New Science and Technology in Line with Terrorist Groups in the Middle East

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Abstract:

Terrorism is a phenomenon that has spread to almost all parts of the world in the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21th century to the extent that many Middle Eastern countries have been subjected to such violence and unrest; in fact, with the advent of science and technology, particularly the global spread of the Internet and social networks, the face of terrorism has been changed and in sum, not only facilitated terrorist attacks, but also introduced new lands of opportunities in the field of means and instruments for terrorists. Thus, the application of biological, chemical, radiological as well as cyber attacks proves that terrorist groups benefited from modernized science and advanced tools root in the potentials of the globalization age. Clearly, they do so in order to improve the only process of goal attainment. The main issue of this descriptive-analytic paper concerns how new science and technology appealed in line with the development of terrorist groups actions in the Middle East? Accordingly, the hypothesis is that terrorist groups in the Middle East are constantly using modern facilities and technologies in the globalization space to represent themselves and to create massive terrorist networks. This will bring more and more propaganda for broader terrorist activities and significantly promote recruitment as well.

Keywords: Science and Technology, Terrorist Groups, Middle East, Globalization

Introduction

The Middle East has always been thoroughly ensnarled in transformations and long-standing conflicts insofar as this strategic region of energy resources and commercial interests rarely experienced peace and quiet as such. Among prominent consequences of political transformations in recent decades was disclosure of a fact that none of the countries in the region enjoy a united and

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homogeneous setting, but in contrast, we face a wide range of ethnic, religious, linguistic and even tribal diversities. Given the lack of endogenous development and gradually passing modern governance procedures in the Middle East, there is no evidence of the typical formation of concepts like: Nation, integrated culture, nationalistic sentiments; the people in these countries still live in the context of kin-based communities and traditional collective sectors. That's why these artificially established states, or to put it better, top-down state-building processes suffer from structural divergence and interruption in different socio-political and historical contexts.

Accordingly, it would be posited that the ISIS hasn't emerged eventually as a spontaneous wave of fundamentalism in the Middle East, instead originated from its very historical roots, especially the idea of a return to "Golden Age" of Islamic government in the region, Iraq and Levant, called Caliphate which has disappeared since the decline of the Ottoman Empire. There have been several efforts to revive this historical legacy through different discourses and frameworks during the history, and the ISIS is only the newest and maybe the most destructive one. Thus, the article's main concern of investigation is to analyze how new sciences and technologies have been used by terrorist groups and organizations to facilitate their goal-attainment process in the Middle East. The hypothesis made in this paper is that terrorists are constantly employing advanced technologies in a systematic form under the globalized space to express their plans and to develop their massive networks as well. As a result, it would bring propaganda benefits and promote attractions in recruitment leads ultimately to broader levels of fundamental activities and violent extremism across the world.

Foundation of ISIS

Islamic *Salafi Jihadist* terrorist organization, called ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham), is a non-governmental entity seeks Salvation and return to primary Islamic aspirations. ISIS emergence has contributed significantly to regional capacity reduction and decline of the importance of the Middle East with respect to different economic, social and political aspects. So, it seems to be necessary to consider the formation of ISIS and its roots as well as its influence on recent regional transformations rigorously.

In January 2006, The Organization of Jihad's Base in Mesopotamia, commonly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), joined with several smaller Iraqi Sunni insurgent groups under an integral umbrella organization called the Mujahedeen Shura Council (MSC). On 12 October 2006, MSC united with three smaller groups and six Sunni tribes to form the Mutayibeen Coalition, pledging "to rid Sunnis from the oppression of the rejectionists (Shi'ite Muslims) and the crusader occupiers ... to restore rights even at the price of our own lives ... to make Allah's word supreme in the world, and to restore the glory of Islam". A day later, MSC declared the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), comprising Iraq's six mostly Sunni Arab Governorates, with Abu Omar al-Baghdadi its emir and al-Masri Minister of War within ISI's ten-member cabinet (Joscelyn, 2013). Indeed, ISI planned to seize power in the central and western areas of Iraq and turn it into a Sunni caliphate. The group built in strength and at its height enjoyed a significant presence in the Iraqi Governorates of Al Anbar,

Diyala and Baghdad, claiming Baqubah as a capital city.

Hence, the ISIS is seen as an inherently aggressive, Jihadist organization based on Takfiri ideology, and with this in mind the focus holds simultaneously components such as: Caliphate, Jihad and martyrdom. They recognize the revival of the Caliphate system and obedience without any respect to the character of the Caliph. In case of Jihad, they judge their side absolutely right and correct and believe in Excommunication of non-Muslim people, assigning the name "Kafir" to them; this limitation is defined in a narrow way that other Islamic groups and schools namely Shiite Muslims are deprived with a special Sentence for Jihad against them. More interestingly, in the field of Martyrdom they strive steadily toward Suicide Attacks and military operations so as to reach the real salvation and getting to Heaven subsequently (Ghaffari & Alizadeh, 2014: 96).

ISIS is confronting two regimes in Syria and Iraq, proclaiming both apostates because they represent the Shia crescent. It also projects the Shias as a threat to the Sunnis. While the Shias form the majority of the Iraqi Arabs, they are the minority in Syria. In the name 'Islamic State of Iraq and Sham or Levant', Sham or Levant means the Eastern Mediterranean (Petersen 2014). This shows the expansionist ambitions of the ISIS in a region that has artificial borders which it assumes, can therefore, be legitimately eradicated. The group is not only anti-Assad and anti-Maliki; it is also against other extremists, as well as moderate Sunni groups. Its aggressive terrorist program has provoked the local people in the Sunni areas, as well as other rebel groups, although it is also a fact that a few locals continue to support them (Gulmohamad, 2014: 5). Clearly, their goals are substantially religious and differ, at least, for-

mally from those of Seculars and Nationalist members of the Free Syrian Army supported heavily by Turkey and the United States.

In June 2014, the Islamic State launched its surprise campaign in the Northern and Western Iraq, seizing almost all Sunni Arab territories there and expelling the Iraqi security forces. Meanwhile, al-Baghdadi declared the complete independence from al-Qaeda and introduced himself as the Supreme Caliph of Muslims. Its greatest prize was Mosul, a city with a population of nearly two million where the group's fighters have reportedly seized more than $400 million from banks and freed thousands of former Sunni insurgents from prisons. In a sign of its pragmatism, the Islamic State has coordinated its Iraq campaign with former members of Saddam Hussein's Baathist government (Bunzel, 2013: 3).

Intellectual Base of ISIS

Some scholars do hold the view that intellectual basis of ISIS springs from the background of Radicalism in the Islamic history and particularly Khawarij, as the acknowledged founder of Radical thought in the first century of Hijra (Nafe'e, 2014: 91). Indeed, Some Khawarij developed extreme doctrines that set them apart from both mainstream Sunni and Shiia Muslims. They were particularly noted for adopting a radical approach to Takfir (declaring self-described Muslims as non-Muslims). Then, the ISIS and its subordinates are considered with regard to a natural affiliation to this historical legacy in general.

From the respect of Fiqh schools, the origins of such radical approach to Islamic sources primarily traced back to the theological ideas of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. In the history of Salafism, the idea of understanding everything concerning the Islamic creed based on the days of the Companions of the Prophet

and their Successors started from Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780-855 C.E.). In his rejection of the Mu'tazilites (a school of Islamic theology based on reason and rational thought founded by Wasil Ibn Atha (700748 C.E) doctrine of the creation of the Quran, Ahmad ibn Hanbal reaffirmed the primacy of the revealed text over reason (Hosseinzadeh, 2015: 36). Ibn Hanbal also dismissed employing ta'wil (esoteric interpretation) when interpreting sacred texts on the divine attributes of Allah, and rejected the Kalam methodology – which uses rationalistic method to explain revealed (Halimi, 2016: 2).

Likewise, Taqi al Din ibn Taymiyyah, an Islamic theologian who was a trained jurist and expert in theology (1263-1326 C.E), also identified many additions and attachments encompass the religious practices of Islam, and which in his opinion had corrupted pristine Islam. His approach was to focus on affirming the creed of Tawhid (the doctrine of Divine Unity of Allah based on a strict adherence to the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the consensus of the holy ancestors). Ibn Taymiyyah rejected the ideological arguments of the theological schools of his time entirely; arguments which according to him was influenced by Greek philosophy and terminology, and considered the methodology to be in contradiction to that held by the earlier generations (Ibn Taymiyyah 1426H/2005M).

Generally speaking, in the two previously noticed waves of Salafism, often referred to as a classical Salafism, the issue of preserving the purity of the Islamic creed involved bringing Muslims back to pristine Islam (Halimi, 2016: 3). These scholars were thus primarily focused on theological doctrine. That is, Salafism did not enter into the realm of politics; neither was it used as an instrument

to achieve political power. However, Salafism is about religious tradition and the preservation of that tradition in its literalist form. According to Salafi dogma, any deviation from an established understanding of religious norms and practices is an innovation, and any innovation is strictly prohibited." The preservation of established tradition goes beyond religious texts. It is also about accepting the political order as is" (Souaiaia, 2015: 2) as traditionists posited once, the caliphs were guardians of religious traditions and to raise doubt about any given Caliph's ethical and legal standing would amount to raising doubt about the authenticity and transcendence of religious truths. Hence, Salafism does not engage in the causes and original roots of the civil wars during the reign of the third and fourth Caliphs does not concern with the transgressions and crimes of the Umayyad, and does not challenge the reign of Saud clan over Arabia as long as the Saudi rulers act as protectors of pure Sunni Islam and guardians of holy places.

Overall, Jihadi Salafist typically employ two major intellectual approaches that are relatively close to each other: for a group the only criteria taken into account are "the Book and Sunnah" (e.g., rational judgments make no sense in the decision making process). While, for the other group the aforementioned criteria never brought to the fore, unless when accompanied by the Predecessor's perception. To put it differently, fundamentals of Salafism and Wahhabism could be identified more specifically by virtue of several writings include: works of Ibn Taymiyyah and Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab, "Hidayah al-Morid" by Sheikh Avaz al-Ibadi, "Tawhid Allam al-Ghuyub" by Abdul-Ghader Ihdil, "Mujiz Aqidah al-Salaf" by a

group of Saudi scholars and "Encyclopedia of Salafism" by Farid Vajdi. To keep in line with these sources, it could be argued that Takfir (excommunication) and Jihadism are the main components of intellectual background of the ISIS. The former used chiefly as a powerful instrument of self-justification against others, seeking an extensive application of this discourse beyond anything to formalization or normalization of their violent fight upon the world that means to draw a practical distinction between the "ISIS" and the "others". Similarly, the latter denotes a strict and radical interpretation based on formal perception of the Book and Sunnah adopting by terrorists a kind of implicitly legitimate permission for genocide and bloodshed; this makes it obligatory for all to prepare for armed struggles regardless of Fiqh, knowledge and philosophy implications.

Furthermore, according to Salafist obedience to a despotic or cruel rulers not only not condemned, but also on the contrary, is actually approved or rather regarded as an obligatory sentence in any case (unless seemingly command by committing sin). They don't recognize innovations and emerging issues in Islam both in the field of praise, worship and ethics, as well as in sentences, owing to the fact that they only believe in the dichotomy between worldly (secular) and afterlife-related affairs and rarely go beyond basic classifications practically (Raineri & Martini, 2017: 431). Also, they insist on preventing from the spread of new values or thoughts among the followers, even if it involves inevitable modifications in radical approach.

There are different instruments and mechanisms by which terrorist organizations like ISIS attempt to reinforce their influence over the Public in terms of producing propaganda targeted at broad recruitment: dynamic ideology, ideological and territorial associa-tion, sustainable financing, advocacy and membership, practical attraction, and so on. Certainly, the ISIS has chosen the Islamic Caliphate model of governance to enjoy a dynamic experience of an embodied ideology with a specialized territorial domain that makes it plausible to increase in the extent of influence through participation of other terrorist organization; i.e. allied groups within the region.

ISIS in Line with New Communication Technologies

The Islamic State has sophisticatedly utilized social media, from the outset of its historical moment of emergence, as a tool to spread terror around the world to optimize international recruitment efforts. The Islamic State is widely known for its posting of disturbing contents such as beheading videos on the internet. The Islamic State creates its own online content such as videos, magazines, and flyers. This propaganda is disseminated through websites and many social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube. By utilizing social media, the organization has garnered a strong following and successfully recruited thousands of followers.

ISIS targets a variety of different groups, both in the Middle East and Western Countries. There are a wide variety of motives for why fighters may be prompted to join the ISIS. Quantum researchers cite nine attributes characteristic of a fighter looking to join the ISIS: status seeking, identity seeking, revenge, redemption, thrill, ideology, justice, and death (Tucker, 2015: 12). Meanwhile, in terms of content, ISIS produces propaganda videos that range from executions to full-length documentaries. The videos have a high production quality and incorporate montages, slow motion scenes, and are often accompa-

nied by a short dialogue. ISIS has a dedicated team of over at least 100 media insurgents dedicated to recording these videos.

From 2013 to 2014, the organization primarily used mainstream platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube; however, in 2014, these large social media platforms removed the ISIS content and since then, ISIS has chosen to utilize social media platforms that either protect their content or allow for content to quickly be reposted. These platforms of choice are Telegram, Just paste it, and Sure spot (Ibid.). It also implements marketing initiatives like "Jihadist Follow Friday" which encourages users to follow new ISIS-related accounts each Friday. The recorded statistics prove that the ISIS (unlike other radical fundamentalist groups) was more successful in actualizing available media capacities and potentials to facilitate reaching its objectives efficiently. ISIS's extensive reliance on Cyberspace and internet-based social networks as a fruitful ground for publicizing ideological contents made media analysts to mark internet as the main "Battlefield" of the ISIS (Nejatpour, 2013: 96).

More specifically, the main themes of the ISIS activities within social networks consist of, a somewhat reckless, claim to act on behalf of Sunni minorities and nations throughout the region, seeking protection of their rights, and to lead people toward "the right path", along with an appeal to frightening and disturbing audiences in a harsh manner. Besides, numerous media outlets, especially TV channels (which work predominantly under the auspices of Salafist, ethnocentric or Ba'athist currents) have already been collaborating in introducing, developing, maintaining and advertising in favor of their operations and stances through media presentation.

Such freedom of acting preceded by a lack of a concentrated purposive filtering on social media finally resulted in a potentially dangerous phenomenon called "Broad Recruitment of the ISIS worldwide" that seen as a strategic progress in the Middle East.

Here are the main areas of the ISIS activity using new communication technologies for making a greater impression on the audiences:

The link between online ISIS propaganda - easily found on a variety of social media platforms - and the death of people is linear and clear. A guy found some crazy stuff on a site, as we all do - regardless often of whether we even want to or not. But, this leads to a fundamental question: How is it still so easy for terrorism to flourish online?

1. Online chat rooms and forums: online chat rooms and forums are one of the most influential communication tools used broadly by the ISIS adherents to publicize ideological contents dialogically and through a question-based ground of interaction. Today, of course, these instruments have lost the dominance in favor of emerging social networks that proved to be more efficient either in the case of translation or diffusion (Schori Liang, 2015: 5).

2. Release of harmful audio, video and text contents on the web: *Jihadist* videos and filmed terrorist operations, meetings with the ISIS leaders or supporters, special recordings on warfare teachings, etc. are typically released online by the ISIS mostly as video clips, photos, and live shows (Shariat, 2014: 112). The video contents involve different themes and subjects which are mainly relied upon the promotion of violence and aggression. Execution, Crucifixion, Burning, Headshot killing, Drowning, Humiliation and Ab-

asement, Contempt and final expression of the ISIS power considered as the core genre of mentioned video contents (Ibid:138).

Furthermore, ISIS directs its activities through social media and social network services as a key facilitator of goal attainment. This is because-the *super rapid online sharing*-nature of these forms of communication made deep influence on mass users available. As it is of great attention for terrorist organizations, ISIS has sought effective appearance in such networks like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. Ahmed Abousamra, originally from Syria and grown in America, recurrently named as the admin of the ISIS-related accounts in social media services (Ebrahimnezhad & Farmanian, 2014: 56).

By various unofficial and not verified accounts on Twitter, ISIS publishes news and information about recent activities and operations and through accounts of regional fighters or Jihadists, records of everyday events, memories and reports as an opportunity for promotion of Jihad and Salafism constantly released. Instructions on how to make bombs or weapons manually are mainly included in the ISIS Tweets (Schori Liang, 2015: 6).

ISIS considered Facebook as a crucial instrument allows decentralization of messages through the internet and makes it possible to produce different kinds of photos, videos, and voice messages, as well as public/private groups, associations, live Question & Answer sessions or even chats on FB media.

A wide range of video contents with different durations and themes uploaded ordinarily by the ISIS advocates worldwide on YouTube, using numerous accounts to appreciate the Jihadist manner and the death on behalf of the ISIS goals. Lots of these YouTube videos composed of pedagogical contents on Suicide attacks or diffusion of ideas, especially Salafism (Ibid: 6). Meanwhile,

they employ Instagram capacities in view of the personal diaries of *Jihadists* for sharing graphical materials like photographs by which they aim to recruit new members. For instance, a video that shows several Jihadists play with a pet such as cat, dog, etc. is posted in Instagram to heavily influence the perception of fundamentalist movements and convince people that there is nothing strange about the ISIS; there are just seeking justice and peace like other social movements (Farwell, 2014: 50).

In addition to Internet-based social media, the first online magazine by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant called "Dabiq" established with the special purpose of Islamic radicalization and recruitment. It was first published in July 2014, in a number of different languages including English and Arabic. Dabiq was published by the ISIL via the deep web, although it was widely available online through other sources. The first issue carried the date "Ramadan 1435" in the Islamic Hijri calendar with cover title of "The Return of Khalifa" and very high quality of graphic details.

Conclusion

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIS, continues to use and develop information and communication technology infrastructures in recruitment and attraction, as well as in publicizing Salafist Jihadism messages throughout the world simultaneously. While, lots of social media services made serious efforts to ban the ISIS activities and to close related pages and accounts, this terrorist organization is still trying to represent itself through a powerful, authoritative and violent image by means of broadly online content sharing (photo, video, and voice). It is likely to serve as a convincing motivation for certain groups of people who are interest-

ed in fundamentalist ideas. However, this would cause strong feelings of hate and exclusion among a large number of ordinary people. So, the Internet plays an important role regarding acceleration of this process particularly by expanding the scope of engagement significantly.

To this end, the Islamic State has been prioritizing operational education over recruitment propaganda in recent years. Now, it's expending more energy than ever on dishing out bomb- and poison-making recipes, providing theological coaching on why murdering civilians is permissible, and advising on encryption and information security. The official propaganda is still out there but, at least for now, it has become increasingly scarce. Nowadays, to paraphrase a recent Islamic State video, "the Jihad has entered a new phase", one in which "retributive" terrorism is the new priority. Facilitating this change, the ISIS has its approach towards propaganda altered course via social media services.

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