CREST

After Islamic State

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FROM THE EDITOR

The Islamic State group's self-declaration of statehood was unprecedented in the history of Islamist terror groups. The appearance at least of a functioning territory, ruled under extreme salafi-jihadist interpretations of Islam, appealed to some for a wide variety of reasons.

Some came for the excitement of warfare in the defence of the fledgling State. Some came to fulfil the religious dream of living in a caliphate. Some found themselves within its borders through no fault of their own. All this is now changing. The Islamic State's territory is in decline. Squeezed on all sides, it is facing a future where it can no longer lay claim to statehood.

It would be naïve to assume that the decline of Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria mean it will no longer play a significantly disruptive role in the region. But what impact will it have on outlying affiliates such as in Libya and Yemen? How will it affect the role of other countries, such as Iran, or the ideological confidence of its believers? In this issue of *CREST Security Review* we ask leading scholars from around the globe to consider perspectives on the question, 'what happens after IS?'

> **The problem of Islamist violence will not decline with IS; many of the underlying issues that contributed to its rise will still exist**

One of the big questions concerns returning foreign fighters. Our guest editor for this issue, Cerwyn Moore, looks at the different roles transnational activists played in past conflicts, and the effect of policies dealing with their return (page 24). John Horgan (page 14) addresses the plight of children forced to fight for IS, and what the future holds for these young lives.

Turning to al-Qaeda, Donald Holbrook (page 10) suggests that rumours of their demise have been greatly exaggerated, and considers how they might benefit from IS's misfortune. Elisabeth Kendall focuses on the fortunes of al-Qaeda and IS in Yemen, and observes that this war-torn country could provide the ideal location for retreating IS fighters (page 4).

Other regionally-focused analyses of what could happen following the loss of IS's territory are provided by George Joffé (Tunisia, page 8), Joas Wagemakers (Jordan, page 6), Michael Axworthy (Iran, page 7) and Wolfram Lacher (Libya, page 9). A key point to come out of these accounts is that the problem of Islamist violence will not decline with IS; many of the underlying issues that contributed to its rise will still exist. Weak states, opportunist political collaboration with extreme Islamist ideologies, broad disaffection with elite and Western narratives, and many other problems will continue to be an issue. And they will continue to enable an environment in which the violent identity politics of extremist Islamism will thrive.

A slightly more upbeat analysis comes from Christopher McDowell, who focuses on post-conflict Sri Lanka (page 26). His work reveals a positive effect of migration – in this case how the Tamil diaspora has helped avoid a return to civil war. In this issue, and away from our focus on IS, we also hear from Joe Uscinski (page 28), who tells us that conspiracy theories are for losers and Paul Taylor, who shows us what makes a group successful but also how we might help it fail (page 30).

As always, I love to hear your feedback on *CSR* and your suggestions on what we should cover in the future. Email me at m.d.francis@lancaster.ac.uk.

Matthew Francis
Editor, *CSR*

REGIONAL GUIDES TO LIFE AFTER ISLAMIC STATE

ELISABETH KENDALL

YEMEN

Although several pockets of Islamic State (IS) operate within Yemen, it is not currently the dominant group in any region of the war-torn country, even within militant jihadist circles. the most active branches of IS in Yemen over recent months have been Wilayat Aden-Abyan and Wilayat al-Bayda, but even here it is unclear the extent to which IS atrocities are stoked or even designed by political opponents of President Hadi's government to exacerbate discord. While IS in Yemen has carried out mass casualty attacks that have grabbed the headlines, it is al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) that has the upper hand in Yemen in terms of numbers, influence and appeal.

Soon after the Saudi-led coalition began to launch air strikes on Yemen in March 2015, AQAP was able to seize and hold vast swathes of territory in the South and East of the country. This lasted for almost a year until April 2016, when UAE Special Forces moved in.

However, it would be a mistake to imagine that AQAP has been defeated. During 2015, as Yemen's Houthi rebels advanced and coalition bombs rained down on the West side of Yemen, AQAP was able to position its de facto 'state' as a haven of stability in the East.

Operating out of the port city of Mukalla, it amassed significant financial resources and forged alliances with local militias. It implemented community development projects to shore up local support and adapted its global jihadist narratives to chime with local concerns.

Whilst recent drone strikes and military operations have severely dented AQAP's ability to operate openly, the kind of political and cultural capital it built up does not just melt away.

Nor can the ideas that underpin its appeal be bombed into oblivion. Quite the reverse: the ongoing conflict in Yemen means that the appeal of militant Islamist extremist groups like AQAP and, to a lesser extent IS, is likely to increase.

Although the current conflict began as a domestic battle for territory, power and resources, the involvement of Sunni Saudi Arabia (on the side of President Hadi) and Iran (providing some support to the Houthi rebels, most of whom adhere to an offshoot of Shi'ism) fuels the sectarian narratives promoted by militant jihad.

If one adds to this poisonous climate the rugged topography of Yemen, the security vacuum left by an absentee government residing in Riyadh, the weakening of tribal social glue as internally displaced people head East, rampant smuggling networks buoyed by the war economy and a vast and porous coastline, what is the result? An ideal sanctuary for mujahidin fleeing the heartlands of IS in Syria and Iraq.

Although the number of Yemeni mujahidin returning from Syria and Iraq is unlikely to be high – after all, from 2015 they had their own battlefront and did not need to travel to the Islamic State to wage jihad – the worry is that those who do return will bring their comrades with them. This could lead to several potential alternative scenarios, three of which are as follows.

IS ECLIPSES AQAP

First, if the number of IS mujahidin seeking sanctuary in Yemen turns out to be high, we could see IS start to rebuild in Yemen with the help of its existing local branches and by using the tribal contacts of returning Yemeni mujahidin, such that it ultimately eclipses AQAP.

IS CONFRONTS AQAP

Second, as IS numbers increase in Yemen, this could provoke more direct rivalry and confrontation between IS and AQAP. AQAP has been critical of IS's premature announcement of a caliphate, its heavy handed governance and its disregard for civilian casualties. Likewise, IS was highly critical of AQAP's weak implementation of Shari'a law in Mukalla and the surrounding areas under its control until late April 2016.

IS FIGHTERS JOIN AQAP

We could see IS mujahidin start to integrate with AQAP, swelling its numbers and influence and possibly pushing it to become even more extreme. Also, if AQAP's leading ideologues – who tend to take a more gradualist approach than IS – continue to be picked off successfully by drone strikes, that could drive its rank and file to adopt the more radical brand of militant jihad espoused by IS.

Which of these alternatives is most likely?

As for scenario one, given AQAP's head-start in Yemen and the strong roots it has put down, it would be hard for IS point-blank to eclipse it.

Regarding scenario two, the animosity required to generate direct in-fighting among Yemen's militant jihadist groups would likely be less strong than the solidarity found in battling adversity and the common goal of waging war against perceived Shi'ites (Houthi rebels) and the West. Hence, scenario three is perhaps the most likely.

As Yemen's militant jihadists come under increasing military pressure from US air strikes, UAE-supported ground troops and Special Forces, they may increasingly bury their differences and join ranks such that we see the two groups start to blend.

Whatever the case, one thing is certain. The longer the current war is allowed to drag on and regional voices and identities in Yemen remain unheeded, the more fertile the breeding ground for militant jihad and the greater the challenge to counter-terrorism efforts.

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JOAS WAGEMAKERS

JORDAN

MICHAEL AXWORTHY

IRAN

The fall of Islamic State (IS) would be a success for Iran. It would remove a dangerous enemy close to Iran's borders. It would also strengthen Shi'a allies in Iraq and help Syria as well as being one in the eye for regional rival, Saudi Arabia. But it would not be an opportunity to push for regional hegemony.

IF THE ISLAMIC STATE (IS) IS DEFEATED AS A TERRITORIAL ENTITY, THE MAIN ASPECT THAT SETS IT APART FROM AL-QAEDA – ITS CLAIM TO BE A STATE WITH ACTUAL TERRITORY – WILL BE GONE. THIS MEANS IS WILL NO LONGER BE ABLE TO INVITE MUSLIMS TO JOIN ITS PROJECT IN SYRIA OR IRAQ, BUT WILL BE FORCED TO RELY ON TERRORIST ATTACKS AROUND THE WORLD.

This shift in IS's policies can already be seen, but is likely to increase as the organisation loses more territory. From that point on, several scenarios are possible.

One scenario is that IS continues to operate as an alternative to al-Qaeda, with its local branches in countries such as Libya and Nigeria. Given that both organisations will have roughly the same goals, they are likely to merge. Another scenario is that IS will dwindle and al-Qaeda will rise again. Still another option is that they will continue to be rivals, with IS continuing to try to set up a state. Any of these scenarios, and potentially others, are possible.

Given the tensions between al-Qaeda and IS and the inhibitions that some IS-supporters are likely to have had about IS's increasingly violent policies, any future efforts to set up an Islamic state are likely to be slightly different. There is a strong sentiment among many Jihadi-Salafi scholars and leaders that an Islamic state is a very good thing in principle, but that it should not be executed the way IS did it.

This analysis of the situation may result in more careful ways of going about establishing an Islamic state the next time an opportunity arises. In other words: for Jihadi-Salafi critics of IS, the collapse of the latter has the potential to be a major 'I told you so' moment.

In Jordan, there is the additional difficulty of intra-Jihadi-Salafi rivalry. The two main Jihadi-Salafi scholars in the country (and probably in the world) – Abu Qatada al-Filastini and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi – have been strongly against IS from the beginning.

A large number of Jihadi-Salafi activists, however, disagree with them and still have fresh memories of the rivalry between their local hero – Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi – and al-Maqdisi. While they see the former as a brave fighter who was willing to walk the talk, the latter is seen by them as an armchair jihadi who, when push came to shove, was not willing to support the jihad in Iraq.

Moreover, al-Maqdisi often stressed the need to set up an Islamic state, rather than just engaging in attacks without lasting results. When IS came along, it seemed that a sustained effort to do what al-Maqdisi had always wanted – setting up an Islamic state – was finally being made, yet al-Maqdisi again refused to support it because he saw IS as the epitome of the "extremist" policies that he had always rejected.

To some supporters of al-Zarqawi, this was proof that al-Maqdisi was hypocritical and not supportive of Jihadi-Salafism. To al-Maqdisi himself, however, the fall of IS is likely to be seen as proof that he was right all along. Due to the extent of support for both positions, neither of these narratives is going to become entirely dominant in Jordan, with both co-existing uneasily for some years to come.

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Dr Wagemakers' research, at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, concentrates on Salafi ideology and groups, especially in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian territories.

What one thinks about the motivation and stance of the Iranian regime affects perceptions of how it will react to the collapse of IS. The Iranian regime is often characterised as a hegemonic, expansionist power that supposedly uses Shi'a communities elsewhere in the region as an instrument for its own ends.

This characterisation is not plausible for two good reasons. First, Iran is not set up as a militarist or expansionist state. Iranian defence spending was 2.3% of GDP in 2012 according to the Swedish International Peace Research Institute – a typical yearly figure over the last decade or more. This is comparable with the UK – although the Iranian figure could be adjusted up by as much as .75% to include spending on the Revolutionary Guards. Saudi Arabia spending in the same year was 7.7% (10.4% in 2014), Israel 5.7%, United Arab Emirates 4.8%. Outside of the region, the figure for the US was 4.2% (for the Soviet Union in the 1980s – a truly militaristic state with which Iran is sometimes compared - 15-17%).

Second, if Iran were to seek to increase and exploit sectarian tensions for its own interests in an all-out intra-Muslim conflagration, Shi'as and Iran would lose — Shi'as are only 12-15% of Muslims worldwide.

The Iranian regime, like most others, wants (in priority order):
1 To secure its own rule within Iran.
2 To protect Iranian national security.
3 To protect Iranian and (where feasible) Shi'a interests outside Iran.

FOR SHI'A MUSLIMS ... DEFEAT OF IS WILL ALSO BE A RELIEF. BUT THEY WILL BE ANXIOUS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Iran's defence and security posture is essentially defensive, but doesn't always sound defensive. This is primarily down to the heritage of revolution and revolutionary rhetoric, especially under the former president Ahmadinejad. It is also due to Iran's stance toward Israel.

Central to Iranian thinking (and any sound understanding of Iran's position now) is the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). Iran was invaded at a vulnerable moment, and it had few allies (only Syria, and Israel to some extent).

By the end of the war Iran was isolated, and felt it was facing a global alliance of overt and covert enemies. The lesson drawn by Iranians was that Iran could defend itself and uphold self-determination (important for Iranians given a long previous history of invasion and humiliation) but only from its own resources. It could not, and cannot trust external powers to help, or even to keep their word.

A further lesson from the Iran-Iraq war is relevant. In 1982, having regained the territory lost to Iraq at the beginning of the war, the Iranians had a choice – whether to accept a ceasefire, or to continue the war and remove the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein from power.

After much debate, they chose the latter (encouraged by over-enthusiastic Revolutionary Guard officers). However, they overreached themselves, endured six more years of ultimately fruitless warfare with hundreds of thousands killed and more disabled. They were forced ultimately to accept a ceasefire on similar terms to that available in 1982.

Most Iranians, regime supporters or not, now accept that the decision to continue the war in 1982 was a mistake. That lesson of the perils of overreach and the wisdom of a more defensive posture will be uppermost in the minds of the regime leadership as they consider Iraq after IS.

For Shi'a Muslims more widely in the region, defeat of IS will also be a relief. But they will be anxious about what happens next. They will be concerned as to whether the defeat of IS will deepen the bitterness of Sunnis in Iraq that made possible the rise of IS in the first place.

The removal of IS will not remove the root causes of the rise of groups like al-Qaeda, Taliban, and IS in the region, and there is a risk that a new version of al-Qaeda or IS will bubble up.

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GEORGE JOFFÉ

TUNISIA

Tunisia is the North African state with the largest absolute and proportional representation of its nationals within the ranks of the Islamic State (IS). There are, it is claimed, some 7,000 Tunisians enrolled in the movement, compared with an estimated 1,500 Moroccans and between 100 to 200 Algerians.

Many of the Tunisian recruits are located in Libya, despite the fact that Islamic State has been forced out of its stronghold in Sirte. Indeed, Libya is the ideal base, given its political chaos and the wide availability of arms from the stockpiles of the Qadhafi regime, freed up by the Libyan revolution in 2011. IS fighters have, as a result, been able to infiltrate Tunisia and launch the Ben Gardane (March 2016), Sousse (July 2015) and Bardo Museum (March 2015) attacks, as well as a devastating attack on the presidential guard in Tunis in December 2015.

Islamic State, however, is not the only extremist Salafi-jihadi actor in Tunisia. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib (AQIM) has been able to infiltrate the central portion of the Algerian-Tunisian border around Djebal Chaamba where it has been active for the past four years.

Another movement, based in Libya – Ansar al-Shari'a – has also infiltrated the country and probably been responsible for the assassination of at least two leading left-wing Tunisian politicians. It has, on occasion, collaborated with Islamic State, particularly in the training camp at Sabratha which was destroyed by the Americans in late 2015

In addition, a dissident faction of AQIM has been active along the Libyan border with Tunisia from where it launched an assault of a major gas facility at Tiguentourin that killed 39 foreign hostages.

It is, therefore, not clear that the disappearance of IS will mean the disappearance of violent extremism from Tunisia. An alternative vehicle for violent hostility exists and, despite the doctrinal disputes, the overriding objectives of IS,

Ansar al-Shari'a, and AQIM are similar. Moreover, violent extremist protest will persist because the conditions that generated it – poverty, unemployment, lack of political and cultural authenticity of existing regimes – will persist too.

Nor has a driver for the emergence of either IS or AQIM been the failure of a 'religious state infrastructure'. Both movements emerged in states that couldn't accommodate or supress a challenge to their autocracy. Increased religion in the area emerged not because of greater religiosity but because it provided a culturally authentic rallying cry against the rhetoric of the state.

The quest for social and cultural authenticity has become more important as a driver for change than the more mundane but nonetheless real economic and security failures of the state itself.

This dynamic is aided by the tolerance previous regimes have shown for Salafism as an expression of the role of religion within social order. Its political role emerged only because of the parallel growth of Salafi-jihadism as an extremist version of the confrontation between state and social movement in the conquest for control of the state itself.

It is notable, too, that only Libya – an absolute autocracy – experienced a revolution, the implications of which are still unknown. By contrast, Tunisia evolved into democratic transition as a result of its previous status as a liberalised autocracy, as Algeria and Morocco had done so before.

The key to truly marginalising such movements is to ensure that moderate alternatives reflecting Islamic principle, such as the Ennahda movement, succeed.

And that requires such movements to understand and play the political participatory game with appropriate external support whilst recognising that they cannot co-opt or cooperate with their extremist correlates.

That is a lesson that Ennahda in Tunisia and the Justice and Development Party in Morocco have already learned but their companion parties in Libya and Egypt have yet to realise.

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WOLFRAM LACHER

LIBYA

During 2016, Islamic State (IS) was obliterated as a territorial force in Libya. IS fighters have scattered in small groups in remote desert areas, or gone underground as small cells in cities. They are unlikely to again attempt to openly establish control over cities or territory, since this will expose them to US or French airstrikes. They will also be unable to attract the large numbers of foreign fighters that had joined IS in its Libyan strongholds over 2015.

IS may continue to operate as a non-territorial force in Libya, both in remote areas and in cities. Foreign fighters dispersed from former Libyan IS strongholds may move into neighbouring countries, including their countries of origin – such as Tunisia, Niger or Sudan.

But in none of these countries will they find the environment that enabled IS to establish territorial control, as they did in Syria, Iraq and Libya during 2014-15.

IS elements will therefore revert to a more conventional existence as jihadist groups. Whether they do so under the IS label or as al-Qaeda affiliates is largely irrelevant.

The question, then, should be what the demise of IS as a territorial force and the change in wider conflict dynamics mean for Libya's jihadist movement more generally. Jihadism is established in Libya, and deeply implanted in the social fabric of specific cities.

Libyan IS affiliates were but the latest manifestation of Libyan jihadism, one born out of a particular set of

circumstances that do not exist anymore – IS expansion in Syria and Iraq; free movement between Libya and Syria via Libyan airports and Turkey; political and territorial divisions in Libya that opened up space for IS.

All the conditions are there for Libya's jihadist movements to remain virulently active after the demise of the caliphate.

The jihadist subculture that has developed in certain Libyan cities will sustain the flow of recruits to jihadist groups for a long time to come. In the best-case scenario, the state will remain weak; it could plausibly also remain absent from large swathes of the country.

Most importantly, ongoing conflicts continue to create opportunities for jihadist mobilisation, and lead political forces to strike tactical alliances with jihadists.

Across the country, societal tolerance for jihadist movements has drastically receded as a result of the confrontations with IS in Benghazi, Sirte and elsewhere.

This represents a significant change from the situation prevailing in 2012 and 2013, when the group Ansar al-Shari'a operated openly amid local society.

But the pendulum is now swinging towards the other extreme. An increasing range of political and military forces are adopting the discourse promoted by Egypt's al-Sisi and his Libyan acolyte General Khalifa Haftar.

This discourse fails to differentiate among strands of political Islam. In Benghazi, this approach led to a convergence of interests between non-ideological groups, Ansar al-Shari'a and IS. If it is applied to western Libya, it will push many Islamists there closer to jihadists. A US shift towards dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation would contribute to such a trend.

The most acute of current dangers is the eruption of open conflict in Western Libya as Haftar and his allies seek to advance in the region. A war in the greater Tripoli area would likely see jihadists there emerge as a leading force in an anti-Haftar coalition, much as it happened in Benghazi.

In Tripoli, such a war would likely last even longer and be much more destructive. It would provide a jihadist recruitment ground and fighting arena for many years to come. But a similar danger lurks in the potential eruption of conflict in south-western Libya as a result of an expansion of forces allied with Haftar.

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Wolfram Lacher is a researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin.

Map labels:
TUNIS
TUNISIA
NEFTA
MAYMAYA
ZARZIS
TATAOUINE
TRIPOLI
LEPTIS MAGNA
CYRENE
TOBROUK
NALUT
SIRTE
GHADAMES
HUM
EL BREGA
MARADAH
LIBYA

JOHN HORGAN

THE LOST BOYS

THE **SIX STAGES** OF CHILD SOCIALISATION TO THE ISLAMIC STATE

STAGE 1
SEDUCTION
Through propaganda and 'outreach activities' children are seduced by the allure of involvement.

STAGE 2
SCHOOLING
Children have direct exposure to IS personnel for religious and educational indoctrination.

STAGE 3
SELECTION
IS recruiters select some students for 'Cubs' training where they are isolated from friends and family for 1–2 months.

STAGE 4
SUBJUGATION
Turned into disciplined soldiers through intensive training including physical and psychological brutalisation.

STAGE 5
SPECIALISATION
Fostering expertise and exposure to specialised roles (e.g.. sniper, journalist, suicide bomber).

STAGE 6
STATIONING
Role assignment and deployment including recruiting additional members.

Children are routinely targeted in conflict, both by state and non-state actors alike.

By 2013, over 11,000 children were reported killed in the Syrian crisis. Equally disturbing has been the other side of such victimisation. Children are just as likely to be targeted for mobilisation into militant activity. The phenomenon of 'child soldiers' is far from new, but it's an issue rarely considered in the context of terrorist conflict. However, in Syria and Iraq all armed groups, even groups supported by western governments, employ children in some capacity.

The scale of child mobilisation into such groups is difficult to gauge. Nobody really knows how many children have been trained by the Islamic State. A conservative estimate would be that somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 children graduated from Islamic State (IS) training between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2016. That's more than two children a day.

THE EXPERIENCE OF ISLAMIC STATE CHILD SOLDIERS

Children come to the Islamic State through at least five distinct pathways:

1   Accompanying parents, guardians or older siblings who travel to the Islamic State

2   Via local parents who willingly allow their children to become involved

3   Via local parents from whom the children are forcibly removed

4   Via local orphanages in areas where IS has assumed de-facto social control and

5   Children who run away either alone, or with close friends, from local areas or even from abroad.

The result is what appears to be an institutionalised approach to socialising children into IS. The process turns them from passive bystanders into fully-fledged militants in six stages. Initially, children are seduced by the allure of involvement. They consume propaganda or witness IS's 'outreach activities', where the movement's goal is to project a positive, service-providing and popular face.

Through schooling (under IS control) children have direct exposure to IS personnel for religious and educational indoctrination. This also marks an opportunity for selection, where IS recruiters choose some students for 'Cubs' training – 30 to 60-day training camps where they are isolated from friends and family.

A key quality of the child's experiences here is subjugation. They are brutalised, disciplined and turned into soldiers. Graduates will encounter specialisation in a particular role (e.g., sniper, journalist, suicide bomber) before stationing for duty.

We analysed thousands of propaganda items issued by the Islamic State, and second-hand accounts of adult and child former members. Given the limited nature of that data, any attempts to understand this process must be seen as exploratory.

What we have learnt, though, is that IS turns children into militants through a process of informal social learning. This confirms previous research on this process by the anthropologist Karsten Hundeide. Hundeide found, as in our IS data, that children are made to feel welcome, then adopt style and identity markers (e.g., language, uniform) of their new 'in-group'.

The child then slowly learns to redefine the past, in order to readily accept a set of new values. This helps the child 'understand' who the enemy is. Sacrifice and hardship (in this case through military training) are coupled with daily tests of loyalty and discipline. A final test of loyalty (e.g., raping, or executing a prisoner) affords the child the new status as a fully committed insider. This is gradual, systematic and more linear in nature than most accounts of adult involvement.

THE CHALLENGE OF REHABILITATION

The territorial decline of the Islamic State means there is an urgent need to develop solutions to the problems faced by these children. Based on our understanding of child soldiers in other conflicts, we can make some basic assumptions.

Most importantly, we need to understand child socialisation into the Islamic State as a type of victimisation. Our six-stage model captures how IS has mastered and institutionalised child abuse.

However, although accounts of children's experiences with the Islamic State naturally leads us to characterise them as passive victims, the reality is more complex, and equally unsettling.

From a psychological perspective, we will need to address the effects of indoctrination and of trauma. In previous research on former child militants in Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), children were found to have been explicitly taught how to 'hate the enemy'.

In the case of IS, young people have been subjected to a level of de-individuation and 'identity reshaping' so profound that it exceeds in focus and intensity what most adult recruits to IS experience.

Some IS children may be more overtly 'ideological' than others, in the sense of being able to articulate or parrot ideological content. Ideology remains very poorly understood in children and adults alike. Studies of adult terrorists typically view ideology in one of two ways: as a precursor to involvement in violent extremism (e.g., a stepping stone) or as a by-product of involvement (i.e., whereby a person becomes more ideological after being recruited).

After listening to accounts of child recruitment, it might seem logical to assume that children are more 'vulnerable' to ideological commitment. But though a child may parrot ideological content, that doesn't necessarily mean that they understand it. And in any event, that may not necessarily be the most important point; the more significant qualities of childhood trajectories into violent extremism are probably their social and psychological aspects.

Trauma will also be a key issue

IS children will have lost people close to them, seen dead and wounded bodies, killed or violently assaulted others, and faced death themselves. Such experiences have profound and long-lasting psychological impact.

Studies of former LTTE child militants show they exhibited an array of psychiatric conditions including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and severe psychosis. Sadly, the same will be true of many of those leaving IS.

Conflict-related symptoms persist in the longer term where insufficient attention is paid to issues experienced after the conflict. We need to pay attention to these and not just war-related trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Issues such as personal loss during the conflict, family abuse or neglect and the stigma of association with the conflict all lead to the internalisation of negative psychological symptoms over time.

Each case will, however, need to be assessed individually. Children who return from the Islamic State will have had different experiences, and will present different challenges. Some will be traumatised, others will not. For children involved in militancy, their accounts will vary considerably.

Former IS Cubs will need practical as well as psychological support. Access to quality education, vocational and life skills training (to help prepare for civilian life and jobs) are essential, as is access to and use of interim care centres to assist with the reintegration process.

To mitigate recidivism, we will need a way of determining whether, how, and when children are prepared to re-enter civil society. The failure to properly address this results in many demobilised child soldiers becoming even more disturbed.

A further problem surrounds 'stateless' children, born of foreign fighters and most likely of rape. As highlighted by Human Rights Watch, these children do not have identification papers or birth certificates and as such are not able to prove their nationality.

As well as discrimination and lack of access to resources, history also shows us that these children are more vulnerable to prostitution, trafficking, and recidivism.

What can we learn from other attempts to deal with former child soldiers?

Although we can draw on previous experiences of dealing with child soldiers, few 'best practices' have been identified from evaluations of such programs that can readily be harnessed for dealing with child returnees from IS. However, insights from research in Sri Lanka, Colombia, and Pakistan can inform our approach to children who have been involved in terrorism.

One child-centred program in Pakistan's Swat Valley successfully reintegrated 156 youth back into their communities between 2010 and 2014

This project provides its students with all the facilities needed for their education, food, clothing, entertainment, and accommodation. A similar programme in Colombia, where more than half of FARC's militants were recruited as children, also reports positive outcomes. However, other research highlights contrary views, including from some children who felt forced to deny their past and to accept an identity that they didn't recognise to be theirs.

Most programs involve the conflict ending and children being reunited with their families, an outcome which is strongly recommended in general, but which will not be viable in cases where the families were complicit with the children's socialisation into IS in the first place.

However we go forward, the success of rehabilitation programmes will depend on continued monitoring and advocacy, practical assistance for demobilisation and rehabilitation, effective use of political and military leverage by international actors, and an uncompromising commitment by local, national, and international authorities to hold perpetrators accountable. The scale of the challenge facing children affected or displaced by IS is staggering.

The danger of recidivism is high if programmes fall short in rehabilitating children. Three-month programmes that merely focus on disarmament are too short to guarantee any type of sustainable rehabilitation; much longer programmes will be needed if children who have been in Islamic State are to be successfully rehabilitated. But, sadly, it's clear we have a long way to go in understanding how to create an effective rehabilitation program for the thousands of children mobilised by Islamic State.

DONALD HOLBROOK

THE ISLAMIC STATE AND AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI'S 'ALTERNATIVE JIHAD'

As al-Qaeda approaches its thirtieth anniversary, many now seem to be retracting the obituaries they drafted when the organisation was being eclipsed by the rise of the Islamic State group (IS). Of course, al-Qaeda's death has been announced prematurely on occasions in the past. But the group has always managed to survive in some form, morphing at times into a looser entity, illustrating the agility and conceptual ambiguity that has been key to its survival. Yet its current leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has generated little excitement. IS's propaganda described him as 'senile and deviant'. More generous accounts present him as intelligent, humble, but ill-suited for leadership.

A DIFFERENT MODE OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

Since the outbreak of civil war in Syria in 2011, Zawahiri has published over seventy statements, books, and other communiques where he set out his vision for the Middle East, North Africa (MENA), and the Muslim Ummah as a whole.

Over time he has increasingly focused on how to respond to IS's jihad. He has sought to do so by framing IS's rise as a temporary surge of illegitimate excess, akin to the ill-fated Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA) or perhaps even the original outcasts, the Khawarij. He has also sought to prepare, rhetorically, for a more multipolar jihadi universe where there would be opportunities to reclaim ground (ideological as well as physical) lost to IS.

Three interrelated themes appear to define what Zawahiri has sought to do in these statements

First, there was a preoccupation with succession to the vanguard that had been chosen to lead the jihad. Here, Zawahiri responded to IS's challenge to his leadership by reiterating the preeminent position of the Afghan 'Islamic Emirate' and by questioning the legitimacy of IS's leaders, who he presented as oath breakers who desired power and glory.

Second, Zawahiri articulated the need to continue the momentum which ensured al-Qaeda remained relevant in people's minds. He sought to illustrate al-Qaeda as a resolute jihadi force by emphasising both intangibles, such as ideas and the sustenance of a social movement, alongside tangibles, such as attacks against Western targets.

Third, there was a need to offer a semblance of continuity from a first generation of leaders, to which Zawahiri himself belonged, and a second generation that would ensure the organisation's future relevance.

Through his output, Zawahiri sought to chart a course within the jihadi universe that saw al-Qaeda continue to build upon its mode of jihad. This downplayed, in relative terms, sectarianism and emphasised the striking of US and western interests in ways that were fundamentally more targeted, and arguably more sustainable, than those adopted by IS. This would present a more fruitful model which future leaders could adopt and build upon.

DEFINING THE LIMITS OF 'APPROPRIATE' VIOLENCE

Zawahiri's statements over these five years evokes fundamental debates about the appropriate limits and boundaries of violent protest within Sunni Muslim revolutionary movements.

The central question in these debates concerns the 'correct' (from legalistic, functional and practical standpoints) form of militancy. Zawahiri has been on both sides of this argument, defending more profound, ruthless, and indiscriminate campaigns of violence as well as making the case for stricter adherence to limitations and breaks on the use of force. As he risked being outflanked by IS, he became firmly placed in the latter camp.

Why does this matter? If IS continues to disintegrate, its organisational components may begin to resemble those of al-Qaeda more closely with a central hub sponsoring suborganisations whilst promoting attacks in its name throughout the world. This is a heterogeneous universe. Many options exist for those seeking militant Islamist solutions in the MENA region. Within this extremist fringe, moreover, Zawahiri has responded to the rise of IS by situating himself and al-Qaeda in 'the middle' in the hope that this will provide some of the key ingredients for its future survival. At the same time, he has reiterated support for mass-casualty attacks, and self-starter attacks against a range of targets in the West. IS's organisational decline may alter the shape of Islamist-inspired militancy, but it will not eliminate the threat it poses.

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NELLY LAHOUD

WHAT NEXT FOR ISLAMIC STATE?

The size of the Islamic State (IS) and its ability to project a narrative as a state-building entity peaked before the group celebrated its one-year anniversary in 2015. Although IS's influence has inspired terrorist operations outside its borders, including in Europe and the United States, the group has been losing territory in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. How then should we assess the threats emanating from IS in light of the failure of its core narrative, namely the establishment of a functioning caliphate?

ASSESSING THE THREAT

During the early phases of its growth, IS made significant territorial gains, and amassed considerable resources. Ignoring these resources in an analysis of its territorial decline would lead to a skewed picture of the threat that the group continues to pose, both inside and outside its territories.

Consequntly, it may be more helpful to assess IS using criteria developed by political scientist Martha Crenshaw in her 2001 study of terrorism in Algeria. According to Crenshaw, to claim 'that terrorism is successful […] presumes that terrorism is instrumental and that the strategy behind it can be discovered;' whereas 'to be effective, terrorism need merely produce a decided or decisive effect, which may not reflect the original intent of the actor.'

If the objective of IS is to build a state on the ashes of all other states, as its leaders claim, then the group has failed in terms of both criteria: success and effectiveness. However, in statements and communiques produced in 2016, the leadership of IS had already started to establish a narrative of continuity, since they referred back to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, who first led the group that evolved into IS.

It was clear that this evolving narrative was communicated so as to position and sustain IS in the wider jihadi universe, despite significant losses. At the same time, this positioning also initiated a discussion about evolving strategies which the group might employ should it fail to establish a caliphate.

'ENGRENAGE': A FUTURE NON-STRATEGY?

Regardless of the original intention of IS leaders, the group's official publications are making it clear that it would be content for its soldiers, supporters, and sympathisers to inflict harm and disruption on all the enemies of the Islamic State, particularly Europeans and Americans. The former IS spokesperson, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani (killed in August 2016), encouraged Western IS supporters to carry out attacks in Europe and the United States, including against civilians, even claiming that these could be more important than attacks in Iraq and Syria.

Islamic State's terror campaign does not need to adhere to a centralised strategy or single target. So long as enthusiasts are able to deliver violence, then a non-strategy can possibly be made to look like a strategy. This fits the concept of 'engrenage' that Crenshaw discussed, referring to an inescapable chain of violence, whereby terrorism becomes an end in itself, rather than a means to an end.

In the context of IS, now that it is progressively losing control over the territories it once governed, the group would likely welcome 'engrenage' even if the attacks are carried out by freelancers over whom it has no direct control. So long as such attacks keep generating a cycle of violence and are carried out in the name of IS, the group will take credit for them in order to project influence and so as to feed into its own narrative of resilience and sustainability.

ABATEMENT?

If there is no end to the cycle of IS violence in the near future, is it likely to abate? And what factors might cause such an abatement? As noted earlier, the capture of cities by IS enabled the group to accumulate massive resources. If these resources are put in the service of terrorism, and since mounting terrorist operations is relatively cheap, then IS will be well-positioned to deliver indiscriminate operations against the world community for a long time to come.

However, if the group continues to prolong its hold on territories and puts some of its accumulated capital in the service of governance, however poor in quality it may be, then this would have a damaging impact on the longevity of IS as a terrorist group.

Alongside its material resources, IS also requires fighters to carry out attacks. As a group, it built its appeal to foreign fighters on its early military successes on the battlefield. It is doubtful, then, that IS will continue to effectively attract or even manage foreign fighters, given ongoing territorial losses. Indeed, there has already been a sharp decline in the numbers attempting to reach IS.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the group emerged out of the failure of al-Qaeda in Iraq, and unless underlying issues are addressed in the region, it is likely that the message of IS will continue to resonate in some form.

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ISLAMIC STATE'S TERROR CAMPAIGN DOES NOT NEED TO ADHERE TO A CENTRALISED STRATEGY OR SINGLE TARGET... SO LONG AS ENTHUSIASTS ARE ABLE TO DELIVER VIOLENCE

TIMOTHY HOLMAN AND CERWYN MOORE

REMAINERS AND LEAVERS: FOREIGN FIGHTERS AFTER THE ISLAMIC STATE

While much has been written about 'foreign fighters', less attention has been paid to what happens to activists who have travelled to participate in different conflicts when hostilities wither and end. What drives decisions to remain and fight, or leave for home? And what options are available to those who choose or are forced to leave?

THE 'REMAINERS'

There are a variety of reasons for remaining in a conflict zone, some difficult to appreciate from afar. For example, there will be groups of foreign fighters who will be scattered, injured or for that matter traumatised – hampering their capacity to leave the conflict zone.

Routes out of a conflict zone may be blocked, or fraught with danger. As a result, some combatants may switch allegiance to other groups or movements, with different aims.

Some foreign fighters will, of course, choose to fight to the death. Others may think the only route out is through amnesties, which offer temporary respite as insurgent networks splinter and collapse. However, amnesties may favour local fighters, further ostracising foreign combatants captured in theatre.

Those foreign fighters who may remain in the conflict zone will find a dwindling support network, forcing them to operate covertly, and rely on smaller groups of supporters. We know from the conflicts in Chechnya that foreign fighters who remained were captured or killed, having been betrayed by former allies.

Others who remained sometimes married locals, affording them both a measure of protection from clans and enabling them to retain bonds of trust and blend in to local communities.

This illustrates the uncertain environment in which foreign fighters operate: an issue that will apply to Islamic State (IS) too.

Even if IS's foreign activists do manage to leave the frontlines, their options will be limited. Governments continue to block travel routes – making further movement more uncertain. Over time, small groups of foreign fighters are often arrested in the environs of conflict zones – as rolling waves of counter-terrorism are used to detain suspects. Others seek safety in ungoverned spaces, searching out new fronts to continue their chosen path.

The 'Afghan Arabs', fresh from their battle with the Soviets in the 1980s, are a prime example of this phenomenon. Many eventually went on to form al-Qaeda.

THE 'LEAVERS'

There is a risk that returning foreign activists will engage in violence when they return home. The proportion of activists willing to do so depends on a combination of organisational intent and opportunity. Not all conflicts lead to similar levels of violence from returning foreign fighters.

The wars in Bosnia and Iraq did not lead to significant levels of returning foreign fighters plotting in their home countries. However, fighters involved in the conflict in Afghanistan from 2004 onwards generated numerous plots.

In the short-term, violence associated with returnees will continue to be linked to plotting and material support from inside the conflict zone. The Paris and Brussels attackers provide an example of this type of attack.

These types of returnees come back with the express purpose of carrying out attacks. Whether this kind of plot can continue depends on the extent to which IS is able to maintain some kind of control or influence over returnees.

Most involvement by foreign fighters in terrorism is linked to interaction with an entity, like IS, that has declared intent and which has some enabling capacity. The ability of groups to communicate outside of the conflict zone may contribute to surges in activity.

Propaganda distributed via social media platforms has proved to be an important enabling factor in the mobilisation of fighters from Europe and has the potential to encourage ongoing engagement in violence.

French experience suggests that plotting activity in the short to medium term is associated with 'short fuses' and 'slow burners'. 'Short fuses' are those activists tasked upon return to act, and 'slow burners' are those who might be willing to act depending on the circumstances. These circumstances are difficult to predict in advance but are linked to their social networks and external events.

In the longer term, the involvement of returnees is contingent on their level of continued engagement in networks supportive of violence. These can include the original network that facilitated their departure, or new networks formed in the conflict zone or prison.

For example, the arrest of members of the Buttes-Chaumont group initially appeared to have disrupted their engagement in violence, but they remained in contact and acquired new members. One subsequently travelled to Yemen, some to Tunisia and then to Syria, while others attacked in France.

An additional factor is whether or not there is a terrorist group providing ideological or material support for a terrorist act.

ASSESSING THE THREAT

The ability of returnees to act depends on the capacity of a state to triage them and assess who may or may not pose a threat. This assessment role is further complicated by three factors specific to the Syrian conflict.

The first is the sheer volume of current returnees. This number may grow as fighters still in the combat zone also seek to return.

Second, they have an unusually diverse demographic profile. Previous conflicts had a returnee demographic that was overwhelmingly military age males. The Syria conflict has military age males but also large numbers of females and children.

Third, a returnee is not obliged to return to their state of origin, they could choose to travel to a third state. France, for example, could see not only former French residents and nationals return but also fighters from other French speaking countries – Tunisia and Morocco and also Belgium. Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium face a similar risk.

France could also see increased flows of Chechens given that 7-8% of those who left France to fight for IS were also of North Caucasian origin. No European state has previously been faced with such a complex situation.

There is no straight forward way to assess how individuals will behave upon return, particularly in the long-term. Past evidence suggests a small minority engage in violence, but there is no way to differentiate between those who will and those who will not.

Four approximate indicators appear to be: whether the individual remains engaged in a network that continues to reinforce and maintain the fighter's belief and adherence to plotting; if returnees participate in a social network that supports and reinforces beliefs about the acceptable nature of violence; if the individual is able to acquire logistical support from within this network; and lastly, if a returnee has a connection to a jihadi veteran or entrepreneur willing to facilitate an attack.

Finally, the role of returnees is not confined to acts of violence in their home country.

Historically they have also constituted a cadre of veterans who, in the event of a new conflict, are able to mobilise or vouch for new foreign fighters seeking to travel abroad.

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MARK YOUNGMAN

LESSONS FROM THE DECLINE OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS INSURGENCY

The decision by the Islamic State (IS) group to proclaim a 'caliphate' in June 2014 was a watershed moment in the history of jihadism, but it was far from the first attempt at jihadist state-building. Examining the reasons for the failure of one such project, the Caucasus Emirate (IK) in Russia's North Caucasus, and the demise of the regional insurgency under the banners of both IK and IS can help us better understand the relationship between a group's ideology and its composition and operating environment.

In October 2007, veteran Chechen field commander Dokka Umarov announced the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate (IK), finalising the victory of the North Caucasus insurgency's Islamist wing over nationalist-separatists in its historic Chechen core. This self-proclaimed jihadist state united insurgent groups across the region, albeit without controlling any territory. Yet, in December 2014, the IK started to fracture, and a combination of deaths and defections meant that, by late 2015, it had largely ceased to exist as a functioning organisation.

The Syrian conflict undoubtedly accelerated the decline of the IK. Reflecting divisions in Syria – among both North Caucasian groups and in the broader jihadist community – the IK found itself split between the Islamic State (IS) and its opponents. While the IK's senior leadership sided with al-Qaeda, many commanders and rank-and-file rebels favoured IS.

As a result, the IK experienced large-scale defections, and IS formalised its advance into the region in July 2015 with the establishment of the Caucasus Wilayah (IS/CW) as an official province of its caliphate. The IK's already precarious position was further undermined by security service operations that killed many of its remaining leaders.

The downward trend in violence in the North Caucasus, however, predates the large-scale involvement of North Caucasians in Syria, with two contradictory processes contributing to the IK's initial decline. First, the authorities from 2010 onwards pursued several soft policies, including local

commissions to rehabilitate insurgents and increased engagement with Salafi communities. Extremist ideologies always seek to tap into and shape existing grievances, and addressing some of these grievances undermined the insurgency's support base and recruitment potential.

Second, the security services increased the pressure on the insurgency prior and subsequent to the 2014 Winter Olympics. While this signalled the end of the soft measures – and is arguably one of the reasons why the long-term foundations for stability have not been laid – increased security measures made it much more difficult for the insurgency to operate.

In both cases, changes in the IK's operating environment had a significant impact on its appeal.

A further explanation for the failure of the IK lies in the reasons for its proclamation and subsequent ideological evolution. The insurgency needed an ideology that could appeal to both the broader North Caucasus region and the next generation of insurgents. Over time, that ideology shifted from a clear hierarchy of enemies to a blurred focus displaying an increasing interest in international affairs.

With each shift, the leadership sought to expand the insurgency's support base – first from Chechnya to the broader region, then to Russia's Muslims, and then to the global jihadist community – because its original support base was no longer sufficient. Ideological change was heavily influenced by practical considerations.

The final reason for the IK's demise was that, by 2011, it had lost many of its indigenous ideological leaders. Existing research shows that leadership

decapitation can produce mixed results, a conclusion supported by evidence from the North Caucasus: whereas violence declined sharply with the loss of some leaders, it increased significantly with the loss of others.

However, the blurring of enemy hierarchies and the decline of the insurgency both appear to begin with the loss of key indigenous ideologists. It was these people who were able to translate global narratives to local audiences, and to give the IK a distinct identity. While their messages continued to resonate posthumously, without them the IK struggled to respond to changing circumstances.

Pledging allegiance to IS has not revitalised the North Caucasus insurgency. By late 2016, the IS affiliate, Caucasus Wilayah, found itself in much the same degraded state as the IK a year earlier. Caucasus Wilayah leaders sought to redirect the emotional appeal of the caliphate back into the insurgency, but largely appear to have been unsuccessful.

The decline of the North Caucasus insurgency, and the failure of IS to translate support for its ideology into significant mobilisation on behalf of a branch of its claimed caliphate, demonstrate the importance of viewing ideological appeal not in isolation, but as continually interacting with operational circumstances. And the lack of indigenous ideologists on the ground constitutes a major obstacle to an insurgency's ability to rejuvenate itself.

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IAIN EDGAR

AFTER ISLAMIC STATE: THE PLACE OF NIGHT DREAM INSPIRATION AND PROPAGANDA

Though non-Muslims might dismiss dreams as irrelevant, dreaming often plays a significant role in Islamic life, including for Islamist extremists. Iain Edgar explains how dreams have influenced decisions and shaped perceptions in jihadist campaigns.

Dreaming has an important role in Islam, and Islamic State (IS) use dream interpretation narratives for conversions, propaganda, legitimation and inspiration. The former flagship magazine of IS, *Dabiq* (now *Rumaniya*), contained in its last publication a narrative concerning a fighter who was reported as seeing his martyrdom in a prior dream. Also published in *Dabiq* were three dreams of the Brussels bomber, Khalid El Bakraoui.

These included his first prison conversion, his IS inspired dream battle fighting alongside the Prophet Mohammed, and his own ultimate mountain-top deliverance. Such martyrdom dream accounts have a long history in Islamic countries and interpretive dream practices are contained in various accounts of the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

Dreams are not just something that are received, they can also be sent. Dream transmission by authorised teachers, Shaykhs, is an enduring trope in Sufi Islam. One Cyprus-based Naqshbandi Shaykh I interviewed confirmed that he sometimes sent his followers spiritual guidance in night dreams. Outside of Sufi Islam, there are two notable accounts of night dreams being sent and used to call followers to jihad.

Dreams were reported as an important recruitment strategy in bringing many young women to fight in the siege of the Red Mosque in Islamabad in 2007.

Even more extraordinarily, hundreds of the followers of the leader of the failed 1979 siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Juhayman bin Seif al-Uteybi, were reported to have had dreams of his brother-in-law being the true Mahdi – the prophesied redeemer of Islam.

Leadership is an important theme in dream accounts. For example, accounts attributed to Mullah Omar are well known to have authorised, inspired and validated the rise of the Taliban leader. They also helped secure and legitimate his position.

DREAMS CAN DISTURB AS WELL AS INSPIRE

In 2016, a dream of al-Baghdadi being instructed by the Prophet Mohammed to leave Mosul apparently caused consternation amongst IS fighters in the city. This dream was publicised on pro-Assad and Kurdish websites, possibly as part of a counter strategy designed to taint al-Baghdadi.

Dreams are also not restricted to leaders who live. The spiritual reputation of the leader is important and a reclusive figure such as al-Baghdadi may be less of a dream focus than Osama bin Laden. On Twitter, there are accounts of the now dead IS military leader, Omar al-Shishani, who often courted media coverage, being dreamt about heroically by his followers.

Dreams and their interpretation in Islam, and likewise by IS, are an accepted way of conjuring a hopeful future and a way of understanding and recovering from defeat. IS Twitter accounts providing dream interpretation have been highly used amongst IS networks.

For instance, dream accounts by IS on Twitter help explain defeat by revealing a critique of IS for not helping the poor enough and wasting food. The change in dream subjects can also be significant.

Dream accounts of glorious martyrdom in recent *Dabiq* publications could well have been intended to inspire extremists to undertake jihad and violence in the West.

Whether they are felt to be transmitted or received, night dreams and visions are likely to continue to play an important role in the cultural tapestry of Islamic State fighters, regardless of territorial losses.

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CERWYN MOORE

TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM THROUGH THE AGES

Although transnational activism has changed dramatically as a result of globalisation, the process of travelling to participate in conflicts in different parts of the world is not new. There are many reasons why people decide to travel to participate in activism, and these reasons should also be reflected in ways authorities deal with those who return. It is useful, then, to revisit some examples of transnational activism and consider different types of returnees in order to better understand the direct and indirect consequences of desistance, re-integration and rehabilitation.

MANY FORMS OF ACTIVISM

While much of the analysis of those who travel to overseas conflicts focuses on foreign fighters, it is important to recognise different forms of transnational activism. In past conflicts, just as in Syria, ideologically-inspired activism took many forms. It was not uncommon for medical specialists including nurses, or writers and artists involved in fund-raising, to travel to join the International Brigades in 1930's Spain. Then, in the latter part of the 1940's, dozens of British volunteers – from many different walks of life – travelled to fight in the 1948 Palestine war. Many also volunteered to participate in post-conflict nation-building.

In 1870 the UK government passed the Foreign Enlistment Act to prevent volunteers travelling to participate in foreign conflicts. The act was deployed again in the 1930s, in a largely symbolic attempt to prevent participation in the Spanish Civil War. By the late 1940s, the act was again discussed as a way to regulate British volunteers travelling to engage in Israeli state-building efforts.

More recently, the initial rallying cry in Syria focused on providing charitable and medical support for refugees fleeing violence in the Middle East.

As the conflict became more entrenched, local groups sought to raise support through new information and communication networks, including Twitter. This produced forms of activism that were both physical (providing medical support) as well as virtual (providing moral and ideological support).

The declaration of Islamic State's caliphate in August 2014 sparked a different wave of activism, mobilising those who travelled to participate in what they saw as state-building. Specialists with engineering or medical training were joined by those who saw migration as a religious obligation. Some travelled as families – seeking the promise of a life within an Islamic state. IS started to introduce formal structures of governance, adding to the façade of a legitimate state.

HOW TO DEAL WITH RETURNEES

Just as there are many reasons why people became transnational activists, so there needs to be a variety of responses to those who return from overseas conflict zones. In the case of the Spanish Civil War, even those who fought for the fascists were not necessarily imprisoned when they returned.

The author Peter Kemp went almost seamlessly from Franco's nationalists to the UK's fledgling Special Operations Executive. His experiences in Spain were used to support the UK during the war.

At the other extreme, when the 1980s conflict in Afghanistan finished, some of the Afghan Arabs travelled back to their homes as heroes, while small numbers sought out new places to wage jihad. However, some former activists – including fighters – faced uncertain futures, barred from return to their own countries. This was especially true of Egyptian militants.

The threat of arrest had the indirect effect of creating a new clandestine milieu – out of which a new movement, al-Qaeda, emerged.

The options for returning fighters who choose to desist from violent activism are clearly mixed: some may be detained, arrested or imprisoned, while others might enter rehabilitation programmes in their home countries. However, the options for those returning volunteers who were activists but not combatants are even more uncertain.

This group of returnees includes male and female activists or, as John Horgan notes in his article in this edition of *CSR*, child soldiers. The many forms of activism – and activists - linked to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq will require innovative thinking to address a new generation of returnees.

CHRISTOPHER MCDOWELL

SRI LANKA, DIASPORA POLITICS AND THE END OF VIOLENCE

The defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in brutal final battles in May 2009 reverberated around the world. An estimated one million Sri Lankan Tamils left the island over the three decades following the outbreak of civil conflict in 1983 settling in Europe, North America, Southeast Asia and Australia.

The immediate reaction to the manner of the defeat, the violence against civilians and attacks on hospitals, among these communities was one of anger. Major cities such as London, Ottawa and Sydney saw large demonstrations, hunger strikes and the lobbying of governments to intervene in Sri Lanka to stop what placards described as "genocide" against the Tamil people.

Almost eight years on from the final battles in north-eastern Sri Lanka, the anger has not subsided. However, and contrary to what many predicted at the time, the response of diasporic Tamils has not been resurgent support for the LTTE and armed struggle for a separate Tamil state. Rather, the response has been a commitment to international and national legal processes to chart the future of the island. In our research we seek to understand why the political orientation of overseas Tamil communities embraced non-violence and placed its faith in transitional justice. The answers can be found in Sri Lanka as well as in the countries of settlement.

The defeat of the LTTE was total. The military, political and civil structures established since the mid-1980s collapsed. Tamils in the diaspora had been prepared, or felt that they had no choice, to show support for the LTTE during the Civil War. With its defeat, the LTTE was shorn of its status as the only group able to protect Tamil civilians. It lost the very basis of its appeal to Tamils abroad who were worried about friends and family at home, or of those who still believed that a separate state was achievable and violence might be necessary to accomplish it. The LTTE 'Boys' previously active in Europe and North America, managing the information war and propagating the mystique of The Tigers, found that their previously pliant audience had evaporated.

For the first time there was open discussion about the corruption of the organisation, having collected millions of dollars in 'voluntary donations' and through criminal activities, and questions were asked about the division of the spoils by former leaders with knowledge of the bank accounts.

Even before the defeat, support for the LTTE and the separatist cause were waning among overseas Tamils. Over the thirty years of asylum, migration and settlement, Tamil communities had become more diverse and more representative of the population in Sri Lanka in terms of class, caste, and geographic origin. Social and cultural institutions were gradually re-established, marriages forged together strong families, and success in education and business created wealth and a vision for the future. As overseas Tamils put behind the asylum and refugee labels and embraced citizenship, there was an increasing sense of confidence in what it meant to be a Tamil abroad.

The nationalism of the LTTE, rooted in a centuries old dispute about the first settlers on the island, and an ideology reliant on a narrow and antagonistic construction of ethnicity and identity, chimed less and less with the values of internationalism and cosmopolitanism now familiar to second generation Tamils. Their new social identity gave them the confidence to challenge the politics of the past.

As with all established communities, Tamils in the West who trace their heritage to Sri Lanka have elites from the business, professional and political world. These campaign for justice, to hold those in power to account for past human rights abuses and war crimes, and advocate for a constitutional solution to the island's problems. Western governments and international institutions engage with elites when pressured to do so. The government in Colombo, and indeed the political representatives of Tamils in Sri Lanka, remain cautious of the diaspora, wanting their investment but fearing them unreliable as allies.

Faith in a constitutional, justice-based and internationally mediated way forward for Sri Lanka remains strong among overseas Tamils. However, the risk remains that if the reform, truth and justice mechanisms do not deliver and reconciliation fails, then frustration among the diaspora will grow and positions will likely harden.

The Sri Lankan case raises interesting broader questions about the factors that shape attitudes towards a political cause at home held by those who have created a new life elsewhere. This might include the preparedness to defend or oppose the use of violence.

The organisational and resource capacity of a group to maintain an international network of supporters with direct links to overseas communities, and the ability to control the political narrative through the management of propaganda is critical. Important also are issues around identity and levels of integration in host countries, which affect the ways in which diaspora communities receive a rationale for violence, and view options for political settlements back home.

JOSEPH E. USCINSKI

EVERYONE IS A CONSPIRACY THEORIST

Conspiracy theories help out of power groups cope with their lowly status...
Put simply, conspiracy theories are for losers.

The Brexit campaign, the election of Donald Trump, the rise of extreme political parties across Europe, and the emergence of fake news on social media have all been tightly intertwined with conspiracy theories.

With all the news surrounding conspiracy theories, perhaps it is time to take stock of what we really know about them. Of course, the definition of conspiracy theory is itself open to debate.

I understand conspiracy theories as an unofficial account of events that explains outcomes through a small group, working in secret, against the common good. Here are five things social scientists have learned about such accounts in the last decade.

1 CONSPIRACY THEORIES ARE BOTH TIMELY, AND TIMELESS

As far back as recorded history goes, conspiracy theories have been part of the human condition. No age particularly stands out as more conspiratorial than another. In recent decades, events have triggered conspiracy theories focusing on the assassination of JFK, the death of Princess Diana, and the terror attacks of 9/11.

Before that, there were red scares and fears of monopoly trusts, Freemasons, and Illuminati. Conspiracy theories are alive and well, but there is no reason to conclude conspiracy theorising has hit an apex.

2 EVERYBODY BELIEVES IN CONSPIRACY THEORIES

In the most neutral terms, conspiracy theorists are anyone who believes in conspiracy theories. We track how popular conspiracy theories are with opinion polling, but most polls only ask about one or a few conspiracy theories.

If pollsters could ask about an unlimited number of conspiracy theories, it is likely that everyone would express belief in at least one if not several. With this said, there is heterogeneity: some people believe in very few conspiracy theories, others have a conspiracy-driven mentality and believe in many.

3 CONSPIRACY THEORIES MUST COINCIDE WITH EXISTING DISPOSITIONS

There is an assumption that conspiracy theories spread now more than ever because of the internet. While it is true that information can travel farther and faster than ever before, it's not necessarily true that conspiracy theories have benefited from this more than any other type of information has.

There are many fringe theories skulking around the net, but studies of web traffic show that few people take an interest. The reason is simple: for people to believe in a given conspiracy theory, those people must not only have a predilection for conspiracy theorising, but the theories themselves must also harmonise with individuals' other predispositions.

These include their political party or ideology, their racial and religious viewpoints, and their other worldviews.

To wit, Muslims, in very high numbers, question the official accounts of the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks because it is easier for them to place the blame for these events on a group other than their own. Devout Catholics will not believe in DiVinci Code theories suggesting that Jesus fathered offspring with a prostitute; these beliefs resonate better with non-Catholics.

9/11 Truth theories were only able to convince conspiracy-minded Democrats in the US; Republicans would not believe that President Bush blew up the Twin Towers.

There are millions of conspiracy theories out there, but most won't amass much following. People are fickle with their beliefs and aren't quick to fall prey to any given conspiracy theory.

4 POWER ASYMMETRIES CAN RIPEN CONSPIRACY THEORIES

The more we learn about conspiracy theories, the more we find that they can act as a bellwether, telling us who is afraid of who, what, and when.

They are conjectures about who has power and what they do with it when no one is looking. Rarely do conspiracy theories accuse the weak (e.g., the homeless) of conspiring.

Therefore, accusations of conspiracy levied by out-of-power groups against in-power groups tend to resonate most in society. Groups who feel that they are ruled by another will experience anxiety due to their perceived powerlessness.

As a coping mechanism, conspiracy theories help out of power groups cope with their lowly status, close ranks, bealert to potential oncoming dangers, and seek redemption. When a group's power increases, the anxiety driving the conspiracy theorising subsides. Put simply, conspiracy theories are for losers.

5 CONSPIRACY THEORIES CAN HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES

People who are convinced that terrorism is a government perpetuated hoax will be less supportive of, and less compliant with, government initiatives for fighting terrorism. Even worse, conspiracy theories can lead people to justify violence.

Which individual conspiracy theorist will resort to violence is impossible to predict. But which types of people will tend towards violent acts is not entirely unpredictable.

Social scientists have learned much about those who think in conspiratorial terms; two important characteristics are that (1) they view conspiring as an acceptable means of achieving goals, and (2) they are more accepting of violence. People who believe powerful groups are out to get them will eventually fight fire with fire.

Joseph E. Uscinski is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Miami, and a co-investigator on a CREST-funded project on conspiracy theories.

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7 THINGS WORTH KNOWING ABOUT GROUPS

We're all members of groups that we want to succeed. But what if we want some groups, like terrorist cells, to fail? We talked to Paul Taylor to find out more...

There are clearly a myriad of factors that determine whether or not a group succeeds. What is the most influential?

Interestingly it's what psychologists call 'sabotage' — an individual's deviant behaviour, which can come in three forms: destruction, where deliberate actions impinge on success; inaction, where lack of motivation affects success; and wastage, where a person's effort is misplaced. Terrorists' erroneous efforts to maintain security are a good example of wastage.

An intervention that enhances this behaviour may serve to impede group success.

Are there common mistakes people make when trying to judge how well a team is getting on?

One thing that's often overlooked is the multidimensional nature of cooperation and competition among group members. It's very easy to say 'these two get on' or 'don't get on', but relationships are richer than that. Take conflict. Terrorists within a cell may argue about the details of their intended attack or they may argue about who is in charge. Conflicts around task-related issues can sometimes help groups be more successful. Conflicts around relational dynamics rarely help and often hinder.

If I wanted a group to fail, I'd place more faith in an intervention that caused relationship friction.

IT'S VERY EASY TO SAY 'THESE TWO GET ON' OR 'DON'T GET ON', BUT RELATIONSHIPS ARE RICHER THAN THAT

Can we be sure that interventions will help groups fail?

No. Disruption can often cause more harm than good. What's often forgotten is that, once formed, the interpersonal dynamics within a group create a 'stable equilibrium' in performance, regardless of whether or not this is optimal. This equilibrium is then only punctured when an environmental trigger prompts a change.

Interventions on groups who are somewhat dysfunctional or functional but predictable must therefore be considered carefully. The shock created by the intervention may promote a change that leads to a more effective group that is harder to investigate.

Will we ever have a nice formula for determining how best to disrupt a group?

No. But we can use evidence-based generalisations to guide planning. Some of these have existed for a long time. For example, the anthropologist Robin Dunbar proposed a theoretical 'Dunbar's number', which is the number of stable interpersonal relationships a mammal can maintain given its thinking capacity.

In humans it's believed to be about 150. Critical to disruption is the implication of this theory, which is that terrorists with many connections will have less cognitive resources to use elsewhere.

It suggests that those at the centre of large attack networks are less likely to be actors (but may be facilitators); so whether they are the primary target for an intervention will depend on whether you want to disrupt the network, or catch the actors.

So being part of a large terrorist group is not necessarily a good thing?

That's exactly right. Indeed, psychologists have known this about groups for quite some time. Small groups tend to build strong and deep social ties that create a social cohesion that elevates their performance. Larger groups struggle to maintain this cohesion and sense of a singular 'in-group identity'.

Indeed, at least in the short term, one of the fastest ways to limit the productivity of a group is to 'merge' them with another group. In this situation, 'relationships' and 'identities' need re-negotiating — though in the longer term the extra diversity in skills it brings can make for a more effective group.

LASTING CHANGE COMES ABOUT FOLLOWING SMALL NUDGES (E.G., SEEDS OF DOUBT) RATHER THAN HARD SHOVES

I recently read something on 'nudge theory'. Is that relevant here?

Yes it is. It's easy to think that the best way to disrupt a group is to hit it hard. However, there's a lot of evidence to suggest that lasting change follows small nudges (e.g., suggestions, seeds of doubt) rather than hard shoves (e.g., arrest).

In particular, 'nudging' is attractive because it appears to be effective irrespective of how engrained a person's behaviour is, or how developed a group's cohesion. Nudges slowly engender a motivational change within the person (i.e., they personally make the decision to change).

By contrast, changes externally imposed on a person are generally resisted, or at best they produce short-lived differences.

What's the primary lesson you would like to pass on about disrupting groups?

That fear of failure is a major inhibitor of goal achievement. Ironically, young children often outperform adults on novel team tasks because they lack this fear. Children just 'try things' until they find something that works.

From an intervention point of view, this means that it may be possible to magnify the natural factors that impede group progress by enhancing the perceptions that people often fail (e.g., through rumours).

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Paul Taylor is Professor of Psychology at Lancaster University, and Director of the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats.
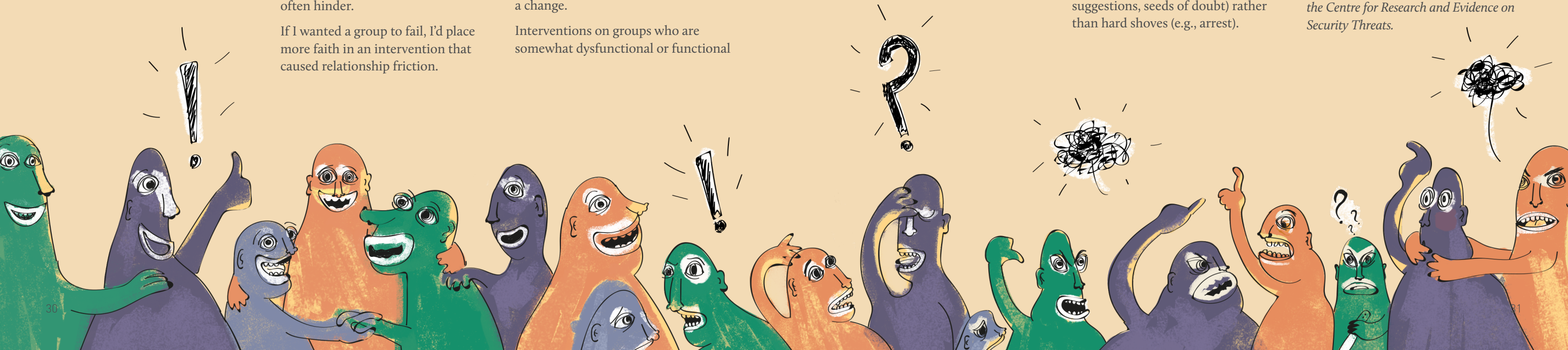
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