity Theory and providing another potential explanation as to how Breivik's intergroup conceptualisations have come to be so oppositional.

### ***Discussion***

Breivik's conceptualisations of ingroup and outgroup can be coherently summarised as follows: The ingroup in the widest sense consists of the majority of Ethnic Europeans actively adhering or desiring a return to conservative societal values, distained and persecuted by a small but powerful minority.

Where the ingroup is one cohesive social unit, the outgroup is twofold and seemingly unified only by their antagonistic attitude to the ingroup. Islam is perceived as inherently violent and its adherents as dehumanized barbarians, while Cultural Marxists are perceived as intolerant and hysterical ultra-liberals who intentionally suppress factual truths in pursuit of ideological ends. The former desires the violent death of the ingroup, while the latter desires the eradication of the ingroup's ideals and values.

A clear pattern that can further be seen in Breivik's conceptualisations is the sub-categorisation of each group. Within the ingroup there appears to be three: Ethnic, political and personal (the Knights Templar). The outgroup is as mentioned split in two, depending on whether or not they belong within Breivik's perceived ingroup society.

Further, within both ingroup and outgroup, a distinction is made between active and passive members. Passive members of the ingroup includes all those who are perceived to share Breivik's ideals but do not



actively advocate or fight for them. The passive *outgroup* members refer to those 'inside' European society who are perceived as passively accepting the detrimental actions of the 'active' outgroup.

The conceptualisations portrayed by Breivik correspond to the patterns proposed by Social Identity theory initially, with the added theoretical extensions introduced by his Lone-wolf status. One can see that, as suggested by Moskalenko & McCauley (2011), Breivik most certainly identifies with an ingroup that extends far beyond those near to himself, albeit not so much beyond those similar to himself. This provides an example of the Minimal Group Paradigm translated through the perspective of a lone-wolf individual: an ingroup is conceptualised based on basic identifying factors. As the individual is solitary, the group identification logically extends to all who appear to fit the group-defining properties, limited by outwards appearance rather than personal familiarity or knowledge. Here one can see here how SIT requires some modulation when applied to a lone-wolf individual, but retains its overall validity and usefulness.

The prime concern one might have with the SIT's validity rests on its social grounding, given the asocial nature of Breivik's process of conceptualisation. However, while Breivik exists in a space of political activism comparatively unpopulated by explicit group conditions, he still conceives of himself as existing in a social world, a *social context*. As pointed out by Arena & Arrigo (2006) identity is central to any terrorist, and there is no doubt that Breivik *identifies* as existing in a social context, which returns one to the introductory point made about how the essential unit of analysis is how Breivik himself perceives reality, not the objective truth of it. This is a fact extended to the use of SIT in this context, and as such, utilizing a *socially-based* theory to understand Breivik's intergroup conceptualisations should be seen as a highly instructive framework for understanding the formations of intergroup identity within a lone-wolf individual.

## Conclusion

In summarizing the findings of Breivik's Ingroup/Outgroup conceptualisation, answering the first part of the research-question, we can order it as seen in Table 1 below.

	Ingroup	Outgroup
Personal	Knights Templar	
Political	Cultural Conservatives	Cultural Marxists
General/Ethnic	Ethnic Europeans	Islam

From what has been explored in the analysis-section, it is clear that these conceptualisations are sophisticated and well defined. Even 'Islam', which is conceptualised as lacking complexity of motivation, is given a detailed, if selective, historical background. According to SIT, such complexity of conceptualisation corresponds to the perceived extreme intergroup conflict. The way in which the ingroup and outgroup are so thoroughly conceptualised might be understood as a necessary step in the process of creating a comprehensive concept of the outgroup and ingroup, lacking any fellow individuals sharing his particular intergroup perspective. The more detail Breivik collected on either group, the greater the detail with which he could formulate the intergroup conflict. According to Ricketta (2005), this would result in an even stronger identification with the ingroup, feeding back into the conceptualisation of the outgroup.



The fact that no outgroup entity falls into the ‘personal’ category of conceptualisation is a fact that fits into a typical pattern of terrorist polarizing rhetoric. According to Jerrold Post, ‘the other’ tends to represent “*the establishment*” (2005, pp. 54-55), the terrorist actor self-conceptualising as counter-establishment. Accordingly, Breivik’s conceptualisation of the outgroups as exclusively establishment entities<sup>5</sup> is entirely concordant with the pattern, as does the emphasis that his ingroup is *not* part of an ideological establishment.

What we can conclude from this paper, is that Breivik’s ingroup and outgroup conceptualisation function as mutually reinforcing concepts, each defining and being defined by the other. This provides us with a very interesting perspective into how lone-wolf individuals might come to radicalize to the point of violent action. Being subject to a self-directed process of deeper and deeper intergroup conceptualisation which, if uninterrupted and given the right conditions persists to the point of extremism. At this point, the conceptions of the ingroup’s superiority over the outgroup becomes a conscious, articulated belief rather than an underlying psychological attitude, symbolising a change in the individual from radicalizing to radical.

The patterns uncovered in this paper demonstrates the feasibility of applying Social Identity Theory to the case of lone-wolf terrorist individuals. When an understanding of lone-wolf terrorists is coupled with the insight into intergroup conceptualisation provided by the SIT the resulting theoretical framework has proven to offer compelling and valid data.

This paper provides several avenues of approach for future research, the most prominent of which might be to more thoroughly explore the exact process of the formation of intergroup conceptualisation in lone-wolf violent actors, working on the basis of the process used in this paper. Further, future research should also endeavour to collate case-studies of several lone-wolf individuals, so as to enable analysis of data from several sources rather than rely on one case alone.

This paper has provided a preliminary content-analysis case-study focused on the social intergroup conceptualisation of Anders Breivik, a psychological phenomenon that has only been superficially explored thus far in Breivik’s specific case and in lone-wolf terrorism generally. A pattern of intergroup conceptualisation has been uncovered, which suggests great potential for future research on this topic.

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## Notes

1. Ethnocentricity as a pattern of behaviour indicates that the (ethnic) ingroup being favoured over a specific outgroup, necessitating explicit conceptualisation of both ingroup and outgroup.

2. “In the case of lone-wolf terrorism, such acts are committed by persons

(a) who operate individually; (b) who do not belong to an organized terrorist group or network; (c) who act without the direct influence of a leader or hierarchy; (d) whose tactics and methods are conceived and directed by the individual without any direct outside command or direction” (p. 6)

3. A translation of these proceedings can be found at

<https://sites.google.com/site/breivikreport/transcripts/anders-breivik-court-transcript-2012-04-17-live-report> (Author and date of publication unknown, accessed on February 7<sup>th</sup> 2014). The origin of this translation is unknown, but the translation is accurate.

4. “But what happens today to Europeans who suggest that there are differences among ethnic groups, or that the traditional social roles of men and women reflect their different natures, or that homosexuality is morally wrong? If they are public figures, they must grovel in the dirt in endless, canting apologies. If they are



university students, they face star chamber courts and possible expulsion. If they are employees of private corporations, they may face loss of their jobs. What was their crime? Contradicting the new EUSSR ideology of "Political Correctness." (Breivik, 2011, p. 11)

5. Islam constituting an establishment in and of itself.

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## Operation Enduring Freedom: Institutional Constraints, Alliance Commitments, and the Power Capabilities of Counterterrorism

by Kyle T Kattelman



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### Abstract

*What prompted states to participate in the War on Terror? Conventional wisdom concludes that the endeavor is an unpopular exercise in US imperialism, yet this argument is juxtaposed with the overwhelming amount of international support in its initial stages. Additionally, while there is a great depth and breadth of information on aggregate terrorist attacks and their theoretical motivation, there is relatively little with regards to counterterrorist behavior. This study represents the first of its kind to examine from a global perspective the counterterrorist behavior of states by linking it to the conflict theories of general and immediate deterrence. The results will show how democratic characteristics inhibit military commitment while alliance obligations act as an outside constraint that engenders preemptive behavior. However, once committed militarily, state capabilities are the main influence on the level of preemptive action applied. This analysis supports the utilization of traditional conflict theories when examining state counterterrorist behavior.*

**Keywords:** terrorism, counterterrorism, alliances, collective action

### Introduction

Shortly after the attacks on 9/11, President George W. Bush, in *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS 2002, 1), outlined three crucial tasks to protecting the US from further violence, stating, “We will defend the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers. We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.” These goals stand in stark contrast to those outlined under the Clinton administration in 1998, which argued that the main objective of the US was to bolster economic prosperity by promoting democracy and human rights abroad (NSS 1999). President Clinton’s statement was broad in comparison to the pointed and focused goals of President Bush. More important, Clinton’s statement implied peace, an attitude not present in the declaration of the Bush administration. Given the course of events that just transpired, its absence should come as no surprise. The attacks on 9/11 were an unparalleled global event that singlehandedly shifted US security strategy and the global system seemingly overnight. No single international crisis can rival the scope and depth of global consequences that the hijackings of four commercial airliners harkened in that day. Events that come close, such as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the concomitant commencement of WWI, were as much a product of the complicated web of international alliances and diplomatic blunders as it was an act of terrorism (Gaddis 2004). Indeed, 9/11 truly stands alone in terms of its tactical success and strategic implications.

A global insurgency of this scale warrants global action, and global action has been taken (Kilcullen 2005). The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have resulted in trillions of dollars in expenditures, thousands of casualties, and a countless amount of international protest. How has a single incident triggered such a severe response? How do threatened nations react to al-Qaeda and their affiliates?



The theoretical conclusions reached by Arce and Sandler (2005) and Enders and Sandler (2006) state that deterrence is a problem of liberal democracies. What can be argued, however, is that global terrorism is a problem of all states due to the fact that attacks could happen anywhere in the world. However, democracies do feel the brunt of this threat and have experienced a disproportionate amount of violence from international terrorism (Li 2005). So what aspects of liberal democracies and, more broadly, all threatened states, affect counterterrorist actions? Why do some states engage in military offensives, while others stay on the sidelines to shore up defenses on the home front? The theoretical differentiation between general and immediate deterrence (Zagare and Kilgour 2000; Quackenbush 2011) and its ties to regime characteristics can help lend insight into these puzzles. To date, scholars analyzing terrorism have examined the causes, targets, and types of attack (Ginges 1997; Rees and Aldrich 2005; Miller 2007). However, they have not examined counterterrorist measures on an aggregate scale, mostly relying instead on case studies. Conversely, aggregate-level analyses focusing on the characteristics of terrorists have led to conclusions that can be generalized across a broad spectrum of terrorist activities regarding their causes and strategies (Crenshaw 1981; Hoffman 1995; Newman 2006; Benmelech, Berrebi, Klor 2012). The research conducted here represents an attempt to offset this disparity by employing large-N quantitative analyses on the counterterrorist activities of countries in an effort to attribute state characteristics to general counterterrorist behavior.

This analysis represents an attempt to explain the dilemma faced by liberal democracies when combating terrorism by tying it into more traditional conflict theories of deterrence. What follows is a discussion of the perceived belligerence of US foreign policy and its activities in the Middle East. The purpose is to explain why traditional power balancing theories do not account for the coordinated multilateral operations seen today in modern conflict. The reason behind this is that most of the world feels the threat of global terrorism and does not balance against the US because they share its overarching goal of eradicating al-Qaeda. What follows next is a discussion of general and immediate deterrence, with an effort put forth explaining how it is possible for states to deter terrorism, and a discussion of why advanced liberal democracies are in a state of immediate deterrence.

Next, discussions of the dilemma of liberal democracies and resulting hypotheses are outlined, examining the paradox of how expressly targeted states are the ones most reluctant to act, how alliance commitments work to overcome the misgivings of democratic leaders on behalf of military intervention, and how capabilities drive the level of preemptive action once a state commits. Finally, the results are presented, followed by a conclusion noting both the strengths and weaknesses of applying aggregate analyses to counterterrorist behavior.

### ***Contemporary Balancing in the Global System***

Traditional power balancing theories argue that the US should be experiencing international backlash due to its rank as the top military power and its subsequent interventions into the Middle East (Leiber and Alexander 2005). What is to be argued is that the lack of balancing stems from the shared sentiment of the international community that a global terrorist threat exists. That threat sets the stage for conceptualizing the multilateral counterinsurgency under more traditional conflict theories of general and immediate deterrence.

Though the events of 9/11 precipitated the mass invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan under the politicized misnomer of the “Global War on Terror,” the actual declaration of war came in a much subtler form from the perpetrators of the attacks a few years earlier. On February 23, 1998, Osama bin Laden issued a *fatwa* declaring war on the US, Israel, and all liberal democratic nations, which prompted a following two-phase





strategy for a global *jihad* against the West (World Islamic Front 1998). Though the events were treated indifferently from the West, the credibility of their intentions crystallized in the unprecedented and historic destruction of WTC Towers 1 and 2, the crash of a Boeing 757 into the Pentagon, and the failed hijacking of Flight 93. An outlier in terms of destruction (Mueller and Stewart 2012), the attacks on 9/11 signaled that the perpetrators intended on carrying out a global insurgency. And though such violence is unlikely to be replicated, al-Qaeda has a presence in at least 40 countries, indicating the extent of its operations and its ability to invoke fear (Kilcullen 2005).

Viewing this theoretical reasoning in light of the military measures of the US and its coalition partners, the goal of the operations in Afghanistan attracted participants because the motive of the US was not entirely self-serving. Arguably, the US was acting on what it saw as an immediate and global threat. This assertion is further justified by the fact that NATO (2005) invoked Article 5 of its self-defense pact for the first time in its history. International terrorism threatens a host of target states that would all be better off if the source of the threat was eliminated. In this sense, the removal of al-Qaeda and its affiliates can be thought of as a public benefit (Enders and Sandler 2006), with the broader goal of global security precipitating a united coalition.

Hence, a more accurate appraisal would be that states do not balance because they lack the motivation. As argued previously, the attacks of 9/11 can be seen as an unprecedented and devastating attack on the international community, with liberal democratic states serving as the specific target. Yet all states felt some degree of threat as evidenced by the lack of balancing. A more general view of international policy supports this assertion. Lieber and Alexander (2005) find no change in the Cold War alliance patterns following the US's aggressive shift regarding missile defense in the late 1990s, arguing that there was little need to change the alliance patterns in the post-Cold War environment. Russia and China did give vague remonstrance to US involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2002 and 2003 but took no further action. Additionally, the opposition to these actions was not cleanly delineated along cultural lines; states with large Muslim populations were also active participants in the global War on Terror, with countries such as Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia lending cooperative efforts (*Country Reports on Terrorism* 2005). The main point is that all states, even predominantly Muslim ones, view international terror as a threat. Indeed, most al-Qaeda activity occurs in the historic caliphate region in the Middle East and shows evidence of broadening beyond its original borders (Kilcullen 2005). In general, the global consensus may be dissatisfied with US foreign policy, but they are inactive in response to specific demonstrations of perceived US aggression (Voeten 2004). Even the most belligerent of US actions, such as its national missile defense policies, fail to elicit a response (Quackenbush and Drury 2011). This does not mean that the global community is satisfied with US foreign policy. It does, however, imply that there is no one policy that serves as the fulcrum upon which to successfully leverage international pressure.

Hence, the absence of balancing in regards to US interventions into the Middle East stems in part from the prevailing fear that particular states have regarding international terrorism, specifically concerning al-Qaeda. This mutual concern is analogous to the conflict situation of general deterrence. The global threat of international terrorism puts all states on alert (Arce and Sandler 2005; Enders and Sandler 2006). That does not mean that the level of threat is felt equally or that state reactions are homogenous. What it does signal is that the *fatwa* issued by bin Laden theoretically put all threatened states on a higher level of alert, a situation of *general* deterrence. When states are directly challenged, as the US was after 9/11, the threat of an international terrorist attack is greater. In this instance, the US realized that al-Qaeda possessed a credible threat. Since terrorists do not claim a particular state and rely on fear, threats of an attack are often not credible (Bapat 2006). The attacks of 9/11 indicated to the US and other liberal democracies that al-Qaeda



possessed a credible threat and thus selected liberal democracies into a situation of *immediate* deterrence. This study represents a closer examination into the institutional characteristics that motivate offensive state action. In order to examine this in more detail, a closer look at the specifics of deterrence is necessary.

## *Terrorism and Deterrence*

In order for deterrence to work, two conditions must be present. The first is that the defender must be aware that there is a challenge to the status quo. In other words, a threat must exist. The second is that the decision making process on behalf of the adversary must be influenced by costs and benefits (Quackenbush 2011). This is all predicated on the base assumption that the actors are rational, an assumption that is not without its detractors. If terrorists are irrational they do not perceive costs and benefits and thus cannot be deterred. The popular argument championed by the press is that terrorists do not measure costs in the traditional sense that states use (Trager and Zagorcheva 2006). Since the global insurgency consists largely of radical Muslims who view themselves as martyrs, the threat of costly retribution would only confirm their goal of a glorious death (Pape 2003)<sup>1</sup>. Framed in this logic, terrorists do not fear punishment.

The above reasoning implies a reliance on procedural rationality, which argues that rationality is defined by the ability of actors to have access to all information, process it accordingly, and not be affected by their cognitive limitations or emotions (Lebow and Stein 1989, 1990; Rhodes 1989). In this regard terrorists are not rational because they are religious fanatics that often engage in suicidal missions. However, the assumption used in this article, as well as in rational deterrence theory and rational choice theory in general, is that of instrumental rationality. Broadly stated, an instrumentally rational actor is one who, when confronted with two choices, chooses the one that yields the highest outcome. This definition accounts for any preference, however “irrational” it may seem, as well as for incomplete information, which can often lead to mistakes in choices of strategy. Preferences are subjective in nature and are shaped by beliefs, cognitive limitations, and emotions, but this does not mean that an actor is irrational (Quackenbush 2004, 2011). Rather, actors are rational merely if they choose strategies in an effort to obtain their highest possible preference. Hence, to flesh out the interplay between al-Qaeda, international terrorism, and targeted states using the deterrence framework, it is assumed here that both sides possess *instrumental* rationality.

For the purposes of this article, there are two stages of deterrence that actors can reside in. *General deterrence* is the broader conceptualization of the two and is less focused on crisis management than it is with everyday decision-making in international politics to maintain defense (Quackenbush 2011). This form of deterrence simply embodies the defensive stance that every state exhibits when it maintains secure borders or that terrorist organizations display when they maintain an arsenal of weapons or armed combatants. More threatening is the event of *immediate deterrence*, a situation in which at least one actor is seriously considering mounting an attack while the other side is threatening retaliation to prevent it. A situation of immediate deterrence indicates that general deterrence has failed, for a state's natural defenses have been unable to avoid an international crisis (Quackenbush 2011).

When examining general and immediate deterrence in the context of the War on Terror, the *fatwa* issued by bin Laden in 1998 reorganized the global system into those states that are targeted by this declaration, essentially putting them into a state of general deterrence. However, this action alone was not sufficient to place states into the context of immediate deterrence, given the lack of attention initially paid to this pronouncement. Terrorists often lack the credibility to appear sincere in their goals. Therefore, they rely on violence to signal their intentions. The attacks on 9/11 served as a credible signal to the US and its allies that



they were sincere in their intent of driving foreign troops out of Muslim territory and establishing an Islamic state, for it is unlikely that the US would have removed their troops from Saudi Arabia by the mere threat of an attack on the WTC towers (Kydd and Walter 2006). In this regard, 9/11 placed the US and its allies in a state of immediate deterrence, which ultimately led to a deterrence failure in the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan. To explain the breakdown into international conflict it is important to examine another critical set of actors, the targeted states, and the factors that conditioned their response.

### *Preemptive Action and Advanced, Liberal Democracies*

The opening salvo and ensuing military offensive of Operation Enduring Freedom were spearheaded by the US and a fighting force composed largely of advanced liberal democracies. However, theories of counterterrorist action specify that liberal democracies are situated in a prisoners' dilemma with regard to military action; democratic mechanisms restrict leaders in their pursuit of violent solutions due to the costs inflicted on the invading state (Enders and Sandler 2006; Arce and Sandler 2005). Hence, states, particularly democracies, should refrain from engaging in a military offensive in the face of a terrorist threat. This assertion is strengthened when examining the impact of war costs. Democratic leaders depend on a wider base of electoral support to maintain power. As a result, democracies are especially sensitive to war costs, since the electorate it depends on shoulders the burden of conflict (Valentino, Huth, Croco 2010). As the theatres of Afghanistan and Iraq illustrate, preemptive actions against terrorist groups can evolve into a counterinsurgency, which is a costly endeavor. Fought against a non-state entity, these strategies call for a large contribution of troops to meet objectives with a long-time horizon (Nagl 2002). Additionally, these interventions feature complex goals that leaders must articulate clearly to their electorate if they are to gain public support (Tellis 1996). This suggests that democratic leaders will have a difficult time convincing their constituents to support massive military contributions in pursuit of counterterrorist and counterinsurgent designs, which are inherently abstract (Record 2007).

Yet this is clearly not the case as the current campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate. How is this so? One solution to a prisoners' dilemma is the imposition of outside constraints (Lipson 1993). In the international community, alliances can serve as this constraint. From a liberal perspective, collective security organizations such as the UN and NATO are designed with the precise goal of overcoming collective action problems (Keohane 1993). Additionally, alliance formation allows democracies to minimize costs and increase capabilities by spreading the burden across a coalition of states while simultaneously mitigating the potential political backlash (Valentino, Huth, Croco 2010). Hence it can be expected that alliance commitments will have an important role to play in the decision to commit military forces.

The ties between democracy and development say little of the connection between development and the level of military action a state applies. It is clear from al-Qaeda rhetoric that the target of their ire is Western democratic nations, and liberal democracies do suffer more international terrorist attacks (Li 2005). However, the bulk of terrorist attacks against liberal democracies are not actually carried out within their borders, and there has not been an attack that has approached the magnitude of 9/11 at the time of this writing (Wilkinson 2011). This suggests that terrorists are opportunists that seek to influence powerful states by carrying out attacks against the citizens of liberal democracies and other targets in less-secure venues, where their chances of success are higher (Enders and Sandler 1993; Plümper and Neumayer 2010). Due to the fact that these weak states are often either unable or unwilling to eradicate the terrorist threat from their territory (Byman 2005), and the fact that the intended targets are advanced democracies, it is expected that,



once a state chooses to engage in preemptive action, more advanced countries that are the intended targets will demonstrate the highest levels of preemption.

## *Hypotheses*

The goal of this study is to apply the theories of general and immediate deterrence to the decision calculus of states threatened by the global insurgency composed of al-Qaeda and their affiliated organizations. Although many states are in a stage of general deterrence, liberal democracies are argued to be the main target of terrorist violence. Thus, they feel the threat of terrorism more acutely than other states. The dilemma faced by liberal democracies is that, although they are the main targets, they are subject to a populace that is averse to violence and the restrictions in civil liberties that often follow military action and security issues, which leads to the first hypothesis.

*H1: The more democratic a state, the less likely it is to engage in preemptive action.*

This situation resembles a prisoners' dilemma. Self-interested states are unwilling to work together to eliminate a terrorist threat due to the costs involved, instead allowing the organization to carry on with its violence, making everyone worse off. A mitigating factor is the existence of alliances that act as an outside enforcement mechanism to ensure cooperation, while also serving as a mechanism to minimize wartime costs. Though not all alliances are reliable, the fact that NATO invoked the self-defense pact of Article 5 of its Charter serves as a strong test for the reliability of alliances as a solution to the prisoners' dilemma. This leads to the second hypothesis.

*H2: Alliance members are more likely to engage in preemptive action.*

So far, the hypotheses apply to states in a situation of general deterrence. When looking at all threatened states, those that are democracies are less likely to cooperate and those that are in an alliance are more likely to cooperate. However, once a state is selected into the conflict by choosing preemptive action, it enters into another decision process. This supply side view of preemption is also supported from a demand oriented, terrorist-motivated factor, for liberal democracies, particularly *advanced* liberal democracies are the main target; their level of development equates to a larger amount of influence on the international stage. This leads to the third hypothesis.

*H3: States with greater capabilities lead to higher levels of preemption.*

With the hypotheses outlined, a discussion of the research design will follow. In order to correctly model the situations of general and immediate deterrence, it is necessary to outline the method of selecting cases to construct the universe of states under general deterrence.

## *Case Selection*

Case selection on *which* states are threatened from al-Qaeda and their affiliates is a particularly thorny issue. In order to test for the effects of democracy and development, there needs to be sufficient variation, yet the cases need to properly approximate the group of threatened states. Islamic terrorism makes clear from their rhetoric that Western states are the primary source of their angst, particularly the US and its ties with Israel and the stationing of their troops on Muslim soil. However, the term "Western" is highly ambiguous, and international terrorist attacks are distributed unevenly (*Global Terrorism Database*, 2012).

To mitigate this problem, states will be selected based on their appearance in the *Patterns of Global Terrorism*



(*Country Reports on Terrorism* after 2004). Countries included in the report consist of those where significant terrorist acts occurred and countries where the US has sought cooperation during the previous five years in the prosecution or investigation of acts of international terrorism against the US. Since this study concerns the immediate actions of states after the attacks of 9/11, the cases consist of state actions regarding the decision to join coalition forces for the invasion of Afghanistan for the year 2002 and comprise 103 observations.

## **Research Design**

The first dependent variable is constructed to explicitly determine which states selected to commit to military action and which states did not. It is coded as 1 for those states that either committed troops for the purpose of participating in Operation Enduring Freedom or allowed for the stationing of coalition forces on their soil and a 0 for any other action. States that allow for the construction of military bases are included as engaging in military action due to the evidence indicating that states are the target of terrorist attacks when they allow for the stationing of troops (Byman 2005). The method used to estimate the first model will be a simple logit. This is the most effective method of determining the characteristics that foster preemptive cooperation with the US, for the data set constructed is set up to represent the universe of cases in general deterrence that could be selected into immediate deterrence. Simply examining the characteristics of the coalition forces does not account for the factors that led to their decision to preempt and thus induces selection effects (Fearon 2002).

Another valid method of modeling the first equation would be to utilize an ordinal logit, taking into account non-military deterrent actions such as installing metal detectors or increasing surveillance and arrests. Conceptually, military preemption<sup>2</sup> could be viewed as an extension of deterrent action, as both moves are directed at a common enemy. The only difference is that deploying troops inherently entails more costs, however they are both conducted to achieve the same end result, namely the prevention of a future terrorist threat. However, framed differently, deterrent and preemptive strategies could be conceptually distinct. Whereas deterrent actions regarding the War on Terror are in response to a specific threat, namely al-Qaeda, their effects are broad and do not serve as a pointed effort to specifically eliminate a threat. Generally speaking, deterrent actions could be undertaken to prevent *any* attack and do not impose as much costs on the international community. National defense is a hallmark of state sovereignty; efforts to uphold it are only met with negative reaction when they significantly intrude on individual rights (Enders and Sandler 2006). Military offensives, while directed at the same end, is a different form of means altogether. Public outlook on foreign affairs is fairly minimal, supporting a general aversion to a state involving itself beyond its borders. Additionally, military action almost certainly guarantees the loss of life, a fact that many states are unwilling to tolerate. Crossing the threshold into the sacrifice of human life is a heavier concept than the decision to install more metal detectors at an airport. In light of these arguments, the two concepts of deterrent and military action may be theoretically distinct and linked only indirectly through their focus on a common threat.

A second dependent variable measures the level of preemptive action and is simply the number of troops an individual state committed to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. It is possible to picture the invasion in Operation Iraqi Freedom as a preventive attack to prevent Iraq from acquiring weapons of mass destruction (Levy 2008). This logic implies that the US did not see Iraq as an immediate threat but an eventual one, emboldened by the al-Qaeda attacks of 9/11 to acquire WMDs and use them against the US.



Many in the international community view the acquisition of nuclear weapons as a threshold that warrants a different treatment toward an opposing enemy. Indeed, such an acquisition by Iraq would certainly improve its capability to do irrevocable harm against powerful countries against the US. By contrast, the attacks against Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom more closely resemble a preemptive attack, for these operations were seen as a direct response to the attacks of 9/11. This could also explain the timing of the events, as the invasion of Iraq began a full year after the invasion of Afghanistan. Thus the dependent variable modeled here is the number of troops deployed to Afghanistan in 2002, as it is a more appropriate test of the factors that foster state coordination in the face of a terrorist threat.

To test the effect of regime type, Li's (2005) measures of democracy will be used. The first component is government constraints, a measure of the institutional constraints a chief executive faces, taken from the POLITY IV dataset (Marshall and Jaggers 2000). This measure is based on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating complete executive authority and 7 indicating executive parity or subordination. The second component operationalizes democratic participation and is a combination of a binary indicator of a democracy (6 or higher difference between POLITY IV DEMOC and AUTOC score) and a measure of electoral participation. If the state has a POLITY score of 6 or higher, political participation measuring the percentage of the population that voted in the general election will be used from the *International IDEA Voter Turnout* database. Otherwise, a score of 0 will be assigned. The third measure used captures the overall effects of democracy through a standard POLITY score.

The log of a state's GDP represents the measure of development. It is expected to have a positive effect in both models. In order to account for the link between development and military capabilities the logged ratio of a state's military capabilities to the US is included to isolate the effects of the GDP variable. Finally, an alliance variable is included indicating whether a state is a NATO member.

The remaining independent variables represent an attempt to capture the various costs and benefits that are consequential of a decision to commit troops to combat a terrorist threat. The most explicit example of a state overcoming its apprehension to preemptively strike is when it bears the brunt of terrorist attacks. The logic behind this is straightforward. The benefit that a state derives from the elimination of a terrorist organization is a function of the level of threat that terrorist organization presented to the state. To accurately capture this threat, with regards to this study, only attacks from al-Qaeda and affiliated organizations will be used. Though this greatly narrows the scope of the terrorist threat, it can be reasonably concluded that the invasion into Afghanistan was not undertaken to eliminate *all* terrorist organizations. Limiting the inclusion of attacks in this manner may decrease the significance of this variable, as there might not be substantial variation of attack data among the cases to detect an influence. Nonetheless, specification of the threat is paramount, and it is difficult to make a case that violence from unrelated terrorist organizations would have any effect on such an important policy decision. Identification of al-Qaeda and its affiliates is taken from Stanford University's *Mapping Militant Organizations*. Additionally, since international terrorist attacks are rare relative to the amount of domestic terrorist attacks, a casualty count will also be included. It is expected that as both these variables increase counterterrorist action should increase as well. Casualty and attack data are taken from the *Global Terrorism Database*. Also included are measures of the percentage of Muslims within a state's population and a dummy variable indicating if a state is located in the Middle East.

## Results

The results of the first model are presented in the first column of Table 1. The simple logit results demonstrate



that the decision to commit is largely a function of alliance commitments. The coefficient on NATO membership is of a large magnitude and a high significance, suggesting that alliance commitments are the driving force behind the initial invasion of Afghanistan and that democracies minimize war costs by engaging in coalition warfare. This also supports the theoretical argument that alliances are a possible solution to the prisoners' dilemma of counterterrorism. This finding should come as no surprise, given the fact that the ISAF forces are NATO-led. However, looking beyond the correlation between NATO and ISAF, a more substantive explanation can be established. As mentioned before, the attacks on 9/11 marked the first time that NATO invoked the self-defense pact of Article 5. This article outlines the conditions for a collective response, stating that an attack against one or more allies on European or North American soil is considered an attack on all. The decision to act per the conditions of Article 5 lends considerable explanatory leverage to alliances and the decision to militarily intervene. Originally conceived as a Cold War institution, NATO has evolved to handle an array of conflict dilemmas that are increasingly directed at non-state actors. What is of particular note is the event that triggered Article 5 and the insignificance of the attack and casualty variables. As the first model shows, the number of attacks and casualties a state has suffered the previous year are insignificant predictors of the decision to commit forces. Given that the events of 9/11 are responsible for the invocation of Article 5 and the ensuing "Global War on Terror," how do these two variables figure into the equation?

First it should be noted that, statistically, the event of 9/11 is an outlier. No terrorist attack before or since has killed more than a few hundred in a single event (Mueller and Stewart 2012). It is also worth noting that the method of attack is highly unique, as shrewdly put by Russell Seitz that "9/11 could join the Trojan Horse and Pearl Harbor among stratagems so uniquely surprising that their very success precludes their repetition." (Mueller and Stewart 2012, 90). Hence, the variation of attack and casualties included here are obscured by the events that transpired on 9/11, effectively demonstrating the psychological threat that terrorism is capable of inflicting, however rare the event may be. Such an outcome confirms the solution to the collective dilemma outlined by Arce and Sandler (2005) where a particularly destructive attack motivates state action. In this case, the situation of immediate deterrence created by 9/11 prompted the triggering of Article 5, precipitating the resulting invasion and deterrence failure. In this light, the insignificance of attacks and casualties becomes easier to grasp. Annual death tolls average around 1,000 a year from international terrorism, supporting the notion that 9/11 was a watershed event, though the influence it has on other attacks is minimal (Sandler 2003). This suggests that attacks are at the very least an incomplete measure of the threat of terrorism.

What are surprising are the insignificance of the logged variables *GDP* and the ratio of *Military Expenditures*, which capture the effect of state capabilities. With regards to the War on Terror, alliance commitments provide most, if not all, of the driving force that prompted states to engage in military offensives against terrorist organizations. Development appears to have played little to no role in the decision to engage. This can also be explained through the prism of alliance commitments. The *Country Reports on Terrorism* note that states can engage in a variety of counterterrorist actions, including freezing assets, sharing intelligence, providing flight oversights, participating in joint military exercises, and offering diplomatic initiatives. These effects are not captured in the dependent variable, as it is theorized that contributing military troops is an inherently distinct form of participation that garners a higher amount of both military and political costs. As such, variables consistently correlated with power, GDP and military expenditures, are also co-opted under the power effect of alliance commitments, once again highlighting the impact of catastrophic transnational terrorist events and the ability of states to overcome a collective action problem to present a unified front at the outset.



Also contrary to popular opinion is the obstructive pull that democracy has with regard to preemptive action. This effect is particularly robust, given both the method of case selection and the control variable of NATO membership. Democratic states are less likely to support preemptive action, a reflection of the resident population's aversion to casualties and costs from conflict. This problem is exacerbated by the amorphous threat that terrorism presents. As previously stated, transnational terrorism is an exceedingly rare event, and the threat of attack varies from state to state. The difficulty in quantifying a benefit from participating in the elimination of a nebulous non-state enemy implies that contributing forces is an unpopular option among many. More so than autocracies, democracies seek to minimize the costs of participation in conflict (Valentino, Huth, Croco 2010). Given that contributing military forces almost always involves casualties, and that retaliatory attacks could result from participation, democracies should be generally unwilling to participate as the costs become more manifest than the benefits. This result compounds the dilemma argued by Enders and Sandler (2006). Although liberal democracies are the main target of international terror, they are the most reluctant to take preemptive measures to eliminate the threat. Not only are the citizens of liberal democracies generally against curtailing civil liberties to fight terrorism, they also oppose the mobilization of troops to eliminate the threat. These findings are surprising, given that the *fatwas* issued by bin Laden explicitly target wealthy liberal democratic states, particularly the US, Israel, and their allies.

*Muslim Population* shows a positive effect on the decision to engage in preemptive action, though it remains unclear as to the relationship between a state's Muslim population and its decision to preempt. This could be a reflection of the alliance links between the US and Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, or it could be a reflection of the Muslim population within liberal democracies themselves. Looking at the Muslim population within liberal democracies points to the possibility that they are different from their Middle Eastern counterparts. It could be the case that Muslims immigrating to Western democracies are highly skilled and of a socioeconomic status that facilitates mobility. Norris and Inglehart (2012) find evidence of this self-selection effect at work regarding Muslim immigration to Western democracies, noting that upon relocation, immigrants gradually adopt some of the cultures, ideas, and customs of their new host country. The allure of these nations, with their increasing labor demands and high regard for human rights, has prompted a boom in international migration (Hunter 1998, 2002; Israeli 2008). These factors facilitate assimilation into a democracy more readily and suggest that Muslims, more than other religions and races, condemn the actions of their extremist brethren.

However sound the logic, empirically this is difficult to support. Although Boyle (2010) finds evidence that a majority of Muslims do not share the extremist ideology that radical groups such as al-Qaeda champion, Muslim immigrants to non-Muslim states are comprised of a wide variety of nationalities, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds, indicating that a general explanation may be elusive (Kurth 2002; Kahera 2002). Additionally, public opinion polls on Muslims in the US regarding thoughts on al-Qaeda and the War on Terror find that there is no statistical difference of opinions between the US and European countries as well as between the US and the Middle Eastern countries of Morocco, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Egypt (McCauley and Scheckter 2008).

Larger numbers of Muslims in troop-contributing nations do suggest that their presence is a factor, though it is not clear what the connection is. It could be a defensive action at the state level in which countries with larger Muslim populations contribute for fear of a recruitment factor within their borders. It has been postulated that the evolving hardline policies France has taken against Islamic extremism in Libya, Mali, Syria, and Iran stem in part from its problem regarding the recent growth in militant Islamism that has been precipitated by the large number of Muslims that comprise France's underclass (Wallerstein 2013).





This exemplifies a distinct connection between a country's domestic demographic and its international policy. Hence, hardline policies are a defense mechanism against the spread of radical Islamism. Terrorist actions send a message to their target audiences with the intention of both spreading fear and generating recruitment. For example, when al-Qaeda executed 9/11, their actions carried two separate messages simultaneously to two target audiences. The first was sent to the US and its allies conveying the intention that more attacks were on the way if it did not change its foreign policy in the Middle East. The intended audience and message that extended beyond the immediate sphere of those actually killed and injured in the attack are crucial for an act to be defined as terrorism (Enders and Sandler 2006; Hoffman 2006). The second served as a rallying call to arms to the *umma* throughout the world, a message that al-Qaeda works to cultivate very diligently through propaganda and video documentaries (Amble 2012). This concern for the target audience is what compels a state to temper its counterterrorist actions, for attacks that are too severe could result in a swell of terrorist recruitment and a fear of reprisal attacks. Rosendorff and Sandler (2004) argue that states responding too harshly to terrorist organizations run the risk of arousing a latent group of individuals who share the terrorists' views, angering them to the point that they become recruited into the organization. The hypothesized negative effect was seen as an artifact of states with large Muslim populations shoring up defenses to deter potential terrorist attacks occurring against foreigners on their own soil. However, here it appears that Muslim population has a positive function regarding preemptive commitment. These findings warrant further examination, and are beyond the scope of this study.

**Table 1. Results for Preemptive Action**

Variable	Model I Binomial Logit	Model II Tobit
<i>Attacks</i>	0.162 (0.413)	-28.518 (39.372)
<i>Casualty</i>	-0.080 (0.121)	-1.534 (10.587)
<i>ln(GDP)</i>	0.250 (0.220)	75.887*** (14.371)
<i>Middle East</i>	-0.435 (1.148)	-131.498 (215.118)
<i>NATO</i>	3.462*** (0.988)	92.846** (41.785)
<i>Muslim Population</i>	0.030** (0.125)	2.479 (2.515)
<i>Ratio of Military Expenditures</i>	-0.318 (0.565)	-163.406*** (47.791)
<i>Polity</i>	-0.200* (0.116)	34.678 (31.846)
<i>Executive Constraints</i>	-0.002 (0.090)	-3.444 (10.115)
<i>Political Participation</i>	0.032 (0.022)	-0.930 (1.139)
<i>Constant</i>	9.266* (5.267)	2212.50*** (423.147)
<i>Log-likelihood</i>	-33.90	-123.20
<i>N</i>	100	104

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . Standard errors in parentheses

Turning now to the next model, the distribution of the second variable measuring the number of troops



committed to ISAF is highly skewed to the right, indicating that many states contributed no troops, while others contributed a significant number. A tobit model is used for the second set of results. The theory states that a two-step process is at work regarding the number of troops to send. Additionally, though preemptive action includes troop contributions, it is merely the most visible form of action available. Allowing basing rights and military supplies can be thought of as another form of preemption, though it is difficult to compare a measure of basing rights against the number of troops committed to battle. Consequently, they are not included here. Preemptive action can also include the use of Special Operation Forces (SOFs) to complete covert military actions ahead of standard troop invasions. It is known that the US employed SOFs in its preliminary actions against Afghanistan and Iraq (Woodward 2002; 2004). However, due to the secrecy of these missions, they are often classified and difficult to quantify. These factors indicate that there could be a number of censored observations within the data. To account for this, as well as the two-step decision process behind troop contributions, a tobit model is used<sup>3</sup>.

The results are presented in the second column of Table 1 and show strong support for the effects of capabilities on the number of troop commitments. Indeed, taking into account NATO membership, in which membership leads to a contribution of approximately 93 troops, the amount of preemptive action taken is a measure of state capabilities as captured by the logged variables of *GDP* and *the Military Expenditures* ratio. Tobit coefficients can be interpreted as OLS, however the effects are framed in terms of a latent dependent variable (Wooldridge 2009). Looking at the effects of GDP first, a one percent increase in a state's GDP leads to an expected personnel increase of around 0.76. Since GDP is a widely dispersed variable, a more identifiable interpretation could be teased out. A ten percent increase in a state's GDP would result in an expected increase of ISAF personnel by 7.6. Given that the average ISAF troop contribution in 2002 is 82.56, an increase in GDP by ten percent increases expected troop contribution by .09, almost a ten percent change. The military expenditures variable consists of a ratio of military expenditures between each state as compared to the US. The negative coefficient indicates that the larger the discrepancy between the US and a given state's military capabilities the less the expected personnel contribution will be given from that state. This supports a behavior of buck passing whereby less capable states rely on the stronger members of their cohort to shoulder the responsibility (Arce and Sandler 2005). The average ratio in expenditures is 2.02, indicating the wide discrepancy in troop contributions that stem from the gulf in capabilities. Indeed, a one unit increase in the ratio leads to a decrease in expected troop contributions by approximately 163, lending strong support to the hypothesis that military expenditures are a major driving force behind participation. The growth in the spending disparity between a given state and the US leads to a significant drop in troop contribution. This should come as no surprise, as the US was the vanguard of the initial decision to invade. The results in the second column of Table 1 show that even after a state decides to participate, it still shirks responsibility to more capable allies. Its contributions are commensurate with its capabilities.

Overall, the results reinforce what the preceding theory states. The decision to engage in preemptive action is hindered by the level of democracy a state maintains. However, once states decide to engage in preemptive action, which is largely influenced through alliance commitments, the amount of force used is due to state capabilities. This is made all the more convincing by the complete lack of significance on all other variables within the model. The logic behind this relationship is straightforward; the amount of force used is a product of the amount of force a state is capable of producing.

The results shown here support the hypotheses presented. Democracy acts as a screening procedure that dismays leaders of democratic nations from taking preemptive action. This argument is made stronger when controlling for the alliance commitments through NATO membership, which largely consists of liberal



democracies. Indeed, alliances exhibit a strong pull in persuading states to engage in preemptive action and also account for the large number of troops that a state commits. It appears that democracy captures the residual effects of the decision to commit and temper a state's willingness to get involved. When viewed in this light, it should be no surprise that capabilities explain troop contributions, due to the fact that the invasion of Afghanistan was largely led by liberal democracies. Consequently, it seems likely that the populace of a liberal democracy cares more about the initial decision to get involved rather than the level of preemption. Indeed, the absence of democratic factors on troop contributions could be a reflection of the population's initial and short-lived willingness to support military action and the inevitable casualties that follow once the decision was made to commit (Mueller 1970; Parker 1995).

Another interesting finding is the insignificance regarding the number of terrorist attacks a state receives as well as casualties suffered. Although the events of 9/11 were the most catastrophic international terrorist attacks ever conducted, they were not enough to generate a significant effect on state action. This contributes to the argument that terrorism best works through psychological rather than physical damage (Mueller 2006). The argument becomes even more apparent when one considers the fact that US expenditures on homeland defense alone since 9/11 exceed \$1 trillion (Mueller and Stewart 2012)<sup>4</sup>. Unfortunately, the psychological costs imposed on a state are much more difficult to measure and are not explicitly modeled here.

## *Conclusion*

The interplay between state characteristics, democratic characteristics, and threat levels regarding decisions to engage in preemptive action are difficult to elucidate. The preliminary findings here suggest that the decision to engage is largely a function of alliance commitments tempered by the effects of democracy. There is no doubt that the targets of Muslim extremists are specifically aimed at Western-liberal democratic values, however, the fact that these variables lead to a decline in the probability of military actions reinforces the dilemma of liberal democracies outlined by Enders and Sandler (2006).

It is here that military capabilities take over. This study offers a preliminary look into the mechanisms driving counterterrorism and suggests separate levels of counterterrorism that draw upon separate influences. All capable states should take deterrent action, because these actions entail little retributive costs. A terrorist organization is unlikely to attack because a state upgrades its homeland security, but it is conceivable that it would attack if said state invades its territory to engage in combat. The findings indicate that democracies are pressured to stop at defense when deciding whether to cooperate with the US in taking the offensive. Alliance obligations are sufficient to overcome this, however, and serve as the impetus for military engagement of the enemy. The amount of force then applied in the preemption stage is largely a product of the resources at hand.

The evidence also lends support to the arguments of general and immediate deterrence as stated here. The data represent the universe of cases susceptible to international terrorist attacks from al-Qaeda and their affiliates, as they are all states that have either coordinated counterterrorist actions or been involved in a terrorist attack with the US in the last five years. Though terrorist organizations often lack the ability to project credibility like a state, the attacks of 9/11 sent a credible signal to the US that additional attacks were imminent if it did not soften its presence and influence in the Middle East. From the theory outlined here, it was argued that those states selected into immediate deterrence were mostly liberal democracies. However, instead of engaging the immediate threat of future terrorist attacks, these states were reluctant to strike, only



to be prompted into action by alliance commitments. The unprecedented destruction of the attacks on 9/11 resulted in the NATO invocation of Article 5, which was sufficient to overcome the collective action dilemma facing the states in immediate deterrence. Thus, even in the face of an imminent threat, democracies rely on the external constraint of alliance commitments to engage the enemy, with capabilities driving the level of preemptive force applied.

The results demonstrate the feasibility of using aggregate empirical analyses to analyze counterterrorist phenomena while simultaneously linking this behavior to more traditional conflict theories. In light of this however, there are several additional points worth mentioning. A valid argument concerns the inability of alliance commitments to overcome international reluctance to intervene in Iraq in 2003, a point that US President George W. Bush circumvented by assembling an ad hoc “coalition of the willing.” In this case, the alliance formation was dictated by policies enacted unilaterally by the US (Gordon and Shapiro 2004). This displays the limits of alliance constraints when utilized for counterterrorist ends and underscores the necessity of context when framing a terrorist threat. In the case of Afghanistan, identifying the perpetrators of 9/11 and their capabilities and intentions were clear. In the case of Iraq, tying Saddam Hussein’s regime to WMDs and al-Qaeda proved more difficult and ultimately false (Woodward 2006). Additionally, the invasion of Iraq was seen as a preventive measure to prevent a possible attack in the future, which stands in stark contrast to the imminent threat that Afghanistan presented (Levy 2008), suggesting that states are better able to overcome an immediate threat rather than one on the distant horizon. Future aggregate analyses must be careful to identify the difference between preemptive action and preventive action when identifying the context of the counterterrorist environment.

Another point concerns the nature of the prisoners’ dilemma situation when applying it to the complex and amorphous circumstances of terrorism. The theory and research design utilized here modeled states as relatively homogenous save for a few important variables concerning democracy, alliance status, and military capabilities. Aggregate analysis necessitates such an approach. However, analyzing the threat of a terrorist attack is fraught with a set of unique difficulties regarding the motivations of the terrorist organization, their capabilities, structure, support network, location, as well as identifying the very definition of terrorism itself. These characteristics are much easier to estimate in other states and suggest the possibility that a country’s evaluation of a threat stemming from a terrorist attack is inherently different from a threat that originates from a state. This intricate phenomenon is also complicated by the multiple strategies that states use to combat different terrorist networks, indicating that the multifaceted problem of international terrorism may require action on a case-by-case basis (Miller 2007; Bleich 2009; Meyer 2009).

Finally, the game outlined here is modeled as a one-shot play. This is a clear simplification of a complex decision process and neglects a number of possible alternative explanations concerning the possibility of repeated interactions, reciprocity, and the shadow of the future (Axelrod and Keohane 1985). Subsequent analyses could utilize more complex models of the prisoners’ dilemma by including a time dimension. Additionally, Bayesian methods could be applied to determine if states postpone counterterrorist action in anticipation of the decisions of more powerful countries. Nevertheless, the results show that generalizations are capable of being identified and point to the utility of aggregate analyses and the application of conflict theories to certain aspects of counterterrorist behavior.

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## Notes

1. Pape (2003) notes that while individual terrorists are suicidal, terrorist organizations utilize suicide terror campaigns in a rational and strategic fashion.
2. Arce and Sandler (2005) and Enders and Sandler (2006) model state strategies as a choice between “preemption,” signifying military action, and “deterrence,” signifying the strengthening of defenses without military commitment.
3. A negative binomial was also employed, though convergence was difficult to achieve due to the small sample size.
4. This estimate does not include the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mueller and Stewart (2012) also note that the odds of an American dying from a terrorist attack in a given year are approximately one in 3.5 million.

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## Adversarial Framing: President Bashar al-Assad's Depiction of the Armed Syrian Opposition

by Fabien Merz



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### Abstract

*This paper evaluates how Syrian president Bashar al-Assad is framing his opponents in the context of the Syrian civil war. The question is addressed by conducting a qualitative thematic analysis of 13 interviews he gave to international television news networks and newspapers between March and November 2013. It is found that Al-Assad consequently labels the armed opposition as “terrorists” preponderantly composed of groups affiliated to Al-Qaeda. The “terrorists” are framed as posing a threat to the region as well as to international security on a global scale. Furthermore, Al-Assad denies the armed opposition its Syrian grassroots by portraying them as outside aggressors fighting for foreign interests. They are also depicted as “enemies of the Syrian people”, responsible for all the atrocities and human suffering committed during the Syrian civil war.*

**Keywords:** Syria; Syrian civil war; Bashar al-Assad; framing; adversarial framing; Syrian opposition; terrorism; thematic network analysis.

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The Syrian Crisis is the armed conflict in Syria between forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad's government and those seeking to oust it. The unrest began with several anti-government protests initiated in the beginning of 2011 within the wider context of the protest movements known as the Arab Spring (Sterling, 2012). After several government crackdowns (Human Rights Watch, 2011), the protests evolved into an armed rebellion, which since mid 2012, was *considered* by the United Nations to be a full-scale civil war (Charbonneau and Evans, 2012).

During the conflict, President Al-Assad framed the armed Syrian opposition through interviews he gave to international media. In this context, it is interesting to evaluate how Al-Assad portrayed his opponents. Specifically, one could ask: *How did President Bashar al-Assad frame the armed Syrian opposition in his 2013 media interviews?* As Al-Assad gave these interviews to international medias, his narrative is primarily intended for the international public opinion. This means that the subsequently analysed narrative of Al-Assad must be considered to be primarily predetermined for an international audience and not for a domestic, Syrian one. It is furthermore important to note that the aim of this paper is not to offer an objective characterisation of the Syrian opposition, but to focus on how it was framed by President Al-Assad.

### Literature review

The works of Robert Entman (1991, 1993, 2003) are particularly useful in order to better understand the concept of political framing. According to him, “successful political communication requires the framing of events, issues and actors in ways that promote perceptions and interpretations that benefit one side while hindering the other” (Entman, 2003, p. 414). The mechanism of framing entails the selection of certain facts



and aspects of reality in order to make them more salient (Entman, 1993). This is achieved through frequent references, repetition, and associations with culturally familiar symbols. Framing also calls attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements (Entman, 1993). A particular frame does not eliminate all inconsistent information but the words and images that comprise a frame are repeatedly reinforced through associations with each other in order to render one basic interpretation more readily comprehensible and memorable than others (Entmann, 1991). Entman further asserts, “those frames that employ more culturally resonant terms have the greatest potential for influence” (2003, p. 417).

When it comes to adversarial framing in the context of a violent conflict, terms such as “terrorism” or “terrorist” have a great potential for influence. Aside from being culturally resonant (Nagar, 2010), they also carry strong condemnatory and pejorative connotations (Hoffman, 2006; English, 2009). Some would even argue that “terrorism” is probably the most powerful condemnatory word in the English language (Guelke, 1998).

Anais Chagankerian (2013) has taken into account the effectiveness of the “terrorism” label in delegitimizing those stamped with it. She argues that due to the lack of a commonly accepted definition of what terrorism actually is, governments and political actors are free to use the word as they see fit. Therefore, actions become terrorism and groups become terrorists when it is seen judicious to label them as such (Chagankerian, 2013).

The delegitimizing impact on those to whom the “terrorist” label is applied comes from its profoundly pejorative connotation and its emotional impact, i.e., referring to an actor as a terrorist implies instilling fear regarding his actions and motives (Chagankerian, 2013).

Chagankerian (2013) concludes that the “terrorist” label becomes a very strong strategic tool in order to delegitimize political opponents due to the lack of a commonly accepted definition and the profound pejorative connotations of the word.

Keeping in mind that there might be variations in regards to how the term “terrorism” is understood in different cultural settings, it is, notwithstanding, generally considered to have strongly negative connotations (Hoffman, 2006; English, 2009; Chagankerian, 2013). In these regards, it is also important to note that those labelled by their adversaries as terrorists hardly ever refer to themselves as such, but rather use other terms such as freedom fighters, resistants, separatists, guerrilleros, etc. (Whittaker, 2003; Hoffman, 2006).<sup>2</sup>

This may be best exemplified by Yasser Arafat’s famous speech before the United Nations General Assembly in which he drew a clear distinction between terrorists on one side and revolutionaries that fight for a just cause on the other. Arafat took great care to disassociate the PLO from the terrorist label while asserting and emphasising its role as legitimately fighting for freedom; i.e., he portrays the members of his organisation as freedom fighters (Monde Diplomatique, 1974).

Considering its cultural significance and delegitimizing power, the “terrorist” label is unsurprisingly often used in order to frame adversaries negatively. In her 2010 article “Framing Separatism as Terrorism: Lessons from Kosovo”, Elena Pokalova brings the concepts of “terrorism” and “framing” together by considering how separatists are framed as terrorists by governments.

She argues that since September 11, 2001, governments worldwide are presented with the opportunity to portray their internal adversaries as being part of the international terrorist threat (Pokalova, 2010). This allows governments to disguise and dismiss the causes and grievances of their adversaries through references to an imminent terrorist threat (Pokalova, 2010). This framing of separatists as terrorists, therefore, enables the government to choose from a wide range of repressive measures without fearing international



condemnation and prevents international pressure for a settlement of the conflict by political means (Pokalova, 2010).

Applied to the Syrian context, the theoretical overview considered above makes it very probable that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad will try to frame his opponents negatively (Entman, 1991, 1993, 2003; Pokalova, 2010). While his government is involved in a violent conflict, it is also probable that he will do so by using the condemnatory and delegitimizing power of the “terrorist” label (English, 2009; Nagar, 2010; Chagankerian, 2013). As exemplified by Chagankerian (2013) and Pokalova (2010) the rationale behind this behavioural pattern is aimed at delegitimizing the opposition while legitimising actions taken by the Syrian government against them.

## ***Methodology***

The data for the analysis of how the Syrian opposition is framed is composed of 13 interviews that President Al-Assad gave to television news networks and newspapers from 10 different countries between March and November 2013 (see Appendix 1 for a comprehensive list of interviews).

Each interview was already transcribed either by the media agency, which conducted it, or by the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). As SANA is government-owned, and as the Syrian government is one of the belligerent parties, there was a potential risk with regard to the credibility of the transcripts provided by SANA. Therefore, the transcripts from the SANA news agency were checked with particular care against video recordings of the interviews (see appendix 1 for the sources of the transcripts). These interviews that were conducted in languages other than English were available in translated transcriptions and were checked against other translated transcriptions or English dubbed video recordings of the interviews. It is important to note that no major discrepancies were found in this process of cross-comparison.

The year 2013 was chosen as the timeframe because it was the first year since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in which President Al-Assad gave enough interviews to enable the gathering of sufficient data.

In order to show how President Al-Assad framed the armed Syrian opposition, the gathered data was analysed by using a thematic analysis aided by a thematic network, as proposed by Jennifer Attride-Stirling (2001). A thematic analysis seeks to identify the most salient themes in a text whereas the thematic network is used to facilitate the structuring of these themes by offering a powerful organisation principle. In addition, the thematic network serves as an illustrative tool, which helps the researcher in his interpretation and the reader in his understanding of the analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Entman has stated that: “researchers identify frames by investigating specific words and pictures that consistently appear in a narrative and convey thematically constant meanings across media and time” (1991, p. 7). As a thematic analysis seeks to: “unearth the themes salient in a text” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387), this method of analysis seems perfectly suited to identifying how President Al-Assad framed the Syrian opposition.

## **Analysis**

### ***Construction of the thematic network***

Instead of solely focusing the coding process of the thematic analysis on parts relevant to the armed



opposition, it was decided that a broader perspective was needed; thus, everything that was related to the Syrian opposition as a whole was coded. The aim of doing this was to generate a comprehensive thematic network representing the whole opposition as President Al-Assad depicted it. The overview of the depicted opposition landscape was then used to better direct the focus of the subsequent analysis on themes that are really relevant to the research question. The detailed analysis itself is therefore solely focused on how the armed Syrian opposition is framed.

A total of 195 initial codes were generated inductively. They emerged from the interaction with relevant data, i.e., the codes were what Robson (2011) calls “data driven”. These initial codes were then regrouped into what Attride-Stirling (2001) calls basic themes or what is more commonly known simply as themes (Ryan and Bernard, 2003; Robson, 2011). The 195 initial codes were regrouped into a total of 10 basic themes (see Appendix 2).

The 10 basic themes were then further regrouped into what Attride-Stirling (2001) calls organizing themes. These organizing themes basically summarize the principal assumption about a group of similar basic themes and reveal the salient parts of the data at a higher level of abstraction from the text (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The regrouping of the 10 basic themes resulted in three organizing themes. Each one of these organizing themes represents how President Al-Assad framed a particular part of the opposition, i.e., the armed opposition within Syria, the political (unarmed) opposition within Syria, and the Syrian opposition abroad. Indeed, President Al-Assad made a very clear distinction between those three parts of the opposition. This distinction can be found throughout the interviews. For example, President Al-Assad, in his interview with the *Sunday Times* in March 2013, states:

*If you want to talk about the opposition, there is another misconception in the West. They put all the entities even if they are not homogeneous in one basket. We have to be clear about this. We have opposition that are political entities and we have armed terrorists (Sunday Times, 2013, paragraph 14).*

Al-Assad particularly emphasises the importance of distinguishing between political (unarmed) opposition and armed terrorists. He further repeatedly talks about the unarmed opposition in Syria and the exiled Syrian opposition as being distinct from each other. In the interview Al-Assad gave the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in June 2013, this distinction becomes particularly apparent:

*The oppositional groups abroad are reporting to Western foreign ministries and their intelligence organizations. [...] To be considered a genuine oppositional force, one must live in Syria with the Syrian people and experience its problems and difficulties. Only then can this opposition be a part of the political process (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2013, paragraph 48).*

It is also important to note that Al-Assad consistently labels the armed groups fighting against the government inside Syria as “terrorists”. This is well illustrated in a passage from the *Rai News* interview Al-Assad gave in September 2013, where he explains the distinction between what he considers political opposition and what terrorism:

*Opposition is a political entity, is a political program, is a political vision; this is opposition. If you have arms and destroy and kill and assassinate, this is not opposition. This is what you call terrorism all over the world and in every other country (Rai News, 2013, paragraph 16).*

This depiction of the armed Syrian opposition as terrorists is found as a constant narrative throughout all the analysed interviews. The overall Syrian opposition as depicted by President Al-Assad can, therefore, be considered as being composed of terrorists operating in Syria, a political (unarmed) opposition within Syria,



and a political opposition abroad. These are the three organizing themes of the thematic network proposed.

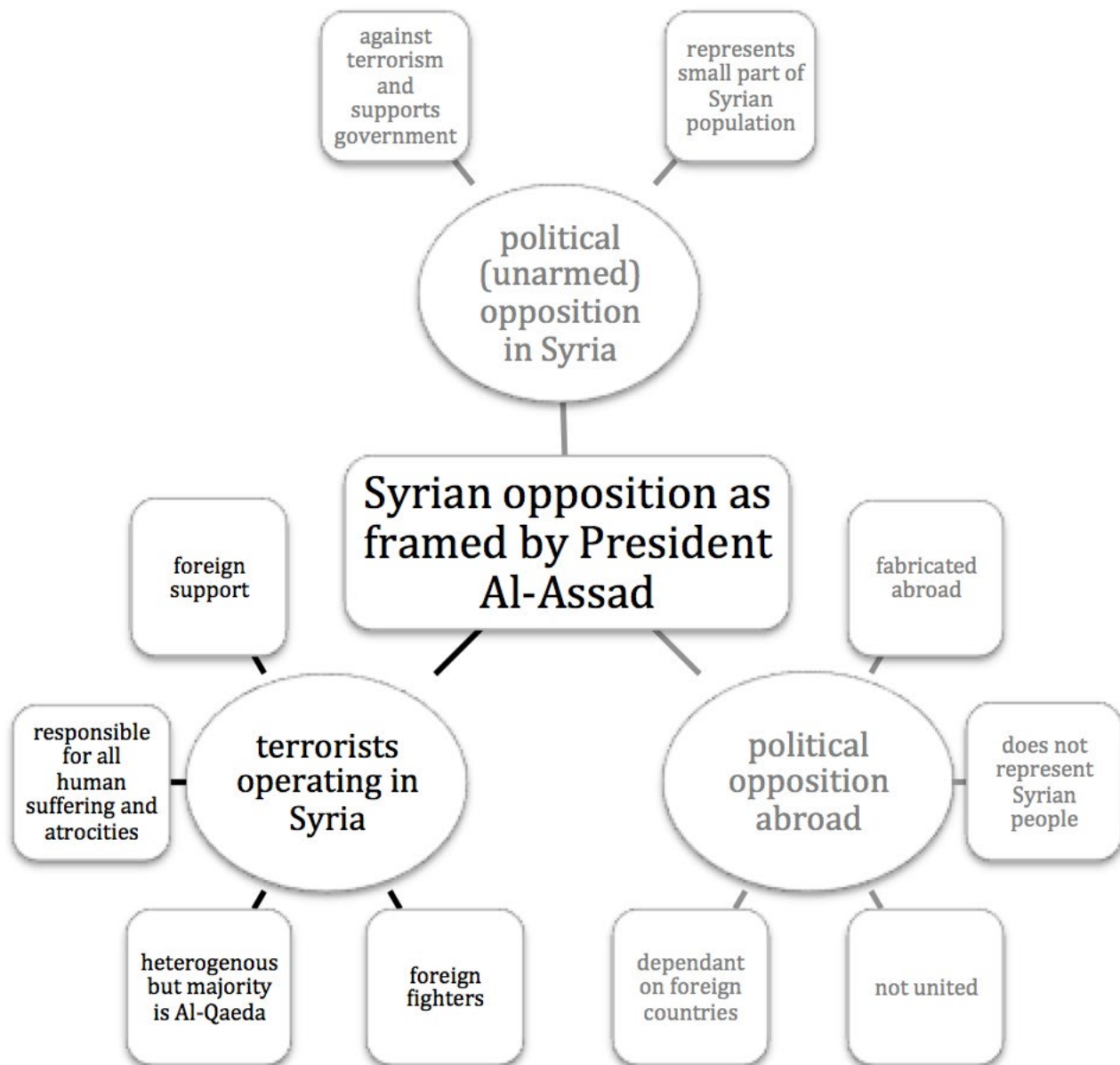


Figure 1: Thematic network of the Syrian opposition as framed by President Al-Assad.

As proposed by Attride-Stirling (2001), this thematic network uses three levels of themes, which is illustrated in Figure 1. The global theme represents the Syrian opposition as a whole. The three organizing themes represent the distinction Al-Assad makes between the political opposition in Syria, the political opposition abroad, and the terrorists operating in Syria. Each of the 10 basic themes represents an element of the frame Al-Assad uses to define the opposition; they are clustered around the part of the opposition to which they relate in Figure 1.

As seen above, Al-Assad frames the armed opposition within Syria as “terrorists”. Therefore, to answer the research question, the analysis will focus on the organizing theme *terrorists operating in Syria* as well as on its four constituent basic themes: (1) *foreign support*; (2) *responsibility for all human suffering and atrocities*; (3) *heterogeneity, but majority affiliated with Al-Qaeda*; (4) *foreign fighters*.



## *Analysis of how the armed Syrian opposition is framed by President Al-Assad*

In order to deconstruct how the armed Syrian opposition is framed, besides being labelled as “terrorists”, each of the four basic themes linked to the armed opposition will be analysed separately.

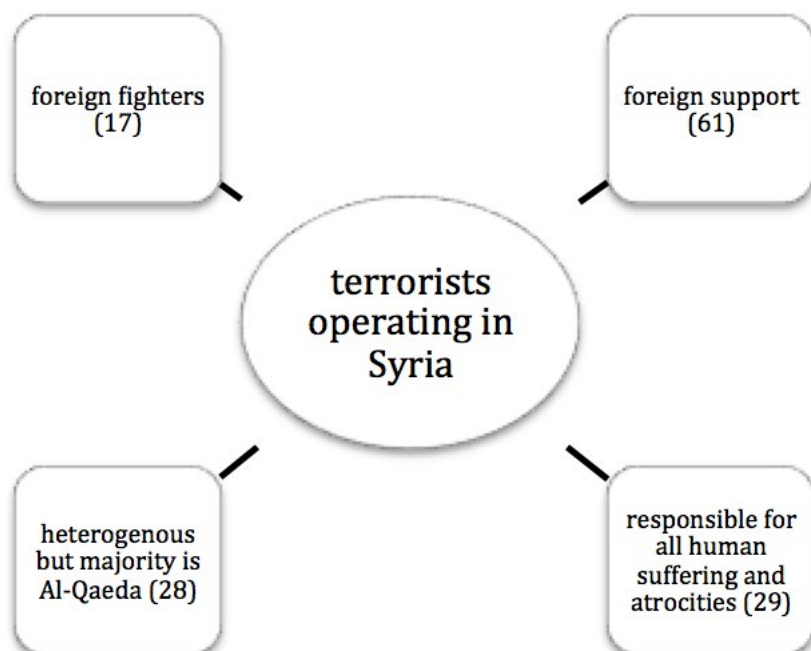


Figure 2: Organizing theme: The armed Syrian opposition framed as terrorists operating in Syria. Note: the numbers in the brackets represent the number of initial codes attributed to each basic theme as a raw estimation of their importance in the frame.

The number of initial codes attributed to each basic theme provides an overview of which elements were the most used and referred to throughout President Al-Assad’s narrative (see figure 2). As frames work by making some elements more salient by constantly repeating and making reference to them (Entman, 1991), these numbers give an estimation of which elements were the most salient in the frame used. This serves as an overview of which elements of the different organizing themes were most emphasized in Al-Assad’s narrative.

### *1. Basic theme: Foreign support*

A total of 61 initial codes were related to the *foreign support* of terrorists. This indicates the emphasis President Al-Assad put on the implication of non-domestic actors in the Syrian conflict. He repeatedly accuses (especially, but not exclusively) Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar of providing direct support in the form of funding, armament, and logistical aid to the terrorists. The Western countries (USA, UK, and France named explicitly) are accused of supporting the terrorists indirectly with political support and intelligence.

What is interesting is that Al-Assad goes further than just asserting that the terrorists receive direct support from foreign countries. At certain points, he very clearly claims that the armed groups are not only supported, but also controlled by foreign countries. For example, in the interview Al-Assad gave the *Sunday Times* in March 2013, he asserts the control Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar exercise on the groups they support:

*Yes there are many groups as I have said with no leadership, but we know that their real leadership*



*are those countries that are funding and supplying their weapons and armaments—mainly Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Sunday Times, 2013, paragraph 27).*

Those groups are, therefore, pictured as terrorist proxies following orders and fighting on behalf of foreign powers. This implies that these different groups do not fight for the interests of the Syrian people or because of domestic causes, but for the interest of those foreign countries that support, finance, and ultimately control them.

This argument regarding foreign powers intervening in Syria has also to be seen in the light of the larger regional conflict, which opposes predominantly Sunni Saudi Arabia and Qatar to largely Shi'a Iran. Within this larger context, Iran supports the regime of Bashar al-Assad (Fulton, 2013), while Saudi Arabia and Qatar support the Sunni-dominated parts of the opposition (Khalaf and Fielding-Smith, 2013). Bearing this in mind, it becomes self-explaining as to why Al-Assad accuses the terrorist groups of fighting as proxies of Saudi-Arabia, Qatar, and other predominately Sunni regional powers such as Turkey.

By asserting that the armed Syrian opposition is contracted from outside, Al-Assad portrays the Syrian conflict not as an internal struggle, but as a foreign aggression. In the interview he gave to the *Spiegel* in October 2013, when asked about the reason for the conflict, Al-Assad immediately asserts that the conflict raging in Syria is external in origin: "My answer here has to be frank and straight to the point. This conflict has been brought to our country from abroad" (Der Spiegel, 2013, paragraph 16). The assertion that the Syrian conflict is caused by foreigners implies that the root causes of the conflict do not stem from the grievances of the Syrian population. It further suggests that the Syrian government is protecting Syria and its population from foreign aggression.

In this depiction, as the conflict in Syria originated abroad, the solution to it also primarily has to be found abroad. From this perspective, the conflict would end with the cessation of foreign interference. In the interview he gave in September 2013 to *Le Figaro*, when asked how the war in Syria could be stopped, President Al-Assad had an astonishingly simple solution:

*So in response to your question, the solution today lies in stopping the influx of terrorists into Syria and stopping the financial, military or any other support they receive (Le Figaro, 2013, paragraph 47).*

He also depicts a very clear hierarchical structure of the "enemies of the Syrian people". At the bottom of the hierarchy are the terrorist groups operating in Syria, who mainly act as proxies of certain Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as regional powers such as Turkey. These Arab states and regional powers are themselves what Al-Assad calls "underlings" and "lackeys" of the great Western powers such as the United States, Great Britain, and France. Ultimately, as framed by Al-Assad, the different groups fighting against the Syrian government are, therefore, will-less proxies fighting for the interest of regional powers who are themselves dependent and obedient towards the United States, Great Britain, and France.

## *2. Basic theme: Responsibility for all the human suffering and committed atrocities*

A total of 29 initial codes were related to the human suffering and the atrocities caused by the terrorists. This indicates how much emphasis is also put on blaming the armed opposition for the suffering that the Syrian population had to endure during the conflict.

According to Al-Assad, the vast majority of displaced civilians fled because of the threat posed by the terrorists. In the *Fox News* interview Al-Assad gave in September 2013, when questioned about the millions of Syrian refugees, he stressed that the terrorists were responsible for the displaced Syrians:



Whenever the terrorists enter an area, the civilians would leave unless they use them as human shields, but in most of the cases the civilians would quit their area because of the terrorists, and that's why you have so many refugees (Fox News, 2013, paragraph 158).

Al-Assad further accused the terrorists of using civilians as human shields and of deliberately infiltrating residential areas in order to cause civilian casualties and then blaming the Syrian Army for the result. When the interviewer from *Fox News* asked Al-Assad about the attacks launched by the Syrian army and about the civilians killed as a result of them, he very clearly put the blame for those collateral damages on the terrorists:

*[...] when the terrorists infiltrate residential areas in villages and sometimes in the suburbs of the cities, and within large cities, and the army has to go there to get rid of those terrorists. The army should defend the civilians, not the opposite. You cannot leave the terrorists free, killing the people, assassinating the people, beheading the people and eating their hearts. When we go to defend them, you say you are killing your own people! You don't, but in every war, you have casualties (Fox News, 2013, paragraph 114).*

From the statement above, it can further be perceived that the “terrorists” are also accused of committing all kinds of atrocities, ranging from beheadings to cannibalism. It is not surprising that besides being blamed for displacing millions of Syrians, using civilians as human shields, and committing atrocities, the “terrorists” are also accused of having committed various massacres, including multiple chemical weapon attacks. For example, Al-Assad explicitly blames them for carrying out the chemical attack of March 19, 2013 in Khan al-Asal near Aleppo (TeleSUR, 2013, paragraph 38; Russia 24 TV, 2013, paragraph 16). It is also interesting to note that Al-Assad implies that the “terrorists” were either able to produce the chemical agents themselves—“Sarin gas is called kitchen gas because anyone can make it” (Fox News, 2013, paragraph 82)—or that it was provided to them by a foreign country:

*[...] the reality is that the West and particular countries in the region, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, maintain direct contact with the terrorists and supply them with all measure of arms. We believe that one of these countries has supplied the terrorists with chemical weapons (Russia 24 TV, 2013, paragraph 20).*

This accusation inevitably also refers to the *foreign support* part of the frame. To recapitulate, the “terrorists” are represented as the enemies of the Syrian people, responsible for all the woes that have afflicted Syria and its population since the beginning of the conflict. Al-Assad, therefore, frames the armed Syrian opposition as being the epitome of evil, barbarism, and inhumanity.

### 3. Basic Theme: Heterogeneous groups but the majority is affiliated with Al-Qaeda

A total of 28 initial codes were related to issues regarding the composition of the armed Syrian opposition. Al-Assad acknowledges that his military adversaries cannot be considered a monolithic bloc. He affirms that a minority of them are composed of individuals such as criminals and mercenaries who are fighting for financial advantages and do not have any political or ideological motivations whatsoever. In the *Sunday Times* interview he gave in March 2013, Al-Assad describes this minority amongst his adversaries:

*The spectrum ranges from petty criminals, drug dealers, groups that are killing and kidnapping just for money to mercenaries and militants; these clearly do not have any political agenda or any ideological motivations (Sunday Times, 2013, paragraph 22).*

In the same *Sunday Times* interview, Al-Assad goes on to link those criminals and mercenaries described above to the Free Syrian Army:





*The so-called “Free Army” is not an entity, as the West would like your readers to believe. It is hundreds of small groups [...] there is no entity, there is no leadership, there is no hierarchy; it is a group of different gangs working for different reasons. The Free Syrian Army is just the headline, the umbrella that is used to legitimize these groups (Sunday Times, 2013, paragraph 23).*

However, according to Al-Assad, those “gangs” operating under the umbrella of what is called the Free Syrian Army are just a minority. He describes the vast majority of the “terrorists” as religious extremists affiliated with Al-Qaeda and its offshoots, like the Nusra Front. In the interview he gave to *Le Figaro* on September 3, 2013 he asserts that, “today we are fighting terrorists, 80-90% of them affiliated to Al-Qaeda” (*Le Figaro*, 2013, paragraph 47). When Al-Assad is challenged by the *Fox News* interviewer later in September on these numbers and confronted with estimations that put the percentage of jihadists linked to Al-Qaeda significantly lower, he dismisses them, saying:

*No one has these precise numbers. [...] It is difficult to be precise, you don't have clear and precise data. What I can tell you is 80 to 90% of the rebels or terrorists on the ground are Al Qaeda and their offshoots (Fox News, 2013, paragraph 97).*

He accuses Al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups of infiltrating Syrian society with their extremist ideology. Their final objective, however, is to spread their ideology all over the world, as Al-Assad asserts in the RT News interview he gave in November 2013: “their final aim is to have this, let's say, Islamic Emirate in Syria where they can promote their own ideology in the rest of the world” (RT News, 2013, paragraph 71).

This is particularly interesting, as by emphasising the international agenda Al-Qaeda and its offshoots pursue in Syria, Al-Assad frames the terrorists operating in Syria as a potential threat, not only for the region, but also for the rest of the world. Al-Assad implies that, if his regime were to lose the war, Syria would become a safe haven for Al-Qaeda and its affiliates with catastrophic repercussions for the neighbouring countries and the interests of Western countries in the region, as well as for security on a global scale.

#### *4. Basic theme: Foreign fighters*

With a total of 17 initial codes, the implication of foreign fighters in the Syrian conflict was the least emphasised theme in Al-Assad's narrative. He claims that the Syrian army is fighting “terrorists from over 80 countries who are supported by Western and Arab states” (*Le Figaro*, 2013, paragraph 70).

This basic theme is closely related and partially overlaps with the *foreign support* theme. Al-Assad accuses his neighbours (especially Turkey) of harbouring foreign fighters and helping them to cross into Syria. In the interview he gave the Turkish Ulusal TV network in April 2013, he asserts that: “Terrorists are entering Syria in their thousands, and maybe in tens of thousands” (paragraph 17). For him, it is therefore clear that: “At the end, large numbers of them [terrorists] are foreigners, not Syrians” (*Fox News*, 2013, paragraph 205).

The narrative that those fighting against the government are to a large part not Syrians fighting for domestic causes, but foreigners fighting in the interests of foreign powers reinforces the argument that the conflict is caused and maintained from abroad.

#### **Discussion and Conclusion**

As frames promote perceptions and interpretations that benefit one side while hindering the other (Entman, 2003), it was expected that President Al-Assad would frame the armed Syrian opposition in a negative way. In the 13 interviews analysed, Al-Assad meets that expectation by consequently attaching the “terrorist” label



to the armed Syrian opposition. Al-Assad extensively uses the pejorative and condemnatory power of the “terrorists” label in order to delegitimize the armed opposition and to present his government as legitimately fighting them to the eyes of the international public opinion (Pokalova, 2010, Chagankerian, 2013).

What is less anticipated and becomes apparent only at a closer analysis of Al-Assad’s narrative is that he also extensively uses other elements in order to frame the armed opposition negatively. These elements are repeatedly placed and reinforced through association with each other throughout the narrative presented by Al-Assad. In addition to the “terrorist” label, these elements also have to be considered as important parts of Al-Assad’s framing of the Syrian opposition.

The armed opposition is continually depicted as foreign controlled proxies preponderantly composed of foreign fighters who are waging war in Syria for foreign interests. It can be said that Al-Assad denies the armed opposition its Syrian grassroots and frames them either as outside aggressors or as mere servants of foreign interests. By asserting that 80-90% of the rebels are affiliated to Al-Qaeda or their offshoots and by emphasizing their international agenda, he also undeniably frames the armed Syrian opposition as posing not only a regional but also a potentially global threat.

The armed opposition is further portrayed as being the cause of all the human suffering and as the perpetrators of all the atrocities committed in Syria. Al-Assad, therefore, clearly frames the armed Syrian opposition as being the “enemy of the Syrian people” representing the epitome of evil, barbarism and inhumanity.

By deconstructing Al-Assad’s narrative about the armed Syrian opposition, this paper shows *how* and to a certain extent *why* the Syrian President frames his adversaries negatively in the context of the Syrian Civil War. It would have been interesting to incorporate and offer an objective characterization that could be compared against the depiction of the armed Syrian opposition presented by Al-Assad. However, the events in Syria are ongoing at the time of writing this paper, the circumstances on the ground rapidly changing, and facts often distorted by propaganda. All these make it difficult to offer an objective picture of the opposition at the present time. A genuine and objective “reality check” that can be compared against the frame used by Al-Assad will therefore need more time in order to allow, what Carl von Clausewitz (1832/1984) famously called the “fog of war” to fade away.

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## Notes

1. I especially want to thank Dr. Sarah Marsden for her guidance and support throughout the writing and publishing process. My thanks also go to the two anonymous reviewers, who provided insightful comments on how to improve an earlier version of this paper.

2. As Richard English (2009) notes, there are a few exceptions in which persons have applied the term “terrorists” to themselves and their associates. IRA member Peadar O’Donnell, for example, used the term “terrorism” to refer to British repression as well as to IRA activity. Osama bin Laden has, for his part, spoken of good and bad terrorism, claiming that Al-Qaeda was practicing the former while its adversaries were carrying out the latter.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Complete list of Bashar al-Assad's interviews used

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## Appendix 2: From Basic to Organizing to Global Themes

Basic themes	Organizing themes	Global theme
Foreign support	Terrorists operating in Syria	Syrian opposition as framed by President Al-Assad
Foreign fighters		
Heterogeneous, but majority is Al-Qaeda		
Responsible for all human suffering and atrocities		
Dependant on foreign countries	Political opposition abroad	
Fabricated abroad		
Does not represent Syrian People		
Not united		
Against terrorism and supporting government	Political (unarmed) opposition in Syria	
Representing small parts of Syrian population		



## Operation Pillar of Defence and the 2013 Israeli Elections: Defensive or Provocative Intervention?

by Philippe Orenes



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### *Abstract*

*Based on the research on the psychological and political effects of terrorism, this paper focuses on the possible use of provocative counter-terrorism operations in order to influence the outcome of elections. Exploring the case of the Israeli Operation Pillar of Defence, that occurred from 14 November, 2012 to 21 November, the study resorts to qualitative and quantitative methods in a semi-flexible design with a view to exploring whether this operation, and the major escalation it took part in, was necessary and proportionate. The findings are that, in light of the broader context and Israeli experience with counter-terrorism responses, the political exploitation of the psychological effects of this crisis may have been a major motive in the decision to launch this operation.*

### *Introduction*

The question of the efficiency of counter-terrorism policies seems to appear to terrorism studies as one of the most important, and yet is of the least researched (Lum, Kennedy and Sherley, 2006). The problem with that question is partly that the goals of counter-terrorism operations may vary greatly, in such a way that evaluating success is most complicated. As Morag puts it: “the fundamental concept of victory, in the context of fighting a war against terrorism, is unclear” (2005, p2). In fact, the situation is even more complicated by the fact that all intentions that motivate the enforcement of a particular policy are not always available to the public, and perhaps not always blameless.

The question this paper addresses focuses on the political consequences of such policies. This is motivated by the numerous findings made by terrorism research about the psychological effects of terrorism. It has often been observed how terrorist activity may influence the outcome of elections (Landau et al. 2004; Gilboa, 2007; Berebi and Klor, 2008, Echebarria-Echabe and Fernández-Guede, 2006). The point here is to try to understand whether counter-terrorism policies are only implemented for the sake of combating terrorism, or whether they may also be used with a view to influencing the results of elections. More precisely, this paper inquires into the possible use of specific offensive operations likely to lead to a major crisis in which the consequences on upcoming elections may appear to have motivated the action more than the strategic context.

It seems, however, necessary to narrow down the focus to a democratic country having enough experience with terrorism for such practices to have emerged. In this respect, Israel seems to meet the criteria and to provide accessible data that may be useful to address the question.

### *Terrorism and elections*

First of all, the psychological consequences of terrorism must be clarified for the method of this paper to make sense. Landau et al. (2004) have observed, in the case of the 9/11 attacks on the US, that terrorism





may act as a trigger for death-related concerns to become salient, thus exploiting the Terror Management Theory. This unconscious process, they argue, results in an increased propensity for supporting charismatic leaders. Typically, one might expect the Israelis to become more supportive of charismatic leaders able both to reassure them and to embody their values in the heights of violence.

Berrebi and Klor (2008), illustrated by Gilboa (2007, p12) in the case of the 2003 elections, similarly argue that in the case of Israel, terrorist activity tends to provoke a shift of the electorate to the right, rather than a mere polarisation (although this is observed, but to a lesser extent). This dense quantitative analysis argues that the partisan theory of voting seems to hold more for Israel than its policy alternative (2008, pp290-292). Simply put, this means that the political identity of the incumbent government and the way it handles ongoing security issues does not affect the way the electorate feels about its capability in that matter: they tend to presuppose, probably based on each political bloc's ideology, that right-wing parties are more fitted to deal with threats to security than their left-wing counterparts.

All this suggests that exploiting provocative counter-terrorism policies for electoral purposes –by making the presence of terrorism felt– is expected to benefit right-wing parties, and more particularly those led by more charismatic characters in Israel. Therefore it makes sense to focus on elections where the incumbent government during the campaign –that is, those responsible for counter-terrorism policymaking– are able to benefit from this. In this respect, the Likud seems most relevant, for it is usually perceived as a strongly right-wing party, regularly scoring high in national elections. Furthermore, over the last few elections that meet the criteria, it seems that the one that took place in January 2013 is most appropriate for the purpose of this paper. This is due to the fact that the other latest elections where the incumbent government was led by the Likud occurred in 2003 and 2006. Yet the former seems worth discarding because it occurred in the framework of the Second *intifada*. This considerably complicates the strategic and retaliatory justifications for counter-terrorism measures, multiplying the alternative hypotheses in a way poorly consistent with the validity of such a short study. On the other hand, the 2006 election is peculiar insofar as the incumbent Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, was launching a new party after breaking away with the Likud to embrace a more centrist ideology. In this framework, the idea that he would have launched an operation meant to benefit his new challengers is hardly credible.

Therefore, the question addressed by this paper focuses on the possible use of counter-terrorism measures by the Netanyahu government, with a view to enhancing their chances for the January 2013 elections.

### ***Counter-terrorism: objectives, effects and justifications***

If, broadly speaking, the goal of counter-terrorism is to limit the threat of terrorism, then it seems fair to claim that disrupting attacks, dismantling or disabling an organisation and deterring it from carrying out attacks are several different ways of achieving this goal. Still, it seems necessary to distinguish between defensive and offensive counter-terrorism. The former is constituted of all the kinds of actions that involve thwarting terrorism in the narrowest sense. That involves, for instance, security screening measures in airports, target-hardening measures in general such as protecting embassies etc. (see Probst, 2005). Offensive measures, on the other hand, involve more disputed methods, such as targeted killings, collective punishment or other actions aimed at harming the terrorist organisation outside of the context of an attack. The problem, of course, precisely lies in the distinction between these two types of actions, for while defensive measures enjoy relatively undisputed legitimacy, offensive operations are more often criticised. Therefore, the line between these two types of activities is often blurred by the desire of the counter-terrorism policymakers to



present most operations as defensive in nature –for none would deny one’s right to self-defence. In the case of targeted killings, for instance, Kendall (2002) displays a great deal of efforts to establish this Israeli practice as self-defence.

However, many have observed that some operations may backfire, insofar as they may increase the resolve and popularity of an organisation instead of disabling it. This is what Ganor calls the “boomerang effect” (2005, p129). As Morag (2005) argues, some of the major goals of Israeli counter-terrorism are naturally to limit the number of Israeli victims to terrorism, to limit the negative economic consequences of such attacks, to optimise the government’s popularity both domestically and internationally, and to undermine that of the Palestinian Authority (see Brym and Gazit, 2011). The latter case, Brym and Gazit argue, would be the cause of the implementation by Israel of such policies known for their “boomerang effect”: “Israel’s assassination of political leaders typically causes more Palestinian outrage and intransigence, and has more negative implications for Israel domestically and internationally, than does the assassination of military operatives” (2011, p3).

In the light of the question this paper seeks to address, it seems fair to focus more closely on counter-terrorism operations likely to have similar results. That is, an offensive operation susceptible of generating a greater climate of tension and insecurity –if not more violence altogether. This involves, as explained above, the targeted killing of political leaders (as opposed to what Brym and Gazit call “ticking bombs”), but also other types of actions likely to provoke the anger of the Palestinians. One may evoke more “conventional” military operations, such as bombings carried out by the IAF that tend to be rather indiscriminate in terms of victims.

When analyzing the counter-terrorism operations that took place during the period of the elections, one of them appears particularly salient: it is Operation Pillar of Defence (OPD) and was carried out from 14 to 21 November, 2012. Along to its particularly large scale, this operation’s timing was perfectly in line with the findings made by Berrebi and Klor that indicate that actions taking place approximately three months before elections (two months exactly in this case) are likely to have significant consequences on their outcome. It seems, overall, simply worth citing the *Jerusalem Post* here, that wrote, on 15 November, 2012:

*“Operation Pillar of Defense began only 69 days before the January 22, 2013 election, making it the fifth election out of the last seven to take place months after an IDF operation.*

*Left-wing activists and politicians accused Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak of launching the attack on Gaza on Wednesday in order to win the electorate’s approval”.*

## **Method**

In order to examine whether OPD may have been an attempt at using an offensive counter-terrorism intervention to generate a climate of emergency likely to be exploited during the upcoming elections, it seems necessary to ask whether it was necessary, proportionate, and effective.

The issue of necessity is here understood as contextual elements justifying such a sudden break in Israel’s counter-terrorism policy. Insofar as defence is a reaction, the question is about what provoked it, and to what extent that is enough to understand why the reaction changed. Proportionality, on the other hand, addresses the issue of coherence in scope between the means used and the goals pursued. A failure to meet this criterion may suggest either that the agent is irrational or poorly informed, or that the goals pursued are not



those stated. Finally, effectiveness suggests an assessment of the relationship between those same stated goals and those achieved –and the extent to which the difference, if any, was not foreseeable.

Therefore, a mixed methods design seems more appropriate, since all of these questions rely on analysing the incentives for action expressed by the decision-makers, and then compare these to real world data in order to conclude whether they can be justified by the course of events. It seems necessary to claim here that the issue of whether the elections were actually influenced by the operation is irrelevant, for this is a matter that relies on several contingent factors that could not necessarily be taken into account by the decision-makers. The purpose of this paper focuses on the question of intentions, not of actual effects. In this respect, it seems fair to analyse the justifications officially given for action, and the accounts of the operation, and then to confront this interpretation to more objective evidence likely to highlight whether other motivational factors are needed to make sense of the decisions made on the timing and method of the intervention.

The study is hence divided in two main sections: first, a brief but necessary thematic coding analysis of official statements related to the Operation has been carried out. The official incentives for action, goal(s) of the operation and their relationship to the choice in the method of intervention were to be clearly identified for the second part of the study to collect and analyse relevant data meant to confirm or challenge the claims made by the decision-makers on their purely strategic motivation.

Given the space constraint, however, it was not possible here to run an extensive review of the Israeli government communiqués concerning the operation. In order to triangulate the information and obtain a more nuanced picture, both the review of OPD published on the Israel Security Agency's website, the one published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and the summary of events displayed on the blog of the Israeli Defence Forces have been analysed. The three of them were issued during and shortly after the events. This choice was essentially based on the need to encompass the possible discrepancies in official accounts addressing different audiences. Arguably, the ISA's website would address more Israeli nationals than the MOFA's which is, by essence, dedicated to external communication. Finally, the IDF account is interesting for, although still being issued by an official source, it is relatively more informal in its layout, and seems to address a more readily complacent audience. All three sources have thus been coded and analysed separately before being combined and their findings confronted with each other.

The second, more substantial, section focuses, as explained above, on contextualising the intervention in order to challenge or confirm the claims on the necessity and proportionality of OPD, and to identify whether the possible political motives outlined by the literature review are to be taken into account to fully make sense of the decision to react this way.

In order to carry out such an analysis, it seems that a quantitative method is more appropriate. Yet the controversial nature of the data sought here and its relatively difficult accessibility demands several data sources to be exploited. Therefore, the data used in this paper concerning the number of Palestinian fatalities is extracted from the B'Tselem online database. This source, already used in works such as Brym's (2012), has the advantage of providing rather extensive data on the conflict and enjoys quite a widespread recognition. Data concerning rocket/mortar attacks and Israeli casualties/fatalities, on the other hand, come from the archives of the Israel Security Agency, available online, because B'Tselem only provides a yearly count of the former, and does not provide figures concerning Israeli casualties. Besides, its figures concerning Israeli fatalities appear to differ slightly, at times, from those displayed by the ISA.

Due to the structure of the datasets, it is unfortunately not possible to have daily data. Therefore, the time unit used in this study is the month. Besides, in order to be able to deal with the data efficiently, its range has



been limited to the number of Palestinian fatalities and killed and injured Israelis. The Israelis were divided between civilians and security personnel, and the Palestinians between combatants and non-combatants (according to B'Tselem figures). One more accurate type of counter-terrorism measures taken into account is the number of people killed in the course of Targeted Killings counted by B'Tselem. This measure has been noted because, as it has been argued, it may at times result in provoking more Palestinian resentment than in actually disrupting terrorism. Finally, the two last variables are extracted from the Israel Security Agency archives: they are the monthly count of rockets/mortar shells launched from the Palestinian territories, the number of attacks this represented, and the total number of terror attacks that occurred in Israel.

It is worth stressing here that the ISA's understanding of the words "terror attacks" is rather broad, for it appears that it ranges from stone-throwing and stabbing attacks to suicide-bombings. This shows that there are possible inherent biases in using the data provided by a party of the conflict (Israel). Not least is the risk of self-victimisation. Yet the MOFA and Shin Beit sources have the advantage of being accessible, documented, and collected systematically over a long period of time by a centralised and national administration.

Finally, all of these data have been collected over the period January 2011- October 2013. This range enables one to observe the development of more long-term patterns in the data, including the two years that led to the operation, and the possible long-term consequences it had in the following year.

### *Israeli account of the operation: findings*

While carrying out the thematic coding analysis, the codes used focused essentially on Israel's justification of the necessity, proportionality and efficacy of the intervention. Hence, the themes of responsibility, changes in the intensity of the conflict (both before and during the operation), Israeli goals and their hypothetical achievement as well as the nature of the IDF actions were paid particular attention.

As to the account of the events displayed on the MOFA website, the coding resulted in the prominent emergence of the following themes:

- Hamas's responsibility for the escalation.
- That Israel was under a growing threat (the operation was pre-emptive).
- It was a response to increasing actual violence.

Similarly, on the IDF blog, one may see many charts and maps stressing the "Hamas Rocket Threat" and claiming how Hamas did nothing to protect civilians during the operation. Yet the emphasis is more laid upon the strategic success of the events. Analysing this account, the coding highlights a slightly different aspect of the operation:

- The "surgical" nature of the attacks.
- The unprecedented intensity and frequency of Hamas's attacks both before and during the operation.
- Hamas's responsibility for any hypothetical harm caused to Palestinian civilians.

With regards to Shin Beth, the standpoint adopted to recall the events differs may be summed up as follows:

- The operation was a reaction to Hamas violence.
- The IDF successfully attacked terrorist targets.
- The human and material cost was high for Israel.

After confronting these codes with each other, the Israeli account is clear: OPD was a direct defensive



response to an intolerable escalation in rocket hits launched by Hamas terrorists (in the most value-laden meaning of the word). The goal of the operation, as stated several times, is to enforce a ceasefire on Hamas. The IDF reportedly hit “1500 terror sites”, providing no evidence confirming this qualification. Even further, the claim the rocket hits dramatically increased is generally supported by a chart (or a link to a chart) meant to illustrate this point. Interestingly enough, the latter often includes in the figures meant to have justified the operation the rockets launched during these 8 days. This is the case, for instance, of both the IDF blog and the Israel Security Agency that provide, with the claims that rocket and mortar hits escalated before the operation, links leading to monthly or yearly agglomerated data giving the misleading impression that the 1500 rockets launched from Gaza during the operation –thus quite likely to result *from* it– are the reason why it had become necessary to intervene.

Another major theme observable in these samples is the death toll Hamas was imposing on Israel. Similarly to the issue of rockets, the claim is that the number of Israeli killed or injured before the operation had increased so sharply that intervention was necessary. Yet the data supporting this claim seems to suffer from the same fallacy as those focusing on rockets and mortars: suggesting the consequences of the operation as its cause. This is mostly achieved through a misleading way of aggregating and presenting the data, and will therefore demand closer scrutiny.

Overall, the major codes emerging are as follows:

- OPD was *defensive*.
- It was a matter of *emergency*: it resulted from an escalation that took place over a few days.
- This escalation manifested itself through a sudden and sharp increase in *rocket-mortar launches* and in the *number of victims* of Hamas terrorism among the Israeli civilians and security personnel.
- And during the operation, *Israel showed a self-restraint in the use of force that was only equalled by the ruthlessness of the Palestinian reaction*. Israel targeted and harmed mostly (if not only, as suggested by the almost complete absence of the question of collateral damage from the official websites) terrorists and combatants, however hazy these categories may be.

From these broad codes, two main themes have appeared to be crucial to the self-perception of the Israeli intervention:

- The theme of responsibility for the operation: essentially blamed on Hamas. This one is composed of two sub-themes:
  - The sub-theme of unprecedented levels of violence before the operation.
  - The sub-theme of intolerability.
- The theme of success: the operation was a great achievement.

What matters, in this study, is to inquire into the validity of these statements, not only objectively, but to try to understand whether they could credibly be held by those responsible for the launching of the operation, or whether some other explanatory factor may be needed to fully make sense of their decision.

Therefore, the following step in this study is to explore the “unprecedentedness” and intolerability of the events that led to the crisis (mostly related to the question of “necessity”), and the outcomes of the operation as they could be expected and observed (involving both the issues of “proportionality” and “efficacy” of the intervention).

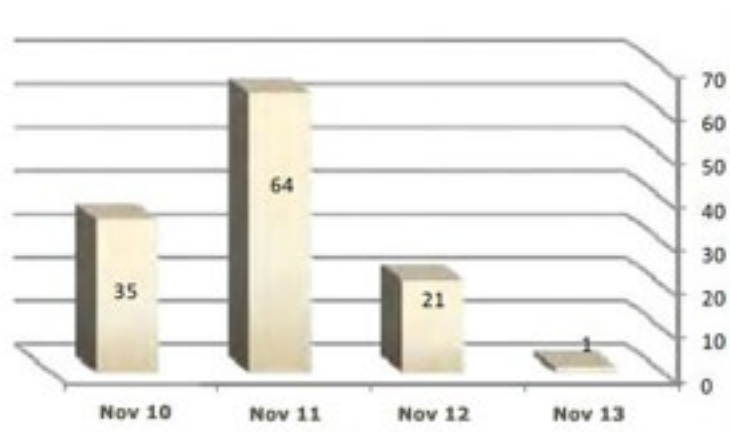


## *The intervention*

The major argument given by the decision-makers concerning the timing of OPD is that rocket and mortar launchings reached an unprecedented frequency just before the intervention. Along to this, the claims concerning the proportionality (the “self-restraint” showed by the IDF during the intervention) are another crucial element of the official account of the events. Finally, the claim that the attack was successful is interesting because of its ambivalence. Indeed, success is a relative concept that depends on what scale is used to measure it. Therefore, the possible biases in the making of this statement are to be analysed.

## *Contextualising the necessity of the operation:*

The argument given for the necessity of the intervention is that the conflict “escalated”. One may reply that it takes two players for a situation to “escalate”. But the account given by Israeli officials is that this escalation was unilateral. The unprecedented nature of the attacks that occurred on the few days leading to the crackdown is taken to be the major reason why such a large-scale operation was necessary. Figure 1 is a bar chart that can be found on the Israeli MOFA website. It displays the number of rocket hits that occurred in the four days that led to the operation.



*Fig.1: daily distribution of rocket fire before OPD. Source: Israel MOFA.*

This chart, surprisingly, seems to suggest that when the operation was launched, the “emergency” character of the situation was not so clear. This is not to say that reacting was not justified, but more that the strikes involved by the operation may have been more retaliatory than purely defensive, since they occurred some two days after the climax of the attacks, when they appeared to be fading away. It ought to be added, however, that when added, the number of mortar shells brings the figures to around 100 hits on 11 November. Therefore, reacting seems naturally quite fair when faced with such intense attacks.

On a more diachronic perspective, however, one may question the “unprecedented” nature of the situation. Indeed, when displaying the monthly number of rocket and mortar attacks that occurred between January 2011 and October 2013 (Figure 2), it appears that rather high peaks had already been reached.

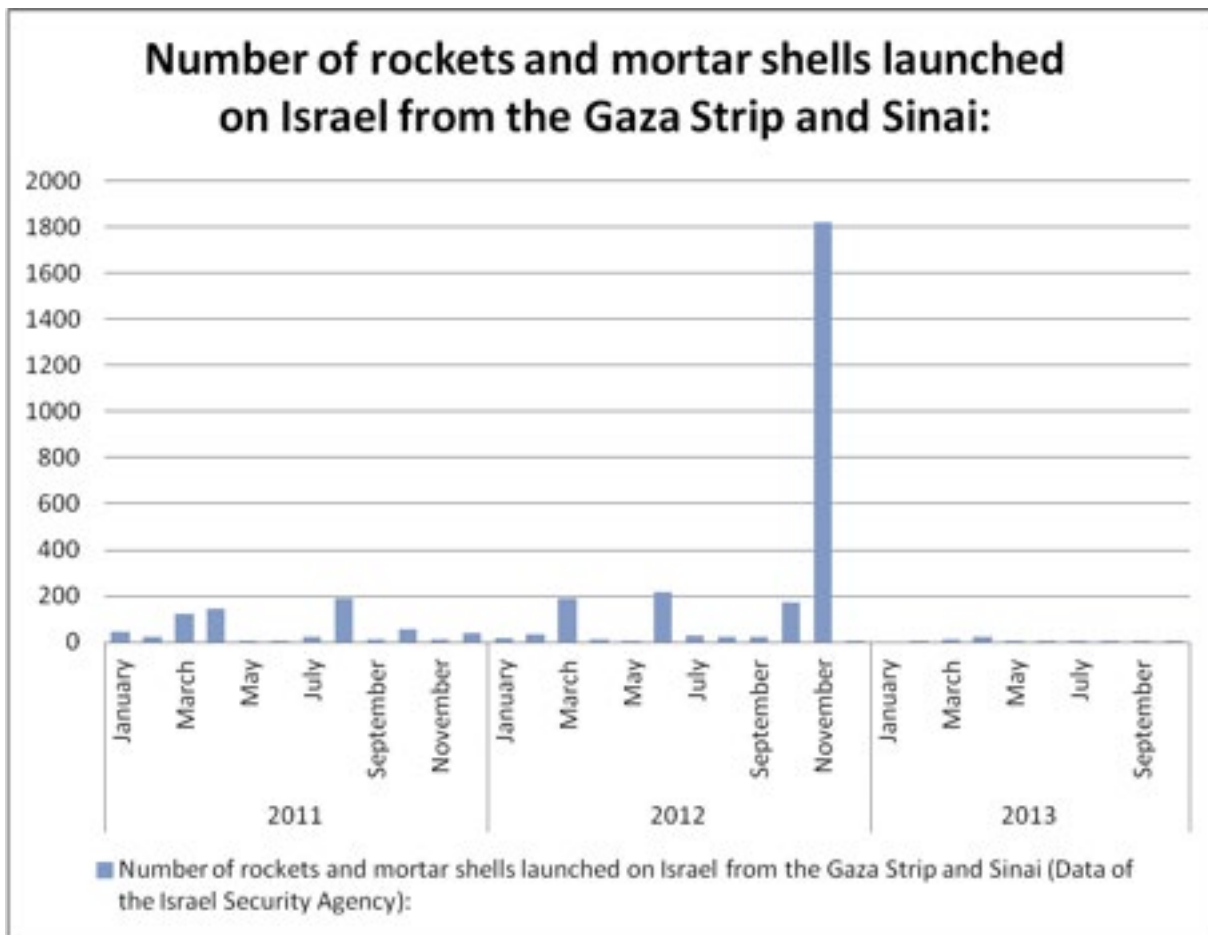


Fig. 2: Number of rockets and mortar shells launched from Palestinian territories. Data collected from the ISA.

As the data show, before the situation escalated, the number of attacks was not unmatched with the near past on a monthly level. Several intense episodes had taken place before, with some 218 hits in June 2012 (197 rockets), and 192 in March of the same year (173 rockets). Even earlier, 191 hits have been counted in August 2011, of which 145 were rockets. Hence it may be argued that, although such intense attacks (over 120 hits in 3 days) may not have happened in the near past, it was not unknown to the Israeli security forces that the Palestinians had the capacity to be so active. In fact, it appears that over two days in June (19-20) 2012, the Palestinians terrorists (reportedly Hamas) had already launched some 112 projectiles into the country, according to the MOFA. It is hard not to notice how such an event is comparable to the escalation that led to OPD.

The same may be said of the amount of fatalities caused by the attacks. Indeed, none was killed before the operation was launched in November 2012, and as Figure 3 shows, there was no particular increase in the previous month(s) in this respect either. The same may be said of the number of Israelis injured in terror attacks. Hence, these motives hardly hold in establishing the dramatic worsening of the situation.

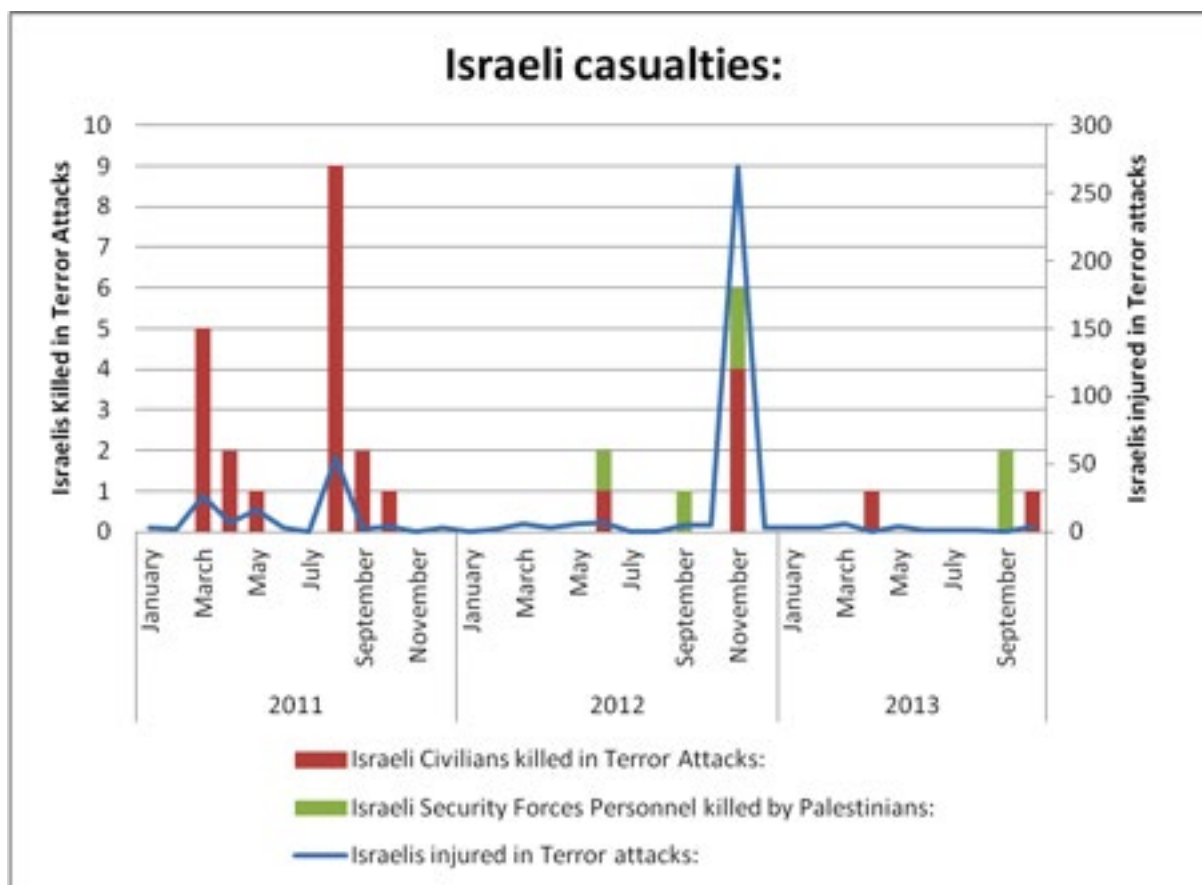


Fig. 3: Number of Israeli casualties: injured and killed. Data collected from the ISA.

Again, all this does not amount to claiming that the Israeli response was unjustified, but it does raise the question of its timing. Indeed, it is interesting to observe that the major crises that occurred over the previous two years never escalated to that extent. Although the attacks were usually followed by Israeli Air Force strikes, mostly on weapons factories and other critical military infrastructures, nothing comparable in scale had been launched since the Operation Cast Lead that took place in 2008 after some intense provocations of Hamas, newly in power after the unilateral withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza (Byman, 2011). It seems quite possible that OPD may be accounted for by weariness, after so many attacks that would always end on a temporary truce followed a few months later by another burst of violence. Israel has naturally grown desiring, like the official statements claim, to impose a genuine ceasefire to Hamas. But again, that over more than two years, the situation becomes so intolerable exactly two months before national elections is an interesting coincidence that might be understood by taking this deadline as a motivational factor.

The point this analysis tries to make is, overall, very simple: the context that led to the operation was not unique. The same intensity in violence had already been reached, at least in June, and possibly two more times: in March of the same year and August of the year before. Yet no such reaction had been deemed necessary these times.

### ***Consistency of the type of actions with the aims of the intervention***

The question explored in this section focuses on what type of actions were carried out during OPD, and how these choices may make sense with regard to the objectives of the operation. It has already been highlighted





that some types of intervention are particularly likely to provoke more resentment and resolve among the Palestinians than others. This is the case of Closures, targeted killings of Palestinian high officials, and all types of relatively indiscriminate attacks, such as airstrikes.

With regards to the operation, it started by the targeted killing of Ahmed Jabari, “Head of Hamas’ military wing in the Gaza Strip”, claims the IDF blog. Many accounts of the event, including the Israeli official statements, acknowledge this as the source of the intense bombing that took place shortly afterwards (the famous 1500 rockets and mortar shells). To this must be added another 14 targeted killings that took place that same month. Given debatable the tactical usefulness of many of them may be, it is clear that they provoked a burst of outrage in the Gaza Strip likely to be responsible to a certain extent for the ensuing escalation.

Nevertheless, the data collected indicates a strong correlation between the number of mortar/rockets launched from the Palestinian territories and the number of Palestinians killed by the IDF, as Figure 4 shows. The visual impression is confirmed by calculating the correlation coefficient between Palestinian fatalities and rocket/mortar attacks which appears to be quite significant: approximately 0.964. The same analysis reveals a correlation coefficient of 0.84 between the number of Palestinians killed in the course of a targeted killing and the number of mortar/rocket attacks.

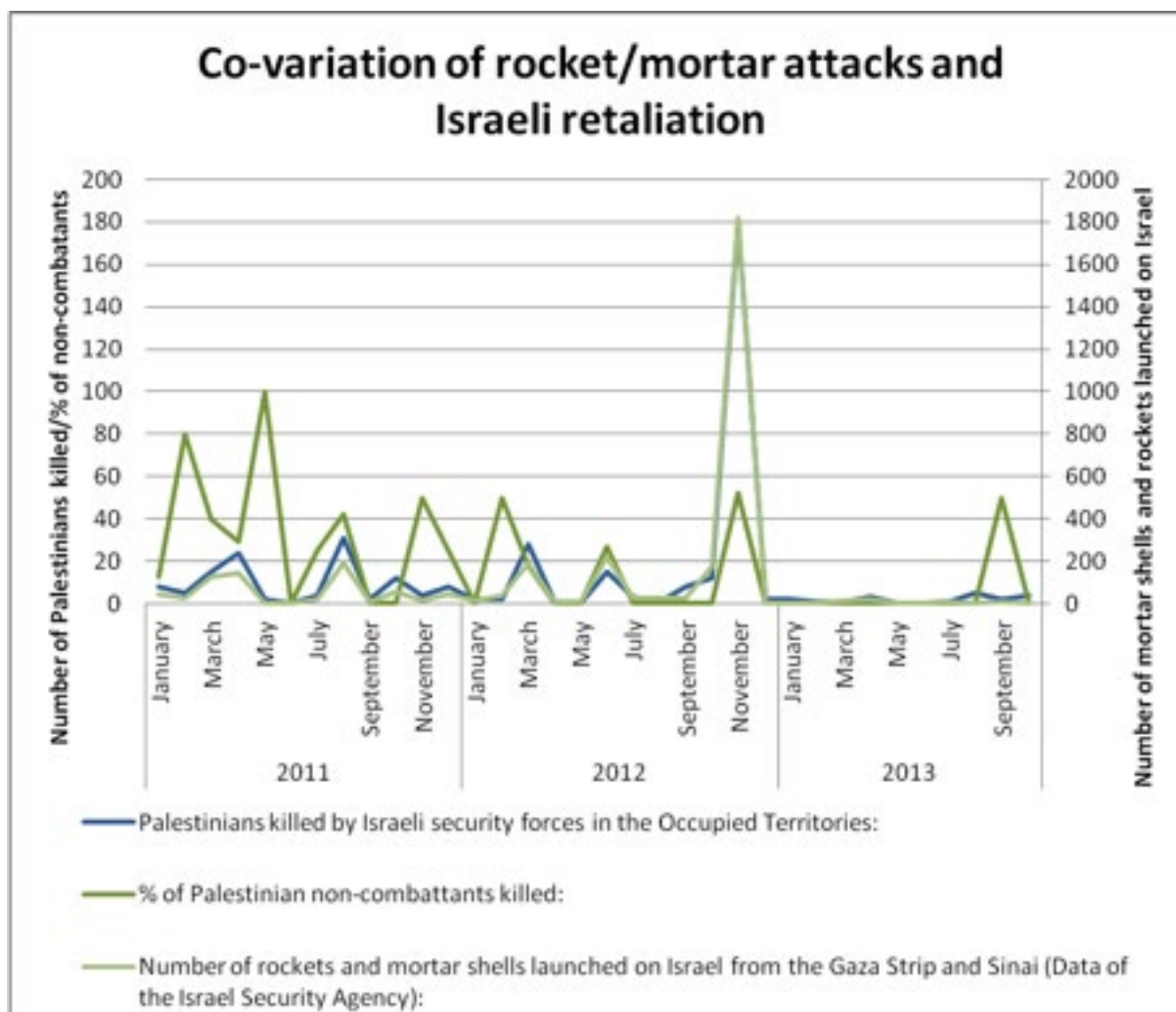


Fig. 4: Co-variation of rocket/mortar attacks and Israeli retaliation. Data collected from B'Tselem and Shin Beit.



The major obstacle to the running of a causality test (such as a Granger causality test, or more sophisticated correlation analyses) lies in the very structure of the data. This would require daily data, for most likely, the reaction time between the killing of a Hamas leader and the retaliatory launching of rockets, or the other way around, is a matter of hours more than of months. This is what was observed in the very beginning of OPD. Besides, the prospects for two-ways causality seem quite promising, and would therefore require a thorough study of the spiral of retaliatory violence in the conflict. Again, however, this is impossible with the data used in this paper, and is further complicated by the apparent lack of exhaustive databases providing such accurate and trustworthy information.

In the light of the data gathered here, however, it is possible to conclude that killing of Palestinians as a response to rocket attacks, or its opposite, is nothing new in the way of settling a crisis. Therefore, in this respect, it doesn't seem that the policymakers have adopted a peculiar approach. Yet it appears that the use of violence was rather indiscriminate, since according to B'Tselem, roughly 52% of the Palestinian fatalities were non-combatants. This is the third highest peak in this variable over the last 3 years; and given the scale of the operation, it certainly stands for the most devastating amount of collateral damage caused by an Israeli intervention over this period of time. This, it has been argued, is most likely due to the very nature of the operations: they consisted essentially of IAF strikes on "1500 terror sites".

Although this type of tactic could, like targeted killings, easily account for the violent reaction that the 8 days of fight witnessed, its selection (and thus the exclusion of, for instance, sending troops to the Gaza Strip) may also be accounted for by the electoral context. This does not necessarily mean that this tactic was chosen *because* it was susceptible of provoking a violent response, but at least because it is the least dangerous for the IDF (who are less exposed in planes than on the ground), since Ganor (2005) has rightfully pointed out how sensitive to security personnel fatalities the Israeli population may be.

As explained above, a counter-terrorism operation may have two different levels of objectives: the ones that are inherent to their very nature: reducing terrorism, limiting the amount of Israelis killed or injured, disrupting terrorist organisations etc. These all amount to the same idea: countering terrorism. On another, tactical level, each offensive operation must have some clearly identified goals. In the case of OPD, the latter have been identified as being the enforcement of a genuine ceasefire with Hamas on its projectile-launching attacks. Yet arguably, if the nature of the operations fail to limit the threat of terrorism and restrains only one form of it but exacerbates others, it may barely be considered a success. In the case of the present operation, many reasons for such a partial failure have already been put forward. As it is possible to observe on Figure 5, it appears that the number of Israelis killed in terror attacks has not decreased significantly in the aftermath of the crisis. Yet more strikingly, Figure 5 reveals that overall, the number of terror attacks has slightly increased, on average, in the same period, and their occurrence has become steadier. While their monthly average was approximately of 105 in the 11 months leading to the operation, with a standard deviation of roughly 57 attacks, (a very instable situation), they have shifted to an average of 116 in the 11 months following, with a standard deviation of 22 attacks. It is worth adding that none of these measures include the figures of November 2012. Hence it may be argued that the operation actually resulted in a stable increase in the level of terrorist violence in Israel.

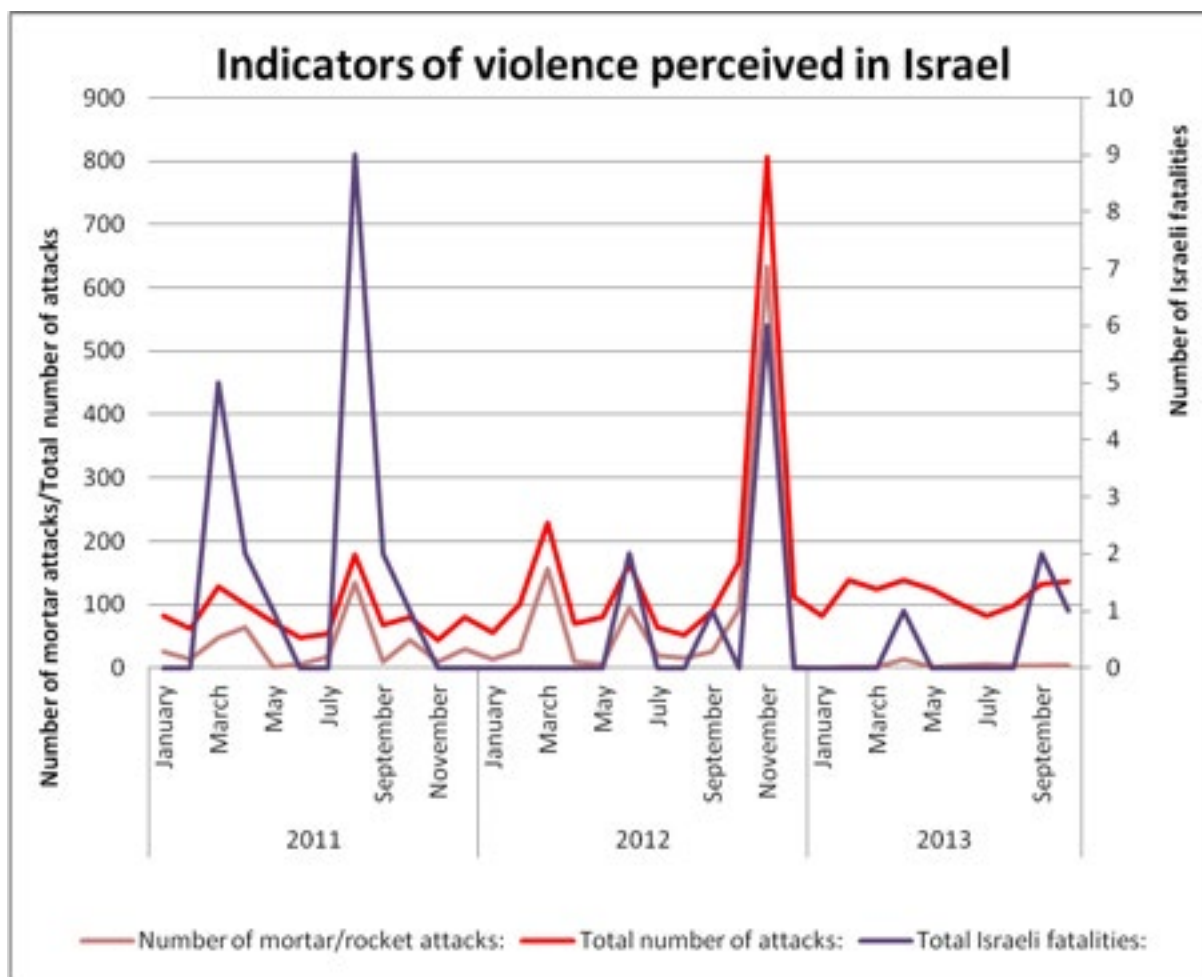


Fig. 5: Indicators of the violence perceived in Israel. Data collected from the ISA.

## Conclusion

This paper focused on the possible use of offensive counter-terrorism operations for electoral purposes. The argument is that, in democratic countries having a long experience with terrorism, the political effects such a factor may have on the public are likely to have become a fact policymakers are aware of. Therefore, the possibility of those who would benefit from them to exploit this resource when in power to help for upcoming elections cannot be ruled out. Using the example of the Israeli January 2013 national elections, this issue has been explored in the light of Operation Pillar of Defence that occurred exactly two months earlier.

The expectations raised by the literature were that a politically efficient exploitation of this crisis would make the issue of terrorism particularly salient to the public, so that conscious and unconscious security concerns would work in favour of the hard-liners –Netanyahu and the Likud. This may have been all the more needed by this party as the US presidential election that was occurring at the same time could have diverted the attention of the public from domestic issues. Therefore, a politically successful operation would have triggered a dramatic response, both raising the concerns of the Israelis and demonstrating the ruler's ability to firmly handle the situation.

Although the intentions of policymakers are always a matter of dispute, this study has showed that the arguments put forward for the necessity and proportionality of the reaction are debatable. Firstly because the



events that led to the escalation were not fully new to the country: they had already occurred under the same government and had not been dealt with in the same way. Secondly, precisely because the way of dealing with it, with regards to its more restrained alternatives, previously used in the same circumstances, may have been expected to provoke a burst of violence, both in the short and the long term. Consequently, the argument of this paper is that the selection of the moment for a change in counter-terrorism response, as well as the more offensive type of reaction adopted –with all the somewhat foreseeable dramatic escalation that would follow– may be better understood in the lights of the expected political effects of the psychology of terrorism in electoral periods.

Naturally, interpreting intentions is never an accurate science, but more generally, this paper meant to stress that the question of counter-terrorism deserves critical attention. The main point here was to illustrate the possibly complex and unintuitive motives likely to be at the source of apparently purely strategic and tactic counter-terrorism decisions. Given the extensive and well-researched psychological effects of terrorist attacks, it has been argued that one should be cautious not to draw too readily Manichean a dichotomy between the perpetrators and the victims, for the latter, too, may have an interest in exploiting this mechanism. Such considerations should hence be taken into account when researching the still largely under-explored field of counter-terrorism policies.

**About the author:** **Philippe Orenes** is an MLitt candidate at the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence of the University of St Andrews. Born in 1992 in Bordeaux, France, he holds a BA in Political Science from Sciences Po Paris, completed in 2013 after a one-year exchange programme spent at the University of St Andrews where he subsequently enrolled for a master's degree in Terrorism Studies. His postgraduate studies focus on the exploration of modern political violence from a multidisciplinary perspective, trying to understand the multiple parallel dynamics that sustain modern conflicts. This implies combining history, sociology, psychology, epistemology and political science and philosophy to approach terrorist and more conventional conflicts in a comprehensive way that focuses on insiders' perspectives as well as on more macro-level explanations.

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## Book Reviews

**Barry Scott Zellen, *State of Recovery: The Quest to Restore American Security After 9/11* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013)**

**Gilbert Ramsay, *Jihadi Culture on the World Wide Web* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013)**

reviewed by Richard English

‘Technology to the Rescue.’ Barry Scott Zellen’s intriguing and impressive new book examines the deployment of technological innovation by the United States, as it has attempted to ensure its security from threat after the atrocity of 9/11. In the words of Zellen’s own manifesto here: ‘*State of Recovery* examines the numerous efforts by technologists and homeland security policy makers dedicated to restoring security and ameliorating the insecurity felt after the attacks more than a decade ago.’

It is a fascinating account. The author considers the dramatic US rise in technology spending, both public and private, since 2001; he assesses the remarkable innovation evident in recent years in biometrics, in information security, and in protection regarding aviation, underground travel, sporting events, food, and the mail system, as well as the reorganization (with the Department of Homeland Security and so forth) of US structures of prevention; he ranges widely over non-terrorist dangers, such as those posed by hostile states (North Korea, Iran), by illegal migration into America, and by increasing border violence.

Zellen is an admirably prolific and highly intelligent scholar. Here, he recognizes that some measure of insecurity and threat will prove residual. And some very good points are made. One of the repeatedly important lessons which emerges from this thoughtful book is the constant need for ensuring intra- and inter-state coordination, cooperation, and partnerships (together with organizational streamlining). Regrettably, it is an insight more easily stated than it is adhered to in effective manner.

No book is flawless. Zellen does not sustainedly explore the degree to which some of the USA’s main counter-terrorist efforts in recent years (especially in relation to Iraq) have actually generated more intense kinds of terrorist threat than had previously existed. Relatedly, he is better on the innovative technological brilliance involved in, for example, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles than he is in considering the possible blowback costs which the USA and its allies are likely to have to pay for drones’ lethal use. Here, as so often, there can be a seeming disjunction between the extraordinarily high levels of technical and technological sophistication shown by counter-terrorist states, and the sometimes crass naivety of states’ political and social approaches to the causation and likely dynamics of enduring conflict.

Zellen has interviewed some fascinating people involved in the world which he delineates. At times, I felt that he might have interrogated their assumptions and claims rather more stringently than he does, in light of other–corroborating or sceptical–sources. So the chapter on nuclear terrorism might perhaps be justified in its somewhat anxious tone; but this would have seemed more persuasive to me had Zellen engaged with the less alarmist arguments of scholars such as Michael Levi (which he does not).

One of the things that Zellen suggests is that ‘both the terrorists as well as those who fight them are finding that the internet has become a theatre of war unto itself’. This raises important questions, which Gilbert



Ramsay's compelling and original new book aims to address. Ramsay too is a scholar of extremely high intelligence, and *Jihadi Culture on the World Wide Web* importantly assesses online jihadism not merely as a security threat, but 'as something of cultural interest in its own right', something 'dependent, but not reducible to the real-world violence which it claims to be premised on'. Dr Ramsay suggests that security concerns have been rather exaggerated in this realm, and that the relationship between the internet and terrorist violence is far more complex than many observers assume.

He makes a convincing case. In doing so, he distinguishes between jihadis (supporters of Jihadi Salafism; people who are committed to jihad) and mujahidin (those who practise violent jihad in a physical sense). His central case is that, paradoxically, most jihadis acknowledge the fundamental duty to take part in militant activities in which they, in fact, take no physical part: 'There is, in a sense, an independent online "jihadi culture" which offers practices, forms of satisfaction, forms of value which, though theoretically premised on the goal of supporting the mujahidin, are not wholly reducible to it'; 'purely online activity can be a worthwhile activity in its own right'. It is not that online jihadism is irrelevant to or utterly independent of physically violent jihad; but, according to Ramsay's argument, it cannot be satisfactorily understood or explained purely by reference to that violence. Online jihadism can be meaningful and prestigious and pleasurable in its own creative, imaginative right.

Provocatively, Dr Ramsay develops an argument that we might understand online jihadism more properly if we consider it a species of fandom. So value and a world of alternative morality are here bestowed by the online culture and practices themselves. They relate, yes, to violent acts, and sometimes do so in a nastily celebratory way. But most jihadis do not practise violence, and probably never have any likelihood of doing so: 'For some at least, it would seem that participation in the jihadi forum is its own reward'.

The book, of course, cannot answer all questions. It would be intriguing to know more about what the mujahidin think of the jihadis, and more about the jihadis themselves on the basis of sources beyond the internet: their actual-world (presumably diverse?) contexts, their multiple motivations, their various trajectories, and their relationships.

It also seems to me that there are some (reasonably encouraging and calming) policy implications to be drawn out from Gilbert Ramsay's powerful book. He is right to stress that government should not see online jihadism purely through the lens of counter-terrorism. But if online jihadis are as he convincingly presents them, then much governmental anxiety and policy prescription in this realm seems unnecessary or even counter-productive. For this reason, as well as for its intellectually pioneering insights and theoretical subtlety, the book deserves high praise and a wide readership.

**About the reviewer:** **Richard English** is Wardlaw Professor of Politics in the School of International Relations, and Director of the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV), at the University of St Andrews. He was born in 1963 in Belfast, where he worked at Queen's University between 1989 and 2011. He is the author of seven books, including the award-winning studies *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (2003) and *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland* (2006). His most recent book, *Modern War: A Very Short Introduction*, was published in 2013 by Oxford University Press. He is also the co-editor of a further five books and has published more than forty journal articles and book chapters. He is a frequent media commentator on terrorism and political violence, and on Irish politics and history, including work for the BBC, ITN, SKY NEWS, NPR, RTE, the *Irish Times*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Newsweek* and the *Financial Times*. His research has received funding from, among others, the British Academy, the Economic



*and Social Research Council, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Leverhulme Trust and the Nuffield Foundation. In 2009 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy (FBA) and a Member of the Royal Irish Academy (MRIA). In 2012, Pan Macmillan published an updated version of *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*, in which Richard English analyses recent developments, including the growth of Irish Dissident Republicanism.*





## About JTR

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