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How Extreme-Right Fringe Cultures and IS's Exploitation of Social Media and Kin Networks affect the Threat Landscape

Terrorism is an ever-evolving phenomenon, which keeps morphing into new forms, amidst a shifting operational environment and socio-political circumstances. In this regard, this issue explores the growing mainstream attention given to violent fringe subcultures in the extreme-right, such as the Incel, Boogaloo and QAnon movements, which has triggered debates in the academic and policy communities, over whether such forms of violence conform to an emergent trend in terrorism. This particularly follows the indictment earlier this year of Incel activists involved in violent attacks under terrorism laws in Toronto, Canada.

Though these sub-cultures, which mainly operate online, are extreme in their behaviours and prone to violence, they arguably do not fit the orthodox definitions and classifications of terrorism. However, given the toxic operational environment in which these fringe sub-cultures operate (ethnically polarised, politically divisive and violence-prone), coupled with their ability to network on social media and the potential threat of cross-pollination, it is too dangerous to ignore them. Given these new sub-cultures are typically leaderless, lack formal structures and are disorganised, it is premature to regard their issue -specific narratives as terrorist ideologies per se, although they have the quintessential ingredients of evolving into ones. Hence, a new academic and policy discussion is needed to appropriately classify these emerging subcultures, along with the attendant policy measures to address the potential threat they pose.

This issue also focuses on the other end of the threat spectrum, with global jihadist groups like the Islamic State (IS), trying to make inroads through social media propaganda and kinship networks to recruit, radicalise and plot attacks. IS' stepped-up propaganda outreach in India through its new propaganda magazine the Voice of Hind is a case in point. Likewise, IS' networks in Southeast Asia continue to effectively use online platforms to appeal to potential recruits and incite them to violence. Last month, two female operatives, believed to be widows of deceased IS terrorists, participated in the twin suicide attacks in Jolo, a known stronghold of the IS-affiliated Abu Sayyaf Group, in the Southern Philippines, which resulted in 14 people being killed and at least 75 others injured.

First, **Kyler Ong** assesses the more diffused and diversified threat emerging from the extreme-right space in the West in recent years. According to the author, growing ideological convergence in the extreme-right landscape has come into focus, with attacks linked to individuals affiliated to loosely-aligned networks largely operating online, becoming more frequent and lethal. Increasingly, extreme-right lone actors and organisations have become more adept at exploiting social media to widen their echo chambers, and subsequently foraying into the violent space. The mainstreaming of fringe subcultures, such as the boogaloos and incels, which openly call for violence against Western governments, means a more focused and systemic counter-response is warranted. To support the authorities' efforts, enhanced monitoring capabilities and more nuanced understanding of evolving extreme-right narratives are required.

In the next article, **Ahmad Saiful Rijal Hassan and Nur Aziemah Azman** examine various examples of online visual media propagated by the Islamic State (IS), from its heyday in 2015 to the present. By assessing a selection of videos, photographs, illustrations and infographics produced and disseminated by the group online, the authors argue that visual media remains a powerful tool utilised by IS in its radicalisation and recruitment efforts. Thematically, some of the visual media captures IS' public service efforts such as in education and the civil service, while more recent images published online seek to portray IS' continuing resilience and strength across its wilayat (provinces). The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is also framed as divine retribution against the group's enemies. Given the importance IS places on its visual propaganda, the authors suggest that counter-responses need to be upgraded to include stronger visual elements and textual rebuttals.

In the third article, **Kalicharan Veera Singam** analyses the narratives found in the IS' new flagship publication Voice of Hind, which is mainly targeted at an Indian audience. According to the author, articles found in the publication espouse a variety of IS themes, ideas and propaganda messages. The group's messaging has also evolved from one of calling Indians to perform Hijra (migration) to its so-called Caliphate, to one of championing the rights of Muslims in India. The terror group's evolved narratives are aimed at capitalising on the growing politico-religious polarisation in the country, with the intent of weakening India's social fabric and spawning new pro-IS cells.

Moreover, while India's security agencies have been largely effective in thwarting the kinetic threat posed by IS, countering the group's renewed propaganda campaign could prove to be more challenging.

Lastly, **Farooq Yousaf** explores the possibilities and implications of kin terrorism in South Asia. The author reasons that attempts by IS to indoctrinate and cultivate family networks, including the wives and young children of male operatives, and incite them to violence, such as in the form of suicide attacks, is a relatively new trend in the region. Yet while kin terrorism in Southeast Asia has received considerable academic scrutiny, it remains underexplored in the South Asian context. Given the social and cultural sensitivities among communities in South Asia, the potential challenges in effectively addressing terrorist-related indoctrination, radicalisation and recruitment that take place within family units, are assessed.

Ideological Convergence in the Extreme Right

Kyler Ong

Synopsis

Recent acts of terror perpetrated by right-wing extremists in parts of the West have put a spotlight on the growing ideological convergence between previously fringe movements and online subcultures, and more orthodox variations of the extreme right, which is also fomenting violence. Hate and racist attacks during the ongoing COVID-19 lockdown, such as in the US' "Black Lives Matter" protests, as well as February's mass shootings in Hanau, Germany, have further muddled the equation in an already fractionalised extreme right scene. The prosecution of a machete attacker in Toronto, Canada, the first incel adherent charged with terrorism offences, has also re-energised debates on definitional issues relating to extreme right violence. The fluidity and incoherence inherent in the extreme right space, accentuated by followers' predisposition to conspiracy theories and a sense of victimhood, defy its easy categorisation and simultaneously, attempts to develop effective countermeasures.

Introduction

Given the type of extreme right attacks in recent years, right-wing extremism has come to be synonymous, albeit too narrowly, with white supremacists, and more fundamentally, the white genocide conspiracy theory, a central tenet of this movement.[1] Prominent extreme right terrorists such as Anders Breivik in Oslo, Brenton Tarrant in Christchurch, and more recently, Tobias Rathjen in Hanau, among others, have been fueled by the white genocide theory, which justifies ridding the West of non-white "invaders"[2] through direct armed action.

The theory propagates that the white race is being replaced by non-whites, a supposed ploy of the Jews, who are regarded as the "puppet-masters", [3] in a campaign of "white genocide". Often conflated with the "great replacement" conspiracy theory, both theories taken together espouse the idea that the white race is under threat due to rising feminism and declining birth rates, the growth of mixed-race marriages, as well as the influx of "black" and "brown" people into the West.[4]

With authorities in the West facing growing challenges in addressing the surge in extreme right-related violence in recent years, such attacks continue to defy easy categorisation due to the movement's fractionalised and "leaderless resistance" structure.[5] Generally, the worldview of right-wing extremists falls into four intertwined buckets: racial supremacy/replacement, anti-government, policy-centred beliefs such as anti-abortion, civil liberties, and pro-gun rights, and misogyny. Lacking a hierarchical organisational structure to provide them with ideological guidance, followers often find themselves navigating the cesspool of extremist ideologies propagated by

[1] "Factsheet: White Genocide Conspiracy Theory," *The Bridge Initiative,* February 3, 2020, https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-white-genocide-conspiracy-theory/.

[2] The 2019 El Paso shooter, Patrick Crusius, stated in his manifesto that his attack was "a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas". See Simon Romero, Manny Fernandez, and Mariel Padilla, "Massacre at a Crowded Walmart in Texas Leaves 20 Dead," *The New York Times,* August 3, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/us/el-paso-shooting.html.

[3] "New Hate and Old: The Changing Face of American White Supremacy," *Center on Extremism, Anti-Defamation League,* p. 14, https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/New-Hate-and-Old_The-Changing-Face-of-American-White-Supremacy_2018_1.pdf.

[4] "Factsheet: White Genocide Conspiracy Theory."

[5] "The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States," *Center for Strategic and International Studies,* November 7, 2018, https://www.csis.org/analysis/rise-far-right-extremism-united-states.

likeminded individuals who live and breathe their beliefs online.

This has fostered a culture of culling and cherry-picking ideologies that fit a particular individual's preconceived notions of the world, allowing for multiple permutations that could be used to characterise a right-wing extremist, whose ideology is often underpinned by conspiracy theories. Increasingly, such ideological crossovers have shown up in the profiles of perpetrators involved in recent extreme right-linked violence. They appear to be "mixing and matching ideologies to justify and explain the targets of their animus and give wider context to their violence."[6]

Ideological Confluence

White supremacism is an oft-used blanket term applied to an assortment of groups that ultimately embrace the racist belief that white people are superior to other races (characterised as out-groups) and therefore should be dominant over them. Prominent outfits include the alt-right, and "traditional" white supremacists such as the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, racist religious sects, prison gangs, football hooligans as well as skinheads.[7]

The 2016 election victory of US President Donald Trump, who ran on a platform of fervent nationalism, and the popular backlash that followed Europe's migrant crisis a year earlier, also contributed to the mainstreaming of the extreme right's xenophobic, anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and neo-Nazi sentiments. This has not only served to embolden disparate networks of white supremacists, and more broadly, the alt-right in the United States,[8] but also contributed to the tainting of mainstream politics in Europe by previously fringe ideologies.[9]

More ominously, some followers of previously disparate networks of violent far-right extremists, including white supremacist and from other fringe movements that espouse anti-government ideologies, such as the accelerationist, boogaloo,[10] and sovereign citizen groupings,[11] appear to be coalescing over social media into a "militia-sphere", largely around "shared attitudes toward [doubting] the legitimacy of the pandemic, lockdown orders and the role of law enforcement and other government officials."[12] The "militia-sphere's" messaging, which latches on to QAnon conspiracy theories,[13] has grown increasingly extreme as

[6] Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware, "The Challenges of Effective Counterterrorism Intelligence in the 2020s," *Lawfare,* June 21, 2020, https://www.lawfareblog.com/challenges-effective-counterterrorism-intelligence-2020s.

[7] The alt-right as a movement took off around 2008 but came into prominence during the 2016 US Presidential Election. Known for their internet imageboard subcultures and more youthful demographics, adherents of this movement reject mainstream conservatism in favor of one that embraces racism or white supremacism. For a full discussion of white supremacism in the United States, see "New Hate and Old: The Changing Face of American White Supremacy."

[8] Ibid.

[9] Kyler Ong and Raffaello Pantucci, "From Fringe to Mainstream: The Extreme Rightwing in Europe," *Observer Research Foundation,* July 1, 2020, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/fringe-mainstream-extreme-rightwing-europe-68848/.

[10] The boogaloo movement has its origins in the weapons and guns section of the extreme right messageboard, 4chan, and dates as far back as 2012. It has since grown in size and, whilst not all of its adherents are white supremacists, some are, making its linkages rather complicated. In general, followers of this movement espouse two fundamental beliefs: the need to overthrow the government through armed action, and an unwavering commitment to gun ownership. See Jane Coaston, "The 'Boogaloo' 'Movement', Explained," *Vox,* June 8, 2020, https://www.vox.com/2020/6/8/21276911/boogaloo-explained-civil-war-protests.

[11] Sovereign citizens regard themselves as self-governing individuals to whom the law does not apply. The concept of being a 'sovereign citizen' also seems to have originated from an extremist movement in the US. Known as the Sovereign Citizen Movement (SCM), it has roots in the later part of the 1900s and can be traced to groups such as the Christian white supremacist 'Posse Comitatus', which espouses anti-Semitism and believes that the US government is controlled by the "Zionist Occupation Government" (ZOG). ZOG is an invented conspiratorial term subscribed to by the broader far-right extremist movement.

[12] Joel Finkelstein et al., "COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere," *Network Contagion Research Institute,* p. 2, https://ncri.io/wp-content/uploads/NCRI-White-Paper-COVID-19-Militia-Sphere-28-May-344pm.pdf.

[13] QAnon conspiracy theory purports that there's an alleged "deep state" comprising Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and George Soros, who are plotting a coup d'état against President Donald Trump whilst being simultaneously involved in an international child sex trafficking ring. "The Great Awakening" is hence the moment these elites will be defeated and the truth of the "deep state" will be revealed. For an account of the origin of QAnon, see Adrienne

the COVID-19 pandemic has progressed, to the point of threatening and enacting violent attacks.[14]

Adherents share the common belief that governments are led by Jewish "puppet-masters", who conspire to replace the white race by enabling a mass influx of racially inferior non-whites into their borders. White nationalist elements who embrace the accelerationist ideology, such as those belonging to the boogaloo movement, believe in sowing civil discord by opportunistically exploiting fissures in the system to ignite a "race war". Their end goal is to facilitate the eventual collapse of the current government and replace it with a white dominant state.[15]

Inciting Violence

In June this year, individuals linked to the boogaloo movement attended various highly-charged anti-lockdown and anti-racial rallies, amidst the ongoing pandemic, with the aim of hijacking these protests to raise contentious civil rights issues, sow disorder, as well as incite violence.[16] Others attempted to exploit the nationwide "Black Lives Matter" rallies to attempt violence. Some were subsequently charged with terrorism offences,[17] including for orchestrating ambushes that resulted in the deaths of security and law enforcement officers.[18] Since the onset of COVID-19, the infamous messageboard, 4Chan, a regular haunt of far-right extremists, has also seen a noticeable spike in boogaloo-related chatter in messageboards catered to violent racial conspiracies.[19] Notable neo-Nazi groups such as The Base and Atomwaffen Division also embrace such accelerationist ideology.

Whilst some boogaloo adherents embrace white supremacist narratives and encourage a "race war", others concern themselves with opposing specific government policies, a mainstay rhetoric of militia enthusiasts and gun-rights groups.[20] Boogaloo-related chatter in various gun-rights and militia enthusiast communities on both Reddit and 4Chan have also surged during the pandemic,[21] with growing calls for followers to amass arms in anticipation of a second civil war, to protect civil liberties perceived to be increasingly curtailed due to government-imposed lockdowns across the country.

This "militarisation" of the extreme right is being further fortified by anti-government conspiracy theories that have found increasing resonance since the onset of the pandemic. For example, members of the QAnon movement have spread disinformation, which include claims that China, in collusion with members of the US Democratic Party, were weaponising the COVID-19 virus.[22] Often, such disinformation has been combined with "seditious themes

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LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," *The Atlantic*, June 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.

[14] Finkelstein et al., "COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere," p. 2.

[15] Katie Shepherd, "An Officer Was Gunned Down. The Killer Was A 'Boogaloo Boy' Using Nearby Peaceful Protests as Cover, Feds Say," *The Washington Post,* June 17, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/06/17/boogaloo-steven-carrillo/.

[16] Anna Orso and Ellie Rushing, "White Supremacists and Other Extremist Groups Are Using Protests and a Pandemic to Amplify Their Message," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 13, 2020, https://www.inquirer.com/news/white-supremacist-extremists-reopen-rallies-black-lives-matter-protests-20200613.html.

[17] Luke Barr, "Boogaloo: The Movement Behind Recent Violent Attacks," *ABC News,* June 20, 2020, https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/boogaloo-movement-recent-violent-attacks/story?id=71295536 ; Joel Finkelstein et al.

[18] Maura Dolan, Richard Winton and Anita Chabria, "Suspect in Killing of 2 Bay Area Officers Tied to Right-Wing 'Boogaloo' Group, Prosecutors Alleged," *Los Angeles Times,* June 16, 2020, https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-06-16/suspects-charged-killing-santa-cruz-cop-and-oakland-federal-officer.

[19] Finkelstein et al., "COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere," p. 5.

[20] Boogaloo Supporters Animated by Lockdown Protests, Recent Incidents," *Anti-Defamation League blog,* May 22, 2020, https://www.adl.org/blog/boogaloo-supporters-animated-by-lockdown-protests-recent-incidents.

[21] Joel Finkelstein et al., "COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere," p. 6.

[22] Marc-André Argentino, "QAnon Conspiracy Theories About the Coronavirus Pandemic Are a Public Health Threat," *The Conversation,* April 9, 2020, https://theconversation.com/qanon-conspiracy-theories-about-the-coronavirus-pandemic-are-a-public-health-threat-135515.

that parallel the boogaloo".[23] Indeed, QAnon ideas have gained traction among gun-rights, militia and anti-government groups,[24] such as the Three Percenters, [25] as well as supporters of sovereign citizenry,[26] over the past year.

More recently, QAnon conspiracy theories were prominently featured during various lockdown rallies, as followers took to promoting revolutionary slogans such as WWG1WGA, which expands to "where we go 1 we go all" (also reminiscent of the boogaloo's "all-at-once go" signals) and designed to incite a revolution. There have also been increasing references to a "Q-army", symbolised by members who wear military-style Q-army badges, all in preparation for "The Great Awakening.[27]

Growing ideological overlaps between these fringe anti-government movements and white supremacists hint at a broader rejection of current governments, alleged to be run by Jews.[28] Other anti-government groups such as the sovereign citizens (which reject government authority), and some anti-abortion activists, who also espouse white supremacist ideologies, specifically curate their conspiratorial narratives to also target Jews. In Europe, the recently outlawed group, United German Peoples and Tribes, in Germany, is affiliated with a loose-knit, neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic sovereign citizen movement known as the Citizens of the Reich.[29]

In December last year, a deadly shooting rampage in a New Jersey kosher market was carried out by a couple who had expressed interest in the anti-Semitic Black Hebrew Israelites movement, that comprises African Americans who believe themselves to be the true descendants of ancient Israelites, and which also include sovereign citizens.[30] Almost as a matter of convenience, anti-abortion activists have also framed abortion rights as a "corrupt" Jewish ploy and have dabbled with violence in the past.[31]

White Supremacy and Misogyny

While the threat posed by right-wing extremists, including white supremacists, has largely been the focus of Western counterterrorism agencies, the growth of a misogynistic ideology fueled by "involuntary celibates", or incels, has recently found expression in violent ways. In recent years, incel followers have taken to committing repeated attacks characterised by some experts as terrorism. Adherents of this movement, mostly men, blame their inability to have romantic or sexual relationships on attractive women, and sometimes attractive men, known as "Stacys" and "Chads",[32] who they claim have warped standards for physical attractiveness.

The incel ideology is largely propagated online, in the so-called 'manosphere', which experts have described as "a decentralised network of websites, gaming platforms and chatrooms imbued with a heavy sense of

[23] Joel Finkelstein et al., "COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere," p. 10.
[24] Brendan Joel Kelley and Hatewatch Staff, "QAnon Conspiracy Increasingly Popular with Antigovernment Extremists," *Southern Poverty Law Center,* April 23, 2019, https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/04/23/qanon-conspiracy-increasingly-popular-antigovernment-extremists.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.; Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia, Volume 1* (ABC-CLIO, 2003), p. 758.
[27] Joel Finkelstein et al., "COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere," p. 10.
[28] Jill Petzinger, "A Radical Fringe Group Refuses to Admit the German Reich Is Over, and It's Getting Violent," *Quartz,* March 18, 2017, https://qz.com/929946/a-radical-fringe-group-refuses-to-admit-the-german-reich-is-over-and-theyre-getting-violent/.
[29] Bojan Pancevski, "German Government Moves Against Fringe Far-Right Group," *The Wall Street Journal,* March 19, 2020, https://www.wsj.com/articles/german-government-moves-against-fringe-far-right-group-11584635090.
[30] Michael Kunzelman, "New Jersey Attackers Linked to Anti-Semitic Fringe Movement," *The Associated Press,* December 13, 2019, https://apnews.com/9107f1204a15e4f5f67c8dcc9245f732.
[31] Alex DiBranco, "The Long History of the Anti-Abortion Movement's Links to White Supremacists," *The Nation,* February 3, 2020, https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/anti-abortion-white-supremacy/.
[32] Colin Clarke and Lilianna Turner, "The Incel Ideology Continues to Build a Strong Following in the Online Manosphere," *Global Network on Extremism and Technology,* April 22, 2020, https://gnet-research.org/2020/04/22/the-incel-ideology-continues-to-build-a-strong-following-in-the-online-manosphere/.

misogyny and significant overlap to other violent ideologies, including right-wing extremism and white supremacy."[33]

In their online postings, some recent incel attackers have taken to weaving white supremacist ideologies, including racist and anti-Semitic sentiments, into their toxic masculine narratives,[34] sometimes to the extent of blaming Jews for "controlling society" and being the cause of "social decay and degeneration".[35] For instance, Elliot Rodger, often regarded as the first incel attacker, who was vehemently against anti-interracial relationships, railed in his manifesto that he could not understand how "an inferior, ugly black boy" could "get a white girl" when he "descended from British aristocracy" and the black boy "from slaves".[36]

On other occasions, whilst inceldom was not instrumental in instigating an act of terror, white supremacist attackers such as Philip Manshaus and Stephan Balliet demonstrated incel refrains, even if their motives were clearly racial rather than misogynistic defiance.[37] In the recent mass shootings in Hanau, the shooter Tobias Rathjen, demonstrated inherent misogyny, QAnon-esque conspiracy leanings, as well as a twisted interpretation of inceldom, where he attributed his inability to find a romantic partner partly to alleged state surveillance.[38]

Is It Terrorism?

Recent violent plots and attacks linked to extreme right attackers have re-energised debates over the lack of a universal definition for terrorism, as well as definite mechanisms to differentiate terrorism from extreme right violence and hate crimes.[39] For law enforcement agencies and governments, this has contributed to deviations in prosecutorial charges as well as other multi-jurisdictional challenges. In Europe, for instance, violent right-wing attacks continue to be prosecuted as non-terrorist offences, mainly owing to the challenge for law enforcement in establishing a clear link between the attackers and extreme right-wing terrorist organisations.[40] Similarly in the US, violent acts committed by white supremacists are often prosecuted as hate crimes or homicides.[41]

Such definitional issues were given a fresh impetus following a massage parlour stabbing attack involving an incel follower in Toronto in February. The attack was covered prominently in the media, given that it was the first in the world in which an incel attacker was charged with terrorism offences.[42] But the

[33] Ibid.
[34] Online chatters on an incel forum demonstrates vehement denial of adherents' association with the extreme right; ironically, their justifications are inherently anti-semitic and racist, with white supremacist discourse pervasive. See, "Why does media keep pushing the "incels are far right extremists" narrative? *INCEL.CO*, June 3, 2020, https://incels.co/threads/why-does-media-keep-pushing-the-incels-are-far-right-extremists-narrative.211635/; Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware and Ezra Shapiro, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* April 2020, p. 573, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1751459?journalCode=uter20; Joel Achenbach, "Two Mass Killings a World Apart Share a Common Theme: 'Ecofascism'," *The Washington Post,* August 18, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/two-mass-murders-a-world-apart-share-a-common-theme-ecofascism/2019/08/18/0079a676-bec4-11e9-b873-63ace636af08_story.html.
[35] Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware and Ezra Shapiro, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence," p. 573.
[36] Ibid., p. 573.
[37] Ibid., pp. 573-574.
[38] Blyth Crawford and Florence Keen, "The Hanau Terrorist Attack: How Race and Conspiracy Theories Are Fueling Global Far-Right Violence," *CTC Sentinel,* March 2020, https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CTC-SENTINEL-032020.pdf.
[39] Victor Asal, Kathleen Deloughery and Ryan King, "Close Cousins or Distance Relatives? The Relationship Between Terrorism and Hate Crime," *Crime and Delinquency,* October 2012, pp. 663-668. https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/close-cousins-or-distance-relatives-relationship-between-terrorism-and-hate-crime.
[40] Martin Banks, "Europol Voices Concern Over 'Worrying' Rise in Violence and Propaganda by Right-Wing Extremists," *The Parliament Magazine,* June 24, 2020,https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/europol-voices-concern-over-'worrying'-rise-violence-and-propaganda-right-wing.
[41] Helen Taylor, "Domestic Terrorism and Hate Crimes: Legal Definitions and Media Framing of Mass Shootings in the United States," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, September 2019, p. 231, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/18335330.2019.1667012?journalCode=rpic20.
[42] Justin Ling, "Incels Are Radicalized and Dangerous. But Are They Terrorists?" *Foreign Policy,* June 2, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/02/incels-toronto-attack-terrorism-ideological-violence/.
In contrast, the 2018 incel vehicle-ramming attack by

sentence also attracted criticism in some quarters, given the degree of uncertainty over whether the attack had been carried out in the name of a political or ideological worldview, generally regarded as an important predicate of terrorism.[43]

A similar debate arose following the Tennessee Waffle House shooting in 2018, whereby the attacker, targeting mainly Blacks, was discovered to be an adherent of the sovereign citizen movement. Yet, there was little direct evidence to suggest the attack had been carried out to advance the sovereign citizen ideology.[44] In a broader sense, both cases are reflective of an ongoing debate in the canon of terrorism literature over whether an ideology is a direct cause or merely an amplifying factor in instigating an individual to violence.

Reconceptualising Terrorism

While extreme right violence is not a new phenomenon, recent years have seen an uptick in its frequency and lethality. Ideological convergence, variously termed as fringe fluidity, has also become common place, revealing a "shifting, complex and overlapping milieu of individuals, groups and movements espousing different but related ideologies, often linked by hatred and racism towards minorities, xenophobia, Islamophobia or anti-Semitism."[45]

Increasingly, extreme right-linked individuals and groups have grown adept at exploiting social media to widen their echo chambers, and forge ties with international networks abroad,[46] mainly to mobilise others to violence. Recent episodes of such violence have raised questions about whether a more focused and systemic response is warranted, particularly for emerging groups like the boogaloo, which openly call for violence against the authorities.[47]

As a greater number of lone actors and extreme right groups foray into the violent space, sometimes resorting to terrorism, the polarisation that results from in-and-out-group violence provides a fertile environment for further[48] ideological convergence in the extreme right. It also contributes not only to greater reciprocal radicalisation and violence between the extreme right and groups espousing broadly opposing ideologies, but also ideological confluence, including with groups from the far-left as well as Islamist extremists.[49]

Alek Minassian, in Toronto, was not charged with terrorism. See "Teenage Boy Charged in Canada's First Incel Terror Case," *BBC News,* May 20, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52733060.

[43] Simon Cottee, "Canada May Host the World's First Incel Show Trial," *Foreign Policy,* June 1, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/01/canada-may-host-the-worlds-first-incel-show-trial/.

[44] J.M. Berger, "The Difference Between a Killer and a Terrorist," *The Atlantic*, April 26, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/04/the-difference-between-killer-and-terrorist/558998/.

[45] "Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism," *Counterterrorism Committee Executive Directorate, United Nations Security Council,* April 2020, https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/news/2020/04/01/cted-launches-trends-alert-extreme-right-wing-terrorism/.

[46] Julia Ebner, "The Far Right Thrives on Global Networks. They Must Be Fought Online and Off," *The Guardian,* May 1, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/may/01/far-right-networks-nationalists-hate-social-media-companies.

[47] Criag Timberg, "As Trump Warns of Leftist Violence, A Dangerous Threat Emerges from the Right-Wing Boogaloo Movement," *The Washington Post,* June 18, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/06/17/trump-warns-leftist-violence-dangerous-threat-emerges-right-wing-boogaloo-movement/.

[48] Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware, "The Challenges of Effective Counterterrorism Intelligence in the 2020s."

[49] The confluence of far-left concerns over issues concerning the environment and the extreme right on immigration and race has led to the emergence of an ideological strand known as "ecofacism", which was expressed in the manifesto of the Christchurch and El Paso shooters, premised on the idea, amongst others, that over population (of non-whites) needs to be prevented to save the environment. See Joel Achenbach, "Two Mass Killings a World Apart Share a Common Theme: Ecofascism." Likewise, ideological convergence between the extreme right and Islamist extremists has long been observed. The recent case of a neo-Nazi US soldier who had consumed propaganda materials from the Islamic State, expressed admiration of al-Qaeda and disclosed information on his unit's deployment to a purported member of the Islamist terror group is illustrative of how a shared enemy could transcend broader ideological leanings. "US soldier Ethan Melzer accused of planning attack on own unit," *BBC News*, June 23, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53145806.

To prevent radicalisation and tackle hate crimes and violent extremism, a re-conceptualisation of terrorism and the attendant countermeasures is warranted. A recent Real-Time Delphi Study published in April 2020, which seeks to anticipate and identify emerging threat elements that could have potential implications on the future "trajectories in the perception of terrorism",[50] highlights several contentious grey areas, including the differentiation between terrorism and hate crime,[51] and provides a nudge that more needs to be resolved.

Further, there also needs to be a renewed commitment from the authorities and social media firms to assiduously ban radical and hate groups and remove extremist content online.[52] Such operations will have the inevitable effect of pushing extremists' activities and narratives underground, making them harder to track. To better address this, enhanced monitoring capabilities need to be complemented with a thorough understanding of the nuanced narratives propagated by extremists. This also holds potential for the development of more qualified and targeted counter-narratives that reach beyond the binary worldview of the extremists

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[50] Ted J. Gordon, Elizabeth Florescu, and Yair Sharan, "Definitions of Terrorism a Real-Time Delphi Study," April 25, 2020.

[51] In Germany, for instance, expressions of extreme views are illegal but not considered terrorism as long as they do not lead to physical violence. In Canada, inciting a riot against a particular group of people may be considered hate speech, but not domestic terrorism as long as no physical acts of violence are committed. See ibid.

[52] Julia Ebner, "The Far Right Thrives on Global Networks. They Must Be Fought Online and Off."

Islamic State's Visual Propaganda: Amplifying Narratives and Affecting Radicalisation

Ahmad Saiful Rijal Hassan and Nur Aziemah Azman

Synopsis

The Islamic State (IS) terrorist group has always employed images as part of its propaganda campaign to portray, supplement and amplify its extremist narratives. With its consistent online media operations and effective use of online platforms and social media networks, IS' visual propaganda is pivotal to its radicalisation and recruitment efforts. This article assesses IS' ideological narratives and the images that accompany them, particularly those found in IS photographic reports, publications and videos, as well as the radicalising effect such propaganda has on vulnerable Muslim youths. It is argued that the deliberate distribution of IS' images across different platforms over time, aimed at various target audiences, remains an important component of the group's strategy to achieve its political and military aspirations.

The Power of Visual Elements in Narratives

Within the narrative landscape, visual elements play important roles, often serving as symbols and representing common cultural values. IS uses narratives effectively in developing and legitimising its ideology, and communicating its strategy and mission. Its sophisticated propaganda strategy not only includes extensive use of online social networking, but also high-quality video productions and publications. This is evident in IS' daily publication of photographic reports providing updates on its so-called *wilayat* (provinces), and publications that include illustrations and infographics, as well as high quality videos.

IS uses images strategically in its online media campaigns, to communicate its narratives as well as attract and influence potential recruits and followers. Hence, it is important to analyse IS' visual imagery, to not only better grasp the messages embedded within, but also avoid drawing incomplete or misleading conclusions. Essentially, the use of images is advantageous, given they instantly attract the attention of viewers, yielding perception and comprehension at the same time.[1] In addition, visuals also stimulate viewers' emotional responses, particularly those depicting graphic violence.[2]

Viewers focus on visual information because they see images as credible records, allowing them to "witness" events while not being physically present.[3] Verbal information, on the other hand, requires viewers to engage in a more sequential approach to process and internalise its meaning. For IS' non-Arabic speaking supporters and networks based across the world, the use of visuals can also serve as an effective means of communicating the group's narratives.[4]

While visual images mainly serve the purpose of capturing viewers' attention, they also provide a means of expanding IS' audience base through media campaigns. Images can potentially attract the attention of younger

[1] Anne Marie Barry, *Visual Intelligence: Perception, Image, and Manipulation in Visual Communication*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 24.

[2] Cori E. Dauber, and Carol K. Winkler, "Radical Visual Propaganda in the Online Environment: An Introduction", in *Visual Propaganda and Extremism in the Online Environment*, ed. Carol k. Winkler and Cori E. Dauber (U.S. Army War College and Strategic Studies Institute, 2014), p.10, https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=756464.

[3] Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects, (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), p. 117.

[4] Finch, Andrew, Wei Song, Kumiko Tanaka-Ishii, and Eiichiro Sumita, "Speaking Louder Than Words With Pictures Across Languages," *AI Magazine*, June 2013, Vol. 34 Issue 2, p. 31. https://doi.org/10.1609/aimag.v34i2.2471.

audiences, many of whom are impressionable, vulnerable and also lacking in sufficient religious knowledge. Besides, the use of visual images in persuasive campaigns also heightens message recall.[5] Viewers do not typically see or process visual images in isolation, but see them in combination with captions, audio soundtracks, or other textual material. They remember the information conveyed if visual images reinforce the auditory track of a video or the written text. Certain images function as part of influential media campaigns, with their message and meaning only comprehensible when situated within broader audio, textual, and visual message contexts. Others can carry significant messages and have a lasting impact as markers for certain cultures, systems of values and ideologies.[6]

Given that IS is a violent extremist organisation, its propaganda is replete with images depicting violence and brutality. Such images, which are known to greatly stimulate emotional responses in some viewers, predictably will continue to feature prominently in IS' propaganda channels going forward. At the same time, IS also uses images to depict alternate themes and narratives it deems alluring. In this article, IS images are assessed ranging from those published during IS' heyday in 2015 in the Iraq-Syria theatre to the present day, and broadly fall under two overarching themes of (1) utopianism, and (2) resilience.

Utopianism is arguably the broadest and most important narrative espoused by IS, following the establishment of its so-called caliphate.[7] From 2014 to 2016, a steady stream of content was uploaded daily online, depicting mundane aspects of life, such as children playing at amusement parks and fighters relaxing and having a swim. Other visuals introduced some of IS' education system and civil services efforts. Such visuals, meant to assert the group's legitimacy, were aimed at positioning IS as a capable self-governing caliphate. IS' caliphate was also framed as the utopia that other jihadist groups aspire to create but have so far failed to realise. In this article, images used to depict utopianism are specifically those that portray (i) education under IS; and (ii) civil defence and public service efforts.

Meanwhile, IS' theme of resilience started to emerge in earnest in its propaganda prior to and after the fall of Baghuz,[8] then IS' last physical stronghold in Syria. This theme is embedded in IS' narratives of (i) *baqiyah wa tatamaddad* (remaining and expanding); (ii) war of attrition; and more recently, (iii) COVID-19 as divine retribution. Notably, there has been a shift from narratives that depict utopianism to those of resilience in IS propaganda. The images selected in this article reflect the resilience theme as embedded in the three aforementioned narratives.

Analysing Visual Elements in IS Narratives

IS, since its inception, has perpetuated numerous narratives that help to project the group's ideology and inflate its image among supporters. IS propaganda content includes, among others, captioned photographic reports, the weekly Arabic newsletter Al-Naba' and several videos. When analysing this content, it is important to note how the elements within the images are arranged or composed, how it is placed in relation to other objects in the image, and how well the subject matter is expressed. The composition of an image determines whether it is eye catching and will resonate powerfully.

1) Utopianism

i) *Education under IS*

Examples of visual elements that portray and bolster IS' utopianism narrative can be seen in

[5] According to Allan Paivio's Dual Coding Theory, images contain two codes: one visual and the other verbal, each stored in different places in the brain. The dual-coding nature of images allows for two independent ways of accessing visual memories, increasing the odds of remembering at least one of them.

[6] Tommaso Durante, "Visual Culture and Globalization: The Visual Archive Project of the Global Imaginary," *Global-e,* June 1, 2014, Vol. 8, Issue 4, https://www.21global.ucsb.edu/global-e/june-2014/visual-culture-and-globalization-visual-archive-project-global-imaginary.

[7] Charlie Winter, "The Virtual "Caliphate: Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy," *Quilliam Foundation*, July 2015, p. 28.

[8] Nur Aziemah Azman, "Islamic State's Narratives of Resilience and Endurance", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses,* Vol. 12, No. 1 (January 2020), p. 82, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CTTA-Annual-Threat-2020.pdf.

Images 1, 2, 3 and 4 below. Image 1 is a screenshot taken from a video by IS in Raqqah titled "Education Under the Caliphate." The video features the terror group's efforts in restructuring the education system in its territories and showcases the atmosphere and environment of schools operating under IS' control. Image 1 shows four girls, with the one dressed in pink and donning IS' black banner headband being the main subject and the rest in the background in the video, the girl dressed in pink is seen reciting verses from the Quran and becomes the focal point of the scene, highlighting IS' Islamic education system in operation for children.

Image 2 is another screenshot from the same video, showing an assembly of boys reciting a prayer before studying, with the inclusion of the single raised index finger pointed upwards. The gesture is a symbolic cue adopted by IS and refers to the Islamic principle of *tawhid* (the oneness of God) and the unity of the Muslim *ummah* (community of believers).[9] In the image, the interaction between the man in brown in the foreground and the children in the middle ground creates an environment that illustrates the rigorous IS-inspired Islamic education.

Image 1

Image 2

Images 1 and 2 are screenshots from "Education under the Caliphate" video by IS in Raqqah. March 6, 2015. Source: Shumukh Al-Islam Network.

ii) *Civil defence and public service efforts*

Images 3 and 4 showcase IS' capability in governance that further feeds its utopian image. Image 3 is a screenshot from a video by IS in Raqqah titled "Safety and Protection Office" that introduces the work of IS' office dealing with civil defence matters in Raqqah. The image shows its firefighters responding to a dispatch call ready to go to the scene. The appearance of two fire trucks is meant to illustrate that IS has the necessary equipment for its civil defence. Image 4, also taken from the same video, shows the capability of the firefighters to conduct their work. Image 5, on the other hand, is a photographic report by IS provincial media in Ninawa showing a group of workers repaving the road – as indicated in the caption - as part of IS' public service efforts.

Image 3

[9] Zelinsky, Nathaniel, "ISIS sends a message: What gestures say about today's Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, September 3, 2014, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-09-03/isis-sends-message.

Image 4

Images 3 and 4 are screenshots from "Safety and Protection Office" video by IS in Raqqah. October 23, 2015. Source: Shumukh Al-Islam Network.

Image 5. Photographic report from IS' Ninawa province. Caption in Arabic says: "Repaving the main road of Al-Salam district in Mosul city". February 12, 2016. Source: Shumukh Al-Islam Network.

These images are among many used by IS to portray itself favourably among supporters and bolster its narratives. Such images were constantly produced, almost on a daily basis, by the group's media arms for at least three years following its inception. However, there was a gradual decline in the production of media output depicting IS running a functioning state since the end of 2016. This followed the mounting US-led military campaigns then, targeting the group's fighters and territorial strongholds.[10] Meanwhile, the production of propaganda content devoted to military and operations reports doubled from this period, eclipsing attention given to governance, public services, commerce and other topics portraying civilian life.[11] After the collapse of its self-proclaimed caliphate in early 2019, IS' media output, in general, has declined but not ceased. The group's narratives have shifted to those that assert resilience and fortitude, especially following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic earlier this year.

2) Resilience

i) *Baqiyah wa Tatamaddad (Remaining and Expanding)*

The narrative of *baqiyah wa tatamaddad* (remaining and expanding), continues to be prominently referenced in IS' operational propaganda. The *baqiyah* (remaining) part is affirmed through the consistent production and dissemination of propaganda content that publicises operations carried out by IS affiliates such as those in the Sinai, West Africa, the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and Yemen. In his audio speech, IS spokesperson Abu Hamzah Al-Qurasyi also asserted IS' resilience and perseverance, and that it is *baqiyah* (remaining).[12]

A case in point is the "Vengeance for Sham" campaign, which was widely touted online and found in many of IS' media content, after its fall in Baghuz. Image 6 is an English translation of an infographic released in issue 177 of IS' Arabic weekly newsletter Al-Naba', illustrating some statistics from the battle. Also featured was a map with location pins, indicating successful operations. The information found in the infographics supports the IS' rhetoric of expansion and continuing strength.

The narrative of expansion or *tatamaddad* continues, albeit not as aggressively as during the height of the group's reign. This can be gleaned from the statements and photographic reports released by IS in which areas the group operates in are introduced as *wilayat.* These include Central Africa, Turkey, Somalia and Southeast Asia. To its sympathisers, these *wilayat* serve as proof of IS' continued relevance. Image 7 is a screenshot from a video by IS in Turkey titled "The Best Outcome is for The Pious". It shows five men putting their hands together while

[10] Scott Shane, "ISIS Media Output Drops As Military Pressure Rises, Report Says," *New York Times*, October 10, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/11/world/middleeast/islamic-state-media-propaganda-isis.html?auth=link-dismiss-google1tap.

[11] Ibid.

[12] "Allah destroyed them, and a similar fate awaits the disbelievers," *Al-Furqan Media Foundation*, January 27, 2020.

reciting the pledge of allegiance or *bai'ah* to the so-called caliph. Moreover, the inclusion of the Arabic logo that says "Turkey" on the top right affirms the creation of an IS affiliate in Turkey.

Image 6. English translation of Al-Naba' issue 177. April 12, 2019. Source: Shumukh Al-Islam Network.

Image 7. Screenshot from the IS Turkey video "The Best Outcome is for the Pious". July 10, 2019. Source: Shumukh Al-Islam Network.

ii) *War of Attrition*

Another narrative that IS stresses is that it will outlive its enemies through a war of attrition, thus further feeding its *baqiyah* slogan. Deceased IS spokesman Abul Hasan Al-Muhajir, in his audio speech released in March 2019, affirmed the guerilla tactics employed by IS fighters, emphasising them as "imbalanced hit-and-run battles."[13] This strategy was reinforced by the late "caliph" himself, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in his April 2019 video appearance. Al-Baghdadi asserted that IS' battle is now to bleed the enemy in a long fight, proclaiming that the mujahidin "have shown their enemies that they are capable of holding the reins of initiative, knowing that the battle today with their enemies is a battle of attrition".[14] This war of attrition narrative and IS' "reins of initiative" were illustrated in a list of campaigns IS claimed to have coordinated, including the group's "Battle of Attrition" campaign launched in June 2019.

In a September 2019 audio speech, Al-Baghdadi highlighted the first two waves of the "Battle of Attrition" campaign and boasted that they were coordinated and planned in advance.[15] In May 2020, IS' new leader Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashimi Al-Qurasyi congratulated and supported fighters on the third wave of the group's Battle of Attrition that lasted from 14-25 May.[16] The self-proclaimed military campaign inspired violence by IS affiliates in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Somalia, West Africa and the Philippines. Image 8 shows the infographic in issue 236 of Al-Naba' which illustrates the statistics from the battle. Again, the use of a map with location pins seemingly showcases the success of these operations.

[13] "He was true to God, so God was true to him," *Al-Furqan Media Foundation*, March 19, 2019.
[14] "In the hospitality of the *Amiru Mu'minin,*" *Al-Furqan Media Foundation*, April 30, 2019.
[15] "And Say, Act," *Al-Furqan Media Foundation,* September 16, 2019.
[16] "Battle of Attrition 3 Infographic," *Al-Naba'* Issue 236, May 29, 2020.

Image 8. Infographic of third wave of Battle of Attrition" in Al-Naba' issue 236. May 29, 2020. Source: Shumukh Al-Islam Network.

iii) COVID-19: Divine Retribution

In February 2020, more than a month after the COVID-19 outbreak made headlines, IS shared its views on the pandemic, alleging that it is divine retribution, namely against China for its alleged persecution of Uyghur Muslims. More than a week after cases of COVID-19 first emerged in Iran in February 2020, IS in issue 223 of Al-Naba' then carried an editorial which gloated over the virus outbreak in the country and mocked the Iranian management of the epidemic. Image 9 is a screenshot of the editorial titled, "Lost are those you invoke except for Him."[17] The image used in the editorial is of a man possibly disinfecting the tombs in a Shiite shrine. It was also used to mock Shiites, given their holy city was then an epicentre of the outbreak. The article also highlights the so-called hypocrisy of the Shiites, scoffing they only turn to God in times of crisis and return to polytheism in times of relief and ease.[18]

Further commenting on the pandemic, issue 226 of Al-Naba' featured an editorial on the spread of COVID-19 titled "The worst nightmare of the Crusaders." Echoing its first commentary on God's retribution on China, IS also noted that God's torment in the form of the virus has mostly struck "idolatrous" nations[19]. Image 10 is a screenshot of the editorial and uses an image of two soldiers of a Western country performing a check on a masked driver. IS' editorial depicts the West as having to deploy their security forces to assist in COVID-19 relief efforts, which is framed as a nightmare scenario, given many governments with strained resources are also grappling with rising health and economic costs.

While IS has addressed China, Iran and the US explicitly in its propaganda regarding COVID-19, the group has yet to release any official media content involving countries in other parts of the world, including around Southeast Asia (SEA). On SEA-focused Telegram groups, the images that pro-IS online community circulate include photos of deceased Syrian or Iraqi military personnel alleged to have died from COVID-19. In this case, although the captions in the photos are in Indonesian, the images were not related to the SEA region.

Image 9. Screenshot of editorial in Al-Naba' issue 223. February 28, 2020. Source: Shumukh Al-Islam Network.

[17] "Lost are those you invoke except for Him," *Al-Naba'* Issue 223, February 28, 2020.
[18] Ibid.
[19] "The worst nightmare of the Crusaders," *Al-Naba'* Issue 226, March 20, 2020.

Image 10. Screenshot of editorial in Al-Naba' issue 226. March 20, 2020. Source: Shumukh Al-Islam Network.

The Radicalising Effect of Visual Elements in IS Narratives

Most visual elements in jihadist media function as emotionally grounded tools of persuasion and a radicalising factor, in part shaping the beliefs of potential recruits. The success of such media campaigns in stimulating an individual may depend on the associations that come with certain visual images. For instance, the images depicting "Muslim suffering" and "heroic fighters taking revenge," "damage to Muslim properties" and "responsible and competent quasi-government provides help" (Images 3, 4 and 5), "corrupt, westernised education system" and "overhaul of education system by replacing the curriculum with IS-inspired Islamic curriculum" (Images 1 and 2) make a potent combination[20] that could effectively contribute to radicalisation.

Meanwhile, some images have the ability to function as cultural identifiers, cultivating a collective form of memory that encourages identification with the group. In Image 1, the black banner headband donned by the main subject serves as a cultural identifier that reinforces loyalty to IS. In Image 2, the raised index finger is another cultural identifier exploited by IS to represent *tawhid* and the unity of the Muslim *ummah.*[21] Such a symbolic gesture, according to experts, evokes fantasy themes and may serve as tools for building group cohesion.[22] For Muslims in general, it is already a customary practice during prayers to raise the index finger on the right hand of the worshipper to emphasise the oneness of God.[23]

Many Muslim youth search for a sense of personal and religious identity and turn to many media platforms, particularly online, in search of answers. Those radicalised online demonstrate a fascination with the idea of becoming part of a "small brotherhood of super-heroes who avenge the Muslim *Ummah* (nation)".[24] Through the use of myriad media images that appeal to their hope and expectations, IS has exploited such sentiments and, to some extent, fostered a sense of belonging among some disenfranchised Muslim youths in search of solidarity.

Conclusion

IS' visual propaganda continues to be a powerful tool for recruiting new members and inspiring violence among its supporters. Narratives that portray themes of utopianism and a sense of belonging can be potent radicalisation and recruitment drivers. While these narratives continue to evolve in a post-caliphate environment and during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, they have already succeeded in attracting and fortifying a support base that is loyal to and sympathises with IS.

[20] Anne Stenersen, "Gathering Data Through Court Cases: Implication for Understanding Visual Messaging," *Army War College (U.S.). Strategic Studies Institute*, July 2014, p. 51, https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=756464.
[21] Nathaniel Zelinsky, "ISIS sends a message: What gestures say about today's Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, September 3, 2014, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-09-03/isis-sends-message.
[22] John F. Cragan and Donald C. Shields, " The use of symbolic convergence theory in corporate strategic planning: A case study," *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (1992), pp. 199-218, 10.1080/00909889209365329.
[23] "Tashahhud," "The Oxford Dictionary of Islam," *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, John L. Esposito (ed.), http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2348.
[24] Swanson, Ana. "Why young people become jihadists, according to a top expert." *The Washington Post,* December 18, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/12/18/why-young-people-become-jihadists-according-to-a-top-expert/.

In this light, it can be helpful to understand the types of images that individuals who are at the "ground floor" of radicalisation might be drawn to. Some may gravitate toward images of an "adventure" and a "cool" counterculture while others may be drawn to images of "divine purpose". A deeper understanding of IS visual media (that is, choice of subject, objectives and target audience) are useful in the development of effective counter messaging and ideology approaches. As there is nothing incidental about IS' visual campaigns, entities and individuals involved in counter messaging and ideology enterprise should take a leaf out of the IS playbook and devise their own communications strategies which incorporate convincing textual arguments and strong imagery.

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The Islamic State's Reinvigorated and Evolved Propaganda Campaign in India

Kalicharan Veera Singam

Synopsis

The Islamic State (IS) terrorist group has ratcheted up its India-focused social media campaign following its previous propaganda failure to garner support for the group in the country. Based on the evolved IS narratives found in its new flagship magazine Voice of Hind, this article posits that the terror group's reinvigorated propaganda campaign in India is aimed at exploiting the growing politico-religious fault lines and Muslim grievances. The assessment shows IS' propaganda is likely intended at recasting its image as a group that champions the rights of Indian Muslims. The article highlights the importance that IS attaches to the Indian subcontinent for its Ghazwa-e-Hind (the great battle of India) eschatological belief and as a potential recruitment base. The growing presence and involvement of Indian fighters in some of IS' recent terrorist attacks in the subcontinent is also assessed.

Introduction

"*O Muslims of Hind come rushing out of your houses and rebel against the unjust rule of the disbelievers*," reads a statement from the *Voice of Hind*, a flagship publication of IS focusing on India.[1] Hind is the name IS and its affiliated groups use for India. In an obvious attempt to sow discord among Indians of different faiths, it calls on its followers to "rise and strike" using various types of crude weapons[2] to kill "disbelievers" or "*kuffar*" whether they are "neighbours or strangers."[3] The *Voice of Hind*, likely to be IS' official publication, is part of a larger and renewed propaganda campaign to fuel fresh recruitment and make inroads in India.

Though it is hard to pinpoint the level of IS' support and numerical strength, according to most sources, the terror group does not have a strong operational presence in India.[4] From 2014 to 2018, the number of "pro-IS" cases in India was between 180 and 200, which is miniscule given India's approximately 200 million Muslim population.[5] A few incidents involving Kashmiri protestors waving the IS black flags gave rise to concerns that the group might have an undetected presence in the valley.[6] However, the group failed to rise to prominence in Kashmir.[7]

This is not to say that the IS' threat to India has subsided. According to a recent UN report, IS has between 180 and 200 members in the country, mostly in Kerala and Karnataka.[8] IS' messaging in the Indian context is useful to understand how the terrorist group exploits communal cleavages, sectarian fissures and political polarisation. Unlike Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and other terrorist organisations, which primarily focus on recruitment and carrying out terrorist attacks, IS' ideological

[1] Voice of Hind, Shawwal 1441, "Lockdown Special," p. 5.
[2] Ibid., p. 16.
[3] Ibid., p. 7.
[4] Operational presence refers to the IS' capacity to function as an effective fighting unit and its ability to engage in overt or covert kinetic operations.
[5] Kabir Taneja and Mohammed Sinan Siyech, "The Islamic State in India's Kerala: A Primer," *Observer Research Foundation*, October 2019, www.orfonline.org/research/the-islamic-state-in-indias-kerala-a-primer-56634/#_edn1.
[6] "Protesters Again Display ISIS Flags in Kashmir Valley," *The Times of India*, October 17, 2014, www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Protesters-again-display-ISIS-flags-in-Kashmir-valley/articleshow/44857740.cms.
[7] Mohammed Sinan Siyech, "Why Has the Islamic State Failed to Grow in Kashmir?" *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* , Vol. 10, No. 5 (2018), p. 11, www.jstor.org/stable/26435154.
[8] "Twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities," *UN Security Council,* July 23, 2020, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_717.pdf.

narrative demonstrates a keen interest in weakening the social fabric of religiously diverse societies. This paper tracks how IS' extremist narrative and strategy has evolved in India. It will also demonstrate why these changes are significant and why India continues to be attractive to IS as a recruitment base.

IS' Renewed Propaganda Campaign

The significance that IS accords to India is hard to overstate. India is estimated to have the second largest Muslim population in the world and is expected to have the world's largest Muslim population by 2060.[9] India's Muslims are also the world's largest Muslim minority population in a country. The group's growing 'romanticisation' of India could in part be explained by the huge recruitment and growth potential it sees in India and the subcontinent.

The IS propaganda campaigns in the past had been to motivate its radicalised followers in India to undertake *Hijra* (migration) to the Middle East and to fight for the IS' self-proclaimed Caliphate. The IS' call to undertake migration was only heeded by a tiny fraction of India's Muslims. According to India's former Intelligence Bureau Director Syed Asif Ibrahim, only 108 Indian Muslims had joined IS with half of them originating from the Indian diasporic communities in the Middle East.[10] He attributed India's "Sufistic and non-Salafi nature of Islam," its democracy and counter extremist education taught in many of the country's madrassas as reasons for the lack of appeal for IS ideology.[11]

Historically, there has been a very low level of support for jihadist groups among Indian Muslims. The support was so low that it prompted some extremists to condemn India's Muslim community for not supporting the *Ghazwa-e-Hind*[12] (the great battle of India), an eschatological belief that envisions the Indian subcontinent as an important battlefield in the final Islamic war.[13] It is among the most popular jihadist narratives that has been used extensively in IS and other jihadist groups' propaganda.[14] The *Ghazwa-e-Hind* is also compatible with IS' ideological and operational goals in India.

In the *Voice of Hind* issues, the IS has further developed the *Ghazwa-e-Hind* narrative by drawing from recent developments in India, particularly the controversies regarding the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA),[15] the increasing COVID-19 infections, the Indian government's revocation of Kashmir's semi-autonomous status and the security lockdown of the territory. The evolved *Ghazwa-e-Hind* narrative found in *the Voice of Hind* articles manipulatively fuse the growing Hindu-Muslim tensions in India with portions of religious teachings and jihadist narratives, and contemporary animosities towards the Indian state.

Voice of Hind and the Evolving Ghazwa-e-Hind Narrative

The *Voice of Hind*, which came into publication in early 2020, provides some useful insights into how the IS messaging has evolved over time. The Voice of Hind has released six issues thus far[16]; the publication is likely to be a product of a small-scale

[9] Jeff Diamant, "The Countries With the 10 Largest Christian Populations and the 10 Largest Muslim Populations," *Pew Research Center,* May 30, 2020, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/01/the-countries-with-the-10-largest-christian-populations-and-the-10-largest-muslim-populations/.

[10] Bharti Jain, "Ex-IB Chief: Just 108 of 180m Indian Muslims Joined IS," *The Times of India,* December 07, 2018, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/ex-ib-chief-just-108-of-180m-indian-muslims-joined-is/articleshow/66993956.cms.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ghazwa-e-Hind is also referred to as the Ghazwatul Hind in Arabic.

[13] Husain Haqqani, *"Prophecy & the Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent," Hudson Institute*, March 27, 2015, https://www.hudson.org/research/11167-prophecy-the-jihad-in-the-indian-subcontinent.

[14] Ibid.

[15] The Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 was passed into law by the Indian parliament in December 2019 to fast-track citizenship for immigrants fleeing religious persecution from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The CAA provides a pathway to Indian citizenship for undocumented Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Christian, Jain and Parsi immigrants. The CAA came under controversy and was met with protests as it singled out undocumented Muslim immigrants to be not eligible for Indian citizenship.

[16] "ISIS Releases Issue Six Of ISIS Magazine Voice Of Hind, Urges Indian Muslims To Join Hindi-Language Jihadi Social Media," *MEMRI*, July 29, 2020, https://www.memri.org/jttm/isis-releases-issue-six-isis-magazine-voice-hind-urges-indian-muslims-join-hindi-language.

editorial and printing operation of IS members and sympathisers.[17] Each issue of the Vo*ice of Hind* contains five to six articles which discuss wide-ranging topics but with a central message to its followers calling them to engage in violence to defend their faith. The articles in the *Voice of Hind* adopt a rather simplistic form of writing and contain extensive but distorted quotes from the Qur'an and other Islamic texts to provide a veneer of religious legitimacy.

Although the *Voice of Hind* is an India-based IS publication, not all articles in the publication make references to India. In fact, a few articles do not make any reference to India or Indian Muslims and are most likely targeted at a global audience. In these articles, the group claims to provide guidelines on how certain religious practices should be observed by Muslims. In the article, (*the) Muslims should observe Ramadan and celebrate the Eid with the Caliphate*, the group states that religious scholars and committees supported by governments around the world are "untrustworthy" and "un-Islamic".[18]

Most articles in *Voice of Hind* demonstrate the group's keen interest in a grander agenda of delegitimising the Indian state in the eyes of its Muslim population. One *Voice of Hind* article, for instance, makes reference to the arrest of anti-CAA protesters from the Jamia Millia Islamia university and states that such incidents are "just the beginning of the sufferings of Muslims in India."[19] Other articles make references to incidents where Muslims were allegedly denied access to hospitals[20] and an effort by the state to "sully the Eid celebrations."[21] The narratives presented in the *Voice of Hind* include some real injustices and discrimination faced by Indian Muslims with other imagined or exaggerated ones to present Muslims of India as an oppressed lot.

The evolving *Ghazwa-e-Hind* narratives are also a reflection of IS' efforts to redeem itself from the earlier perception that it considered Indian Muslims to be inferior to Arab Muslims.[22] In the earlier years of IS, it is believed that Indian fighters were not viewed upon favourably by the terror group. According to Indian authorities, fighters from India were not considered by the IS to be "martially inclined" and to be "inferior to Arab fighters."[23] A case in point is of pro-IS Indian jihadist Areeb Majeed, who performed menial and demeaning tasks such as cleaning toilets when he joined IS in 2014.[24] Majeed's experience subsequently became a cautionary tale for potential Indian jihadists who wanted to travel to Iraq and Syria to join IS. However, the terror group has since made attempts to rebuild its image among Indian Muslims by demonstrating its receptiveness to granting them important roles in its ranks.[25]

The involvement of Indian fighters in some of the high profile IS attacks in Afghanistan this year lends further credence to the idea that IS' perception of Indian fighters is changing. One of the IS gunmen involved in the Kabul Gurdwara attack where 25 Sikh worshippers were killed is believed to be an Indian.[26] Three Indian fighters were also part of a major prison break incident in Jalalabad that resulted in 29

[17] Robert J. Bunker and Pamela Ligouri Bunker, "The Appearance of Three New Radical Islamist English-Language Online Magazines: Al Risalah, One Ummah & Voice of Hind," The Appearance of Three New Radical Islamist English-Language Online Magazines: Al Risalah, One Ummah & Voice of Hind, *Small Wars Journal*, May 10, 2020, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/appearance-three-new-radical-islamist-english-language-online-magazines-al-risalah-one.

[18] Voice of Hind, Ramadan 1441, p. 13.

[19] Voice of Hind, Shawwal 1441, "Lockdown Special," p. 9.

[20] Ibid., p. 10.

[21] Ibid., p. 11.

[22] Rahul Tripathi, "Islamic State Consider India, Pakistan, Bangladeshi Fighters Inferior to Arab Fighters: Report," *The Economic Times,* November 23, 2015, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/islamic-state-considers-india-pakistan-bangladesh-fighters-inferior-to-arab-fighters-report/articleshow/49895577.cms.

[23] Ibid.

[24] "ISIS Recruit Goes Home to India after Having to Clean Toilets: Reports," *The Straits Times*, January 25, 2016, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/isis-recruit-goes-home-to-india-after-having-to-clean-toilets-reports.

[25] "Islamic State Releases Video Allegedly Showing Indian Jihadists Fighting in Syria," *The Economic Times*, July 12, 2018, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/islamic-state-releases-video-allegedly-showing-indian-jihadists-fighting-in-syria/articleshow/52364998.cms.

[26] Vijaita Singh, "The Hand of Another Indian Suspected in Kabul Attack," *The Hindu*, April 2, 2020, www.thehindu.com/news/national/the-hand-of-another-indian-suspected-in-kabul-attack/article31230319.ece.

being killed and hundreds of IS and Taliban fighters escaping.[27] These incidents indicate that IS' Indian fighters are taking on more important roles in the group's Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) branch and could potentially target India or Indians abroad.

The IS' renewed propaganda campaign is also intended to spawn new pro-IS terrorist cells in India. The IS propaganda campaigns in the past likely inspired the creation of several terrorist cells. These India-based IS inspired terrorist cells include the *Ansar-al Tauhid fi'Bilad al-Hind* (Supporters of Monotheism in the Land of India),[28] *Janood-ul-Khalifa-e-Hind* (Army of the Caliph of India) [29] and the more recently formed *Harkat-ul-Harb-e-Islam* (Movement for the War of Islam) and *Ummat-e-Mohammadiya* (Followers of the Prophet Mohammed).[30] In exchange for the privilege and legitimacy that IS grants its affiliates for being part of its self-proclaimed Caliphate, the group has been able to draw on these cells' resources and manpower and serve as IS' operatives in India. Members of these terrorist cells have been arrested by India's National Investigation Agency for their pro-IS activities and for planning attacks.

The coronavirus pandemic and the rising COVID-19 infections in India have also been mentioned extensively in the *Voice of Hind* issues as divine retributions against the IS' enemies.[31] The group released a "lockdown special"[32] edition with articles titled "Brothers, Stand Tall," "Diseased World," "Lockdown Terror," "Expansion of Jihad" and "Down With the Disbelievers". The articles call on IS followers to be "carriers" of the virus and deliberately spread the infections to "make it worse" for the group's enemies.[33]

Countering the Evolved Extremist Narrative

The IS narratives, as presented in the *Voice of Hind* articles, have evolved and grown in their sophistication. Crucially, the narratives have shifted away from promoting *Hijra* to the Middle East to one of championing the rights of Muslims in India. The IS narratives innovatively merge theology, nostalgia for the Mughal era (a Muslim dynasty that ruled India from 1526 to 1857) as well as emotive factors emerging from the growing religious polarisation and Islamophobia in India. The primary goal of the articles in the *Voice of Hind* is to instil in the minds of Indian Muslims that the Indian state had made the community a subservient population and that it is only in an Islamic State that Indian Muslims would be able to live with dignity and redeem their past glory.

To counter the IS' evolved extremist narrative, the counter messaging of security institutions and religious organisations would also have to grow in its sophistication. While the Indian state's security agencies have been able to foil IS' terrorist plots in India, the terror group's attempts to evoke negative sentiments against the state and promote violence as a legitimate response to Islamophobia may prove more challenging to counter. In other words, although India's operational preparedness and responses to the kinetic IS threat have thus far been very effective, it remains to be seen if the state would be able to as effectively counter the emerging IS narratives intended to capitalise on Muslim grievances and vulnerabilities in the country.

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[27] Rezaul H Laskar and Neeraj Chauhan, "Kerala Physician among 3 Indian Islamic State Operatives Killed in Afghanistan Prison Attack," *Hindustan Times*, August 5, 2020, www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/kerala-physician-among-3-indians-is-operatives-killed-in-afghanistan-prison-attack/story-mVJIpIGY6SAWXIiTAXWaKN.html.

[28] "Ansar-Ut Tawhid Fi Bilad Al-Hind (AuT), an India-Specific Jihadi Outfit That Pledged Allegiance to the Islamic State (ISIS) in September 2014, Has Started Online Propaganda for ISIS in Bengali," *The Times of India*, Nov 18, 2015, www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Ansar-ut-Tawhid-fi-Bilad-al-Hind-AuT-an-India-specific-jihadi-outfit-that-pledged-allegiance-to-the-Islamic-State-ISIS-in-September-2014-has-started-online-propaganda-for-ISIS-in-Bengali-/articleshow/49825548.cms.

[29] Bharti Jain, "IS Head-Hunter Sent Rs 6 Lakh to Busted Cell Janood-Ul-Khalifa-e-Hind," *The Economic Times*, July 13, 2018, www.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/IS-head-hunter-sent-Rs-6-lakh-to-busted-cell-Janood-ul-Khalifa-e-Hind/articleshow/50753513.cms.

[30] Mohammed Sinan Siyech, "The Islamic State in India: Upgrading Capabilities?" *Middle East Institute*, Feb 5, 2019, www.mei.edu/publications/islamic-state-india-upgrading-capabilities

[31] Voice of Hind, Sha'ban 1441, Issue 2, p. 7.

[32] Arvind Ojha, "Islamic State Tells Indian Muslims to Be Coronavirus Carriers," *India Today,* July 26, 2020, www.indiatoday.in/india/story/islamic-state-tells-indian-muslims-to-be-coronavirus-carriers-1704572-2020-07-26.

[33] Voice of Hind, Shawwal 1441, "Lockdown Special," p. 9.

Conclusion

IS' concerted effort to subvert segments of the Indian Muslim community with its renewed propaganda campaign indicates that the threat from the group to India could be growing. Historically, the Indian Muslim community has been very resilient against extremist ideologies. However, the increasingly assertive Hindu hyper nationalist sentiments and growing Islamophobia are eroding the syncretic and pluralistic make-up of the Indian society. This erosion, if left unfettered, poses opportunities for extremist ideologies like IS to entrench itself in vulnerable segments of the Indian Muslim community, which may feel insecure about its place in India.

IS' renewed propaganda campaign in India complicates Indian security agencies' counter terrorism efforts in a number of ways. While IS will most likely not be able to establish a territorial base in India, its propaganda could lead to more radicalisation and inspire new terrorist cells. If the threat from the IS increases, it may warrant more action from the country's security agencies. But the fragile relations between India's Muslim and Hindu communities could further erode if counter terrorism operations create the perception that the Muslim community is unduly targeted and vilified. Hence, counter-terrorism and deradicalisation efforts must be carefully managed by all players, including the Indian state, so that there is little room for IS to exploit Indian Muslim perceptions and sensitivities.

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Islamic State and Kin Terrorism in the Post-COVID-19 South Asia: Exploring the Possibilities and Implications

Farooq Yousaf

Synopsis

Since territorial and organisational setbacks in Iraq and Syria, coupled with improvements in financial and border controls, the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group is employing unconventional strategies to attract recruits, such as the use of kinship and family networks. This paper discusses the potential of kinship and family ties in IS' terror recruitment in South Asia. This study underscores that kin terrorism remains understudied in South Asia and requires systematic investigation for a better understanding in relation to terrorist recruitment. The paper concludes with the recommendation that future CT and PCVE strategies in South Asia should factor in kin terrorism and the role of familial networks in recruitment and radicalisation to effectively counter the twin threats of extremism and terrorism.

Introduction

Kin terrorism, both in counter-terrorism (CT) and preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) approaches, has recently gained traction with the involvement of multiple, often blocs of, family members in terrorist attacks.[1] With growing physical limitations, owning to COVID-19 lockdowns, especially when it comes to recruitment, terrorist groups will look beyond traditional means of radicalisation and recruitment.[2] One such non-traditional technique involves the exploitation of kinship and extended family networks for terrorist recruitment.

Kinship is likely to play a key role in radicalisation and terrorist activities in the post-COVID-19 world.[3] Furthermore, limited response capacities of governments and law-enforcement agencies in South Asia make it an attractive target for transnational terror groups to use kinship and family ties to expand their reach and recruitment. IS has already exploited family networks in the Middle East, with Iraq reporting a spike in family-related attacks.[4] These family-based IS networks have carried out attacks in South and South-East Asia as well. In this context, this paper uses open-source data to discuss the nature of kin terrorism and its impact on security in South Asia. In its second section, the paper briefly defines and discusses the characteristics of kin terrorism. The third section explores the potential of IS to manipulate kin terrorism in South Asia. In conclusion, the study discusses security implications for South Asia related to kin terrorism.

What is Kin Terrorism?

Even though not a novel phenomenon having roots found in the Italian Red Brigades in the 1970s and 1980s,[5] kin terrorism has gained

[1] Abdul Basit, "Kin terrorism: A new weapon for the Islamic State," *Today Online,* May 23, 2019, https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/kin-terrorism-new-weapon-islamic-state.

[2] Shemin Joy, "Fear of irrelevance amidst COVID-19 may prompt terrorist groups to launch attacks: UN report," *Deccan Herald,* July 26, 2020, https://www.deccanherald.com/national/fear-of-irrelevance-amidst-covid-19-may-prompt-terrorist-groups-to-launch-attacks-un-report-865928.html.

[3] Eric Tlozek and Fouad Abu Gosh, "Islamic State never needed a caliphate to keep menacing the world. Now it's regrouping," *ABC News,* July 11, 2020, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-11/islamic-state-is-back-and-the-west-is-partly-to-blame/12429296.

[4] Husham Al-Hashimi, "ISIS in Iraq: The Challenge of Reintegrating 'ISIS Families," *Center for Global Policy*, July 7, 2020, https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-iraq-the-challenge-of-reintegrating-isis-families/.

[5] Mohammed M Hafez, "The ties that bind: How terrorists exploit family bonds," *CTC Sentinel,* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2016), pp. 15-17, https://ctc.usma.edu/the-ties-that-bind-how-terrorists-exploit-family-bonds/.

traction in recent years. This is because, with tighter security, monitoring and territorial controls, terrorist groups have turned to expanding their networks via the families of their recruits, resulting in major terrorist attacks involving some or all members of the family unit.[6] Dean Alexander defines kin terrorism as "two or more members of the same clan supporting the threat or use of terrorism." [7]

Family is an institution that transmits fundamental values of acceptable behaviour, identity, commitment and loyalty to its members.[8] Therefore, the radicalisation process that takes place through the family and results in greater trust and group loyalty is also different from conventional radicalisation.

In conventional radicalisation, the subject requires ideological mediation and a series of commitments towards a radical ideology, whereas in family radicalisation pre-existing tight-knit kin bonds 'offer opportunities for radical socialisation that simultaneously satisfy psychological needs; such as avoidance of cognitive dissonance, the need for maintaining meaningful relationships and validation from valued peers.'[9] Unlike conventional radicalisation and recruitment, members of the same family unit join a terrorist group and/or support a radical ideology out of love, respect, compassion and peer pressure from other family members.[10] Also, members of the same family operating in a radical and/or terrorist group forge strong bonds and create a deep sense of belonging, which cannot be normally achieved through other forms of social organisation. This also helps in keeping illegal activities, partaken by trusted family members, clandestine.[11]

A 2015 study of the New America think-tank found that nearly one-third of the western fighters in Iraq and Syria had familial links to jihadism either through relatives who were already fighting in the region or through marriages.[12] Likewise, Magouirk, Atran and Sageman (2008) found strong kinship bonds that extended both within and between terrorist organisations in East Asia.[13] Sageman (2004), in his study of 172 jihadist terrorists, also found that in 75 per cent of the cases, strong kinship and friendship bonds played a key part in the radicalisation process of the jihadists.[14] However, kinship with regards to IS in South Asia and the role of family members and their persuasion to their "kin" to join terrorist groups has received little attention.

Kin Terrorism in South Asia

Various factors, such as limited response capacities of law-enforcement agencies, social inequality and underdevelopment and often the problematic role of the state, in terms of its support for proxy terrorist outfits, have made South Asia an attractive location for radicalisation and terrorist activities. Even with limited operational capacity in countries like India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, IS has also proved its efficacy by forming alliances with local terror factions; for example the al-Alami faction of Lashkar e Jhagvi in Pakistan.[15] Other terrorist groups in South Asia, especially Al Qaeda (in Afghanistan and Pakistan) and Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan have exploited "fictive" (e.g. *ummah*) and lineage-

[6] Basit, "Kin terrorism: A new weapon for the Islamic State."
[7] Dean Alexander, "What Are Family Terrorism Networks?" *Psychology Today,* February 16, 2019, https://www.psychologytoday.com/ie/blog/let-their-words-do-the-talking/201902/what-are-family-terrorism-networks.
[8] Wilson Muna, "Family-Based Networks: Soft Policy Tools in Countering Radicalisation to Violent Extremism," *IntechOpen*, May 6, 2020), https://www.intechopen.com/books/terrorism-and-developing-countries/family-based-networks-soft-policy-tools-in-countering-radicalisation-to-violent-extremism.
[9] Hafez, "The ties that bind: How terrorists exploit family bonds," p. 15.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Sulastri Osman, "Jemaah Islamiyah: of kin and kind," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs,* Vol. 29, No. 2 (2010), pp. 157-175.
[12] Bergen, Peter, Courtney Schuster, and David Sterman, "ISIS in the West: The new faces of extremism," *New America*, November 16, 2015, p.3, https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/future-war/policy-papers/isis-in-the-west/.
[13] Justin Magouirk, Scott Atran and Marc Sageman, "Connecting terrorist networks," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* Vol. 31, No. 1 (2008), pp.1-16.
[14] Sageman, *Understanding terror networks*, pp. 111-113.
[15] Kunwar Khuldune Shahid, "Islamic State Comes for South Asia," *The Diplomat,* June 18, 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/islamic-state-comes-for-south-asia/.

based kinship and 'tribal' association to attract recruits belonging to different ethnic tribes.[16]

Various studies have investigated the role of families, including that of women, in terrorist recruitment and radicalisation, involving terrorist groups other than IS, in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Indian-Kashmir. For instance, Asal, Fair and Shellman (2008) have examined Pakistani families whose male members joined jihadist groups in Kashmir and Afghanistan. They found that seeking permission from a family member was important for a would-be jihadist and at least one member in over 60 percent of the surveyed families gave permission for jihadism when the male member sought their permission.[17] Moreover, Fair (2018) has examined how Lashkar-e-Taiba (now Jamaat-ud-Dawa) has exploited family values by using parents to encourage their sons to partake in militancy in in Indian-Kashmir.[18] Similarly, Bloom and de Leede have studied the intentional targeting of madrassa girls by Pakistani extremist groups with a hope that these girls will educate and radicalise the next generations at home.[19] Yet, the role of family networks in terrorist recruitment and radicalisation in South Asia has not discussed IS.

Notwithstanding its understudied nature, IS has exploited familial networks to carry out attacks across South Asia. For instance, in Sri Lanka, two of the bombers involved in the 2019 Easter bombings, Mohamed Ibrahim Ilham Ahamed and Mohamed Ibrahim Inshaf Ahamed, were brothers and sons of a well-known businessman in the country. Ilham Ahmed's pregnant wife, Fathima Ilham, also detonated herself when the police raided their house, killing herself, her two children and three police officers.[20] Additionally, relatives of the Easter attacks' mastermind Mohamed Cassim Mohamed Zaharan detonated themselves following a police raid on April 26, 2019.[21]

Similarly, in Bangladesh, Asmaul Husna, an IS-inspired girl, stabbed a Dhaka police officer in February 2018, after the police officials visited her home for information about her sister Momena Shoma.[22] Momena was previously charged with a terrorism offence for stabbing her landlord in the neck in Melbourne, Australia, in the same month and was sentenced to 42 years.[23] Bangladeshi security agencies also note that IS has focused on forming squads of female terrorists in the country, where most women join the group under the influence of family members.[24]

Likewise, India has also reported several cases of kin and family terrorism related to IS. For instance, in January 2020, the Afghan security officials reported that ten Indian widows of IS fighters were detained in Kabul's Badam Bagh prison.[25] One of the widows from South India named Maryam, a convert to

[16] Akbar S. Ahmed, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror became a Global War on Tribal Islam,* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013).
[17] Victor Asal, C. Christine Fair, and Stephen Shellman, "Consenting to a child's decision to join a jihad: Insights from a survey of militant families in Pakistan," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* Vl. 31, No. 11 (2008), pp. 973-994.
[18] C. Christine Fair, *In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (London: Hurst and Co., 2018), pp.130-147.
[19] Mia Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and terror," *Gender Issues,* Vol. 28, No. 1-2 (2011): pp. 1-21; de Leede, Seran, "Afghan Women and the Taliban: An Exploratory Assessment," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, April 2014, https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Leede-Afghan-Women-and-the-Taliban-April-2014.pdf.
[20] Siobhan Heanue and Eric Tlozek, "Pregnant wife of Sri Lanka bomber detonates suicide vest, killing children and police," *ABC News,* April 25, 2019, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-25/pregnant-wife-of-sri-lanka-bomber-detonates-suicide-vest/11045306.
[21] "Sri Lanka attacks: Suspect Zahran Hashim's relatives die in raid," *BBC News*, April 28, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48085525.
[22] Lindsay Murdoch, "Alleged Melbourne attacker's sister knifed policeman: Dhaka police," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 14, 2018, https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/alleged-melbourne-attacker-s-sister-knifed-policeman-dhaka-police-20180214-p4z0ae.html.
[23] James Oaten, "Bangladeshi student Momena Shoma sentenced to 42 years for terror attack on homestay landlord," *ABC News,* June 5, 2019, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-05/bangladeshi-homestay-guest-sentenced-for-engaging-in-terror-act/11180560.
[24] Kamran Reza Chowdhury, "Indian Woman Recruited Neo-JMB Militants, Bangladesh Police Allege," *Benar News*, July 17, 2020, https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/woman-arrested-07172020174848.html.
[25] Praveen Swami and Neethu Reghukumar, "Fate of 10 Indian widows of Islamic State terrorists, imprisoned in Afghanistan, casts new light on movement that led dozens from Kashmir to Kerala into Nangarhar," *First Post,* January 7, 2020,

Islam from Catholicism, revealed that she had moved to Afghanistan with her husband Yahiya, who was also a convert.[26] In this migration were also her other convert friends, accompanying their husbands.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, several cases of kin terrorism have come to the fore in recent years. In December 2015, Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Department revealed that a major female network was busted in Karachi. According to officials, the network of affluent women was spreading IS literature through digital means and brainwashing other women. The network also consisted of the wife and mother-in-law of Saad Aziz, the main accused of the Safoora Goth attack.[27]

Similarly, Naureen Laghari, a medical student, was arrested in 2017 before becoming an IS suicide bomber. Laghari abandoned her home and education to join IS and was later arrested by the security agencies. Laghari also revealed that after her training and instructions from IS, she married Ali Tariq, an IS militant who was killed in the police raid and shootout. Tariq persuaded by her to target Easter services in Lahore.[28]

These instances, involving families, especially women, suggest that in South Asia, family dynamics and composition provides a conducive radicalisation and recruitment environment for groups like IS.

In terms of its family dynamics, South Asia is predominantly based on traditional and conservative patriarchal family structures. These mediating structures, if utilised and exploited by terrorist groups for radicalisation, can aid in bringing family members quickly into a group. This is because unlike social media recruitment, the new recruits already share some sense of identity with their kin. Secondly, unlike Western societies, male members in the family – both father and brother – are treated with respect and command authority over junior and female members.[29] Culturally, such "collectivist" social structures, therefore, provide more conducive terror recruitment conditions as compared to western individualistic societies. Hafez believes that in such conditions, terrorist groups can succeed in bloc recruitment, allowing for family group commitment to the militant groups, as those members who are not part of the organisation cannot stay behind due to peer (or family) pressures.[30] Noor's findings are identical to that of Hafez, that is, fathers and brothers influence female members of the family in becoming suicide bombers.[31]

Conclusion

Though it is still early to predict the impact of IS' exploitation of kin terrorism in South Asia, this paper aims to generate a discussion on the importance of kinship in terrorist recruitment and radicalisation in the region. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in tighter border controls and travel restrictions, will play a major part in whether, and how, terrorist groups such as the IS modify their recruitment strategies and extensively use "family networks" to recruit. This is because families, now mostly confined within the boundaries of their homes, can be more vulnerable to radicalisation due to kinship pressure or influence. Additionally, unlike social media exposure, families possess the element of trust between its members which can expedite the radicalisation process.

https://www.firstpost.com/india/fate-of-10-indian-widows-of-islamic-state-terrorists-imprisoned-in-afghanistan-casts-new-light-on-movement-that-led-dozens-from-kashmir-to-kerala-into-nangarhar-7871811.html.

[26] Ruchi Kumar, "From Kerala to Kabul prison: widow of Indian ISIS fighter tells her tale," *The National*, May 24, 2020, https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/from-kerala-to-kabul-prison-widow-of-indian-isis-fighter-tells-her-tale-1.1023096.

[27] Imtiaz Ali, "CTD arrests suspected financier of Safoora Goth massacre," *Dawn*, December 19, 2015, https://www.dawn.com/news/1227213.

[28] Talha, "What You Need To Know About Noreen Laghari, The Girl Who Joined ISIS," *Parhlo,* April 17, 2017, https://www.parhlo.com/security-forces-catch-noreen-laghari/.

[29] Roger Ballard, "South Asian Families: In Rapoport, Fogarty and Rapoport (eds.), *Families in Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 174-204.

[30] Hafez, "The ties that bind: How terrorists exploit family bonds."

[31] Saba Noor, "Women Suicide Bombers: An Emerging Security Challenge for Pakistan," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* , Vol. 3, No. 11 (2011), pp.1-3, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26351018?seq=3#metadata_info_tab_contents.

At any rate, as outlined, there remains a gap in South Asian security infrastructure in dealing with, and understanding, the detrimental role of kinship and family relations in terrorist recruitment and operations. To mitigate this threat, PCVE experts need to develop models that can predict the formation of family terror networks and formulate interventions before a member of the family can radicalise other members. Such models should also focus on the "family" as a major unit of analysis and a determinant of radicalisation within South Asian families. However, because "family units" in South Asia carry community pride and dignity, invasive interventions, therefore, present social and cultural challenges. Such challenges can be moderated through community-based interventions involving positive engagement of the offenders with their families, among other initiatives.

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Normalization of Violence —Conceptual Analysis and Reflections from Asia
Irm Haleem (ed)
(Routledge, 2019)

Terrorist Deradicalisation in Global Contexts —Success, Failure & Continuity
Rohan Gunaratna, Sabariah Hussin (eds)
(Routledge, 2019)

International Case Studies of Terrorist Rehabilitation
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Rohan Gunaratna, Sabariah Hussin (eds) (Routledge, 2019)

Civil Disobedience in Islam— A Contemporary Debate
Muhammad Haniff Hassan (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

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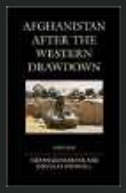
(Imperial College Press, 2016)



Afghanistan After The Western Drawdawn
Rohan Gunaratna and Douglas Woodall (eds)
(Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015)

Resilience and Resolve
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(Imperial College Press, 2015)

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