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Citation style: Wojtasik Karolina, Horák Vit. (2019). Do-It-Yourself Terrorism. How Do Terrorist Organizations Inspire, Support and Teach Their European Supporters via Internet?. "System Safety: Human - Technical Facility – Environment" (Vol. 1, Iss. 1 (2019), pp. 947–955), doi 10.2478/czoto-2019-0120



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DO-IT-YOURSELF TERRORISM. HOW DO TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS INSPIRE, SUPPORT AND TEACH THEIR EUROPEAN SUPPORTERS VIA INTERNET?

doi: 10.2478/czoto-2019-0120

Date of submission of the article to the Editor: 05/11/2018

Date of acceptance of the article by the Editor: 28/12/2018

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Abstract

The following paper is a review article. It is an attempt to analyze the most widely available publications of Salafi terrorist organizations addressed to European supporters. This article concentrates primarily on publications describing tactics related to committing acts of terror on civilian population. Organizations like AQ and ISIS suggest launching attacks using the most available resources (attack using a knife or a sharp tool, arson, ramming with a vehicle), constructing various kinds of IED (pipe bomb, pressure cooker bomb), encourage to attack in public and poorly protected places or advise on how to organize a shooting and hostage-taking situation. Moreover, they state bluntly that theft, vandalism or causing major traffic accidents are also actions which can help in the war with infidels. The substantive value of the instructions is questionable – the authors of many of them (e.g. the attack using a knife) have vague idea about equipment and combat. The content of these publications suggests that they are prepared for people relatively young, with no general experience in life and combat training. Terrorist organizations skillfully select passages from Quran and hadiths to find a pseudo religious justification for barbarism and cruelty. Finally, they treat all victims indiscriminately – all infidels deserve to die and killing them is a glorious achievement.

Keywords: DIY jihad, terrorist organizations' propaganda, ISIS, AQ, IED

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalisation and the development of the Internet triggers various consequences. One of the negative results of the development of modern technologies is exploitation of the Internet by terrorist organisations. AQ (al-Qaeda), AQAP (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) and ISIS (the Islamic State) have mastered new technologies and use the Internet to publish their own informational and journalistic materials as well as spread propaganda and instructional publications (Bari Atwan, 2015). The propaganda activity of these organisations which takes place in the Internet is a

phenomenon widely analysed and discussed (Ingram, 2017; Bloom, 2017). Frequently examined are the ways of radicalisation and recruitment of European fighters and female volunteers who join the ranks of terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq (van San, 2018; Wignell et al., 2017). The issue which receives the least amount of scientific attention is the phenomenon of Open Source Jihad. It is a strategy used by Salafi terrorist organisations (mostly AQ, AQAP and ISIS) which consists in providing their radical sympathisers and supporters with propaganda and ideological materials via the Internet. The materials also include tactical information (instructions on how to construct an IED or organise a terrorist attack) and creative ideas for killing civilians in the West. An attack conducted by a terrorist who was not a member of any organisation, did not have any direct contact with members of such organisations but read materials published by it, expressed support or exchanged correspondence with ideologists or other sympathisers of an organisation is referred to as an “inspired attack”.

2. METHODS

The following paper is a review article. Press publications which provided tactical knowledge, inspired, convinced and urged people to conduct a terrorist attack in a country inhabited by infidels were selected from the materials available online in English. No publications available on the DarkWeb were used. The study material consisted of 10 issues of *Rumiyah* magazine (ISIS), 17 issues of *Inspire* magazine (AQAP) and two e-books (ISIS). The research questions concerned ways, suggestions and instructions related to killing civilians, means of justifying such attacks, the target group as well as the substantive value of these instructions. The technique of content analysis defined as an investigation of recorded human communications (Babbie, 2009:342) was used in this study. This technique is applicable to the following forms of expression: books, magazines, websites, poems, newspapers, songs, letters, e-mails, bulletin board postings, contents of internet forums, social network sites and any components or collections thereof (Babbie, 2009:342). The definition of content analysis closest to the one conducted in this article comes from an article by Ewa Nasalska in which content is defined as a “term used to describe a set of meanings expressed by symbols (word, music, pictorial, art or gesticulative) which are the subject of information. A scientific method was developed to reconstruct, organize and interpret the content of a given information transmission. This method was named content analysis” (Nasalska, 1982:51).

3. RESULTS

The analysed publications clearly show that the duty of any Salafi terrorist organisation sympathiser is to kill infidels. Both AQAP and ISIS use similar arguments: a society which supports politicians (e.g. by voting in elections) who send soldiers to Iraq and Afghanistan or authorise air strikes in Syria is complicit in the attacks on Muslims and deserve to die. Therefore, it is appropriate to organise attacks in the EU member states and the USA. The authors associated with ISIS state bluntly: “The Kafir’s (infidel’s) blood is halal for you. So shed it”, suggesting clearly that there are no religious or moral consequences for killing a non-Muslim (Wojtasik, 2017: 113-135). Moreover, ISIS publications include articles indicating that infidels should be treated with maximum brutality. Killing women and children is not a sin if it is impossible to separate them from men during, for example, an attack in a public place

or an arson attack. These articles include also a clear reminder that the success of an attack does not depend on thorough preparations or the skill of the fighter, but on the will of the one and only God (Allah) and a fighter who is too confident in his capabilities may be severely punished for his pride. The organisation skilfully selects suras and hadiths to justify all forms of brutality and barbarism. The messages are designed in such a way as if every Muslim was a supporter of the organisation and shared its point of view. This can lead to an increase in anti-Islamic behaviours in the West.

The leaders of AQAP, aware that there are thousands of Muslims in the West who undergo radicalization and who speak either English or French (as their mother tongue or official language of the country), created a relatively simple way to spread the views of the organisation by creating an online magazine available in the most spoken European languages. The purpose of *Inspire* magazine has been outlined in the first issue. It should inspire to fight in the name of ummah and for ummah which, according to the organisation, simply means to kill non-Muslims (infidels). A couple of dozen pages of colourful magazine modelled on the "serious" opinion weeklies, photographs and eye-catching graphics are supposed to reach the people who live in the culture of the image, meme, advertising message - in their case this way of communication is more effective than mullah's sermon. *Inspire* debuted with a coverline: *Make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom*. This issue features an article under the same title which is a manual on how to construct an IED. However, no exact amount of explosive material required to trigger an explosion is provided and the suggested detonator may fail in practice. Nevertheless, from the point of view of national security, such publications have the following consequences: a sympathiser of a terrorist organisation learns that a pipe bomb can be built by a person with no practical experience, from off-the-shelf materials and can use this knowledge to prepare an attack. Moreover, the article is a kind of an incentive for the readers to do further research. The Internet is full of recipes for construction of an IED of this kind and similar articles *inspire* to search for more effective and reliable methods of production or to improve a given construction. It should be emphasised that preparation of an improvised explosive device which can lead to death or disability of many random passers-by is depicted as a natural action which does not entail any consequences (legal, moral or ethical). It seems that assembly poses the only problem. The way device performs is described by the adjective *effective*. According to the author, effectiveness means at least 10 kills with a single bomb made in 1-2 days.

The second issue of the periodical suggests using a *mowing machine*. "The idea is to use a pickup truck as a mowing machine, not to mow grass but mow down the enemies of Allah" (*Inspire* No.2:45) – the author clarifies. The article explains why ramming pedestrians with a pickup truck is an effective way of killing, provides instructions on how to choose an appropriate place and how much speed is required. It is also suggested to mount metal blades to the front grill to maximise the efficiency of the attack. The author concludes with a comment that the best operation is an unexpected one which causes maximum death toll and economic losses. The article was published in 2010. Despite that vehicle terror attacks had happened before in the USA or Israel (and Iraq), the one in Nice (14.07.2016) was shocking and completely unexpected. Due to a large number of casualties, this attack has shaken public opinion and opened a new chapter in the history of terrorist attacks in Europe. Other

attacks using vehicles soon followed: Berlin 2016, London 2017, Stockholm 2017 and Paris 2017. This tactic “proved to be reliable” in European conditions and Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel quickly became a hero and an example for other European jihadists.

Subsequent issues of *Inspire* provide more ideas for killing civilians. The authors teach how to successfully destroy a building by causing a gas explosion and advise which apartment to target in order to damage the structure of an entire block. Readers are encouraged to start forest fires and are instructed on how to make it spread rapidly. Another element of the tutorial section is a detailed description of how to produce acetone peroxide – an explosive material which is highly dangerous to use and obtain (*Inspire* No. 6:39-45). Terrorists have been creating devices based on this substance for years and such bombs were used in attacks in Brussels (2016), Paris (2015), London (2005), New York (2009 – a plot to bomb the subway) and in Israel. In addition, *Inspire* provides instructions on how to make a remote detonator (*Inspire* No. 8:34-39), car bomb (*Inspire* No. 12: 64-71), advises how to effectively set parked cars on fire (*Inspire* No. 10:53), cause car accidents (*Inspire* No. 10:52-55) and substantial traffic disasters (a detailed instruction on building a derailer). The authors encourage readers to vandalism on the assumption that all actions which cause harm to the infidels (also in the economic sense) are desirable. The 12th issue provides information on potential targets in the USA, Great Britain and France - a list of locations worth attacking and information on events/national holidays which attract large numbers of people in each country. The 13th issue features a 40-page manual (*Inspire* No. 13:70-111) on how to construct a bomb which can be detonated in a passenger plane. The next issue includes instructions on how to make a hand grenade (modified version of a pipe bomb) and how to assassinate a particular, selected person (*Inspire* No. 14:64-81). In the 15th issue the subject of assassinations is continued and extended to include a section on performing an execution at victim’s home. Moreover, it contains instructions on how to make a parcel bomb, how to plant an explosive device underneath the car of a potential target and how to install a charge which is triggered by opening the door to an apartment/house (*Inspire* No 15: 66-89).

Rumiyah magazine associated with ISIS, through the cycle entitled *Just terror tactics*, publishes tips for those who would like to conduct a terrorist attack in a location inhabited by infidels but don’t know how to do it. It is clarified in the first part of the cycle (*Rumiyah* no. 2:12) that, although presented tactics are addressed to the so-called lone wolves, the term *just terror* (it is clearly stated that the word *just* refers to justice) is more adequate. It is used with regard to the operations in countries where the majority of population is non-Muslim (Arabic: Dar al-Kufr) conducted by fighters who declared allegiance (Arabic: bay’ah) to the so-called Islamic State. The organisation encourages killing as many infidels as possible which, apart from direct loss of life, will have more serious social consequences: “The overall objective of any just terror operation is to bring horror and misery to the enemies of Allah, and to remind them that their efforts to wage war against Islam and the Muslims will only lead to more and more mujahidin appearing in their very midst, ready to strike them mercilessly on their own soil” (*Rumiyah* no. 2:13). The readers of the magazine are suggested to commit mass killings – preferably in crowded and poorly protected places. Opening fire on a group of people is recommended as a very effective way of killing infidels and spreading panic and fear in the society. The authors suggest

creating a so-called staged hostage-taking situation in order to prolong the operation. This way police assault is delayed due to concerns about the life of the hostages. As a result, paramedics cannot reach and help the injured who slowly bleed out, the situation attracts more media attention and spreads trauma, sense of threat and fear. The article clearly states that such situation should result in killing the hostages and that negotiations are just means to an end, i.e. escalation of the effects of the attack and achieving the highest possible number of casualties. The following issues of *Rumiyah* provide instructions on carrying out knife attacks – which body parts to strike, what kind of weapon is preferable, how to lure a victim into a trap and where to look for a target. There is a lot of wishful thinking in these pieces of advice and not much specific knowledge. The authors seem not to realise that incapacitating a grown man is not a straightforward task and shooting or handling a firearm has to be developed through training. The section concerning ramming pedestrians using a pickup truck is equally non-substantive. Common-sense tips: the need to plan the attack, verify the route and choose the most optimal place are logical but the guidelines regarding the truck are not. The organisation does realise, however, that even the most radicalised supporter may not be able to directly attack someone using a knife or a firearm or drive a pickup truck and provides instructions on how to start a fire in residential buildings, schools, hospitals and forests. In fact, *Rumiyah* magazine does not offer anything new. All of the tactics described in the magazine have already been presented in *Inspire* which has been published for the past 8 years by *Al-Maleheem Media* (media wing of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula). So far, *Rumiyah* magazine has not featured instructions for making an IED which appeared frequently on the pages of *Inspire*. Although only variations of manuals on how to prepare a pipe bomb or a pressure cooker bomb have been published over the years, the media and propaganda effect of such materials is invaluable.

In 2015, ISIS issued online two “tactical” manuals: *How to Survive in the West. A Mujahid Guide* and *Muslim Gangs. The Future of Muslims of the West*. Both e-books were published in a non-editable format, although it is clear that the authors chose the simplest publicly available word processors and did not make use of the available functions to the fullest. In *A Mujahid Guide* it is possible to identify two main theses. Firstly, a properly motivated lone fighter can successfully conduct a terrorist attack about which millions of people will learn about. Secondly, the theatre of ideological and armed struggle between Muslims and infidels will soon move to Europe, thus it is important to make necessary preparations through physical training, gathering financial resources, tactical training, recruitment, radicalization of other likeminded Muslims or organising attacks. The e-book entitled *Muslim Gangs*, published in the same year, is based on two assumptions. Firstly, the so-called lone wolves are needed and can be very effective, but radical cells are even more effective. Secondly, actions of radical ISIS supporters can be much more effective if they start to form gangs and create own enclaves where infidels would be denied entry. The publication is addressed primarily to the citizens of the Western European states where ethnic, national and religious minorities are numerous enough for the above assumptions to be met. Such scenario would not be possible, for example, in Poland. As far as tactics is concerned, the publication contains several comments which may have specific, negative (from the point of view of counter-terrorism forces) implications. In some fragments, the authors explain that the police and other forces will be increasingly brutal and uncompromising in their actions. If a fighter gets arrested, he will be

tortured and humiliated, thus it is preferable to die instead of being deprived of dignity by infidels. Moreover, there is a high probability that an attacker will be fighting ferociously to avoid getting stopped and, when finally surrounded, will detonate an explosive belt or another kind of IED committing suicide and killing nearby police officers.

In summary, the instructions and tips, especially those published in *A Mujahid Guide*, are addressed to unexperienced and unfamiliar with combat young people. Pieces of information which for someone with minimal life experience are worthless, may sound professional for teenage enthusiasts of armed jihad who do not realise the absurdity of some of those tips and take at face value the declarations that anyone can join ISIS and perform great deeds in the name of ummah. A young man is much easier to radicalise and convince to do something risky and deadly – for example a terrorist attack. It should be noted that the average age of those responsible for a series of attacks in Paris (13.11.2015), which resulted in 129 casualties and more than 300 injured (with 90 of them in critical condition), is 26 years. Moreover, the existence of deep-cover fundamentalists who for months feed on the vision of wreaking total destruction in the name of God and ummah is a serious danger. The act of terror in Nice (14.07.2016) proved that a single, properly motivated fighter is capable of conducting an attack which killed 86 people and injured 450 (with 50 in critical condition).

Table 1
Comparison of the content related to killing civilians

| ACTIVITY | INSPIRE (AQAP) | RUMIYAH (ISIS) | MUJAHID GUIDE/MUSILM GANGS (ISIS) |
|--|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Calling for killing infidels in EU countries and the USA | + | + | + |
| Construction of an IED | + | - | + |
| Construction of remote detonators | + | - | + |
| Vehicle-ramming attack | + | + | + |
| Arson | + | + | + |
| Knife attack | + | + | - |
| Assassinations | + | + | + |
| Causing road accidents | + | - | - |
| Causing traffic disasters | + | - | - |
| Destruction of public property | + | - | - |
| Destruction of private property | - | + | - |
| Theft | + | + | + |

4. DISCUSSION

The common theme of the attacks in San Bernardino (2015 – 14 casualties, dozens of injured), Orlando (2016 – 49 casualties, dozens of injured) and Nice (2016 – 86 casualties and more than 400 injured), apart from a high death toll, is the fact that the attackers did not have a direct contact with any terrorist organisation. In the case of

the attacks in Bernardino and Orlando, the terrorists declared allegiance (via social media or during negotiations) to ISIS. However, there is no publicly available proof that they were members of this organisation or established contact with members of the Salafi terrorist organisations like AQ, AQAP or ISIS. Although the attacker from Nice did not swear any allegiance, ISIS quickly claimed responsibility for the attack and recognised Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel as a mujahid from their organisation. These examples characterise the so-called inspired terrorist attacks – i.e. attacks conducted by radical supporters of armed jihad. Such operations are prepared and carried out with no direct involvement of terrorist organisations but frequently using instructions they provide and under the influence of the propaganda they spread.

Table 1
Inspired attack vs. direct attack

| | ATTACK INSPIRED BY A TERRORIST ORGANISATION – NICE, 14.07.2016 | DIRECT TERRORIST ATTACK – PARIS, 13.11.2015 |
|--|---|--|
| INVOLVEMENT OF A TERRORIST ORGANISATION | Indirect | Attack directed and carried out by fighters from ISIS |
| LOCALISATION | Single location | Multiple locations |
| SUICIDE ATTACK | No | Yes - explosive belts |
| ATTACKER | Inexperienced attacker who did not kill anyone before | Military experience, confirmed kills in Syria |
| IED | No IED | All IED worked |
| HISTORY OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY | No | Yes |
| LEVEL OF RADICALISATION | Very high | Very high |
| NUMBER OF CASUALTIES | 86 | 130 |

The analysis of major terrorist attacks organised in EU countries and the USA indicates clearly that inspired attacks are gaining popularity.

With access limited only to the publicly available materials, it is impossible to clearly determine if the attackers made use of the publications discussed in this article (such data is accessible only by the security services). However, it should be stressed that the tactics and methods deployed by the fighters correspond to the contents of the publications released by terrorist organisations. On 16.11.2017, 106th issue of *al-Naba* weekly (in Arabic) was uploaded online. This information and propaganda periodical is published by one of the media wings of ISIS. The articles relate to the military activity of the so-called Islamic State, predominantly within Iraq and Syria. Apart from news from the front, extensive reports on successes (not as much about losses), the newspaper provides a lot of statistical data on the number of killed enemies, acquired equipment, successful detonations of VBIED (vehicle-borne improvised explosive), etc. *Al-Naba* is not translated into any European language. The 106th issue includes a summary (*Al-Naba* No. 106: p. 2) of ISIS operations carried out abroad during the past year. It should be noted that the organisation uses Islamic calendar according to which during autumn of 2017 came the end of the year 1438 (3.10.2016-21.09.2017) and the summary pertains this time period.

Table 3
Characteristics of the attacks

| | 11-19.03.2012, TOULOUSE, MONTAUBAN, FRANCE | 13.11.2015, PARIS, FRANCE | 2.12.2015, SAN BERNARDINO, USA | 12.06.2016 ORLANDO, USA | 14.07.2016 NICE, FRANCE |
|--|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| INVOLVEMENT OF A TERRORIST ORGANISATION | inspired | direct | inspired | inspired | inspired |
| TACTICS | active shooter | active shooter, IED, hostage-taking situation | active shooter, IED, | active shooter, hostage-taking situation | ramming pedestrians, active shooter |
| CASUALTIES | 7 | 129 | 14 | 49 | 86 |
| GOAL | mass murder | mass murder | mass murder | mass murder | mass murder |
| ATTACKER | home-grown terrorist | Fighters returning from abroad | home-grown terrorist | home-grown terrorist | home-grown terrorist |

The organisation's activities abroad include in total: 38 operations in 19 countries conducted by 80 mujahids. The article shows statistics related to the attacks mounted in 19 countries and classifies them by category: 24% - using IED or grenades, 21% - stabbing attack using a knife or other sharp tool, 19% - using firearms, 18% - suicide missions, 13% - vehicle-ramming attack, 5% - arson. The above-mentioned tactics have been described in the official publications of ISIS and AQAP.

5. CONCLUSION

Firstly, the substantive value of the study material is questionable. Common-sense tips are intertwined with strange comments and this mixture is seasoned with a lot of wishful thinking. However, such messages should not be ignored because they have substantial value from the propaganda point of view. Even if these instructions are recognised as useless by a determined terrorist, there are other ways to find further guidance. Secondly, terrorist organisations formulate their message in a way suggesting that all Muslims are supporters of jihad and potential threat. This will result in an increase of aversion and hatred towards all Muslim population, including those who have nothing to do with terrorism. Thirdly, terrorist organisations are perfectly aware of psychological effects of an attack and keep reminding at every opportunity to make an operation obtain as much publicity as possible. They advise also to clearly state the name of the author of an attack so that there is no doubt that the organization responsible for it is fearsome. Fourthly, spreading panic in the society and fuelling the sense of fear or threat are the main goals/results of the attacks conducted in the West by both ISIS and AQ. Fifthly, the organisations encourage to mindless killings, use social engineering to eliminate second thoughts, pricks of

conscience or any reflection and at the same time dehumanise potential victims by blaming all "infidels" for mistakes of a few political decision-makers.

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