

Crowd Sourced Terror: How the Changing Media has Changed Islamic Terrorism

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Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate how changing media technologies have changed modern Islamic terror with particular focus paid to the innovations of the terror group's al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. It will chart the shift from the old media landscape where the means of communication was dominated by States and large media corporations to the onset of new media and web technologies which have opened up new communication opportunities for terrorist organisations. Investigating how circumventing the established media has afforded these groups better access to their target audience and greater control over their narrative than ever before. Attention will be paid to the technological innovations and the groups that first realised their potential and exploited them as a means of communication. It will track terror media campaigns from the televised interviews and terror spectacles deployed by Al-Qaeda, through the web innovations of Zarqawi and Awlaki to discussing the role of the current pioneers in this field the Islamic State. It will examine the role the latter has played in shifting the paradigm to relying on social media as a primary weapon of choice for dissemination. Several major propaganda releases will also be analysed in the scope of this paper to illustrate the changes at a tangible level. As well as charting the shifts of terrorism that occurred during these technological advancements the paper will conclude with a brief investigation on which direction terrorism and media will likely take.

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Chapter 1: Terrorist Media & Propaganda

Terrorism as Communication

Propaganda is defined by Jowett and O'Donnell in their book propaganda and persuasion as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognition and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (Jowett and O'Donnell, V, 2012). Terrorism on the other hand has many definitions while notably having no universal definition as agreed upon by the United Nations General Assembly. In the absence of a legal definition an effort has been made to reach a consensus on an academic definition, of which one of the most recent ones as defined by Alex P. Schmid reads:

Terrorism refers, on the one hand to a doctrine about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear generating, coercive political violence and on the other hand, to a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violence without legal or moral restraints targeting mainly civilian and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties (Schmid, 2011).

Additionally in order to properly frame this discussion in the context of modern Islamic terror this papers attention will be restricted to the use of contemporary terrorism by non-state Islamic terrorist organisations concentrating on the groups known as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. These definitions established it is important to note in discussing terrorism and propaganda that they are identical, in so far as they both seek to influence a mass audience in a way that is intended to further the aims of the sponsor. Yet while terrorism has a singular purpose propaganda can serve many purposes often times using terror as a propaganda tool in a way which was first described during the 19th century wave of Anarchist terror as propaganda by the deed. What is clear is that terrorist organisations need to capture their target audience's attention to spread their message, if an attack or propaganda piece fails to deliver the

intended message then it becomes useless as a tool to further the organisations agenda. Seib and Janek (2010) refer to a concentric circle model to explain the reach and effects of a terrorist attack. At the core of a terrorist attack is the immediate damage and loss of life, while devastating to those caught up in the violence the impact of such an attack is limited to the victims and their immediate circle of friends and family. Unless the objective of the attack was to eliminate a specific person or destroy a particular building the impact of such a strike in terms of a propaganda tool will be relatively low. The successes of these attacks grow however as the imagery and reports they generate spread to a larger audience. The next circle comprises local media from the area of the attack with an audience familiar with the site and perhaps victims of the attack. The proximity to the attack means the reaction of this audience is often times visceral and heated. Beyond this circle are the more distant news consumers who are only moderately moved by the news (p.29). In saying this one needs only to think about attacks such as 9/11 and the 2004 Madrid train bombings to know that these incidents can deeply affect a great deal of people not directly targeted. A study conducted by psychologist Suzanne Thompson in which she interviewed over five hundred people regarding their anxieties and fears post 9/11 resulted in; 60% saying they felt more distress after the event and 55% reporting they had a stronger fear of flying because of the attacks, all of the interviewees were not direct victims of the attacks themselves (cited in Johnson, 2006). The channels which these images and reports are disseminated are often the through conventional media , whose desire to gain readership and viewers often leads them to do inadvertently highlighting a terrorist's cause and playing into their hands providing them with what Margaret Thatcher referred to as the "Oxygen of publicity" (1985).

Symbiotic Relationship between Terrorism and Conventional Media

It is not a new revelation that terrorism and the media have a particular symbiotic relationship. As far back as the Algerian war of independence during the birth of the mass media and contemporary terrorism, insurgent Ramdane Abane wondered "Is it preferable for our cause to kill ten enemies in a *oued* [dry riverbed] of Telergma when

no one will talk of it?, or a single man in Algiers which will be noted the next day by the American press?” (Hoffman, 2006). The two entities can both directly and indirectly feed off one another. Terrorist organisations depend on the multiplier effect of the concentric circles model to spread fear and draw attention to their cause using a ‘propaganda by the deed’ strategy, while the news media thrives on the real life drama and ‘entertainment’ that terrorist attacks create (Nacos, 2007). Terrorist organisations therefore count on the media for publicity while the news media benefits from the terrorists ability to create fear which can be sold to an anxious audience. According to a study by Tanja Milosevska and Nenad Tenaski, use of the conventional media’s desire to attract an audience, often automatically grants even small acts of a terrorism nationwide and sometimes even global attention. The authors note:

The structure and competitiveness of the news industry appear to influence media attention to terrorism. As the media environment becomes more decentralized and competitive, news outlets may try to maintain market share by devoting more attention to terrorist attacks that employed novel tactics or that are particularly violent. Such a development could pose new challenges for the media relations of homeland security agencies by giving the public a distorted picture of the threat to terrorism and reducing the ability of the authorities to explain their policies and to put the problem of terrorism in an appropriate context (2014).

In an effort to understand the phenomenon further Kevin G Barnhurst has distinguished two models of the terrorist- media relationship (1991): the first is the culpable-media model, this model places part of the blame for terrorism at the doorstep of the media. The culpable media model describes the dilemma in which as the media cover terrorism they incite more terrorist attacks, which produces more media coverage, with the result being more terrorism. It suggests that terrorists would have less of a motivation to go to such dramatic measures if they knew that it would be largely passed over by the conventional media. This model can be applied most effectively to the type of ‘lone wolf’ terror that has been the hallmark of recent terrorist attacks in Europe and elsewhere, as ideological top down type attacks by terror groups may have been carried out regardless of media coverage. The second

“vulnerable media model” on the other hand sees the media as a victim of terrorism which suggests that their hands are tied regarding the coverage of such terrorist attacks. In a media landscape where agencies compete for an audience, choosing not to cover an attack may be disadvantageous in terms of maintaining market share of an audience. This problem is amplified in more liberal western countries where free speech is highly valued and a choice to not cover an event may be seen as a cover up. The form of traditional media discussed above can be characterized as a “one to many” communication, where the audience might be virtually limitless, but a small cohort of established institutions selectively disseminates information. This form of media by its very essence is troublesome for terrorist groups as a means of communication as they have no real control over the message or by whom it is received. With the advent of the internet and new media technologies these problems have been largely eliminated. Terror groups now have direct control of their narrative and direct access to their target audience completely circumventing conventional media channels. The following section will give a brief overview of modern terrorisms relationship to the new media.

Terrorism and the New Media

In his article *Combatting Terrorism in the New Media Environment* John Amble provides a useful definition of the new media:

New media should be broadly defined to include virtual networks which so-called many-to-many communication occurs; the specific platforms that facilitate such interactions, including blogs, Web forums, social networking websites, applications that allow the sharing of user-generated content, and so on; the Web-enabled devices that allow users to tap into these networks; and new media’s interactive collaborative nature (2012).

Terrorists have always made use of and exploited the latest technologies be it the printing press or the satellite TV, these groups have recognised the importance of new technologies in advancing their aims and spreading their narrative. With the advent

of the internet and the proliferation of web 2.0 technologies terrorists can now create and spread their own non-diluted content via the World Wide Web to reach their exact target audience. In an age of the global war on terror and the subsequent decentralization of terror groups the internet has become a safe haven for terrorists in a time of unprecedented worldwide pressure. If the scholar Brian Jenkins is correct in his assertion that “Terrorism is aimed at the people watching not the actual victims, terrorism is theatre” then terrorists need the attention of an audience and have over the last two decades devised ever more inventive ways to transmit their message (Jenkins, 1983). The following will discuss the role the changing media has played in two of the most media orientated, influential and technologically savvy modern Islamist terror groups namely Al-Qaeda and the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It will examine how new media technologies have shaped the tactics and media campaigns of the groups that have exploited them.

Chapter 2: Al-Qaeda, Al Jazeera and the Terror Spectacle

Origins of Al Qaeda

The origins of al-Qaeda as a terrorist network can be traced to the Soviet War in Afghanistan (December 1979 – February 1989). The global Muslim extremists found a rallying cry for their cause and flocked to Afghanistan to wage *Jihad* (Holy War) in defence of what was seen as aggression by the Soviet Union against the Muslim population. One of these young Muslims who answered the call was 23 year old Saudi National Osama Bin Laden. Bin Laden the son of a wealthy Saudi construction magnate used his vast wealth to establish himself as a donor for the afghan *mujahedeen*. Bin Laden was to play a central role in training and organising the foreign mujahedeen fighters, setting up several camps to this end along Afghanistan’s border with Pakistan. Generously funding the war effort against the soviets with his own personal wealth Bin Laden slowly began to develop plans to create a more international organisation expanding beyond the confines of the current jihad against the Soviets. The “Gold Chain” support network which Bin laden established allowed

wealthy financiers from Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf States to channel money to a “Bureau of Services” which was internationally used to recruit and train new fighters. It also saw an influx of clandestine support for the rebels from the Saudi Arabia and the United States, which saw them both secretly channel billions of dollars to the cause in an attempt to undermine the Soviet Union (Burr and Ehrenfeld, 2016). This funding in addition to his own wealth allowed the network overseen by Bin Laden to become an increasingly powerful entity. In August 1988 with the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan seeming inevitable and the war all but won, Bin Laden met with his associates in a suburb of Peshawar to discuss and implement new goals for the organisation and how best to use the vast resources accumulated during the war. They decided to create a base (al-Qaeda) for potential future global jihad operations. In the minutes from the meeting, al-Qaeda’s goals were described as the following: “al-Qaeda is basically an organised Islamic faction; its goal will be to lift the word of God, to make his religion victorious” (Bergen and Cruickshank, 2012). When the withdrawal of Soviet Union forces was completed in February 1989 the al-Qaeda leadership began to work towards implementing the goals outlined the previous year. Al-Qaeda was to seek ways to unite global jihadist movements from around the world to become interoperable and spread their influences within their respective regions of operations (Bergen and Cruickshank, 2012). A growing anti-American sentiment started to develop within the group around 1992 when American troops began to arrive in Saudi Arabia and Somalia, the former seen by Bin Laden as particularly inflammatory as he saw this as an intrusion of the west into traditionally sacred Muslim land. Opposition to such actions led to Bin Laden being expelled from the Saudi kingdom where he had resided since the end of the war against the Soviets, he took refuge in Sudan for a number of years before returning to Afghanistan, where he was given safe refuge by the new ruling Taliban party. It was here where that Al Qaeda would establish its main centre of operations.

Al-Qaeda First Phase 1994 - 2001

For much of the 1980's and 90's the means of mass communications was still dominated by states and media corporations, these alone could afford the infrastructure to produce material and broadcast to a global audience. Islamic extremist groups for the most part had to rely on the circulation by militants of hard copy propaganda in the form of pamphlets, audio cassettes and eventually video tapes. These were distributed by hand in local mosques or sold in niche Islamist bookstores, although this type of propaganda could have a mobilising effect on those already disposed to the ideology its broader impact was relatively low (Burke, 2015). Al Qaeda did little to reach out to the mass media for much of the first half of the 1990's, only sympathizers and militants on the inside viewed and consumed this material. Given the constrained communication resources available to terrorists during this and earlier periods, it is not surprising the emphasis that was often given to exploiting the traditional mass media. A summation of this period is described is provided by Torres et al in their paper analysing the global jihadist propaganda:

In this first period, propaganda related activity followed common patterns of other organisations: the elaboration of written and audio-visual documents that repeated over and over the demands of the group; video documentaries that describe the training activities of the group, demonstrate arsenals, and capture images of some of some armed action (for example of Mujahedin in Bosnia or Algeria); and audio visual recordings of discourses by ideological leaders of the organisation. Most of this material was for internal consumption: for activists of the support networks of individuals that moved within circles that included potential recruits (2006).

As mentioned al-Qaeda's initial propaganda and media campaign was very limited. The first noteworthy release came in the form of a 1996 public letter during Bin Laden's exile in Sudan, entitled "Message to His Muslim Brothers in the Whole World and Especially in the Arabian Peninsula" however this verbose statement attracted little attention. With this communiqué Bin Laden had hoped to carry the banner of Islam against the "Crusaders and Jews" it did little to capture the broader

imagination outside of radical sectors and went largely unnoticed in the United States. Unwilling to make the same mistake again, Bin Laden spent the next two years undertaking a publication campaign in the news and media and gave various interviews with Western and Arabic journalists before reaffirming his threats against the west in a 1998 statement entitled “World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders” (Torres Sorriano, 2008). Yet this statement also did not achieve the level of success Bin Laden had hoped for. The failure of these communications was blatantly obvious, however during the latter part of the 1990’s opportunities were starting to emerge that opened up new avenues of communications for groups like Al-Qaeda.

Al Jazeera: The turning point

It wasn’t until 1998 that the most profound shift in Al-Qaeda’s strategy occurred, a strategy that came about because of Al-Jazeera. By the end of the decade local language satellite television stations began to pop up across the Arab world. These stations along with the spread of satellite dishes allowed a greater number of people across the Muslim world to gain access to content than at any time previous. These stations broadcast footage of violence against Muslims from warzones such as Gaza and staged controversial lively television debates, bringing a new type of television experience to countless homes across the middle east (Burke, 2015). Qatar based studio Al-Jazeera was the flagship of this phenomenon, it became the channel of choice for much of the Muslim world due to the perceived lack of credibility owing to strict state censorship of other stations in the genre. On this widespread appeal Soriano notes:

Given that the rest of Arabic TV stations, strongly controlled by their governments of origin, are known for their lack of credibility, Al Jazeera has become the preferred network for the majority of Muslims, regardless of the country where they live, their social situation, their level of religiosity, and their political preferences. It has a varied staff coming from different countries helping to place the foundations for a Pan-Arabic

identity; this is reflected in its wide editorial coverage. All of this enhanced by attractive surroundings and narrative techniques “imported” from U.S news bulletins. (2008)

The potential power as a communication tool of these new stations was not lost on Bin Laden. Now back in Afghanistan and being sheltered by the Taliban, Bin Laden set about trying to harness the opportunity these new television networks would afford him. In the years leading up to 9/11 Bin Laden gave a series of carefully choreographed interviews to Arabic journalists, his appreciation for the benefit this type of coverage is highlighted by the fact Bin Laden sent a signed letter to Pakistan to a collaborator informing him that certain journalist be paid more, his goal being increased coverage of his statements and activities (Burke, 2003). For the reasons mentioned above al-Jazeera became al-Qaeda’s broadcaster of choice to disseminate their propaganda. Bin Laden began sending couriers equipped with pre-recorded video tapes to the company’s headquarters in Islamabad, he used these tapes to affirm his threats to the west and clarify al-Qaeda’s mission statement: “We seek to instigate the [Islamic] nation to get up and liberate its land, to fight for the sake of god and make Islamic law the highest law and the word of God the highest word of all” (Burke, 2015). However the results of these media campaigns were not satisfactory. Bin Laden found that his messages as they had always been were at the mercy of editors, even though he now had an excellent channel in which to communicate to the Muslim world it also transpired that Al-Jazeera editors made similar decisions as their western counterparts. Tapes were often times heavily edited, delayed from being broadcast and sometimes not considered news worthy enough to air. The content itself also left a lot to be desired; these often times rambling and esoteric sermons did little to rouse the Muslim world into action as intended. Again the lesson for the extremists was clear; a change of tactic was needed. The group began planning attacks on a grand scale, events so shocking that no news editor in the world could ignore them.

Al-Qaeda and the Terror Spectacle

It is important to remember that during this period the internet was in its infancy and its penetration into the Arab world miniscule as such this change in tactic represented a practical solution from Al-Qaeda's point of view to the problem of mass communication. As Torres explains:

The precarious nature of the propaganda mediums used by GJM (Global Jihadist Movement) used in this phase is explained to a large extent by the limitations in terms of data transmission via the internet (the downloading of a document would take hours using an old modem and use of digital video cameras had yet to proliferate) and lack of access to the internet" (Torres, Jordán and Horsburgh, 2006).

The new strategy would require significant investment in training and infrastructure to be successful. With their established headquarters in Taliban controlled Afghanistan and the financial backing of Bin Laden among others, the move toward such a strategy was relatively painless for the organisation. In the years leading up to the 9/11 attacks al-Qaeda became solely focused on achieving this end, terror cells were set up across the globe in North Africa, Europe and elsewhere with the aim of striking the enemy spectacularly and in their own back yard. The camps in Afghanistan became an essential element of the new campaign with estimates that between 1996 and 2001 up to 20,000 fighters received direct instruction in their confines (Kean and Hamilton, 2004). The best of these recruits were chosen for advanced instruction with the end goal being the deployment of these operatives for larger scale attacks against the west. The first escalation of violence was the double car bombing of two U.S embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 which killed 200 people this attack initially received huge media coverage but was quickly overshadowed by events elsewhere (Burke, 2016). Two years later Al-Qaeda followed up this attack with a suicide bombing of the American destroyer USS Cole as it was being refuelled in Yemen resulting in the death of 17 US sailors; this too however received fleeting attention. Bin Laden even invited journalists from Al-Jazeera to a celebration to publicize the attack in which he read poetry and praised the efforts of

the attackers but the footage was prematurely cut (Burke, 2015). The efforts of this new campaign however would come to fruition less than a year later, culminating in one of the biggest terrorist attacks in history. On September 11th 2001 the group succeeded in pulling off one of the most spectacular terrorist plots ever, striking the very heart of American capitalist society in an attack would become one of the most documented events in world history. The footage of the planes striking the twin towers would be replayed repeatedly and the striking imagery that the event produced would resonate for years to come. The attack as a terror spectacle was described by Douglas Keller in his book from 9/11 to Terror:

The live television broadcasting brought a “you are there” drama to the September 11 spectacle. The images of the planes striking the World Trade Centre, the buildings bursting into flames, individuals jumping out of the window in a desperate attempt to survive the inferno, and the collapse of the towers and subsequent chaos provided unforgettable images that the viewer would not soon forget (2003).

With these attacks Bin Laden and al-Qaeda had succeeded where many terrorists before them had failed, they had captured the undivided attention of the globe in real time. For the next several years Bin Laden’s every word would be broadcast often in its entirety by the world’s media, who then analysed and discussed his messages (Burke, 2016). Under these circumstances al-Qaeda sought to capitalize on their new found notoriety by transmitting its message that the Muslim world must rise up in face of persecution and to use it as an opportunity to threaten their enemies. As Osama bin Laden commented, 9/11 transmitted a message that was understood globally, by “Arabs, non-Arabs, even the Chinese” (Torres, Jordán and Horsburgh, 2006). From then on the message and group became increasingly global. Another factor that was to accelerate the group’s transition into a truly global network was the response from the United States, which only weeks after the attack saw them invade Afghanistan declaring a global war on terror.

Chapter 3: Jihad 2.0 Zarqawi and Awlaki

Global Jihad and the internet

Following the invasion of allied forces and its subsequent loss of a physical sanctuary in Afghanistan the internet has become somewhat of a virtual sanctuary for Al-Qaeda, it has so as much out of necessity as for efficiency's sake. With the proliferation of the internet this medium increasingly provided an effective, expeditious, and anonymous means through which the movement can continue to communicate with its fighters, followers, sympathizers and supporters worldwide (Hoffman, 2006). For Al Qaeda the internet meant not only a new way to reach the media in a safer and more immediate way, it also marked a turning point in their communication strategy given that the web devalues the importance of traditional media. It allowed terrorist organisations for the first time to establish a direct channel of communications to their target audience. An increasingly decentralized organisation al-Qaeda increasingly turned to this new media to further its global campaign. In a 2001 report for the RAND Corporation Brian Jenkins comments on the use of internet by terrorists:

Terrorists use the internet to disseminate their ideology, appeal for support, spread fear and alarm, among their foes, radicalize and recruit new members, provide instruction in tactics and weapons, gather intelligence about potential targets, clandestinely communicate, clandestinely communicate, and support terrorist organisations (Jenkins, 2011).

Al –Qaeda's online communications fall into three tiers as outlines by Brian Jenkins: At the top are the official sites such as alneda.com which carry the messages of the leaders such as Bin Laden and Zawahiri. The second tier revolves around discussions of strategy by recognised jihadist figures. The third tier comprises the many chat-rooms and independent websites where followers verbally and visually embellish the official communications, fantasize about ambitious operations, boast, threaten and

exhort each other into action (Jenkins, 2011). This type of strategy allows al-Qaeda to communicate more readily with its now dispersed following while completely avoiding the problematic nature of communicating via the established media channels. Around this period the new decentralized al-Qaeda began to adopt a franchised approach to the model of global jihad, starting with Saudi Arabia and Iraq and expanding throughout the Middle East. Through the creation of formal branches, al-Qaeda was able to project an image of success despite meagre operational capabilities and an inability to follow 9/11 with new large-scale attacks on American soil (Mendelsohn, 2016). It was the leader of one such al-Qaeda franchise in Iraq known as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi that would implement the next major change in jihadist media and strategy.

Zarqawi: *Shaykh* of the slaughterers

In the aftermath of 9/11, al-Qaeda became the most hunted terrorist group in history. Just two years after the 9/11 attacks, Al-Qaeda's membership of 4,000 dwindled down to just a few hundred due to numerous arrests around the globe. In the first few years of the war on terror nearly 80 percent of Al-Qaeda's leadership and members in 102 countries had been killed or captured (Michael , 2007). In spite of the pressures placed on the group by the US led war on terror the group managed to endure. In order to survive the network began operating through associated groups in the Middle East, East Africa, Asia and Europe. In doing so, Al-Qaeda was transformed from a group into a movement. One such group to align itself to the al-Qaeda brand was the self-styled Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) it was this group and its leader Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi that would come to embody the shift from the old internet landscape of chat rooms and heavily controlled "official content" to a more peer to peer form of communication offered by new web 2.0 technologies such as file sharing portals and fledgling social media sites. It was Zarqawi who first realised the opportunities that these new digital media technologies afforded groups like AQI, he realised that they no longer had to create content that appealed to news editors or the established media they could manufacture their own productions and share them on the internet reaching their exact target audience. Zarqawi also took advantage of the

growing availability of cheap portable video cameras and editing software which would allow those with even the most rudimentary skills to create professional looking content (Burke, 2016). In little over four weeks during the summer of 2014 Zarqawi through the use of internet savvy and unprecedented brutality would transform himself from a bit part player in the Iraq insurgency to one of the most infamous terrorists in the world.

In early April 2004 Zarqawi released a 30 minute audio recording clearly laying out who he was, what the goals of Al-Qaeda in Iraq were and ideological justification of the group's attacks. The purpose, as Paul Eedle described was to create a clear "branding statement" which was to serve as a tool to magnify the effects of their future violence (2005). Prior to this adoption of this campaign Zarqawi's and AQI's attacks had to pursue high profile targets or kill large numbers to gain any traction with the established media. By going online however Zarqawi could maintain complete control over his message and gain greater publicity through smaller operations. This last advantage crucially allowed Zarqawi to operate with far lighter infrastructure when compared to the camps and training facilities of Al-Qaeda in the past (Burke, 2016) arguably contributing to Zarqawi being able to avoid capture in one of the most active war zones on the planet for more than 3 years. Zarqawi even went as far as hiring a press secretary known as 'Irhab 007 to take up the responsibility of posting his leaders pronouncements (Michael , 2007). The escalation of this campaign occurred on the 11th of May 2014 when a video entitled 'Sheikh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi Slaughters an American Infidel' was uploaded to the Islamist website The Forum of the Islamic Supporters. The video shows five masked jihadists standing behind the kneeling and bound hostage, 26 year old American contractor Nicholas Berg. One of them reads a statement warning the United States against the mistreatment of prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison and calls for global jihad against the west before Zarqawi himself decapitates Berg with a knife. The video marked the beginning of a long series of similarly brutal murder films that would run well beyond the lifespan of Zarqawi. It was downloaded over a half a million times within the first day and propelled Zarqawi into global infamy (Labi, 2006). In this endeavour Zarqawi risked little and became a hero to jihadists worldwide. In addition to being a precursor to many of the grotesque films that would follow this video was also

notable for two reasons: being the first of many to use what Monica Maggioni refers to as the “kidnap narrative” and introducing repurposed western imagery namely in the form of captives in orange jumpsuits. In relation to the first Maggioni points out “The video of Nick Berg’s beheading marked a change in pace and inaugurated a sinister tradition: between 2004 and 2005, the kidnapped narrative series followed a precise script including Westerners kneeling down with a Kalashnikov armed mujahedeen standing behind them” (Maggioni, 2015). The second is the use of orange jumpsuits in the style of those used in Western terrorist detention centres, the decision to dress Berg in such attire was an intentional act to imitate those worn by detainees in prisons such as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. As Ronald Jones comments on the symbolism the tape produced:

The linkage between the U.S treatment of Abu Ghraib prisoners and the slaying of Nicholas Berg was more than visual. The center militant reads a long statement in which he specifically said that they had tried to trade Berg for prisoners at Abu Ghraib, but the U.S government refused. The executioner said, “So we tell you that the dignity of the Muslim men and women in Abu Ghraib and others is not redeemed except by blood and souls. You will not receive anything from us but coffin after coffin slaughtered in this way” (2005).

The imagery and symbolism of this video would be reused not only in subsequent Zarqawi productions but can even be seen in the recent murder videos produced by AQI’s most recent incarnation the Islamic State. However the filming and novel dissemination of executions was not the sole addition that Zarqawi made to the arsenal of Jihadist media tools. He also reinvented a tactic that had been used to some extent by Chechen guerrillas in the late 1990’s which was the filming of successful attacks on enemy targets to serve as propaganda. Zarqawi began to document attacks on coalition forces to demoralize allied troops and bolster his own ranks within AQI. These attacks were often synchronized with audio of stirring *nasheeds* (These Islamic hymns are usually reserved for prayer and contain no music which is banned by the strict form of Salafism followed by most Sunni extremist groups such as Islamic State), Zarqawi even went as far as creating an hour long montage piece called “The Winds of Victory” which he released in late 2004, which

was again disseminated through various online platforms. It is probably with more than a hint of irony that Zarqawi was eventually killed in an airstrike in 2006 owing to the fact that US Special Forces were able to triangulate his position due to geographical landmarks evident in one of Zarqawi's boastful propaganda films. Zarqawi's use of web 2.0 technologies did a lot in terms of addressing terror group's problems of creating and disseminating content, however some problems of dissemination remained, potential viewers would have to be alerted to the existence of a video or would have to undertake a search through various chat rooms to find its location. Yet towards the end of the decade further technologies would again allow for greater autonomy of jihadist media campaigns with one figure being particularly noteworthy in the exploitation of these innovations Anwar al-Awlaki, spokesperson for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula he would promote a style of do it yourself terrorism and methods of communication that would earn him the nickname 'Bin Laden of the Internet'.

Awlaki and DIY Terrorism

It is clear that the changing internet landscape led to the emergence of violent online jihadist media campaigns. The continued evolution and increasing ease of accessibility of these technologies after Zarqawi's death allowed for his successor Anwar al-Awlaki to continue this online revolution. The most noteworthy changes that facilitated this subsequent innovation were the proliferation of cheap and readily available access to the internet and the growing use of social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. It was again another offshoot of the Al-Qaeda organisation that was first to exploit these technologies. Anwar Al-Awlaki a US-born youthful cleric prominent in the Al-Qaeda offshoot Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was the first to suggest the use of social networking sites to spread jihadist material more widely and to reach new recruitment pools. Awlaki had correctly gauged the growing popularity of these new social media platforms especially amongst the younger generation. This move was all the more potent when one considers the age demographics of the global Muslim population and the increasing use of mobile

technologies as an emerging trend around this time. Janbek and Seib comment on this emerging audience.

By some estimates, 60 percent of Arab Muslims are under age 30, which means the popularity of new media is certain to accelerate as access to it widens. The mobile phone is fast becoming ubiquitous, particularly among the young and particularly in developing countries, providing relatively inexpensive connectivity at numerous levels ranging from basic telephone conversations to Internet access. The socialization of young people around the world is changing because of this (2010).

Awlaki was highly influenced by the work of the Al-Qaeda strategist named Abu Musab al-Suri, who wrote about the importance of decentralization as early as 2004. Al-Suri penned a piece in the same year, his 1600 word treatise *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, he branded the hierarchical model of al-Qaeda at the time as out dated and vulnerable, calling instead for a change to grassroots leaderless resistance and that Al-Qaeda needed to “spread of a culture of preparation and training by all methods, especially the Internet.” This strategy which some analysts have referred to as ‘Leaderless Jihad’ calls for would be jihadists to contribute what they can where they can, it was to be echoed in many of Awlaki’s media publication’s and marked a fundamental change in strategy for Al-Qaeda as lone wolf attacks had only been theorized up until this point. Awlaki created his own blog, Facebook page and YouTube channel and began to distribute the online English language magazine *Inspire*. Awlaki being American born understood American culture and was able to communicate in a way that appealed to young American Muslims. *Inspire* with its slick production values and graphics, mixed ideologically driven material with pragmatic instructional pieces sought to foster a do it yourself approach to terrorism. Taken together and packaged in this format *Inspire* attempts to increase motivation and lower the barriers for entry into terrorism, resulting in an increase in terrorist behaviours (Lemieux et al., 2014). Although not an entirely new approach in itself as there had been several online publications of this sort including even Zarqawi’s monthly internet magazine *Thurwat al-Sinam* (The Camels Hump), *Inspire*’s, quality, creativity and most importantly effectiveness was unmatched by any of its predecessors (Vallee, 2015). The fact that it was also aimed at an English speaking

audience made it an especially interesting development in al-Qaeda's media strategy (Lemieux et al., 2014). Through a section of the magazine entitled Open Source Jihad, *Inspire* tried to do exactly that and inspire actors in the west to commit acts of terror providing practical instruction on attacks such as the guide to manufacturing a bomb entitled "Build a Bomb in the Kitchen of your Mom" or a video called "The Ultimate Mowing Machine" instructing the would be jihadist on how to fit blades to the front of a vehicle to "mow down the enemies of Allah" (Lemieux et al., 2014). In addition to *Inspire* Awlaki pioneered the tactic of delivering sermons via popular social media sites such as YouTube. Delivered in a soft spoken American accent Awlaki gave religious justification for attacks against the west and implored Muslims to take the fight to their hometowns. Hoffman on the novel way Awlaki delivered his lectures "Undoubtedly charismatic, bilingual in English and Arabic, al-Awlaki's lectures were straightforward, clear and sometimes witty. The contrast with the traditional oratory of established clerics and prayer leaders was dramatic and al-Awlaki rapidly built a substantial following" (Burke, 2015). The first established link between this new media campaign and an attack occurred at the army base Fort Hood Texas in late 2009 when US Army Major Nidal Malik Hassan killed 13 people apparently as a reaction to being ordered to serve overseas in Afghanistan. It transpired that Hassan had been in regular direct contact with Awlaki who openly questioned Hassan's service and labelled any Muslim who killed other Muslims in combat to be a "beast, bent on evil, who sells his religion for a few dollars" (Philip and Janbek, 2010). Awlaki took to his blog to pronounce the attack a great success and called Hassan a hero, writing that the all Muslim soldiers currently in service must follow Hassan's example to justify their presence in an infidel army. Links to Awlaki were then established in attacks such as the failed bombing of Northwest flight from Amsterdam to Detroit by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (The Underwear Bomber), the attempted attack on US Army base Fort Ricks and even with the London bombings of 7/7. By the end of 2009 there were more than 2,000 Awlaki sermons on YouTube which had the combined view total of 3 million (Philip and Janbek, 2010). These attacks were heralded as proof of the benefits of the new strategy with Bruce Hoffman noting of the change "the ability of terrorist organizations—such as AQAP—to motivate and empower individuals to commit acts outside of any chain of command, represents a change in the nature of terrorism itself. (Hoffman, 2010)". However this new found fame that was afforded to Awlaki in light of these attacks made him a top

priority target for the American military and he was to become the first US citizen to be put on the US 'Kill or Capture' list (Burke, 2015). On September 30th 2011 while travelling in a convoy in the northern Yemen's al-Jawf province Awlaki was killed by a predator drone strike, Samir Khan the supposed editor of Inspire magazine was also killed (Brown and Severson, 2011). The strategies pioneered by Zarqawi and Awlaki would not die with the two men however and by 2014 a new terror group would seize headlines around the world by building on the tactics of these two men nearly ten years after they were first used

Chapter 4: ISIS Crowd Sourced Terror

Rise of the Islamic State

After the death of Zarqawi in 2006 and the subsequent US military advance against the group, AQI was severely weakened and over the next few years existed as a largely ineffectual defeated entity. When American troops finally withdraw from Iraq in 2011 they leave behind an Iraq that finally looked stable. This year also saw the spread of the Arab spring movement across the Middle East, Syrian Dictator Bashar Al-Assad began to crack down violently on the uprising turning the situation into a full scale civil war. Assad in an attempt to discredit the uprising released huge numbers of jihadists from Syrian prisons to taint the rebel cause with extremism make it harder for foreign powers to justify support for the uprising. In the meanwhile AQI endured as an Al-Qaeda affiliate but had rebranded as the Islamic State in Iraq and was led by Muslim scholar Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi. During this period Baghdadi makes several crucial decisions to strengthen his organisation and spread its influence in the region. In 2012 Baghdadi sent a top deputy to Syria to create a new Al-Qaeda branch to fight alongside the rebels against the regime, known as Jabhat Al-Nusra it gave the group a crucial foothold in the country. Baghdadi also attacked a series of prisons in Iraq releasing former jihadists, he also recruits heavily from the recently freed inmates swelling the group's numbers in Iraq. For the next year the group undergoes unprecedented growth in the region this growth emboldens Baghdadi who declares

himself alone as leader of Al-Qaeda forces in Syria and Iraq, the group expands into Syria and rebrands again becoming the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Although originally formed in Iraq the group begins to amass an army in Syria due to Assad's indifference, for Assad allowing ISIS free reign divides his enemies and diverts attention away from the regime. In June 2014 ISIS launches a military style invasion of northern Iraq, the Iraqi army capitulates in many instances and the group overruns northern Iraq capturing the cities of Raqqa, Fallujah and Mosul (Bari Atwan, 2015). Baghdadi makes his only public appearance in July and announces the return of the caliphate (Muslim Nation) in all captured territories proclaiming himself Caliph (leader of all Muslims). The Islamic State at this point now controlled one fifth of Iraq and a large portion of eastern Syria. As well as being one of the most militarily successful jihadist groups of the modern age Isis has become the new flag bearer of electronic jihad, writer Abdel Bari Atwan maintains in fact that the group could never have achieved such a large army in so short a time without mastery of the internet, with the caliphate using it for everything from propaganda and recruitment uses to battlefield strategy and instruction (Bari Atwan, 2015). In a few years ISIS would surpass Al-Qaeda becoming the most advanced effective terrorist organisation the of the modern age, becoming as much a media conglomerate as a terrorist group releasing on average of 38 new pieces of media content per day: – 20-minute videos, full-length documentaries, photo essays, audio clips, and pamphlets, in languages ranging from Russian to Bengali (Winter, 2015).

Crowd Sourced Terror

The name ISIS has become synonymous with the expertly produced often times ultra-violent content of its official media organisations al-Hayat, al-Furqan etc., which produce everything from full length documentaries and mock current affairs films to monthly internet magazines and mobile applications. The group's media campaign however when analysed more thoroughly has provided yet another paradigm shift in terms of terrorist media strategies, as pivotal as the ones mentioned in the previous chapters. Its strategy has broken new ground, shifting the process of creation and dissemination of media from a centric model to a ground up peer to peer approach, in

a shift that some commentators have dubbed ‘Crowd Sourced Terror’ (Veilleux-Lepage, 2016). In the past content creation was the sole domain of the leadership in which they alone would produce and release material. Now thanks to the continued popularity and proliferation of social media technologies every jihadist is his or her own media outlet, reporting live from the frontline in tweets, offering enticing visions of a utopian society within the Islamic State via short films and images posted to sites such as JustPaste.it and Instagram, entering into friendly conversations via Skype, messaging on anonymous Android platforms and posting links to the groups propaganda material and its infamous catalogue of videos (Bari Atwan, 2015). It is through this openness that ISIS has been able to differentiate its brand from those that have gone before, where the old guard of al-Qaeda had a more controlling approach in terms of narrative and content, ISIS is more than happy to farm out its media activity and violence to individuals who have no concrete ties to the group. It does this not by hiding in the password only forums of the early 2000’s, it operates openly on the much loved social media platforms of the west, as a result the ISIS brand has infiltrated at a far more personal level than any other previous organisation. The effectiveness of this novel use of social media according to FBI director James Comey:

Your grandfather’s al Qaeda, if you wanted to get propaganda, you had to go find it. Find where Inspire magazine was and read it. If you want to talk to a terrorist, you had to send an email into Inspire magazine and hope that Anwar al Awlaki would email you back. Now all that’s in your pocket. All that propaganda is in your pocket, and the terrorist is in your pocket. You can have direct communication with a terrorist in Syria all day and night, and so the effect of that — especially on troubled minds and kids — it works! It’s buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz. It’s the constant feed, the constant touching, so it’s very, very different and much more effective at radicalizing than your grandfather’s al Qaeda model (Reilly, 2015).

Rather than a single figure in charge or a master plan, the Islamic States social media campaign is networked, reflecting the nature of the space in which it is played out. From jihadists on the ground in Islamic State territory who share the imagery their exploits to Islamic state supporters who disseminate such content, all spend a

considerable amount of time on digital devices as their input is vital to the health of the brand. The fact the demographic that is most attracted to the Islamic State are in their late teens and early twenties, and have been shown to be the most active online with 70 percent using social media daily and spending on average of 19.2 hours per week on the internet (Berton and Pawlak, 2015), makes it easy to understand the emphasis ISIS has placed on targeting individuals on this platform. The group has given special priority to filling the staff of their media companies with IT and marketing specialists, often western educated it is these professionals who know the exact strategies to target the always on web 2.0 generation. It is important to mention that while the creating of content by jihadists within the state and sympathizers elsewhere does account for a portion of ISIS propaganda the majority of material is still produced under direct guidance of media strategists with the aim being to keep the overall message of the ISIS strategically unified (Veilleux-Lepage, 2016). Perhaps the most innovative method that has been pioneered by ISIS is the pervasive crowd sourced method of dissemination most notably on the social media platform Twitter.

Weaponized Twitter

If social media is the battle ground for its media war then Twitter has become the weapon of choice for the Islamic State, with ISIS carrying out the vast majority of its information distribution on the platform. Although as mentioned some supporters do create their own content the majority is still created under the direct guidance of Islamic State however the dissemination of official ISIS content is almost exclusively carried out at a grass roots level. According to Richard Barrett the extensive reliance on unaffiliated sympathizers re-tweeting or re-posting content has no clear precedent and can be viewed as the latest innovation in online terrorist media (Barrett, 2014). This type of reliance on a peer to peer distribution network was exemplified on the day when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the establishment of the Caliphate in the grand mosque in Mosul. Immediately the Islamic State beginning circulating pictures of the speech in a hype building campaign similar to Hollywood producers before a video of the speech was uploaded onto YouTube. The links to which were then widely distributed on the anonymous file sharing website JustPaste.it by official ISIS agents

before in turn being tweeted by tens of thousands of ISIS supporters. These sympathizers, in turn, re-tweeted the links and – more importantly – copied and uploaded links to the video and the video itself, using various different accounts. These new links were then added to justpaste.it and tweeted again, in a repetitive manner (Barrett, 2014). This strategy, aimed at gaining maximum exposure and overcoming attempts to suppress Islamic State propaganda, has shown its efficiency on many other occasions. To bolster this strategy ISIS affiliates created an app named The Dawn of Glade Tidings which was available freely on Google play for several months until its removal for violation of terms of contract (Weyers, 2015). Crucially this app allowed Islamic States media offices to periodically send tweets from the accounts of users who had installed the app thus again flooding social media and bypassing Twitter spam controls (Bergen, 2014). In addition to this strategy Islamic State supporters routinely engage in the hijacking of “Twitter storms” manipulating Twitters algorithms to amplify its message across the platform (Bari Atwan, 2015). This tactic involves the repurposing of trending hashtags by adding those hashtags into their own unrelated tweets which then include link to Islamic State material which are hosted on anonymous file sharing sites. In August 2014 for example in the run up to the Scottish vote on independence ISIS supporters included hashtags such as #VoteNo and #VoteYes in their tweets during the run up to the referendum. Trending celebrity stories are also hijacked in this manner, People searching for #LewisHamiltonGrandPrix in November 2014 received instead links to an Islamic State propaganda video showing child soldiers training in Syria (Bari Atwan, 2015). The Islamic State has realised that it needs to reach a certain level of distribution saturation extremely quickly in order to overwhelm platforms before staff can react. Utilization of trending hashtags in conjunction with Islamic State’s own ones such as #theFridayofsupportingISIS and #AmessagefromISISstoUS, increases the overall exposure of the groups message. This strategy allows the content created by Islamic State media teams to be disseminated by thousands of supporters in order to reach an audience of millions of Twitter users. In fact, in a period of only one month between September 17th and October 17th 2014, the activities of ISIS supporters resulted in 4.1 million re-tweets (Barrett, 2014). Islamic State has not only made innovations in terms of dissemination of terrorist content via social media platforms it has also taken the production standard of its content to new highs but also increased the violence pioneered by Zarqawi to ever more shocking levels.

Islamic State Official Media

As discussed in previous chapters the Islamic State has pioneered a crowd sourced approach to terror in terms of dissemination and to some extent creation of its content. An analysis would not be complete however without mentioning the official propaganda releases that make up the bulk of the groups content and while they do not in themselves mark a complete paradigm shift, they have built upon the previous innovations of Awlaki and Zarqawi in terms of production value and brutality to produce content that is without peer in modern terror. Under the umbrella of its media wing there exist several media companies with full time staff the main ones including al-Hayat, al-Furqan and al-Itsam. These exist solely for the purpose of propaganda production (Bari Atwan, 2015). The al-Itsam production company based in Syria is responsible for most of the slick, high production value murder films that have become synonymous with the group. Though this ultra-violent media accounts for only a fraction of the overall propaganda output of Isis, this material has had a disproportionate impact (Burke, 2016). Many of the clips serve a dual purpose, inspiring one group of people while disgusting and frightening another (Burke, 2016). George Fawaz notes on the intended impact of such propaganda:

While ISIS' propaganda is abhorrent to the outside world it is greedily devoured by its social base. Its slickly produced recruitment films about cultural cleansing not only reinforce its strategic message of triumph and expansion but also divert attention from battlefield setbacks (2016).

ISIS has spared no expense in its media campaign hiring both professional film makers and editors, it has also brought in cutting edge technology and qualified operators, the result has been that the content is more akin to that of a major Hollywood film studio than a terror group. One such video that demonstrates how far the group has taken the innovations pioneered by Zarqawi is a production called "Though the Unbelievers Despise It" it reportedly cost \$200,000 to produce and

more than 6 hours to film (Bajekal, 2014). All the visual elements consistent with the kidnapping narrative used by Zarqawi are present; condemned captives, prison style jumpsuits, armed and uniformed Jihadists are all on display. The scene is highly choreographed being shot using several cameras from multiple angles the Jihadists appear to be under direct cinematic instruction throughout the mass execution. One notable feature of the film is also the unmasked nature of the killers, researcher Veryan Khan suggests that the killers were chosen for their cinematic properties with the men being rather handsome, clean cut and from a wide variety of backgrounds to convey visually the broad reach of the 'Caliphate' (Bajekal, 2014), further illustrating the attention to detail the group affords to its propaganda. This footage is not unique on the other hand with the group boasting a whole catalogue of similarly brutal and well produced videos; such as the infamous burning alive of Jordanian pilot Muath Al-Kasasbeh and the execution of US journalist James Foley which both gained world-wide notoriety. The type of ambush and live action footage popularised by Zarqawi has also been improved and received similar production emphasis, the most recognizable work being the full length documentary style production titled "Flames of War" which highlights Islamic States seizure of a Syrian military base near the city of Raqqa in northern Syria. This piece is notable for its use of actual battle field footage alongside slick editing techniques. The film is narrated in English and professionally employs several slow motion scenes that serve to glorify combatants and which are unusual in filming real life combat situations. Meria Svirsky a member of the Clarion projects notes:

The film utilizes romantic imagery carefully crafted to appeal to dissatisfied and alienated young men, replete with explosions, tanks and self-described *mujahedeen* [jihadist warriors] winning battles. Anti-American rhetoric provides the voice-over to stop motion and slow motion action sequences. The use of special effects such as bullet-time is interspersed with newsreel footage (2014).

Along with the ramping up of quality and violence in the video productions produced by the Islamic State the group has also taken the hard copy magazine style propaganda of *Inspire* to new heights. Perhaps the most influential media centre in

terms of targeting of a western audience through this style of media is the Islamic State's al-Hayat Media Centre (Barrett, 2014). Along with creating many of the official messages of the group that are shared across social media platforms, it is responsible for the publishing of online newspapers and magazines.

In July 2014 it began to publish the lengthy digital magazine titled *Dabiq*, which in contrast to *Inspire* is available in a variety of European languages in the hopes of reaching a large a readership as possible (Barrett, 2014). The magazine is littered with high-quality photographs, perfect grammar, and articles by Muslim clerics to boost the legitimacy and appeal of immigrating to the Islamic State's caliphate (Vallee, 2015). *Dabiq*'s overriding message is the reestablishment of the caliphate and is more of an articulation of a long term religious, military and political goal rather than the how to guides seen in *Inspire*. The second issue entitled *The Flood* with its slick cover art and article entitled *It's Either the Islamic State or the Flood* pursues this narrative referring to the caliphate as the ark and the rest of the world as infidel land which will be soon swept away (Kovensky, 2014). Interestingly Islamic State go to extreme lengths to show their words in action with entire pages devoted to displaying the bodies of 'infidels' and scenes of military victories, it is this action and the tangible existence of the state as a geographical entity that have persuaded many to migrate to Syria and Iraq to be part of its project. Ben Connable, the former head of the Marine Corps' cultural intelligence program and a senior analyst at the RAND Corporation, says that while "Al Qaeda has hesitated in some ways [with] statements against indiscriminate bombings and attacks," the Islamic State "has been less restrictive, and far more violent and willing to do just about anything to achieve their ends. That unrestricted behaviour generates some excitement" (Kovensky, 2014). It is clear through its media productions that the ISIS message has spoken to a larger demographic than any previous terrorist group. Over 30,000 people have made the journey to join the Islamic State since its inception more than the combined amount that joined during the whole of the Afghan insurgency of the 1980's (Soufan Group, 2014). Many do so in search of the kind of action and violence depicted in propaganda such as the *Flames of War* or to join in the construction of the caliphate described in *Dabiq*.

The Crumbling Caliphate and the Rise of Citizen Journalism

It is now nearly three years since Baghdadi announced the establishment of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and the Islamic state is in free fall. Due to sustained military actions of the Kurdish YPG, the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Iraqi army on the ground and the aerial bombardment from allied and Russian air forces the group has become enemy number one for many powers in the region. It is fast losing its grip on its traditional centres of power of Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria (Lister, 2017). However it is not just territory the group is losing, over the last six months, ISIS has seen its finances slashed, media operations crippled and several high-ranking leaders killed or captured (Lister, 2017). This period has seen the media output of the group plummet as they are increasingly forced to divert resources to the very real battle on the ground, even what media it does produce now more often than not centres around the killing of Iraqi and Syrian service men (Milton, 2016). The output may also have slowed because of efforts by social media companies, notably Twitter, to thwart the Islamic State's use of their platforms. Since Twitter began aggressively suspending Islamic State accounts, the group has moved to Telegram and other less popular sites, and the greater attention to evading measures taken against it has slowed the groups media stream (Milton, 2016).

As the pressure on the group grows Islamic State has come to rely more heavily than ever before on a certain type of crowd sourced propaganda with imagery being produced by citizen journalism. The recent sporadic attacks on the west such as the Westminster attack or the attack in Nice last year, which are carried out either by direct order from ISIS or as inspired lone wolf attacks are inevitably captured by bystanders, removing the need for Islamic State to do any central production for the images to be distributed (Bender, 2016). Although this type of shift has been borne out of necessity and does not directly involve exploitation of a new media by the terrorists, it is clear that the group understands they can indirectly exploit current technologies to spread their message, thanks to the ubiquity of mobile capture devices and a clear desire for witnesses to upload cell phone videos of ISIS inspired

attacks that have been taking place in the West. Evidence of this type of approach by ISIS can even be traced back as far as attacks such as the ones seen at the Bataclan nightclub and the Charlie Hebdo massacre, the terrorists involved seemingly made no provision to bring camera equipment as they could rely on the unprecedented prevalence of cameras to do the job for them (Burke, 2016). Not only does this open up a new method of communication for groups like ISIS it also creates a different type of content, one that, due to its intimate nature may resonate more with a western public moreso if the content is disseminated by established media rather than in an online environment solely. As Hayley Watson Describes:

Not only then do citizen journalists increase the publicity of an attack, but they do so in an extremely personal, intimate and visually graphic manner. Importantly, by using an established, news organisation for the publication and dissemination of their material, dependent citizen journalists are able to gain a vast global audience for their material, thereby dramatically increasing not only the amount of publicity to an act of terror, but also the type of publicity given

As the pressure on the Islamic State increases we are likely to see an increase in these types of attacks and the citizen journalism they inspire. Due to territorial and manpower losses the Islamic State is now trying to expand its global reach and develop stronger recruitment pools in Europe (Dugulin, 2017). Senior militants in the organisation are now calling for an increase in the type of single assailant attacks mentioned above, these operationally simpler attacks while not causing huge amounts of damage offer a great deal of psychological impact due to the type of imagery mentioned which will only heighten insecurities in Europe and allow for propagandist victories in a time when the group is faltering. This new shift in tactics and mode of communication through the imagery citizen journalism produces, offer a stark contrast in aesthetics and communicative capacity to the slick propaganda videos of the groups hayday in the 2014-2015 period. Shaky and often unclear first hand views snatched from the scene of attacks, provide emotive and powerful imagery and may become the genre of choice for terror groups to spread their message (Bender, 2016).

Conclusion

As initially examined, terrorism needs an audience and for the majority of the recent past the only way for a terrorist group to convey its message was through the conventional media. Although this approach is difficult it can be achieved through spectacular violence and attacks on high profiles targets. This form of communication is also far from ideal as it offers the terrorist very little control in terms of narrative or to whom the message is broadcast. With the advent internet technologies we have seen terrorist groups recognise the potential power of these to communicate their undiluted message directly to their target audience, moving away from the spectacular violence of attacks like 9/11. Individuals like Awlaki and Zarqawi as demonstrated above showed great inventiveness in exploiting these new technologies. Zarqawi recognised the dissemination power of the internet and also its role in making the media's traditional role as a gatekeeper redundant, which he exploited to gruesome effect. Zarqawi's contemporary also played a key part in a paradigm shift reinventing terrorism with his DIY approach, encouraging attacks through various mediums. We have most recently seen the role the latest innovators the Islamic State have played in advancing terrorist media techniques, building on the exploits mentioned they have taken production and dissemination to new heights. The group have set the bench mark for terror organisations for years to come in terms of inventiveness and brutality. Their use of social media as both a crowd sourced disseminator and producer of content has been without precedent in modern Islamic terror. As discussed the future efforts of terror groups particularly ISIS may focus on small scale attacks on the west, exclusively relying on the imagery produced by members of the public to spread its message of fear. In this way Islamic terror has taken the form of a series of unpredictable, inter-related violent incidents that attract fleeting attention rather the large scale attacks that were the hallmark of early al-Qaeda (Burke, 2016). It would be incorrect however to claim that other trends may not be on the horizon; one such trend that has been touted is the live streaming of

terror attacks by the perpetrators (Burke, 2016). However there is less evidence supporting this trend than the shift to small scale attacks and user generated content, as such due to the constraints of the paper it has been excluded. There has been only one recorded incident of its use by a terrorist group, al-Shabaab during the Westgate Mall shootings reported the attack in their own words as it unfolded via Twitter (Conway and Dillon, 2016). However attacks like this outside the realm of terrorism do seem to be on the rise such as the recent Facebook live murder in Cleveland of a 75 year old pensioner would suggest (Solon, 2017). In terms of its use as a terrorist media tactic it would seem it may hinder rather than help, as Maura Conway explains in her paper on the topic extremists may lose the narrative control they have only recently been able to achieve, “This desire to edit and control the narrative will not always be possible when it comes to live video streaming. It’s possible that during the live streaming, unintended outcomes that were not choreographed play out, perhaps shedding light upon the perpetrators’ clumsiness, and potentially inciting ridicule” (2016). For now it remains to be seen if techniques like this will gain traction within global terror, one thing is for certain that in their pursuit to remain relevant and communicate their message terrorist groups will always look to exploit the latest technologies in ways discussed above. It will take the collaborative effort of the media, government and the public to deny them the oxygen of publicity they so badly crave.

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