Power of Words: When Terrorism Goes Viral

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Abstract

In recent years, the actors of terrorism quickly learned how to adapt to the new communication and media environment. From face-to-face communication, localized propaganda, and direct recruitments methods, terrorist cells and organizations started moving their activities to online forums, social networks, and social media. The impact is huge and widespread: not only has their primary reach extended, but also, thanks to the overall globalization of communication methods, they are being given secondary "advertisement" through exposure in world media. This is becoming more than evident in the case of ISIS, whose reach and communication methods are unprecedented. This paper concentrates not only on ISIS, however, as it introduces when and how terrorism started turning viral and what particular forms this communication, propaganda as well as recruitment shift takes, together with what primary and what secondary threats it poses. Moreover, emphasis is put on both the technical aspects of the aforementioned changes as well as on the analysis of the new means of communication as such, namely on its linguistic, psychological, imagery, and security content. The outcome of the paper is the identification of the methods and analysis of the current state of affairs in terrorist communication, together with overall evaluation of their contemporary recruitment and propaganda practices.

Key words

Al Qaeda; Communication; Cyberjihad; Cyberspace; ISIS; Media; Propaganda; Social Media; Terrorism.

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Introduction

Terrorism is not a new threat the society is facing. This threat, however, has been evolving and its ever-changing forms create new issues the society needs to face and address. Assessing terrorism from the communication and media point of view, it can be understood as a message. A message that further spreads messages by its sole existence and its actions. Terrorists and their organizations are well aware of the power the media have, the more in this globalized age, and they quickly adapted to the treats the media in general and virtual world in particular have to offer. Although their battlefield and training camps may not always be first-class, their knowledge of modern communication methods and possible effects of these methods is. Not only they know how to operate modern media themselves, they also know how to make media listen to them. In 2005, Al Qaeda's (AQ) then second in command Ayman al Zawahiri wrote to AQI[247]'s emir Abu Musab Zarqawi: "[…] We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media" (Stern and Berger 2015: 105[248]). The message could not be clearer.

The reasons for the new media deployment vary: the jihadists use it for their internal communication; it provides possibilities for new, cheaper, and faster forms of recruitment; it is a platform for propaganda and boasting; and importantly, it helps with spreading fear to those who are supposed to be afraid. To put it simply, it enables to pass on desired messages in a cheap, visible, and unprecedently fast manner. Though, not always do the messages come from the terrorists themselves. World media, social media users, and virtually anybody who is to any extent engaged in the world affairs, are providing terrorists with secondary "advertisement" for their actions by paying attention to them and talking about them. Ultimately, "if it bleeds it leads" and terrorism sells well, so in fact, terrorism can be also perceived as a profitable source of news for the media companies, often accompanied by simplified black and white narratives which are dangerous by themselves, regardless of the actual content. This all seems to be a vicious circle of a complex supply and even more complex demand. The aim of this paper is not to resolve how to break the circle, but to analyze what is in this circle, how this circle works, and how it changed with the Internet age, hoping to produce a critical analysis and an overview of the matter in question, stressing the crucial moments of this transformation and their effects in respective contexts, which can serve as an outline for the policymakers and counterterrorist strategists, or as a base for further research.

To begin with, it is necessary to identify how the terms *terrorism* and *terrorist* are understood in this paper. There are at least two main factors to be considered: firstly, there is no official, globally accepted, and internationally binding definition of terrorism. Alex P. Schmidt (2012) wrote that terrorism is a contested concept where many variables play important roles and therefore a definition of *terrorism* is necessarily going to differ based on the subject's specific stand on and understanding of these variables. It has been repeated many times that "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter," yet there is some common ground to be found in the Western[249] understanding who is perceived as a *terrorist* and what is understood as *terrorism*, with "violence

[247] Al-Qaeda in Iraq
[248] Further on abbreviated as "S&B 2015: xx".
[249] "Western" is not used primarily as a geographical denomination – Western is understood as one coming from a free source, usually, but not restrictively from Europe, North America, and Australia.

committed by groups with political goals, targeted against civilians, and intended to create fear among a larger population being the recurrent themes" (Knoke 2012: 232).

Secondly, David C. Rapoport in his 2002 article "The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11" stated that the labels *terrorism* and *terrorist* themselves kept evolving and who might get labelled as a terrorist nowadays might have not necessarily be given that label some 100 years ago: our perception of a terrorist threat keeps changing, too. He further claims that there have been so far four individual waves of terrorism in modern history and each of these waves differed in its tactics, actors, targets, and goals. The last stage which he called "Religious Wave" started, according to him in 1979[250], with religion, predominantly but not solely Islam[251], "supplying justifications and organizing principles for the New World to be established" (Rapoport 2002). Cockburn (2015: 100) further on states that 1979 was "the key date for the development of the jihadist movement as political players".

Therefore, based on the above mentioned, this paper shall deal with jihadi terrorism as it is understood by Western scholars and Western media and shall attempt to analyze the adaptation of jihadi terrorists to the new media and online communication environment, while emphasizing what primary and secondary threats it causes and how and where they are being projected. Since ISIS has proven to have mastered the transformation best so far, emphasis shall be laid on their activities. Secondarily, the paper points out that the threats stemming from this turn are not confined to communication only and definitely not only to the communication taking place in the cyberspace. It has influenced world media in general and it challenges, among others, our social values, notion of freedom of speech, and last but not least private businesses.

Lastly, it is important to highlight that this paper deals with ongoing processes and at the time of its publication, there might already be new information available. Moreover, there is not yet enough distance from which it would be possible to examine everything that has been happening; there might be both unintentional as well as intentional bias in the news coverage which I had to at certain points rely on, and some data is not yet available for security reasons or they are simply classified. These challenges, although having been taken into account, might have projected into the final analysis.

The Media Cradle

Taking 1979 as a milestone in the birth of jihadi terrorist movements, it is obviously hardly possible to talk about mass communication and especially not yet on a social media (SocMed) level. The communication channels were different – communication was offline at first, gradually turning online as soon as the possibility arose – and so were the targets of the jihadi media production. Formerly, it was mostly potential recruits who were the primary target of the external communication; making it to the headlines and breaking news had not yet been the priority (S&B 2015: 101). Additionally, internal communication within the group and also between the affiliated groups and factions was another reason for the early media usage. Some of the former offline methods kept on being used and are still used nowadays, such as planting dead drops, night letters

[250] Triggers that he quotes are the Iranian Revolution, Russian invasion of Afghanistan, and beginning of a new century according to the Muslim calendar (Rapoport 2002).

[251] It is necessary to bear in mind that Islam itself is not unified and is divided among various factions out of which only a certain part of worshippers turned into extremists and terrorists respectively.

and leaflets aimed at that part of population that still has no Internet access (Archetti 2015), using couriers by hands – especially favorite by late Bin Laden for its security benefits (S&B 2015: 58, Gardner 2013), or some more modern methods such as using disposable SIM cards and USB sticks (Gardner 2013). Generally, though, the communication environment has changed significantly since 1979.

It is fair to say that the jihadist groups have been skillful in adapting any innovation in the field of communication production ever since its rise in early 1980s. At first they produced propaganda films on videotapes, recorded audio lectures on cassettes, and they also published four-color magazines – those were part of localized propaganda that had been successfully escaping the Western media radar (S&B 2015:101). The magazines and newsletters could have been sent out via mail, handed out near and in mosques, or those who were interested in getting more information could go to the dedicated centers located world-wide; tapes and its content were discussed in person after communal screenings, usually accompanied by a cleric's speech (S&B 2015: 127-128); home gatherings, meetings with veterans, and lectures were commonplace, too (Hegghammer 2013: 8, 11).

However, the true birth of the new generation of violent jihad that would later "set the stage for a global Muslim revolution" dates back to 1988 when the elitist and tightly cohesive organization called "the base" appeared – in Arabic *al qaeda* (S&B 2015: 54-55). In the retrospective and in the light of 9/11, it might be surprising to see that for the first decade of its existence AQ was publicity-shy and only very few people in the US government actually knew its name (S&B 2015: 244). That was, though, part of a calculated security strategy and in general, the awareness of existence of these jihadist groups was low-scale, localized, dependent on local networks, and aimed at those who already knew of the existence of the group or had adequate affiliations to find out.

Though, printing the materials out and sending them via mail was costly and limiting, therefore, shifting to e-mails when the possibility arose was a next logical step. For comparison, a printed version of *Al Hussan* newsletter[252] cost monthly about $1,000, while sending out *Islam Report* via e-mail cost nothing; the same fate awaited video tapes and DVDs with the arrival of digitalized downloadable files and online file storages (S&B 2015: 128). However, DVDs persisted as an especially common medium for bragging about the jihadi deeds for a very long time: AQI[253] still used them at its early beginnings. They were actually so common that the US soldiers were trained to expect an attack if they noticed civilians with a video camera shooting on streets, as these shots would be later found on DVDs near the place of an attack (Sekulow 2014: 2). Nonetheless, as the 1990s came, the Internet and also the new communication methods started being used, both by the general public and the terrorist groups, which brought along not only a shift in their operation scope, but also new threats.

Transition Stage and the Early Internet Adoption

The early 1990s were still at least partially marked by more conventional communication and propaganda – the jihadists continued using print media, fax, TV, radio, face-to-face propaganda, press conferences, and journalist interviews (Bockstette 2008: 12, 17), along with private

[252] Published in Boston.
[253] Founded not long after the 2003 US Invasion to Iraq, later turned into ISIS.

gatherings, lectures, and religious sessions; AQ was running training camps for the indoctrination purposes, too (S&B 2015: 65). At the same time, though, the Internet started gaining popularity: dial-up bulletin boards and chat rooms on Yahoo! and AOL became more and more common, and so were communication softwares like vBulletin (S&B 2015: 128). However, as the communication scope changed, the target audience, the internal group arrangement, as well as the applied techniques started changing, too. Thanks to the Internet, it was fast, cheap, and easy to achieve a world-wide reach and it did not take long for the jihadists to embrace this opportunity. The goals of the groups became bolder, with bigger recruitment and awareness-spread ambitions to begin with. Yet, it is important to bear in mind that "optimal recruitment tactics vary in space and time" (Hegghammer 2013: 4) and what works for one group does not necessarily have to work for another, the example being a great difference between AQ's rather modest tactics compared to ISIS's media exhibitionism. Therefore it is always necessary to distinguish between individual groups and their tactics, though, there is an evidence of fairly common line of development across the jihadist groups.

Throughout the 1990s, Bin Laden often passed his messages to the Western world through giving interviews to Western journalists (Gendron 2007: 14). The boost in broadening the audience came by the end of 1998 with "shift in the primary strategic communication means due to technological advances and the rise of Al-Jazeera" (Wojcieszak 2007 in Bockstette 2008: 12): the Al-Jazeera network became not only a channel for jihadi message broadcasting, but also a source for other Western networks, should they meet desired criteria for the tape acquisition (Bockstette 2008: 12, Gendron 2007: 14). This is the defining point when the Western media "mutated from its role as a critical observer and reporter to a more and more active role as a conflict participant" (Golan 2006 in Bockstette 2008: 13), which slowly initiated the already mentioned infamous circle of demand and supply. This development was a part of AQ's calculated media strategy:

> "[…] Sheikh Usama knows that the media war is not less important than the military war against America. That's why al-Qaeda has many media wars. The Sheikh has made al-Qaeda's media strategy something that all TV stations look for. […]" (AQ's then spokesman in Gendron 2007: 14).

Even though the Internet usage was increasingly rising, its all-level tactical deployment was not yet the case with all of the jihadist groups.

9/11 and the Online Migration

It did not take long for the game changer to come: when 9/11 happened, it triggered all sorts of shifts, some of which were rather unexpected even for AQ itself. Firstly, it was the fact that AQ – the pioneer in the jihadist field – needed to leave the shadows of its own secrecy. It was shortly before 9/11 when they finally came out of its media closet: after bombing of the USS *Cole* and embassy bombings in 2000, they released a feature-length propaganda video which at last disclosed its key leaders and basic messages to the public – the spark arrived, though, it took some time for the fire to start (S&B 2015: 56). However, 9/11 was not only a turning point in the Western perception of jihadi terrorism, it was also a turning point for AQ itself as they were unprepared for being catapulted to the top spot of the news worldwide (S&B 2015: 56). They had to adopt to this new environment both in terms of their internal politics as well as in terms of their external behavior, but they were slow in doing so – it "took years for al Qaeda to begin fully exploiting the media-ready elements of September 11, although the response from Western news helped fill the

void" (S&B 2015: 57). The results of this "failure" are still visible if one compares today's AQ's tedious video lectures of variable quality to ISIS and their usage of often most up-to-date cinema and PR techniques.

Quoting Stern and Berger (2015: 64-65), "in the years since September 11, Al Qaeda had taken to the Internet, in part to offset its lagging communications from senior leadership, but mostly because everyone else was using the Internet". After the loss of Afghanistan as a physical base and with the spread of the network of affiliated groups under the AQ trademark in the early 2000s, there was no other way to survive than to decentralize and communicate over long-distances, with Internet easily surpassing treats of other traditional mass media (Bockstette 2008: 14). Nonetheless, the original AQ was still slower than some of the other groups to embrace SocMed – AQ preferred password-protected message boards and moderated discussion forums with rigid structure and clear hierarchy, which on the one hand stood for the crucial control mechanism (S&B 2015: 65), but on the other it created a notion of elitism and impenetrability.

As mentioned earlier, 9/11 was an important catalyst after which "jihadist terrorists [considerably] expanded their communication infrastructure and methods of communication"– Al Shabab[254] (AS) set up Islamic Media Publication Company in 2001 which was "essentially the main entity of the media production division of al-Qaeda", heavily relying on the Internet (both in Bockstette 2008: 13). The quality of material they were producing was increasing and after June 2006, all known speeches by the original AQ leaders carried *al-Shabab* logo (Bockstette 2008: 13). The visual communication was on its rise, with the media rhetoric being increasingly "built around the visual component"; usage of Skype, Email, and other VOIP programs became commonplace (Bockstette 2008: 13).

Very important step was adopting English, either spoken or in subtitles, which became a language of choice of the Internet. The first terrorist online magazine – *Sawt al-Dschihad* – saw the light in 2003 and many imitators were to follow, example being AQ's *Inspire,* published in English since 2010 (Bockstette 2008: 18). Dedicated websites started emerging, too. Though, they were often changing their online addresses, disappearing and reappearing, in order to protect their existence (Weimann 2004: 2). Online forums and blogs were more secure and less prone to be shut down in their beginnings. Besides being a communication platform, they also offered an access to file storages where films and other propaganda material was to be found and "since this material spread over numerous web servers located in different countries, blocking access to all copies of the files became virtually impossible" (Europol 2007: 25). Forums were also very convenient when the group wanted to watch over the content of the communication as they provided possibility to ban and block users who were spreading or engaging in undesirable activities. The huge disadvantage of forums was that the jihadists had to wait for people to find them. Nonetheless, after 9/11, "many terrorist sites [and forums] were targeted by intelligence and law enforcement [and thus] turn to social media followed" (Weimann 2014: 2). Forum usage, though, never disappeared fully.

[254] Somalian AQ affiliate.

Social Media Haven and Postmodern Terrorism

In 2010, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported following:

> "While social networking sites have recently become popular with radicals, forums have long been used by terrorists to exchange ideas, and spread ideological, tactical and operational information among a sympathetic audience."

Since then, SocMed kept rising in popularity as they provided a two-way communication and they also differed from the traditional media in their "interactivity, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence"; their user-friendly, free, reliable, and hierarchy-less environment helped in creation of online communities where the terrorists can "virtually knock on the doors" of their recruitees (Weimann 2014: 2-3). Being increasingly aware of the security risks and having taken a lesson from the post 9/11 forum shut-downs, the jihadists learned to access the SocMed via proxy and with fake accounts and fake e-mail addresses (Weimann 2014: 4). Last but not least – the Al-Battar Media Battalion – a group devoted to online dissemination of jihadist propaganda, was established in July 2013 (Weimann 2014: 4). Terrorism finally fully started turning viral and entered its postmodern communication phase.

Looking at the SocMeds specifically, as of August 2015, Facebook (FB)[255] is the largest online social network with 900,000,000 estimated unique monthly visitors (Anonymous 2015d) and almost 1,500 million users as of 2nd quarter of 2015 (Anonymous 2015b). Twitter (TW)[256] follows with 310,000,000 estimated unique monthly visitors (Anonymous 2015d) and almost 304 million monthly active users as of 2nd quarter of 2015 (Anonymous 2015c). Other favorite jihadist sites – LinkedIn (3rd), Pinterest (4th), Tumblr (6th), Instagram (7th), and Flickr (9th) – all follow in the top 10 of the social networks (Anonymous 2015d). YouTube[257] has over one billion users and the number of hours people spend on watching YT material is 50% higher each month year on year (YouTube Statistics 2015). These numbers clearly show how lucrative the SocMed are for the jihadist users: they are "a global town square for the digital age" (Kjuka 2013).

It was FB that started the large-scale terrorist SocMed avalanche: it became the first SocMed gateway to cyberjihad and with the "Facebook Invasion," it initiated a pattern later on repeated with TW or YT (DHS 2010). DHS (2010) defines the various terrorist uses of FB which created a template for other SocMed sites later on:

" • As a **way to share** operational and tactical information, such as bomb recipes, AK-47 maintenance and use, tactical shooting, etc.

• As **a gateway to extremist sites and other online radical content** by linking on

Facebook group pages and in discussion forums.

• **As a media outlet** for terrorist propaganda and extremist ideological messaging.

• As a **wealth of information** for remote reconnaissance for targeting purposes."

FB could thus target and connect less experienced jihadists and link them to the secret forums that "primarily attract already hard-core jihad sympathizers" (Weimann 2014: 6-7). More recently, TW

[255] Launched in 2004.
[256] Launched in 2006.
[257] Established in 2005.

has immerged as jihadists' Internet service of choice[258]: the jihadi use of TW "takes advantage of a recent trend in news coverage that often sacrifices validation and in-depth analysis for the sake of almost real-time coverage"; they also used it as the first SocMed to publicly claim a responsibility for a terrorist operation on[259](Weimann 2014: 8). Twitter has become very popular due to its rigorous resistance to get under external control and maintaining a strict free speech approach, having had very little policy related to terrorism for a longer time compared to other SocMed (Kjuka 2013). Their "who to follow" recommendation also made it much easier to find affiliated jihadist pages (S&B 2015: 134). Further on, YT is said to have been becoming an alternative to jihadi TV (Weimann 2014: 11), providing possibilities to globally share jihadi visuals which are psychologically strong and therefore amplifying political impact and attracting broader audience (Cockburn 2015: 128). Similarly as with jihadi versions of TW (Twishort, TwitMail), versions of YT emerged too – AqsaTube, PaluTube, TubeZik (all run by Hamas) (Weiman 2014: 9, 12). Nonetheless, SocMed are not always the final destination, as the Internet provides several other possibilities for the message spread: online gaming is yet another encrypted and password protected haven and increasingly popular GIFs can carry encoded messages, too (Gerdner 2013).

Though, SocMed also have their disadvantages: they helped to point to the internal struggles in some of the jihadi groups, as the dissatisfied members were provided with arena where they could freely share their grievances in, with no forum moderator to silence them. Example being Omar Hamami, Syrian-Irish-American from Alabama, who started unprecedented Twitter war in March 2012 over his dispute with AS – although the internal fights were nothing new across the jihadist spectrum, fighting in public with the whole world watching was and Hamami became an important catalyst in this transition, starting a new paradigm of a SocMed feedback loop that got even more significant with the rise of ISIS (S&B 2015: 64, 67). However, it did not take long and governments and other law enforcement agencies started targeting jihadists on SocMed, initiating the "whac-a-mole[260]" game, winner of which is yet to be seen.

ISIS, the Master Game-Changer

Not only is ISIS probably the most heard-of jihadi group nowadays, it also became a master of the digital and SocMed environment adaptation. Due to its emergence when SocMed usage had already been a commonplace, they knew how important role they play; however, it was not until 2/2014 when their massive SocMed "campaign for hearts and minds" fully started (S&B 2015: 69). Even before the group became ISIS as it is known today, they "experimented with the idea of trying to launch viral content from the forums" (S&B 2015: 65). Afterwards, they properly virtually documented their military progress and they also launched several hashtag campaigns to support their cause, example being #caliphate of 3/2014, with the actual caliphate proclamation becoming a reality only weeks later (S&B 2015: 70, Cockburn 2015: 60). SocMed are ISIS's daily bread, with official announcements, messages by the members as well as individual fighters and sympathizers, and various audio-visual and textual material being disseminated there constantly. ISIS still uses traditional or at least semi-traditional methods, too, such as running training camps or publishing

[258] One of the first to set up a TW account was Taliban in 1/2011 (S&B 2015: 135)
[259] 2013 AS attack on Westgate Mall in Kenya.
[260] Game "where one takes a mallet to a seemingly unending set of furry rodents that pop up at random from holes in a big board. When one mole gets hit, another one quickly jumps out elsewhere on the board to take its place" (Peritz 2015).

an online magazine *Dabiq*. Additionally, they have been intensively applying advanced PR methods such as the feedback loop model, polling, narrowcasting, or focus-group testing, and their social media team has also been skillfully abusing the digital environment by using TW "bots"[261] to artificially boost their posts and messages. They launched their very own Twitter app *Dawn of Glad Tidings*[262] to share ISIS content more easily, they coordinated re-tweeting, or hacked trending hashtags such as during the 2014 World Cup, with everything being composed in articulate English to reach as wide audience as possible (S&B 2015: 70-72, 149-150, 155). By mid-2014, the ISIS propaganda machine was alive, sharply distinguishing itself from the falling-behind AQ Central (S&B 2015: 72).

ISIS is new not only because of its approach to PR and SocMed, technical skills (Cockburn 2015: 127), and unprecedentedly open use of ultraviolence; it also came up with rhetorics offering civil society with everything it stands for which is to be available to *all* its "citizens". The civil society – something AQ never managed to accomplish – was to be achieved through holly battle which started a popular revolution (S&B 2015: 73-74). The propaganda machine – ever since 5/2014 translated also into many other languages thanks to Al Hayat Media Center – aims at recruiting foreign fighters who could and *should* fight for the newly-established caliphate. These come in abundant numbers from almost all over the world, creating a new security challenge upon their return to their homelands. Their SocMed usage is creating a never-ending stream of advertisement for ISIS, further on supported thanks to the "celebrity" fighters like Jihadi John (S&B 2015: 77, 84). Recruitment and ISIS-related information is to be found all over the web, even on niche SocMed like Ask.fm where users can openly ask for example how to become an ISIS fighter (S&B 2015: 84) – no more hiding, ISIS is becoming blatantly open.

It is important to understand, though, that what ISIS is doing cannot be interpreted and understood solely within the context of the media. SocMed, PR, and communication indeed are an integral part of the propaganda pursuit, but it is also understanding of psychology, language, and theater that makes ISIS so effective. They know they need to contextualize and geography-base the messages to be able to recruit as broad spectrum of people as possible and that the messages need to cover different needs of and appeals for males, females, and children. Women's engagement in extremist movements has been overlooked over a long time period (Koppell 2015) and ISIS took its chance: jihadi brides are a popular SocMed as well as real-life phenomenon, there are female recruiters working online (S&B 2015: 89); moreover women generally have significant impact in their communities which can potentially be used for recruiting.

Theatrical aspects play huge role too – starting with the spectacular four-part series *The Clanging of the Swords* (6/2012-5/2014) with every episode becoming more and more Hollywood-like and brutal (S&B: 106-111), the cinematic methods, although still fluctuating in quality, became unprecedented. The gruesome ISIS video trademark – the beheadings – are a symbolic meta-messages, where the actual killing becomes a secondary matter and "without the possibility of videotaping the event, there would be no motive in the first place to execute someone in such a manner" (Kaplan 2014). That having been said, it appears that these overly-theatrical beheading docu-dramas are staged for the camera: they are then uploaded online for us to watch as the

[261] "Scraps of computer code … usually designed to perform a repetitive task" (S&B 2015: 150).
[262] It got suspended shortly before the caliphate proclamation (S&B 2015: 150).

terrorists know people cannot resist watching them (Humphreys 2014). The audio-visual effect is what matters, hence the carefully selected music, setting, angles, and victims – ironically enough, the first victims were journalists. All in all, in their usage of the Internet and modern communication methods, ISIS is "well ahead of most political movements in the world" (Cockburn 2015: 127).

Whac-a-Mole: Troubles in the Online Paradise

Increasing popularity of SocMed among the jihadists could not pass unnoticed by governments and the intelligence community. Limiting jihadi online existence has already been an issue during the "forums age", however, SocMed, once again, drove the entire matter to a whole new level and public pressure started mounting. There has been an increasing pressure on FB, TW, and YT to filter content of their sites which is, however, in contradiction with the general idea of Internet being an uncensored zone. Any governmental limitation of privately held companies additionally introduces a clash between security and invasion of privacy. Though, FB started actively monitoring and terminating violent jihadists in 2009 (S&B 2015: 136), YT introduced flagging a terrorist content, meaning that any video would be removed if the company were to find a video depicting "gratuitous violence, advocated violence, or used hate speech"; TW has been resisting for much longer based on the argument of free speech and has been facing transparency issues since (S&B 2015: 130, 143, 164, Weimann 2014: 13). Nonetheless, getting rid of jihadists on SocMed is far from an easy task and two similes have been often quoted in this context: "whac-a-mole" game and the legend of Hydra – "cut one head off and two more grow to take its place" (CIA 1985 in S&B 2015: 138), meaning that taking down one account will not stop it from re-emerging elsewhere and it will even less likely stop the whole organization from existing online.

It is not possible to perceive this matter as a one-sided story though: private companies like YT or FB need to protect their business interest and integrity through observing privacy protection. By succumbing to the governmental pressure to limit or provide information for intelligence purposes, they not only threaten their direct profit and market standing, but they also allow terrorists to interfere in yet another sphere (S&B 2015: 139). Even though it was not exactly in their primary interest, the SocMed companies started somewhat reluctantly applying the requested measures, such as blocking and taking down the accounts, often repeatedly, costing the terrorists time, effort, losing the "archived" information, number of followers, and the carefully-built network, as the sites and accounts could not fully rejuvenate so flexibly; after some time and many take-downs, some of the pages stopped appearing at last (S&B 2015: 144-145). The mole stayed put until ISIS emerged.

Though, closing the accounts down is not always a priority either, as effective infiltration or surveillance can produce a great amount of intelligence useful for counter-terrorist measures. However, the West suffered a great setback after the Snowden NSA leaks which exposed the extent and targets of their surveillance, result of which being that "members of virtually every terrorist group, including core Al Qaeda, are attempting to change how they communicate […]" (Anonymous 2013). They once again started turning to the "old-school" methods like the password-protected forums where they shared what pages to avoid and how to survive on SocMed, setting up fake e-mail accounts, using multiple and disposable SIM cards, using encryption, code words, veil speech, writing in Arabic or less common languages, rotating computers, using internet

cafés in order to avoid IP tracking, or using "dead letter boxes"[263] (Bogart 2013 and Anonymous 2013). Turning to the Dark Web (Osborne 2015) and usage of privacy-protection systems like TOR became a commonplace, throwing the intelligence workers often back at the beginning. Last but not least, messaging services like WhatsApp and iMessage are posing a threat, too, as communication through them is automatically cyphered and thus intelligence agencies cannot read them without the owners releasing the code which is once again opening the question of security vs. privacy (Václavíková 2015). All in all, terrorists became aware that leaving an electronic footprint might incriminate them and so the mole started using other holes.

Advent of the New Threat(s)

Terrorism in the 21st century is openly brutal, however, the number of people who die yearly in terrorist attacks is still smaller than for example a risk of dying in a car accident (Harari 2015). It is the effect of the media that blows public fear to extremes. One part of this are the original jihadi messages that are as accessible and as uncensored as never before, the second is the Western reporting that often values a "good atrocity story" that shocks hard, spreads fast, and sells well (Cockburn 2015: 120). Manipulated symbolism that is embedded in the original messages, the often oversimplified black and white narratives, and melodramatic visual attractiveness of instant war reporting which is, however, frequently missing context and requires interpretation, are dangerous (Cockburn 2015: 114-115). So is the fast reporting due to immediate accessibility of news but little time to properly verify it as other media might be faster in their reporting and thus steal the thunder. This all is playing into terrorists' hands.

This connects well with the psychological threats stemming from the jihadi tactics: instillation of fear in Western society, self-radicalization and subsequent emergence of lone wolfs in the West (Weimann 2014: 1, 14), radicalized foreign fighters going to fight for ISIS, and also reduction of the recruitees' capacity to feel and empathize based on an ongoing exposure to horrors resulting in production of even more brutal extremists. However, it would be simplistic to broadly accuse SocMed for causing this – technology is a tool for spreading, but it always "depends on an individual's unique position within a configuration of relationships at any given time" (Archetti 2015) whether they will succumb to the recruiters' pressure and join or if it produces the exact opposite. After all, "four decades of psychological research on who becomes a terrorist and why hasn't yet produced any profile" (Horgan in S&B 2015: 81).

Linguistically speaking, the jihadists quickly understood the global impact of English and started using it broadly. With the rise of ISIS, the linguistic base was taken one step further and the messages started being translated into other languages, too. Further on, the official ISIS announcements are very often using the inclusive "we" when speaking about goals and achievements of ISIS, which makes the viewers, should they be sympathetic with the conveyed message, feel as being an integral part of what is happening. This is especially important for understanding the recruitment impact on psychologically weaker, vulnerable, or otherwise socially excluded individuals, as the sense of belonging may make them sympathize or make them join the group. The narrative of ISIS is inherently victorious, greatly overusing words such as "victory",

[263] One of AQ's favorite techniques: using shared e-mail account where messages would be saved as drafts and read by multiple people after logging in – the message would never get sent and will thus pass as unregistered (Bogart 2013).

"triumph", and "power" (S&B 2015: 107, 117), creating a notion of strong and victorious state through "propaganda of the winner" (Winter in Anonymous 2015a).

Conclusion

It is evident that a significant shift has been made in the way the jihadists reach out to their audience. The shift has also been made in the way the audience responds to the messages as well as in the way how the Western media treat the whole shift. The terrorist groups have also proven great adaptability to changes in communication methods, however, they never abandoned the old-school methods altogether. With changes in communication came also a change of reach which further on triggered changes in the target selection, internal changes within the groups themselves, and changes in propaganda tactics. It appears that democracies are more "susceptible to provocation than nondemocracies" (Kydd and Walter 2006: 71) due to their protection of free speech. The relationship between terrorists and media appears to be symbiotic: "the perpetrators would have far less impact without media publicity and the media can hardly be expected to resist reporting" (Kartz & Liebes 2007 in Bockstette 2008: 16). Social media opened an arena of unprecented scope and possibilities, but cannot be blamed in full for all what is happening. ISIS currently represents a master of the media adaptation and adoption. This whole shift and system of changes subsequently caused threats in other spheres that need to be addressed, too.

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