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Restraint in Terrorist Groups and Radical Milieus

Guest Editors
Joel Busher and Tore Bjørgo

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Words of Welcome from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to announce the release of Volume XIV, Issue 6 (December 2020) of *Perspectives on Terrorism* (ISSN 2334-3745). Our independent online journal is an Open Access publication of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), Vienna, and the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) of Leiden University's Campus in The Hague. All past and recent issues are freely available online at the following URL: https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/perspectives-on-terrorism.

Perspectives on Terrorism (PoT) is indexed by JSTOR, SCOPUS, and Google Scholar. Now in its fourteenth year, it has more than 9,200 registered subscribers and many more occasional readers and website visitors in academia, government and civil society worldwide. The articles of its six annual issues are fully peer-reviewed by external referees (double-blind) while all other content is subject to internal editorial quality control.

This last issue of 2020 is a **Special Issue, edited by Joel Busher** (Coventry University) **and Tore Bjørgo** (C_REX, University of Oslo) on the topic

'**Restraint in Terrorist Groups and Radical Milieus**'.

It features 14 articles by twenty (co-)authors and is based mainly on a workshop held at the *Centre for Research on Extremism* (C-REX) in Oslo in January 2020, and two subsequent panels organised for conferences of the *European Consortium of Political Researc*h (ECPR) and the *Society for Terrorism Research* (STR). The articles cover right-wing, left-wing as well as religious and other types of terrorism and radical militancy, making use of a common conceptual framework as the guest editors explain in their introductory article.

These articles are followed by the usual **Resources** and **Announcements** section with its standard features:

- the CT Bookshelf wherein our Book Reviews Editor Joshua Sinai provides abbreviated reviews of new publications;
- an extensive bibliography, this time on the perennial question how terrorism should be defined, compiled by Associate Editor Judith Tinnes;
- the regular overview of new web-based resources on terrorism and related subjects by Associate Editor Berto Jongman; and
- the Conference Calendar by Associate Editor Reinier Bergema and Editorial Assistant Olivia Kearney.

The articles and other texts of the current issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* have been reviewed and prepared for publication by Alex Schmid and James Forest, the journal's principal editors, while the technical online launch of the December 2020 issue of our journal has been in the hands of Associate Editor for IT Christine Boelema Robertus at the Hague Campus of Leiden University.

Restraint in Terrorist Groups and Radical Milieus: Towards a Research Agenda

by Joel Busher and Tore Bjørgo

Abstract

Questions about why and how terrorist groups, radical milieus and the individuals that comprise them do not carry out more violence than they do – particularly when they apparently have the ability and opportunity to do so – have tended to receive less scholarly attention than questions about what leads towards violence or why it abates. Yet if we look closely at almost any group, we can usually find evidence of some kind of restraint taking place, whether in the form of limitations on what or who is deemed an 'appropriate' target, or placing limits on the scale or style of violence that militants should deploy. This Special Issue of Perspectives on Terrorism, *for which this article comprises the introduction, responds to this state of affairs by bringing together a series of articles that focus specifically on the issue of restraint within terrorist groups and radical milieus. This article provides a brief conceptual sketch of restraint, and makes the case that paying greater attention to restraint can offer rich rewards for researchers, policymakers and practitioners concerned with understanding and responding to political violence associated with terrorist groups and radical milieus, as well as other forms of political violence.*

Keywords: restraint; terrorism; radical milieus; limits on violence; political violence

Introduction

While scholars of terrorism and radical milieus have made significant advances in understanding the onset and escalation of violence,[1] how such violence declines or ends,[2] and why and how militants deradicalise and disengage,[3] they have made less progress in understanding how and why these groups, and the individuals that comprise them, do not carry out more violence than they do, particularly when they apparently have the ability and opportunity to do so.[4] Where this issue has perhaps received most attention has been in the literature concerned with the effectiveness of otherwise of violent and non-violent campaigns: a literature that indicates that part of the reason militants hold back from further escalation of violence is likely to be that such violence is often at best ineffective and at worse counter-productive.[5] Yet even here, this literature tells us relatively little about restraint as a process: about where, when and how it emerges, gains traction, diffuses through the group or organisation or, indeed, where, when and how it does not.

That this is the case is perhaps unsurprising. Within much of the research on terrorism and radical milieus, there are a number of conceptual and methodological factors that direct our attention away from questions about how and why such actors do not engage in more violence. These include the tendency to focus more attention on cases where violence reaches the thresholds required for inclusion in existing databases than those where it does not; the dominance of binaries such as 'violent vs. non-violent', or 'lethal vs. non-lethal' which, while useful in some respects, can leave out the kind of descriptive nuance of varying degrees, styles and targets of violence that can encourage reflection on how, why and when people hold back from further violence; and the tendency for research on violence prevention to be oriented primarily towards questions about what 'we', as external policy- , civil society- or academic actors, can do to reduce the threat of violence, rather than how members of militant groups themselves can be part of 'the solution'. Furthermore, living as we do in an era in which *The Terrorist* has become one of the archetypal villains [6] and in which we are often confronted with graphic images of, and stories about, the threat of terrorism, asking why such actors do not do more violence might seem surprising, spurious or even inappropriate.

This relative inattention to restraint is problematic, however. First, it represents an important shortcoming in efforts to understand and explain terrorism and political violence, particularly if we subscribe to the basic axiom that effective theory should account for the absence, or at least the scarcity, or low intensity, of a given phenomenon, as well as its presence.[7] Second, it deprives us of opportunities to generate crucial insight and

understanding about how to prevent and reduce such violence.[8]

The aim of this Special Issue therefore is to stimulate and advance research and policy understanding about the processes of restraint in terrorist groups and radical milieus: about how and why members of terrorist groups and radical milieus, in many cases, *choose* to engage in less violence than they could, about how, once these choices have been made, they are translated into practice, and how, once applied, these 'brakes' on escalation [9] either work or fail. This Special Issue does this by drawing together a collection of theoretical and empirical articles that examine processes of restraint as they emerge and evolve, function and fail, within a range of very different contexts. This variation includes terrorist organisations engaged in more or less targeted campaigns of violence, 'radical milieus' [10] characterised by differing levels, styles and targets of violence, and more or less formalised groups engaged in civil conflict.

In this introduction, we first briefly outline our conceptual understanding of 'restraint'. We then discuss in more detail what we believe researchers, policymakers and practitioners alike can gain by paying greater attention to restraint. Finally, we present the articles that make up the bulk of this Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*.

Restraint: A Brief Conceptual Sketch

We understand restraint as a process whereby militants *choose* to drop, downscale or limit an attack or campaign, or adopt tactical or strategic innovations that lead them away from violence, whether that is due to the perceived risk of failure, anticipation of harsh government repression, concern about a possible backlash from their constituency, moral concerns, or a matter of tactical preference.

As the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* tells us, 'restraint' can refer both to externally imposed restrictions – as in a prisoner being put in restraints – and to something akin to self-control, discipline or self-restraint. As our primary interest is in how and why militants themselves contribute to establish and maintain parameters on their violence – in the 'internal brakes on violent escalation' [11] – our use of the term restraint is closer to the latter of these two meanings. When security agencies are able to detect and disrupt a terrorist plot, we consider that an 'external brake'. The perceived risk of being detected, disrupted and punished by police and security agencies may make militants abstain from carrying out their violent plans – a mechanism generally known as deterrence.[12] Restraint emerges as the external brake is internalised as an understanding among the militants that committing certain acts is too risky and/or counter-productive and as they begin to adapt their plans accordingly.

Our interest in these 'internal brakes' does not stem from a belief that they are more important than external brakes, but from the fact that the former have, to date, received comparatively less scholarly attention than the latter. Neither is it our intention to suggest that these internal brakes should be studied in isolation: one of the reasons we prefer the term restraint to the term self-restraint is because of the ambivalence that the former affords with regards to the causal roots of the phenomena under consideration. Since an act of restraint implies some form of intention on the part of the person who deploys restraint, the concept of restraint helps to emphasise the agency of those involved in the decision-making process. This is important if we are to avoid overly structural and deterministic accounts of decision-making within militant groups. At the same time, however, we can and should acknowledge that restraint, like radicalisation or violence, will in most cases be a multi-causal, multi-variate phenomenon, the roots of which might lie within, for example, not just the individual psychology and biography of group members;[13] or the group's ideology or collective identity;[14] but also the social ties between militants and their potential victims;[15] the mores and tactical appetites of their wider support base;[16] the interactions between group members and their various opponents;[17] or the (perceived) opening up of political opportunity structures.[18] This is important if we are to avoid de-contextualised accounts of how militants hold back from (further) violence.

Indeed, following the basic idea that political violence is always, in the final analysis, shaped by developments across multiple relational arenas,[19] we would expect that restraint within terrorist groups and radical milieus

– or the weakening of restraint – is intimately related to group members' interactions with their opponents and other relevant actors. For example, and as described in the literature on the policing of protests and demonstrations, if political opponents, the police or security services make use of repressive means generally deemed unjustifiable within that societal context, we would expect this to undermine processes of restraint, making attempted escalation of violence by the militants more likely and potentially producing spirals of violence.[20] Conversely, we would expect smart policing – e.g. making use of dialogue and facilitating self-policing – to reinforce emergent intra-group restraint and enable leaders to rein in the more hot-headed members of their groups and,[21] more broadly, we would expect that policing strategies that demonstrate clear respect for human rights will make it harder for members of militant groups to justify making recourse to violence.[22] Within this Special Issue, we have therefore encouraged the contributors to be attentive to the way that intra-group processes of restraint shape, and are shaped by, group members' interactions with outside actors.

This way of thinking about restraint is broadly commensurate with how most researchers currently think about strategic or tactical decision-making within terrorist organisations or radical milieus: as deliberative processes shaped by, and responsive to, but not determined by, developments within their operating environment, processes of organisational learning, and emergent organisational or movement cultures.[23] It is also broadly commensurate with how scholars have used the concept of restraint within research on other forms of political violence, such as genocide and mass killings,[24] and the use of force in civil wars.[25]

Since we understand restraint simply as a process that comprises holding back from doing more violence – i.e. we associate restraint with limiting violence, but not necessarily with non-violence – it follows that we can think of, and study, restraint as it operates at any level or scale of violence. Indeed, we argue it is important to do so in order to develop a strong theoretical framework with which to understand restraint. Restraint within the radical flank of a civil resistance movement that routinely breaks the law but rarely carries out interpersonal violence will look different to restraint within an international terrorist organisation that has carried out multiple mass casualty attacks: within the former, restraint processes might cluster around debates about whether or not, and the conditions under which, property damage can be justified; while in the latter case it might centre on debates about whether or not to undertake more indiscriminate lethal attacks.[26] Nonetheless, in both cases, what is taking place is a negotiation around the parameters of what is, or is not, 'appropriate' [27] according to a series of strategic, moral and broader cultural criteria.

Exploring processes of restraint across such different cases can open up important and potentially insight-rich avenues of inquiry about whether similar forms of restraint operate and are more or less effective at different starting levels of violence, and about the generalisability of insights across different types of groups engaged in different forms of violence. This is reflected in this Special Issue, where we have brought together cases with very different outer limits of violence.

Just as restraint is multi-causal and multi-variate, it is also multi-final. This is partly about the intentions of those who deploy restraint. In some cases, those who encourage restraint might intend to prevent any further escalation of violence; in other cases, they might seek simply to limit the extent of escalation, and in other cases still the intention might be to engender a broader shift away from the use of (higher levels of) violence.

What also matters is the ability of those who would deploy restraint – whether they are leaders or members of the rank-and-file – to influence the practice of other members of their group.[28] Brakes sometimes fail, particularly if they are not well-maintained, or if the conditions are not well-suited to braking; and sometimes if the brakes are hit too hard, or at the wrong moment, rather than slowing momentum, those applying the brakes might lose control.[29] And what happens then: if hotheads or splinter groups within the movement carry out violent actions that go beyond the confines of acceptable violence set by the leadership, do leaders respond with exclusion and punishment to maintain the boundaries, do they readjust the parameters of acceptable force by finding ways to justify or minimise the breach, or do they themselves reach for greater violence, thereby stimulating an intra-movement outbidding dynamic? It is quite possible that we can learn as much from cases

of brake failure as we can from cases where they work. Again, this Special Issue contains cases both of brake success and brake failure, and a combination of the two.

Finally, we understand restraint as a process that might be more or less reactive or proactive.[30] Restraint might emerge and be most visible when individuals or factions are reacting to a perceptible shift towards violent escalation by other members of their group, or in the wake of instances of escalation after which other members of the group might seek to re-establish prior boundaries on their action repertoire: in effect, hitting the brakes once it feels that things are going too far or too fast. Restraint can, however, also take the form of more proactive innovations that might lead away from escalation, and even towards de-escalation, such as undertaking training that enables group members to maintain their discipline during encounters with opponents or the security services; developing protocols on the parameters of the acceptable use of force; or a strategic reorientation towards attempting to broaden their support base and achieve wider public legitimacy. It seems likely that a detailed understanding of restraint in any group, particularly over time, will require an analysis both of more reactive and proactive forms of braking, and of how these interact with one another.

Two recent attempts have been made to develop typologies with which to begin to interrogate these processes of restraint as they emerge, manifest and evolve within militant milieus. One of these was developed by Pete Simi and Steven Windisch, and comprised a study of the 'barriers that hinder radicalization toward mass casualty violence'.[31] Based on life history interviews with former extreme right activists in the USA, and rooted within criminological approaches to the presence and non-presence of specific forms of criminal behaviour, their study focuses primarily on individual pathways, albeit situated within the wider cultural logics of the milieus within which those individuals were embedded, and how these pathways did, or did not, lead towards greater levels of violence. They identify five barriers to the adoption of mass casualty violence:

1. Mass casualty violence as counterproductive;
2. Preference for interpersonal violence;
3. Changes in focus or availability, whereby their interest in, and capability to, undertake more serious violence was inhibited either by their focus on drug and alcohol consumption or by non-movement related personal obligations;
4. Internal organizational conflict, whereby growing perceptions of hypocrisy and in-fighting within the movement eroded individuals' commitment to the movement;
5. Moral apprehension and, in particular, a 'failure to employ moral disengagement'.[32]

The other typology was developed by Joel Busher, Donald Holbrook and Graham Macklin. Their typology is based on documentary analysis of three contrasting case studies: the British and international jihadi milieu from 2001 to 2016; the British extreme right during the 1990s, and the animal liberation movement in the UK between the mid-1970s and the end of the 1990s. In contrast to the typology developed by Simi and Windisch, this typology centres analytical attention on the group level, and on the practices through which members of militant groups contribute to establishing and maintaining the parameters on their own violence, either in the form of resisting or pre-empting escalation, or by exploring less violent alternatives. It also attempts to operate at a sufficiently high level of abstraction as to be suitable for the analysis of restraint regardless of the base level of violence within the milieu under analysis. Like Simi and Windisch, however, they also develop a descriptive typology comprising five intersecting categories – in this case based on the logics on which the observed 'brakes' worked – and there is some noticeable overlap between the two typologies. They identified the following 'brakes':

1. Strategic brakes that work on concerns that certain forms of escalation are likely to be ineffective or counter-productive;
2. Moral brakes that work on concerns that certain forms of violence directed at particular targets contradict their ethical principles;
3. Ego-maintenance brakes that work on doubts about whether particular forms of violent escalation are commensurate with established in-group identities;

4. Out-group definition brakes that relate to processes of boundary softening such that some members of out-groups come to be perceived as potential allies, supporters or, at least, not an existential threat;
5. Organisational brakes that relate to considerations of organisational survival and the institutionalisation of the limits on violent escalation.[33]

One of the goals of this Special Issue is for contributors to engage with, critique and advance these typologies, and to develop alternative or complementary conceptual frameworks with which to advance our understanding of restraint in terrorist groups and radical milieus.

What is to be Gained by Studying Restraint?

As indicated above, part of the answer to this question is simply that it can help us to develop a fuller and more compelling account for observable patterns of violence – or non-violence – involving terrorist groups and radical milieus. Serious, and in particular lethal, violence by terrorist groups and radical milieus thankfully remains a fairly rare phenomenon, and where we see greater concentrations of such violence it tends to be closely intertwined with wider armed conflicts. In 2018, just 10 countries accounted for 87% of the total 15,952 global deaths from terrorism,[34] with 95% of global deaths from terrorism occurring in countries experiencing other forms of violent conflict: a figure that increases to 99% 'when countries with high levels of state sponsored terror are also included'.[35] During 2002 – 2018, there were just 317 deaths from terrorism in North America: in Europe (including Turkey) there were 2,296, during the same period.[36]

While part of the explanation for the relative scarcity of terrorist incidents and deaths from terrorism relates to the capabilities of many states to inhibit such incidents, it is clear that the decision-making of members of terrorist groups and radical milieus themselves is also part of explanation. Not only does one not have to look hard to find many reminders of the limitations of even the most extensive law enforcement and intelligence systems when it comes to inhibiting the emergence or escalation of political violence, but most of the evidence indicates that even within terrorist organisations the decision to deploy or escalate violence is rarely taken lightly,[37] and that such decisions often become a focus of considerable, and sometimes ultimately terminal, friction and factionalisation, whether we are talking about groups committed to armed struggle [38] or protest groups who rarely go beyond brawling with their opponents or with one another.[39] That this should be the case is not surprising: one of the most consistent themes running through the empirically informed scientific literature on terrorist groups and radical milieus is that those who engage with such groups and activities by and large are not psychopaths hell-bent on destruction, but rather for the most part are political actors pursuing a series of more or less clearly-defined political, personal and sometimes economic objectives, through an evolving repertoire of action.[40] If we were studying any other type of political actor, we would want to be able to explain all of their tactical and strategic choices.

An enhanced understanding of restraint also has clear practical relevance. First, an effective understanding of restraint offers opportunities to refine analyses of the risk of violence. It could, for example, be used to develop a more precise understanding of where within radical milieus escalated violence is more or less likely to come from; of what or who it is that is holding back the use of greater violence and, by extension, the conditions under which that restraint is more or less likely to hold.[41] Where understanding restraint might be particularly valuable here is in mitigating against the over-estimation of risk and the economic, strategic, political and moral costs that such over-estimation of risk can entail.

Second, paying attention to restraint encourages and can enable a more 'holistic approach' [42] to the prevention and reduction of political violence by conceptualising the members of terrorist organisations and radical milieus as potentially part of 'the solution'. In practical terms, this might translate, for example, into police, security services and other agencies integrating questions about how to foster or reinforce internal processes of restraint within militant groups, or at least how not to disrupt them, within their strategic and operational planning. We believe that such approaches, which 'work with' rather than 'against' some of the characteristics of such groups, can provide benefits both in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

Third, as noted above, debates around which tactics to use often comprise a source of tension within militant groups, particularly when, as tends to be the case, they are infused with broader internal power struggles. As such, and as the contributions to this Special Issue illustrate, observing processes of restraint provides a rich opportunity to gain insights about intra-group dynamics and, in particular, of emergent tensions and fault-lines within some of these groups. Such information and insights are likely to be of considerable strategic relevance to those interested in influencing the actions of such groups.

Fourth, paying attention to processes of restraint can help us to avoid overlooking the basic deliberative processes that take place within these groups, or indeed the basic humanity of (most of) the people who comprise them. This is not *just* an ethical position: however abhorrent we might find certain groups, we are likely to understand them better if we understand them as individuals, as human beings and all that this implies, rather than falling back on demonisation and stereotypes.[43]

All of this comes with a note of caution, however. As discussed above, restraint is a multi-causal, multi-variate, multi-form and multi-final process – in other words: it is complex. It is therefore important that we take a realistic and intellectually honest approach to the sorts of claims that we might make, and with what degree of confidence. Policy makers and practitioners quite understandably want tools and assessments that they can use to inform their decision-making, and academic researchers experience considerable professional, institutional and moral pressure to respond to such requests. To date, however, we are at the early stages of exploring the possibilities that this avenue of enquiry offers. We can provide conceptual tools: theoretically robust and coherent ways of identifying and describing emerging phenomena, and we can connect this with a wider set of insights about the escalation, de-escalation and non-escalation of political violence, but we wish to urge caution in reaching much beyond that, for the time being.

About this Special Issue

This Special Issue brings together articles that explore restraint as it manifests and functions in different groups, across different settings, and from different analytical perspectives. The articles contained within this Special Issue were drawn together across a dedicated workshop held at Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), University of Oslo, in January 2020, and dedicated panels organised at two international conferences: the European Consortium of Political Research and the Society for Terrorism Research, albeit the second of these was postponed due to Covid-19. Articles were selected for inclusion in the Special Issue based on a standard blind peer review process.

The cases from which the contributors draw are set within diverse national and historical contexts; include groups that take their ideological inspiration, or justification, from a range of different sources, including, among others, white racial nationalists, jihadists, separatists, anti-fascists and animal liberationists; and range across groups characterised by fairly strong and centralised command and control structures to groups in which members or affiliates operate through highly devolved structures, or through forms of leaderless resistance.

The cases also draw across groups that have deployed vastly different levels and styles of violence: from those clearly committed to armed struggle and mass casualty violence, to those where any form of interpersonal violence implies pushing at the parameters of what is deemed appropriate. In response to calls to broaden the range of cases from which scholars of terrorism in particular draw their insights and develop and test their theoretical understanding,[44] the editors have also included analyses of phenomena that, while still comprising political violence, tend to sit at or beyond the parameters of what is usually studied by terrorism scholars, such as ethnic violence, and political violence that falls short of thresholds usually used to define terrorism.

Finally, we have also sought to bring together articles that have different analytical starting points, both in terms of the contributors' primary disciplinary backgrounds and in terms of the basic units of analysis around which they organise their research. For some of the contributors, their initial point of entry into understanding

and exploring restraint is the individual actor and why and how particular individuals within radical milieus come to hold back from further violence – and in doing so they build on a number of other studies that have begun to attempt to address these questions.[45] For other contributors, their analytical focus centres more on the group, and understanding how processes of restraint manifest in, evolve, and shape the tactical repertoires of specific groups, movements, scenes or milieus. For other contributors still, their starting point is spaces and/or places and understanding the uneven distribution of political violence by non-state actors. As this research agenda moves forward, we believe that the most productive avenues of enquiry are likely to be those that successfully integrate these different analytical starting points.

This introduction is followed by two further articles that survey the existing literature and begin to explore central conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues pertinent to researching restraint in terrorist groups and radical milieus. The first of these, by ***Bart Schuurman***, is concerned primarily with the individual level of analysis. Schuurman argues that involvement in terrorist violence is in fact an unlikely outcome of radicalization processes, and that research needs to focus on why most individuals that engage with extremist groups or milieus never commit this type of violence. Like several other contributors, Schuurman reaches beyond Terrorism Studies as he sets out a series of insights from the existing literature that might be used to help to illuminate the differences between 'violent and non-violent radicalization outcomes.' He draws particular attention to the potential empirical and conceptual contribution of Criminology to understanding non-violent radicalization outcomes and the pathways that lead there. He also sets out a series of methodological considerations, and offers critical reflections on possible solutions to issues around data access and strategies of analysis.

In the second of the primarily conceptual and methodological articles ***Leena Malkki*** moves the focus to more meso- and macro-levels of analysis. Malkki's discussion centres on how analysis of the 'lack of political violence' and the uneven distribution of political violence across different settings can be leveraged to generate insight about the processes, mechanisms and conditions that generate or inhibit the emergence, escalation and continuation of violence. Malkki focuses in particular on qualitative and mixed methods research on terrorist violence where, she observes, the use of negative cases has been less frequently or extensively utilised than in the quantitative literature. The article explores how negative cases have been used within that literature to date and what methodological and conceptual lessons can be drawn from that literature, before going on to discuss a series of key opportunities and challenges for the effective use of negative cases studies within qualitative and mixed methods research designs within the field of Terrorism Studies.

The rest of the Special Issue comprises empirical, case study-based articles. The first three of these comprise case studies focusing on far right groups or milieus. ***Tore Bjørgo*** and ***Jacob Ravndal*** examine processes of restraint within The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), a militant and action-oriented National Socialist organization that aims to generate revolution and a pan-Nordic white state, mainly through extra-parliamentary struggle. The NRM asserts that violence will be necessary to achieve their revolutionary goal. To date, however, they have opted to deploy primarily legal means, condoning only limited forms of violence by its members. The article engages with Busher *et al's* 'internal brakes' framework, and examines the logics on which the brakes within the organisation appear to operate. The article argues that the NRM leadership does not, in principle, have any moral restraints against mass murder in the future since they claim that racial war is inevitable. Rather, they refrain from using such methods in the present due largely to strategic concerns that such violence would undermine their prospects of gaining popular support and lead to constraints on their opportunities to propagate their political views via legal channels. The leadership is highly aware that the organisation might be banned, and activists imprisoned if they let violence escalate too much. The authors observe an important ambiguity in how this position plays out in practice. They note that the NRM states that members 'planning and carrying out of offensive violent actions will lead to exclusion' from the organisation. In practice, however, this policy does not seem to be implemented, at least 'not in a strict way,' and in fact there have been deliberate attempts by the NRM leaders to 'test and expand the legal boundaries on violence and threats against enemies' in order to create more opportunities for escalation. The authors argue that such attempts to expand opportunities for escalation should be resisted, not least through enforcement of the rule of law.

Graham Macklin examines the puzzle of why the extreme right milieu, 'saturated with violent rhetoric, doom-laden apocalyptic jeremiads […] and the technical wherewithal to make good on such threats,' has not generated as much violence as it would appear capable of. He does this by using a case study of the British extreme right in the 1990s. The article traces how the British National Party tried to achieve electoral respectability while at the same time militants on its own 'radical flank,' belonging to Combat 18, engaged in violent street confrontations with anti-fascists. Macklin uses his case study to illustrate how the internal brakes on violence function across micro, meso and macro levels, situating individual processes of reflection within movement dynamics and the wider political context. He also draws attention to brake failure. In this case, it seems that such failure must partly be understood in the context of a movement leadership in a structurally weak position within its own movement as the 'moderates' struggled to counteract the enduring allure and influence of the radical flank.

The third contribution that deals with far right milieus is provided by ***Steven Windisch***, ***Pete Simi, Kathleen Blee*** and ***Matthew DeMichele***. Using life-history interviews with 91 North American-based former white supremacists, they examine how homicidal violence is perceived as either an appropriate or inappropriate political strategy. They observe that on the whole their interview participants had considered homicidal violence to be an inappropriate strategy, either due to perceptions that it was morally unjustifiable and/or that it was politically ineffective. They note, however, that homicidal violence could come to be considered an appropriate strategy if it was understood as a defensive measure within the frame of 'racial holy war' or 'RAHOWA'. They argue that capturing and understanding how white supremacists frame the permissibility of homicidal violence comprises an important step towards a better understanding of the 'upper limit' or thresholds for violence within this milieu.

The next three articles describe activism within various parts of global jihadi networks. ***Donald Holbrook*** examines internal debates, doubts and discussions among jihadi militants in the UK about the scope of jihadi violence. He does this through a study of private online conversations between 'Islamist militant sympathisers,' including ISIS supporters, and individuals who went on to plan acts of terrorism. Holbrook notes that the 'internal brakes' within the conversation threads are organised around four debates: group identity, targeting and exclusion, family and friendship dynamics, and knowledge acquisition. His analysis indicates that while participants in these threads were consistent in their support for mass-casualty terrorism, there were several points of disagreement around issues such as the targeting of members of the faith community, and the legality and morality of public executions. It does not seem, however, that these differences undermined in-group cohesion. Holbrook also draws attention to the multi-final nature of restraint dynamics, observing that it is not clear that the violence was simply abandoned as a result of these debates, but may rather have been redirected.

Silvia Carenzi examines the targeting choices of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), al-Qa'ida's former affiliate in Syria, and in particular what appears to be the increasingly local focus of their action over time. While acknowledging that ideology plays an important role in shaping the strategies of militant groups and their definition of enemies and, by extension, appropriate targets, Carenzi's analysis foregrounds the importance of militants' interaction with other actors and the environment, and with that their understanding of emerging opportunities and threats. Drawing on the literature on social movements, she conceptualizes the increasingly local focus of HTS as a form of 'downward scale shift', and discusses how such a conceptualization can enhance our understanding of how groups develop and sustain the parameters on the focus of their violence.

The third case study dealing with the global jihadi milieu shifts our focus to the North Caucasus. ***Mark Youngman*** examines the case of Kabardino-Balkarian Jama'at (KBJ) in Russia's North Caucasus republic of Kabardino-Balkaria. Youngman describes the growing antagonism between an emergent overtly Islamic social movement and the religious and political authorities, and how this eventually results in the movement's leadership, and much of its membership, moving to a full-blown insurgency. What Youngman concentrates on in this article, however, are the limits on the violence that followed – arguing that if we are really to understand political violence it is not enough to observe simply that a group has 'crossed the Rubicon,' but also 'how they came to cross their particular Rubicon and how they behave on the other side.' While KBJ's campaign did develop into a full-blown insurgency, violence in Kabardino-Balkaria nonetheless remained considerably more

restrained than elsewhere in the region. He argues that four 'brakes' can help us to understand the more limited nature of violence here: the movement's social origins and ties; the group's attitudes to the moral permissibility of violence; their scepticism about the strategic benefits of violence; and the personal authority of leaders that enabled the other brakes to work. As Youngman observes, the case not only illustrates well the importance of intra-group processes of restraint in shaping conflict outcomes, but also the potentially high price that might be paid when external actors undermine or disrupt those processes.

The next two articles are concerned with left-wing milieus. In the first of these, ***Nigel Copsey*** and ***Samuel Merrill*** examine how militant anti-fascists in the USA understand violence and exercise restraint in their use of it: a timely topic given calls from prominent conservative and right-wing politicians to designate Antifa a 'domestic terrorist organization,' and the recent first case of a self-identified anti-fascist deploying lethal force (during an altercation with a Patriot Prayer supporter, in Portland, on 29 August 2020). Copsey and Merrill recognise that physical confrontation has a central place within the logic of Antifa. They argue however that despite this recent incident, and despite Antifa's call to fight fascism 'by any means necessary,' the relative absence of the deployment of lethal violence by Antifa activists stands in stark contrast to some of their political opponents. To explain this, they explore how restraint, both physical and rhetorical, is embedded within the movement culture and strategy of action, and how processes of intra-movement ostracization have been used to uphold restraint even at a time of intense confrontation with their political opponents.

Raquel da Silva and ***Ana Sofia Ferreira*** then discuss restraint within three armed left-wing organisations that operated in Portugal both before and after the 1974 April Revolution that overthrew the *Estado Novo* regime. Based on interviews with former militants, they explore how these research participants remember and recount the restraint that characterised their organisations' tactical repertoires, and how the outer limits of violence for each of these organisations was intimately related to the specific socio-political situation prior to, and after, the end of the dictatorship. In doing so, they trace how restraint from lethal violence, particularly prior to 1974, was rooted in perceptions of such violence as both counterproductive and immoral. This changed as parts of the radical left milieu became disillusioned with the transition process, with a small faction adopting the use of targeted killings as part of their action repertoire, albeit they continued to reject the use of indiscriminate killing. In doing so, the authors draw our attention to the interactions between intra-group processes of deliberation and developments within the wider political context, and how this shaped the changing operation of restraint within the same movement over time.

The final three articles are based on cases that encompass political violence associated with separatist militancy, animal liberationism and ethnic violence. ***John Morrison*** examines restraint in the context of the Real IRA (RIRA), focusing on the sporadic use of violence by the RIRA in the years after the Omagh bombing of August 1998, one of the most lethal attacks of The Troubles. Morrison discusses the intersection of external pressures – the post-Omagh response from the legislature and security services – with 'internal brakes', and situates this theoretically in relation to political organisation theory and the primacy of organisational survival. The article emphasises the importance of, and need for, conceptual frameworks that are able to capture and articulate the dynamic interactions between external pressures and internal decision-making processes.

Rune Ellefsen and ***Joel Busher*** explore processes of restraint and their failure throughout the course of the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign. They argue that even at this 'high-water mark' for militant animal rights activism, restraint within this campaign was evident in a series of innovations away from more militant tactics at the outset and during the final stages of the campaign, and in the resistance to the use of interpersonal violence across the campaign, even in the face of a significant escalation of repression and policing. In tracing the dynamics of this restraint, the authors observe however that there is a difference between the processes of innovation away from violence and the processes whereby activists maintained the outer limits of their action repertoire: while the former appear to be heavily contingent on developments within the activists' operating environment and the general fortunes of the campaign, the latter are associated with the basic logics of the campaign and therefore less contingent on external developments. This, they argue, has potentially significant implications for understanding how restraint functions and sometimes fails: even

as 'brakes' less deeply rooted within the underlying logics of the campaign might be loosened, any resultant escalation might still be limited by those brakes that are less contextually contingent and more deeply rooted within the underlying logic and culture of the movement.

In the final article, ***Sarah Jenkins*** considers how one can explain lower local levels of violence within the context of episodes of ethnic violence in Kenya and Kyrgyzstan. As Jenkins observes, there are often important sub-national variations in the onset, intensity, and duration of violence, as well as individual-level variance in participation and non-participation. Explaining this variation is likely to have both theoretical and practical relevance. Drawing on field research in neighbourhoods that comprised 'pockets of peace' during episodes of ethnic violence in both countries, Jenkins argues the emergence and effectiveness of restraint in these cases is closely associated with strong, cross-cutting social ties. Such ties foster restraint in three ways: by making interpersonal violence more difficult in the first place; by disrupting emergent us-them distinctions as the episode gains momentum; and by facilitating coordination and cooperation among community leaders.

There are limits of course to what can be achieved in one Special Issue of a journal. Each of these articles generate as many questions as they resolve: about, for example, the applicability of findings across different types of movements, across different phases of organisational or campaign cycles, or to different forms of political violence. Nonetheless, we hope that this collection of articles will provide a valuable contribution towards, and will inspire further research into, generating a better understanding of the dynamics of restraint in terrorist groups and radical milieus and how such understanding can help us to respond more effectively and sustainably to different forms of political violence.

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Non-Involvement in Terrorist Violence: Understanding the Most Common Outcome of Radicalization Processes

by Bart Schuurman

Abstract

This article argues that to better understand involvement in terrorism, research needs to focus on why most extremists will never actually commit such violence. It starts from the premise that involvement in terrorist violence is an unlikely outcome of radicalization processes. The dramatic and violent nature of terrorist attacks can obscure the fact that most individuals who adopt extremist views will refrain from acting in support of their convictions altogether, or do so in essentially non-violent ways such as through fundraising or the dissemination of propaganda. The norm of non-involvement in terrorist violence among people radicalized to extremism, offers considerable opportunities for new research directions. This article begins by expanding on why non-involvement in terrorist violence deserves more attention from researchers. It then discusses insights within and beyond the field of terrorism studies that can help explain the differences between violent and non-violent radicalization outcomes. The discussion then turns to some methodological considerations relevant to obtaining a better understanding of non-involvement in terrorist violence among radicalized individuals.

Keywords: non-involvement, terrorism, disaggregation, comparative research; protective factors, non-violence

Introduction

Terrorism is communication through extreme violence, purposefully bloody theatre in which murder is less the principal aim than the means used to draw attention to a cause, a group, or a grievance.[1] In the post-1945 period, non-state terrorists have often succeeded in forcefully grabbing the attention of citizens and governments, even if they seldom achieve the goals they pursue.[2] It has become a cliché to point out that, as a cause of death in Western societies, terrorism ranks far below the more mundane risks posed by traffic, ladders and bathtubs.[3] Other forms of violence, such as domestic abuse and homicide, are far more widespread yet receive a fraction of the attention that politicians and the media allocate to terrorism.[4] At least in part, contemporary terrorism's outsized societal impact stems from the premeditated use of extreme violence, the explicit targeting of civilians and noncombatants and its often purposefully indiscriminate nature. Anyone who represents a broadly defined category of enemies could be a victim and these characteristics imbue terrorism with an ability to simultaneously shock and enrage that ensures it grabs the attention of citizens, politicians and academics.

The gruesome spectacle of terrorist violence invariably draws attention to its perpetrators. Their motives, backgrounds, and personal characteristics have attracted significant scholarly interest since academic research on terrorism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s.[5] An early line of work suggested that terrorists were driven to violence by psychiatric conditions such as psychopathy and narcissism.[6] Other such research emphasized developmental issues, suggesting some terrorists externalized deep-seated conflicts with their parents or an inability to live up to societal expectations.[7] Although these findings correspond to the popular view of terrorists as deranged or damaged individuals,[8] they quickly attracted criticism on methodological and empirical grounds.[9] As the study of terrorism grew exponentially in the years following 9/11,[10] much of this early work was criticized, leading to a thesis of terrorists' psychological 'normality' that has itself recently come under scrutiny for lack of nuance.[11] Over the past two decades, the search for causes of terrorism has broadened significantly beyond the individual level of analysis, with researchers considering group and structural-level influences as well.[12]

Following jihadist terrorist attacks in Madrid, Amsterdam and London in the early 2000s, 'radicalization' emerged as the master narrative for understanding the process leading to involvement in terrorism, among academics as well as broader society.[13] The term has stuck, despite uncertainty over its exact meaning and ongoing discussions about whether or not it overemphasizes the role of ideological convictions among the dozens of other potentially relevant variables.[14] In this article, the term radicalization refers to the varied processes that can lead people to participate in radical, extremist or terrorist groups or movements. Its use here is thus not limited to the cognitive interpretation of radicalization that sees it as the adoption of ever more radical, and ultimately extremist, ideological convictions. This broader understanding of radicalization acknowledges that involvement processes are as likely to be driven by a personal search for meaning, belonging, or adventure as they are to be (solely) guided by convictions.[15] Indeed, actual ideological radicalization may follow rather than precede involvement in radical or extremist groups or movements, underlining the importance of looking beyond ideology.[16]

A distinction is also made between radicalism and extremism. Here, the former refers to views and movements that seek far-reaching political or societal change but usually pursue these goals in a non-violent fashion and while remaining by-and-large within the confines set by democratic governance and the rule of law.[17] By contrast, extremism refers to convictions that seek not just change but revolution and (or) explicitly advocate the use of violent means to achieve desired outcomes.[18] One of the downsides of radicalization as a concept is that it implicitly ties radicalism to terrorism, rendering suspect movements and ideas that challenge the status quo in a vocal and perhaps confrontational but usually peaceful manner. As this article goes on to argue, the trajectory from radicalism to terrorism is far less common than is often assumed. To minimize confusion, the phrase 'radicalization to extremism' is used here to clarify the focus on people and movements explicitly in favor of the use of violence.

Fortunately, as the field of terrorism studies matured in recent years, so has radicalization as a concept and our thinking about the factors thought to underlie such processes. Overly reductionist understandings of terrorism stemming from 'root causes' such as poverty or lack of education, the notion that terrorists share particular 'profiles',[19] and the idea that involvement processes are linear and deterministic, have largely been abandoned.[20] Increased use of primary data has provided the greater detail and reliability needed to assess existing explanations for radicalization and develop new ones.[21] Mental health issues have received renewed and more nuanced consideration.[22] Yet, despite this progress, and despite the attention that terrorism continues to demand as a societal threat, our ability to explain how and why people become involved in it, other than retrospectively on a case-by-case basis, remains limited.

One of the key challenges remains understanding why the majority of people who radicalize to extremism never come to participate in the planning, preparation or commission of terrorist attacks.[23] The extreme violence at the heart of terrorism and its ability to have long-lasting adverse effects on societies, naturally draws attention to those who wield it. But for every person who committed terrorist violence on behalf of al-Qaeda, the IRA or the National Socialist Underground, hundreds if not thousands of others did not, despite sharing similarly extremist worldviews, peer groups and comparable socioeconomic backgrounds.[24] Unlike the literatures on civil war and insurgencies, terrorism studies has spent relatively little attention on this variation of the 'collective action problem'.[25] It is still largely unclear why most people who radicalize to extremism are content to 'freeride' on the violent militancy committed by a small group of their ideological compatriots.[26] By focusing predominantly on cases of radicalization leading to terrorist violence and underemphasizing those where it did not, the field has struggled to make sense of a key distinction in the outcome of radicalization processes.[27] This not only hampers our ability to isolate the most relevant factors for understanding involvement in terrorist violence, it also limits our knowledge of the protective factors that may keep those who radicalize to extremism from crossing this ultimate threshold.

Challenges to Understanding Non-Involvement in Terrorist Violence

A core issue that many attempts to understand involvement in terrorist violence face, is that they have done so by selecting on the dependent variable. In other words, trying to explain why people commit terrorist attacks by studying only the perpetrators of such attacks. Of course, analyses of those at the sharp end of radicalization have much to offer and have yielded a range of relevant insights.[28] But trying to understand involvement in terrorist violence by looking only at actual perpetrators of such crimes obscures exactly those counter-examples of non-violent radicalization necessary to bring to light what sets both apart in terms of personal background characteristics, involvement-process dynamics and the influence of group as well as structural-level variables.[29] Within the set of individuals who radicalize to extremism, what sets apart those who engage in terrorist violence from those who do not?

As a result of this overemphasis on perpetrators of terrorist violence, existing explanations for involvement in terrorism, as well as risk assessment tools intended to help practitioners detect and prevent terrorism and radicalization to extremism, suffer from a specificity problem.[30] This is the challenge of explaining why, for instance, only one or two members of extremist groups will actually turn to terrorist violence, despite the characteristics of these individuals' backgrounds and involvement dynamics being shared by a much larger portion of group members.[31] The specificity problem is what makes it unwise to rely on 'root causes' such as poverty or discrimination, as there will always be many more individuals who did not turn to extremism, let alone actual terrorism, despite exposure to similar conditions.[32] It is at the heart of the problem with interpretations of radicalization that see the adoption of increasingly extremist convictions as leading to terrorist violence, because there will always be many more people who espouse extremist views without acting on them.[33]

Tackling the specificity problem is key to a better understanding of the differences between violent and non-violent radicalization outcomes. To do so, three specific challenges need to be overcome. The first of these concerns how radicalization and involvement in terrorism are conceptualized.[34] As several authors have argued, radicalizing to extremism and actually engaging in terrorist violence are two related but separate processes that need to be – but have often not been – explained independently.[35] Radicalization is not predetermined to lead to extremism, let alone involvement in terrorism or other forms of political violence.[36] Many people who radicalize will not go beyond the adoption of radical points of view (i.e. usually non-violent and seeking change but not revolution). Similarly, participation in non-violent activism, such as demonstrations or attempts to gain political influence through electoral politics, seem far more likely outcomes than involvement in terrorism. Moreover, for a considerable number of people who radicalize, radical or extremist ideologies' attraction is not so much their use as a blueprint for collective action, but as a source of individual and group identity.[37] Their goal is not to 'do something' but to 'be someone', underscoring that radicalization may be as much about meaning-making as it is about achieving political or social change.

Just as radicalization processes are better seen as having a multitude of possible outcomes than simply propelling people towards terrorism, so too should those outcomes themselves be disaggregated. While involvement in terrorism is often conflated with the execution of terrorist attacks, this is actually only one of several 'organizational roles' available.[38] Terrorist organizations or cells are likely to have as many if not more individuals in non-violent 'support' positions related to logistics, recruitment, propaganda or finances. There are also likely to be participants who are best classified as simple 'hangers-on' with limited interest in actually doing anything. Acknowledging the multi-finality of radicalization outcomes and the numerous forms that involvement in terrorism can take, is a first step towards a better understanding of what combinations of personal background factors and radicalization-process dynamics shape the key distinction between violent and non-violent outcomes.[39] While there has been a promising push towards disaggregating what it means to be radicalized or involved in terrorism, this research direction deserves to gain more traction in the years to come.[40]

A closely related second issue standing in the way of a better understanding of why most people who radicalize to extremism will not actually become involved in terrorism, is the dearth of comparative research designs within terrorism studies.[41] While more carefully conceptualizing the different forms that radicalization and involvement in terrorism can take is a crucial first step, explaining those differences will require a range of comparative studies to be undertaken. There is plenty of potential. For instance, by studying broad differences in radicalization outcomes, such as between those individuals who become involved in violent extremism in some shape or form (i.e. as recruiters, propagandists, violence users, etc.) and those who do not. It would also be fascinating to further develop work that teases apart role adoption or allocation within extremist and terrorist groups to better understand why some persons will, for instance, advocate political violence but not use it themselves.[42] Key insights may also be gained from making comparisons between different forms of violent extremist movements. Why, for instance, does the long-term trend among European right-wing extremists show a decline in the use of deadly violence while the opposite is true in the United States for the 2000s and 2010s?[43] While comparative research designs are not entirely absent from terrorism studies, their potential has hardly begun to be utilized.[44]

Carrying out such comparisons effectively means surmounting a third challenge. Like participation in other forms of crime, radicalization pathways and terrorist-involvement patterns will be characterized by specific combinations of both risk and protective factors.[45] The partial mitigation of risk factors by protective factors may be an important explanation why only some people within an extremist organization will actually turn convictions into violence. In recent years we have begun to see protective factors feature more prominently in research on terrorism and radicalization, although to different degrees.[46] At the same time, the literature points to ongoing issues with the limited empirical validation of both risk and protective factors.[47] It also conveys a sense that much more work needs to be done to maximize our understanding of the role that protective factors play in accounting for different radicalization outcomes and role-adoption patterns in terrorist groups.[48] Studying users of terrorist violence and the risk factors associated with their behavior has certainly proven useful, yet further progress may depend on coming at this problem from a still largely unexplored angle. What keeps most extremists from engaging in the terrorist violence that they support in words but not deeds? Can attention for protective as well as risk factors help explain such non-involvement in terrorist violence?

A Multidisciplinary Perspective on Risk and Protective Factors

Studying extremists' non-involvement in terrorist violence does not have to start from scratch. There is increasing attention within terrorism studies for this subject, and a large body of work in adjacent disciplines that can offer useful insights. The growing number of studies on protective factors for terrorism point to a range of elements, including the importance of family and friends who are not involved in extremism, having numerous social contacts, having family obligations, older age, apathy or the sense that change is not possible, the presence of non-violent alternatives for pursuing change, perceived strategic ineffectiveness of terrorism, a measured government response to protest, and fear of the personal costs of militancy (e.g. arrest, death, loss of income).[49] Others note the protective influence of a stable employment history, the importance of pro-social support systems such as school, and the risk-attenuating effects of a stable upbringing in which parents provide both affection and active involvement in a child's development.[50] Research also underlines the importance of self-esteem, the ability to empathize with others, interacting with diverse groups of people, and the ability to deal with ambiguity.[51] Notable is the emphasis given to the dampening influence of high self-control.[52]

These examples (see [53] for more complete overviews) illustrate that protective factors can take a variety of forms. Some relate to individual characteristics such as age and cognitive style, others stem from upbringing, social networks and systemic elements such as opportunities for achieving change through non-violent means. Complementing this empirically-oriented work are a number of more theoretical contributions, such as Dutter's argument that the 'non-development of an ethos of political violence or armed struggle' was an important element limiting the development of separatist terrorism in Quebec.[54] The importance of looking

at the internal dynamics of protest movements, rebellions and terrorist groups is underlined by Busher et al., who propose several internal brakes on violent escalation that include seeing violence as morally indefensible or strategically ineffective.[55] Clearly, risk and protective factors for terrorist violence are not just found at an individual level, but may also be present within the group or broader movement in which people radicalized to extremism come to participate.[56] Turning to terrorist violence or not may depend on what type of organization or movement is joined and whether an individual is subsequently socialized to see violence as effective and justified or not.[57]

Beyond this terrorism-specific literature, there are years of relevant scholarship in adjacent disciplines such as criminology and psychology. Criminologists in particular have long been studying how various kinds of protective factors impact an individual's likelihood of engaging in delinquent behavior in the short and long-term.[58] Beyond a wealth of empirical work on risk and protective factors, the discipline also offers a useful conceptual distinction between a *promotive* factor as 'a variable that [predicts] a low probability of offending' and a *protective* factor as 'a variable that interacts with a risk factor to nullify its effect'.[59] The first may be most relevant to understanding how and why certain people are more likely to be attracted to extremism while the latter may have more to say about assessing the likelihood of turning to terrorist violence among those already radicalized to extremism. Longitudinal studies have been quite consistent in pointing to the promotive effects of a stable home life, commitment to school, pro-social peers et cetera.[60] Similarly, work on criminal gangs notes that the risks of involvement are lower for young people with strong familial ties.[61] Another relevant insight from criminology is that risk factors can be stacked, thus increasing the likelihood of delinquent behavior and, arguably, diminishing the mitigating influences of any protective factors in place.[62]

Criminology clearly has much to offer for the study of (non-)involvement in terrorist violence.[63] The same applies to work on involvement processes and the dynamics governing the use of violence in related phenomena, such as civil wars, criminal gangs, (youth) violence more generally, the military, and the gender-dynamics present across these domains.[64] There is much to be gained by looking beyond the boundaries set by terrorism studies' core journals, but a broad approach to the literature is no panacea. Despite the greater attention given to the role of protective factors in criminology, that discipline also appears to have favored a risk-factor based approach until relatively recently, particularly in areas relevant to the study of terrorism such as forensic medicine and risk assessment.[65] Especially for those protective factors (and certainly also risk factors) beginning to be linked to radicalization to extremism and involvement in terrorist violence, it needs to be remembered that many lack strong empirical validation.[66] Hence the divergent conclusions reached about, for instance, the relationship between religiosity and radicalization to extremism or the role of strong social ties.[67] While adjacent fields and topics of study have much to offer research on (non-) involvement in terrorism, there are few ready-made answers to be found.

Methodological Considerations

There are several methodological issues to keep in mind when researching non-involvement in terrorism among individuals radicalized to extremism. The first of these is finding and accessing sufficiently detailed biographical information. While perpetrators of deadly terrorist attacks often become the subjects of detailed case studies and extensive reporting (e.g. Anders Breivik), there is little publicly available information on extremists who did not engage in terrorism. Requesting access to police information or applying for permission to interview persons convicted of non-violent terrorism-related offenses are certainly alternatives, but distinctly time-consuming ones. Fortunately, there are numerous (auto-)biographies of former extremists and a growing number of 'formers' who may be suitable as interviewees and whose public profiles make them easy to find. Although extremists who did not become involved in terrorism will be more difficult to locate, the fact that they did not commit such crimes, and have probably not been exposed to much media attention previously, will likely make them more willing to work with researchers. Another possibility here is to prioritize historical cases, in the sense of ones that have progressed through the courts and concern people or movements no

longer at the forefront of militancy, as this is likely to make access to material and interviewees easier, and has the added benefit of addressing the field's overwhelming focus on contemporary issues and developments.[68]

Another option is to focus on individuals prosecuted as members of terrorist organizations but who did not actually contribute to the planning, preparation or execution of an actual attack. In theory, it should be relatively straightforward to distinguish between violence users and, for instance, recruiters or propagandists. In practice, the boundaries between various roles are often blurred, especially within groups with ambiguous organizational structures.[69] Another difficulty here is that preemptive arrests always leave a degree of uncertainty as to whether those individuals who seemed intent to carry out attacks would actually have done so, especially as bragging and fantasizing about violence is a common feature in extremist groups. A solution here would be to operationalize Taylor and Horgan's distinction between involvement and event decisions.[70] For example, while all participants in terrorist groups have made involvement decisions, to qualify as having made an event decision (i.e. a decision to engage in terrorist violence) participants need to have demonstrated clear intent, involvement in planning and preparatory activities (e.g. target selection, logistics) and access to weapons. Such an approach certainly won't remove all ambiguity from the distinction between those involved in terrorist violence and those who are not. But it can provide a basis for broadening case selection of people in the 'involved in terrorist violence' category beyond those caught red-handed on their way to carry out an attack, which will always be a relatively small group.

Alongside acquiring relevant data, there is the question of how to assess it. Although biographical information will be essential to piece together radicalization processes and involvement trajectories, it is vital to broaden the analysis beyond the individual him- or herself. As Bouhana argues, terrorism is something that people do but it cannot be explained simply by looking at individuals; the (physical) context and its myriad influences must be considered as well.[71] A better grasp of (non-) involvement in terrorist violence requires the use of multiple analytical perspectives, including the structural (e.g. socio-economic and (geo)political context), the group or movement level (e.g. socialization processes, role of peer pressures) and the individual level of analysis (e.g. grievances, ideological conviction, views on utility of violence).[72]

Another aspect to keep in mind here, is the importance of taking a longitudinal perspective on the influence that these various factors exert on radicalization and involvement processes. That is, not to take a snapshot of, for instance, terrorists at the moment they were arrested, but to consider how present behavior was shaped by past influences, especially as research shows risk factors are liable to 'stack' over time and persist even if the original cause has abated (e.g. victims of childhood abuse are likely to experience its effects long after the abuse itself has ended).[73] Such a process-oriented analysis is key to identifying changes in the configuration of risk and protective factors that characterize violent and non-violent outcomes of radicalization processes. It may well be that what sets perpetrators of terrorist violence apart is not a greater number of risk factors, but the disappearance of protective influences over time. Attention for the dynamic nature of radicalization and involvement processes will be crucial to gaining greater clarity on what distinguishes those who become involved in terrorist violence from the majority of extremists that does not.

Conclusion

This article has argued that a better understanding of why and how some people become involved in terrorist violence requires this question to be flipped on its head. By studying what keeps the majority of people who radicalize to extremism from involvement in terrorist attacks, the academic community stands to make significant progress on a subject that has been at the heart of the field's debates for decades. Fortunately, the multi-finality of radicalization outcomes, and the various forms that involvement in terrorism can take, has already begun to draw researchers' attention. Likewise, there is an uptick in comparative studies and greater attention for the influence exerted by protective as well as risk factors. While there is clearly a significant way to go before the field's specificity problem has been adequately addressed, that is the tendency to understand

involvement in terrorist violence by only studying actual perpetrators of such attacks, it seems warranted to expect research projects undertaken in this area to yield important contributions in the years to come.

Exploring what sets apart radicalization trajectories that lead to involvement in terrorist violence from those that do not, has clear benefits for the work of counterterrorism policymakers and practitioners as well. Clearer insights into the protective factors that may dissuade participation in this form of political violence can empower prevention work and help curb recidivism among those convicted of terrorism-related offenses.[74] The corollary is a clearer picture of the background factors and involvement dynamics more likely to apply to those who do turn to terrorist violence. This type of information will be beneficial to police and intelligence agencies working to detect and prevent terrorist plots from reaching maturity - agencies which will often need to identify the most high-risk individuals within a larger group of suspects.[75] Given this potential, studying non-involvement in terrorist violence may be one of the most promising ways of pushing the boundaries of knowledge on a form of political violence that has given few signs of abating as a significant societal threat.

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Learning from the Lack of Political Violence: Conceptual Issues and Research Designs

by Leena Malkki

Abstract

There is a rich body of literature that has analysed the emergence of political violence from many different perspectives. While various types of methods and data have been used in these studies, some methodological opportunities have remained underutilised. One of these, particularly in the case of qualitative research designs, has been the inclusion of cases characterised by lower levels of political violence. This article discusses how cases with little political violence have been used in qualitative terrorism research thus far, and what kind of opportunities and challenges are related to including such cases in research designs.

Keywords: Qualitative research; research design; negative cases; resilience; restraint; methods

Why political violence occurs is one of the most fundamental questions in research on terrorism and political violence. A rich body of literature engages with this question from a variety of perspectives. These studies have analysed a wide range of cases using a plethora of analytical frameworks, methods and data. At the same time, there are still underutilised methodological opportunities that could be used to deepen our understanding of how and why political violence emerges.

One of the methodological opportunities that could be used more often is the incorporation of cases with low levels of political violence into research designs. This is especially true in research that uses qualitative methods. To date, qualitative studies have overwhelmingly focused on cases in which there have been (often, by European standards) significant levels of terrorism and political violence, whether it is an in-depth case study of a single movement or country or a comparative study of several of them. While these studies have made a huge contribution to the theoretical understanding of political violence, cases with little political violence also have an important role to play in qualitative research. Ignoring such cases may leave us with an incomplete understanding of the dynamics, processes and mechanisms that are relevant for the emergence of political violence.

This article outlines how cases with low levels of political violence could be used more systematically in qualitative studies on the emergence of political violence and terrorism, why it should be done and what can be gained from it. The article starts by explaining why such research is important. This is followed by a brief discussion of how cases with relatively little political violence have been used in terrorism research. Finally, the article outlines the critical questions and key challenges that should be taken into account when designing studies that include cases in which political violence is low.

Why Study Cases with Low Levels of Political Violence?

This article does not call for analysing and explaining the lack of terrorism and political violence for its own sake. Instead, it is argued that such cases should be studied in order to improve our understanding of the emergence of political violence. At the most basic level, this need derives from key principles of scientific research and theory formation. Within quantitative research design, it is often taken as a basic principle that cases should not be selected on the outcome (dependent variable). If the objective is to establish, for example, how various political, economic, social and demographic factors impact the levels of political violence, it is not sound to include only cases with high levels of political violence in the dataset.[1]

When it comes to qualitative research, the role of cases with limited political violence is somewhat different,

as such research typically differs in its explanatory approach and objectives.[2] Instead of establishing the average effect of specific variables, qualitative research often seeks to explain why political violence emerged in the cases under analysis, and eventually in all cases within the scope of the theory under investigation. When the objective is to explain the path to a certain outcome, much can be achieved by analysing cases in which this path has manifested itself. In this kind of research, selecting only cases in which the outcome of interest has occurred is less problematic and, in fact, is a common practice. Even if this practice is not endorsed by all, there are various widely accepted and used case selection techniques in which only those cases with positive outcomes are selected (e.g. typical case, pathway case and most different case strategies).[3]

Much of the qualitative research on the emergence of terrorism has focused on in-depth analysis of individual cases or comparing a small number of cases in which terrorism has emerged. These studies have provided indispensable insights into the events and developments that played a role in the path toward the outbreak and persistence of terrorism. Such rich and detailed analyses have been highly important for understanding this complex and multidimensional phenomenon. At the same time, negative cases have received relatively little attention.[4]

Cases with negative outcomes have an important role to play also in qualitative research. Even if they are not a required feature of all qualitative research designs, they can be used to build hypotheses and to test and further refine the theories under development (e.g. using deviant and most similar case selection strategies). The value of a case study is not inherently dependent on whether the outcome of interest (emergence of political violence) took place. Some research questions are, in fact, virtually impossible to answer without including cases with negative outcomes in the analysis. By studying cases in which political violence has emerged, we can uncover the commonalities between various episodes of violence. What such an analysis does not reveal, however, is whether these commonalities also manifest, in some form, in cases in which no political violence has occurred. In other words, we cannot fully know the degree to which these commonalities are unique to cases with political violence and the causes that are sufficient for the emergence of political violence.

Another argument for analysing cases with low levels of political violence relates to what one needs to look for when searching for explanations for the emergence of political violence. So far, terrorism studies have focused overwhelmingly on the factors and mechanisms that feed into the emergence and escalation of terrorism. In contrast, the factors and mechanisms that restrain or moderate the use of political violence have received far less attention.[5] Terrorism studies have already started to pay more attention to such factors and mechanisms in the context of research on how terrorist campaigns end and how individuals disengage from terrorism. However, restraining and moderating factors and mechanisms do not come into play only when terrorism begins to de-escalate; they are present in some form from the beginning. This means that the emergence of political violence should not be conceptualised merely as the *presence* of certain factors and mechanisms, as it may also partially result from the *absence* of restraining or protective factors and mechanisms.

Fully uncovering restraining or protective factors and mechanisms by only studying cases with political violence is difficult. For this purpose, cases with few or no instances of political violence must also be examined. Studying such cases can improve our understanding of the conditions that may protect certain areas from outbreaks of political violence and, thereby, what may foster resilience against such violence.

This is particularly important when the explanations for the emergence of political violence are sought with the intention of finding ways to prevent and counter it. Rather than drawing insights from major outbreaks of political violence, it may well be that the cases with little political violence provide the most useful lessons. Understanding protective and restraining factors and mechanisms may produce information that will aid in the development of more effective policies, especially for the early prevention of violent extremism.

Previous Studies that Include Cases with Low Levels of Political Violence

Qualitative studies that include cases with little terrorism or political violence have been fairly scarce, but they do exist. In this section, some examples of such studies are presented. The focus will be on methodological issues - research questions, case selection, data, methods and analytical strategies. The examples are chosen from the literature on the emergence of terrorism and political violence in Western countries in the post-war era. The discussion focuses on studies that use either country, region or group/network as the unit of analysis. This means that studies analysing why some individuals engage in political violence while others do not, are not included. Such research is discussed in Bart Schuurman's article in this Special Issue.[6]

There are a number of small-N qualitative studies that explicitly set out to find why there has been so little political violence in certain cases. Some of these are qualitative historical studies, which typically draw inspiration and justification (either implicitly or explicitly) from counterfactual history. One such study is Nick Brooke's study of nationalism and terrorism in the UK.[7] Brooke contrasts the development of nationalist movements in Scotland, Wales and England with that in Northern Ireland, asking why the first three have witnessed much less terrorist violence than the last, even though the development of nationalist movements had many similarities. In essence, his study is about permissive societal conditions for political violence.

Brooke sets to solve this puzzle by providing an elaborate historical account of the political, religious and social contexts surrounding these national movements over the last one hundred years. The answer lies, in his view, in a combination of several issues, which together produced a political and social environment in which there was little public support for political violence. He highlights the importance of two issues in particular: the development of national identity and the availability of non-violent options. The national identity and Britishness were more compatible with one another in Scotland and Wales than they were in Ireland. Moreover, non-violent means of exerting political influence remained a viable option for the overwhelming majority of the population in Wales and Scotland, effectively limiting the legitimacy of, and support for, violent means.

Other studies have sought explanations by conducting a historical multi-level analysis which look at group dynamics, interactions between various actors as well individual pathways. Among these is Luca Falciola's study on the US white radical leftist groups of the New Left wave.[8] His objective is to determine why these groups did not resort to violence against people in the 1960s and 1970s, even though they had the resources to do so, had begun to organise in guerrilla units and were also ideologically prepared for such violence. Thus, what Falciola seeks to explain is not a general lack of political violence but the decision to abstain from violence against people. To track the mechanisms that contributed to the constrained use of violence, Falciola conducts a qualitative multi-level analysis, drawing from primary sources relating to fifteen radical left groups in the US. After casting doubt on several previous explanations (e.g. strict countermeasures), he concludes that the most important reason for the restraint from violence against people was the moderating influence of the radical milieu. The militant groups were initially supported by the larger radical left milieu, but when a group began to move toward targeting people, it was met with criticism and backlash from its supporters.

A similar question about the lack of certain types of political violence is posed in a number of other studies. For example, Jeff Goodwin examines why there was so little anti-white terrorism in the anti-apartheid struggle.[9] Similarly, Pietro Castelli Gattinara, Francis O'Connor and Lasse Lindekilde analyse why there have been so few lone actor terrorist attacks stemming from the neo-fascist milieu in Italy.[10]

Cases with low levels of political violence have also occasionally been discussed in studies that draw on social movement studies' approaches and models to explain the emergence of political violence, although most influential qualitative studies have focused only on positive cases.[11] Among them is the study on dynamics of radicalisation conducted by Eitan Alimi, Chares Demetriou and Lorenzo Bosi.[12] Their main attention is directed towards the interaction between different actors (social movement, counter-movements, the political system and the security forces) as well as the dynamics within the social movement itself. By systematically analysing these interactions, they identify recurring mechanisms that lead to radicalisation into political violence.

Alimi, Demetriou and Bosi, however, recognise that, in addition to mechanisms of radicalisation, there are likely also mechanisms that work against it. The book includes one chapter that focuses on radicalisation in reverse and non-radicalisation. They provide a brief analysis of three cases of non-radicalisation and suggest that there appears to be at least three mechanisms: consensus mobilisation, underbidding and downward spirals of political opportunity. However, their discussion of these non-radicalisation cases and mechanisms is brief.

Negative cases also feature in Jacob Aasland Ravndal's article on why Sweden has had so much more right-wing terrorism and militancy than Norway, Finland and Denmark.[13] Here, other Nordic countries function as negative cases and comparison points to Sweden. More specifically, Ravndal examines how social movement theories can help in understanding the differences between these countries. He concludes that the higher levels of right-wing terrorism in Sweden can be explained by a combination of the arrival of a high number of immigrants and a lack of influential anti-immigration parties. In addition, differences in experiences during the Second World War played a role. What distinguishes Sweden from the other Nordic countries is that it remained largely neutral in the Second World War and did not witness a purge of Nazi sympathisers after the war ended. Consequently, Sweden was left with a significantly stronger extreme right movement. This has contributed to the vitality of its far-right milieu and a number of dedicated militants for decades since, arguably providing better opportunities for the emergence of political violence.

Ravndal's research design was partly informed by his previous comparative study on extreme-right violence in 18 West European countries between 1990 and 2015, which had shown that there had been significantly more extreme right violence in Sweden than in other Nordic countries.[14] In this larger study, Ravndal uses fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) to test the explanatory power of conditions identified as conducive to right-wing violence in previous research (immigration, socioeconomic hardship, authoritarian legacies, radical right support, radical right repression and left-wing terrorism and militancy). The analysis draws from his Right-wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) dataset, which includes several countries with few or no incidents.[15]

Furthermore, there are a small number of studies that combine quantitative analysis with detailed qualitative analysis of individual cases. The cases in these studies include those in which political violence has emerged as well as those that have witnessed relatively little political violence. Importantly, the negative cases are analysed not only in the quantitative part but also in the qualitative part of the studies. A good example of this kind of research is Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca's study on revolutionary (New Left wave) terrorism in Western countries.[16] The study does not analyse the determinants of all kinds of terrorism but specifically considers lethal revolutionary terrorism. His research includes 23 affluent Western countries [17] and covers the years 1970–2000. The intensity of lethal revolutionary terrorism varied considerably between these countries, and the objective of the study was to find out why. Sánchez-Cuenca describes his method as historical comparative analysis. More specifically, his study consists of statistical analysis, which "is combined with qualitative comparisons and in-depth knowledge of cases".[18]

The main argument put forward by Sánchez-Cuenca is that the intensity of revolutionary terrorism cannot be explained by socio-economic and political conditions at the time of the attacks. Instead, the intensity of revolutionary terrorism in the post-war period is much more strongly connected with developments that took place in the inter-war period. He develops a historical explanation for why and how the interwar period mattered. According to him, this period left its mark on attitudes among the radical left against violence and state repression. These attitudes played a major role in how the radical left reacted to both state repression and initiatives toward violent revolutionary struggle in the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout his study, Sánchez-Cuenca devotes a great deal of attention to carefully analysing what happened in countries with low levels of lethal revolutionary terrorism. In fact, he could hardly have made his argument without doing so.

Other examples of studies that combine quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the emergence of political violence and devote considerable attention to negative cases are provided by Jan Oskar Engene and Luis de la Calle. Engene uses this type of research design to study domestic terrorism in Western European countries from 1950 to 1995.[19] De la Calle uses such a research design to study nationalist violence in Western

Europe.[20] His quantitative analysis of 29 nationalist-driven Western European regions is followed by three sets of case studies, each focusing on a pair or regions, one of which has witnessed political violence and the other of which has been (largely) spared from it (Basque country and Catalonia, Northern Ireland and Wales, and Corsica and Sardinia).

Building Research Designs with Negative Cases

The discussion above offered examples of how cases involving limited political violence can be used to study the emergence of terrorism and political violence. They do not by any means cover the full spectrum of what can be done. Having said that, not all studies on cases with low levels of political violence are equally useful. Making efficient use of such cases requires carefully planning. We will now turn to some of the key questions that should be addressed in that context.

What Qualifies as a Lack of Political Violence?

The first question that needs to be addressed is what is meant by a lack of political violence, and what kind of cases we are looking at. To this point, the expression has been used in this article as a general term simply to refer to cases in which the outcome under study—in this case, the emergence of political violence—has not occurred, or has occurred to a lesser degree. The kinds of cases that fall into this category depend on the exact research topic and question. At a minimum, the following questions are important to consider.

What is the unit of analysis? What a lack of political violence can refer to depends on the level and unit of analysis. It can mean countries/regions that have witnessed relatively little political violence, groups/networks that have committed few acts of political violence, or individuals who have not become involved in groups/networks that commit political violence (or have not committed such acts on their own).

What is meant by political violence? What exactly is lacking in these cases depends on the kind of political violence studied. It can mean a lack of any type of political violence, but could also mean a lack of specific forms of political violence. The study may be limited to the emergence of a certain type of political violence as defined, based on its ideological or political background and focus, for example, on nationalist-separatist or extreme-right political violence. It can also mean a lack of certain kinds of political violence, for example, a lack of terrorist attacks or (indiscriminate) attacks against people. Another issue that may need to be defined is the acts of violence that qualify as political, as this is not always clear-cut, especially in the case of lone actor violence.[21] The same goes for violence - for example, does it refer only to acts against people, or are acts against property also included? Another issue that may need to be solved is how to define escalation and de-escalation. This is important if the lack of a certain type of political violence is taken as an indicator of lower level of escalation. How do, for example, violence against property and violence against individuals relate to each other, and how is the frequency of attacks taken into account?[22]

What are the criteria for absence? The lack of political violence can be defined in absolute terms, meaning literally no political violence. However, setting such a high bar for qualification does not always make sense, especially if the unit of analysis is an entire country. It is very rare for absolutely no politically motivated acts of violence to occur in any large area over any longer period. It is more common to interpret the absence and presence of the outcome in relative terms, such as countries/regions that have witnessed remarkably low levels of political violence compared with other countries/regions. Drawing the border between positive and negative outcomes is not always completely clear and is one of the issues that needs to be defined before the case selection.

How is a lack of political violence defined in temporal terms? The lack of political violence also has a temporal element. It is usually understood as the (relative) absence of political violence within the period under study. Another temporal dimension concerns the duration of political violence. In some cases, it is a quickly passing phenomenon, and no further escalation occurs, whereas in other cases it has continued for years or decades. Cases of short-duration political violence could also qualify as negative case studies. Hence, studying the lack

of political violence would essentially mean studying the quick demise of political violence, intersecting with research on how and why political violence ends.

Connection Between Theory and Case Selection

Studies of cases in which there have been low levels of political violence (however defined) do not automatically make an equal contribution to theory formation. All historical and empirical studies on cases with relatively little political violence can be fascinating in numerous ways. They may offer valuable descriptions of the social world and provide building blocks for more theoretically oriented contributions in the future. Some cases are crucial because of their societal significance and are worth studying simply for that reason.

However, if a study aims to directly contribute to theory formation, the research design and case selection must be carefully considered. The case must not only have a negative outcome but also be relevant. There is no general answer to which historical cases make good case studies. Theoretical usefulness depends mostly on the relationship between the theory and the case. Finding suitable cases is not easy and straightforward. Making informed choices almost always requires detailed knowledge of the cases.

One way to think about potentially useful cases for study is using the possibility principle put forward by James Mahoney and Gary Goertz. According to this principle, "only cases where the outcome of interest is possible should be included in the set of negative cases; cases where the outcome is impossible should be relegated to a set of uninformative and hence irrelevant observations."[23] Mahoney and Goertz suggest that negative cases can be considered relevant when the "value on at least one independent variable is positively related to the outcome of interest" (rule of inclusion), and no other variables would predict the non-occurrence of the outcome of interest (rule of exclusion).

Furthermore, it is crucial to think about the scope. If the purpose is to develop a certain model or theory, the case studies need to be chosen within the range of cases that it is intended to apply to. Case studies can also be used to test whether the theory or model would be more widely applicable. Negative cases are not, however, necessarily the best way to do that.

Maintaining the connection between the theory and the case study throughout the research project is also important. This means that not only should the case selection be justified by theory but also that the theoretical implications of the research results should be discussed. Thus far, especially small-N case studies in the field of terrorism research that have explicitly focused on the lack of political violence have been rather descriptive and have mainly focused on explaining the cases at hand. There is more that can be done.

Case Selection Strategies

Another important issue related to the relationship between case selection and theory is the case selection strategy. Cases with negative outcomes can be used in various case study designs.

The most obvious candidate is the deviant case study design.[24] It allows for producing theoretically relevant studies in a rather short period of time. A deviant case is one that does not fit the causal patterns discovered in a quantitative study or one that runs counter to what a theory would predict. Deviant case studies can help supplement an existing model or theory by providing an explanation for outlier cases. It may also contribute to further theory development by identifying factors or mechanisms that the study or theory in question does not address, thereby helping to develop it further. This means, quite obviously, that deviant cases are useful only if there is already a rather developed theory that can be tested.

In qualitative studies that rely on process tracing, deviant cases can be a useful way to understand causal mechanisms. Negative cases can be of interest as deviant cases when the outcome of interest did not occur even though the causal mechanisms were in place. Detecting the point at which mechanisms break down may be possible by tracing the mechanisms carefully in a deviant case. This can lead to finding contextual or causal conditions that have hitherto remained undetected.[25]

How can good candidates for deviant case studies be identified? Previous large-N or intermediate-N quantitative studies can function as a good starting point.[26] There are often cases which (in one way or another) fit identified patterns poorly. Another way is to start from potential cases and reflect on how different theories of political violence appear to be able to explain them. Of course, cases are always deviant only in relation to a certain theory or model. The same case may be deviant in relation to one theory but compliant with another one.

Cases with low levels of political violence can also be used in comparative case study designs as negative cases. This is a standard practice in social science methodology, and it could be utilised more frequently in terrorism studies.

Negative cases could, for example, be included in most-similar case study designs. It is a research design in which the case studies share similar background factors but differ in outcome. In other words, this would involve studying groups or locations that are similar in many respects that are deemed relevant for the emergence of political violence but different in terms of whether political violence has actually emerged. The cases do not have to be countries or groups—they can also be cities or provinces. An in-depth study of such cases will produce information about what may have caused the different outcomes, regardless of the similarities between the cases (and whether the similarities were truly relevant). While small-N studies do not necessarily produce generalisable results themselves, this kind of research can still make a significant contribution by building new hypotheses about causal factors and mechanisms for further research or helping to refine existing models and theories.

One variant of the most-similar case design that could also be used is a paired comparison in which two similar cases are examined—one in which political violence has emerged and one in which it has not. Some researchers argue that, when the number of cases is limited to two, the study is better placed to generate robust hypotheses, as the number of unmeasured variables is smaller than in larger-N comparisons.[27]

Another type of comparative case study design in which cases with low levels of political violence could be used is the most-different case study design.[28] This means that all cases share the same outcome, in that relatively little political violence has occurred, but they are different in their relevant background factors. The idea behind this choice is not to test theories about what leads to the emergence of political violence as such. Instead, the objective is to supplement these theories by looking for potential restraining or protective factors or mechanisms. Again, there must be a reason to assume that political violence should have occurred in these cases for this research design to make sense.

Transnational waves of political violence provide one potential context for this kind of research design. During such waves, we regularly encounter a situation in which the level of political violence differs significantly from one place to another, even though the ideas and models that inspire the wave are transnational and have supporters in many more places. Furthermore, the conditions conducive to political violence may be more widespread than the political violence actually is. Forming hypotheses about the mechanisms that have protected certain countries or areas from political violence is possible by studying these cases in depth and comparing them with one another.

Besides fully-fledged case studies, cases with negative outcome can also be used as smaller, supplementary cases. These kinds of shadow cases can be used for brief comparisons that further extend the inquiry and allow the researcher to address smaller questions that arise but cannot be analysed using the main cases because they lack the necessary variation. Shadow cases can also be used to further evaluate the conclusions reached in the study. For example, a comparative study that focuses on analysing cases with positive outcomes can be supplemented by shadow cases with negative outcomes. The purpose, then, would be to see whether the conclusions of the study hold when set against negative cases.[29]

Conclusion

This article has made the case for qualitative research within terrorism studies to make more frequent use of negative cases. It has also discussed some key issues that should be taken into account in such research. Studying cases in which political violence has emerged will naturally occupy the central place in the research field. However, cases with low levels of political violence can make a significant contribution to the development of theories and models and provide irreplaceable evidence about the factors and mechanisms that restrain and protect against political violence. The latter is important not only for academic, but also for policy-making purposes, as the conclusions can help to develop efficient evidence-based policies for countering violent extremism—provided that the cases are chosen and the research projects are designed carefully.

Paying more attention to negative cases would also have an important by-product that has not yet been mentioned. It has the potential to improve the academic quality of terrorism studies and help the field move forward. Common complaints among terrorism researchers are that the same questions tend to come up time and again, previous research is too often ignored, theory formation has stagnated and methodological rigour leaves much to be desired.[30] There is a rather broad consensus that the situation has improved significantly during the last two decades, but that there is still room for further improvement.[31]

How could studying negative cases help in this regard? It would broaden the methodological spectrum of the research field and thereby provide more tools for studying this admittedly challenging research topic. What is more important, however, is that it could improve the cumulative academic research on terrorism. In order for scientific knowledge to advance, new studies should build upon the findings of previous studies. So far, this has not necessarily been the strength of terrorism studies, as current events and policy concerns have had a significant impact on research agendas. This is not to say that research should not be timely and policy-oriented. The academic research field of terrorism studies would become more solid by anchoring itself more strongly in previous research. Qualitative studies that include negative cases almost always do so, as their research designs often rely fundamentally and unavoidably on previous theoretical discussions. This is obviously just one of many alternatives for expanding and improving this field of academic knowledge and will not solve all the problems. However, it could help the field to move in the right direction.

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Notes

[1] These kind of studies include, among many others, Erica Chenoweth, "Terrorism and Democracy", *The Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (2013); Walter Enders, Gary A. Hoover & Todd Sandler, "The Changing Nonlinear Relationship between Income and Terrorism", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60/2 (2016); Sarah Brockhoff, Tim Krieger & Daniel Meierrieks, "Great Expectations and Hard Times: the (Nontrivial) Impact of Education on Domestic Terrorism", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59/7 (2015); Henrik Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", *International Studies Quarterly* 50/3 (2006).

[2] On the differences of analytical approaches and case selection in quantitative and qualitative research, see especially James Mahoney & Gary Goertz, "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research", *Political Analysis* 14/3 (2006); Donatella della Porta, "Comparative Analysis: Case-Oriented versus Variable-Oriented Research", in Donatella della Porta & Michael Keating (Eds.), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[3] See e.g Jason Seawright & John Gerring, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and

Quantitative Options", *Political Research Quarterly* 61/2 (2008); Derek Beach & Rasmus Brun Pedersen, "Selecting Appropriate Cases when Tracing Causal Mechanisms", *Sociological Methods & Research* 47/4 (2018); Andrew Bennett & Colin Elman, "Qualitative Research: Recent Developments in Case Study Methods", *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006); John Gerring & Lee Cojocaru, "Selecting Cases for Intensive Analysis: A Diversity of Goals and Methods", *Sociological Methods & Research* 45/3 (2016).

[4] Strong concentration on cases with positive outcome and a call for more attention to cases with negative outcome has been made e.g. in Erica Chenoweth & Andreas Gofas, "The Study of Terrorism: Achievements and Challenges Ahead", in Erica Chenoweth, Richard English, Andreas Gofas & Stathis N. Kalyvas (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism* (Oxford University Press, 2019); Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[5] This is arguably not typical for terrorism studies only. For example, Scott Straus has put forward a similar claim about genocide studies and argues that a "critical missing dimension" of the study of political violence, in general, "is a methodological recognition of negative cases and a theoretical recognition of the dynamics of restraint that helps to explain such negative cases". He calls for a re-conceptualisation of violence as an outcome of both factors of escalation and restraint, essentially claiming that restraint is not any kind of special case but an integral part of the dynamics of political violence. - Scott Straus, "Retreating from the Brink: Theorizing Mass Violence and the Dynamics of Restraint", *Perspectives on Politics* 10/2 (2012), citations on p. 343.

[6] See also Jamie Bartlett & Carl Miller, "The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalisation", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24/1 (2012); R. Kim Cragin, "Resisting Violent Extremism: A Conceptual Model for Non-Radicalisation", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26/2 (2014). The need for more studies like this has been recognised, but the use of negative cases remains quite uncommon, as a recent review study confirms: Sarah L. Desmarais, Joseph Simons-Rudolph, Christine Shahan Brugh, Eileen Schilling, and Chad Hoggan, "The State of Scientific Knowledge Regarding Factors Associated with Terrorism", *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management* 4/4 (2017).

[7] Nick Brooke, *Terrorism and Nationalism in the United Kingdom: The Absence of Noise* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

[8] Luca Falciola, "A bloodless guerrilla warfare: Why U.S. white leftists renounced violence against people during the 1970s", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28/5 (2016).

[9] Jeff Goodwin, "'The Struggle Made Me a Nonracialist': Why There Was So Little Terrorism in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle", *Mobilization: An International Quarterly Review* 12/2 (2007).

[10] Pietro Castelli Gattinara, Francis O'Connor & Lasse Lindekilde, "Italy, No Country for Acting Alone? Lone Actor Radicalisation in the Neo-Fascist Milieu", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12/6 (2018).

[11] See e.g. Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), including her comment on p. 294.

[12] Eitan Y. Alimi, Chares Demetriou & Lorenzo Bosi, *Dynamics of Radicalization: A Relational and Comparative Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). The cases analysed in the study are al-Qaeda, EOKA and the Red Brigades.

[13] Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Right-wing Terrorism and Militancy in the Nordic Countries: A Comparative Case Study", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30/5 (2018). Another example of a social movement study which focuses on a case with negative outcome is Martín Portos, "Keeping Dissent Alive under the Great Recession: No-Radicalisation and Protest in Spain After the Eventful 15M/Indignados Campaign", *Acta Politica* 54 (2019).

[14] Countries included in the analysis are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Explaining Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Grievances, Opportunities and Polarization", *European Journal of Political Research* 57/4 (2018).

[15] FsQCA as a method has been used quite rarely in the study of terrorism and political violence. It is actually surprising given that it is particularly suitable to intermediate-N studies on causally complex phenomena. Results of such analysis would also work as an excellent starting point for building further in-depth case study research designs, including studies on cases with negative outcome. One of the very few other studies using this method to study political violence and terrorism is Michael A. Jensen, Anita Atwell Seate & Patrick A. James, "Radicalization to Violence: A Pathway Approach to Studying Extremism", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32/5 (2020).

[16] Ignacio Sánchez Cuenca, *The Historical Roots of Political Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[17] Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. These are all pre-1994 OECD countries.

[18] Sanchez-Cuenca, op. cit., p. 3.

[19] Engene's aim is to determine how levels of terrorism relate to the problems of legitimacy (derived from ethnic diversity or problems of integration or continuation within the political system) that the state has faced in the past or is facing at the moment. His analysis includes a statistical section and a more detailed qualitative discussion of individual countries, including countries that witnessed few acts of terrorism. Through the qualitative analysis, he also seeks to explain why some countries had less terrorism than his argument and statistical analysis would have predicted. Jan Oskar Engene, *Terrorism in Western Europe: Explaining the Trends since 1950* (Cheltenham & Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2004).

[20] Luis de la Calle, *Nationalist Violence in Post-war Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[21] On this, see Leena Malkki, "Amok – private oder politische Gewalt? School Shootings und die Grenzen der Einzeltäterthese", *Mittelweg 36*, Heft 4-5 (2020); Leena Malkki, "Political Elements in Post-Columbine School Shootings in Europe and North America", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26/1 (2014); Jelle van Buuren, "Performative Violence? The Multitude of Lone Wolf Terrorism", *Terrorism: An Electronic Journal and Knowledge Base* 1 (2012).

[22] This is discussed in the article by Rune Ellefsen and Joel Busher in this Special Issue.

[23] James Mahoney & Gary Goertz, "The Possibility Principle: Choosing Negative Cases in Comparative Research", *American Political Science Review* 98/4 (2004), p. 653.

[24] See, e.g., Jason Seawright & John Gerring, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options", *Political Research Quarterly* 61/2 (2008). In some cases, the negative case methodology can also be applied, see Rebecca Jean Emigh, "The Power of Negative Thinking: The Use of Negative Case Methodology in the Development of Sociological Theory", *Theory and Society* 26/5 (1997).

[25] See Derek Beach & Rasmus Brun Pedersen, "Selecting Appropriate Cases When Tracing Causal Mechanisms", *Sociological Methods & Research* 47/4 (2018), pp. 860–863.

[26] On using case studies to assess arguments proposed in quantitative analyses and how to pick cases for these, see especially James D. Fearon & David D. Laitin, "Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Putting It Together Again", in Robert E. Goodin (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science,* DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604456.013.0052.

[27] On this, see especially Sidney Tarrow, "The Strategy of Paired Comparison: Toward a Theory of Practice", *Comparative Political Studies* 43/2 (2010).

[28] Jason Seawright & John Gerring, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options", *Political Research Quarterly* 61/2 (2008). The most-different case selection technique is used e.g. in Eitan Y. Alimi, Chares Demetriou & Lorenzo Bosi, *Dynamics of Radicalization: A Relational and Comparative Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[29] Bob Hancké, *Intelligent Research Design: A Guide for Beginning Researcher in the Social Sciences* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 75–77. A classic example of this kind of research resign is Theda Skocpol's study *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[30] See e.g. Andrew Silke (Ed.), *Research on Terrorism. Trends, Achievements and Failures* (London & Portland: Frank Cass, 2004); Marc Sageman, "The Stagnation of Terrorism Research", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26/4 (2014).

[31] E.g. Bart Schuurman, "Research on Terrorism 2007–2016: A Review of Data, Methods and Authorship", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32/5 (2020); John F. Morrison, "Talking Stagnation: Thematic Analysis of Terrorism Experts' Perception of the Health of Terrorism Studies", *Terrorism and Political Violence* (forthcoming).

Why the Nordic Resistance Movement Restrains Its Use of Violence

by Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal

Abstract

The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) is a militant National Socialist organization that in principle embraces violent strategies, including terrorism, given the "right" circumstances. However, in practice, the organization restrains its use of violence considerably. To understand why, this article examines three interrelated topics. First, when and why does the NRM leadership permit its members to use violence? Second, why and how does the current NRM leadership restrain the organization's use of violence? Third, how does the NRM leadership respond to cases where NRM members carry out acts of severe violence that clearly overstep the boundaries set by their leaders? Our main finding is that the NRM leadership does not – at least in principle – have any moral restraints against political violence, including mass murder, and that the main reason why the NRMrefrains from using terrorist methods is strategic calculation: such methods are perceived as counter-productive and likely to undermine the NRM's prospects of gaining popular support and opportunities to propagate its political views via public and legal channels. As such, the NRM leaders are highly sensitive to the legal boundaries set by the government. However, they also continuously try to test and expand these boundaries through violent behaviour against the police and political enemies, and by honouring rather than punishing activists who overstep the limits officially drawn by the leadership.

Keywords: political violence, terrorism; extreme right; restraints on violence

Introduction

The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) is a National Socialist organization with branches in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland – although its origin, core and stronghold are in Sweden. Its declared goal is to establish a pan-Nordic white state. In its official handbook for activists, the NRM states that:

> *The Resistance Movement is not pacifist. We are aware that we can only be victorious through physical struggle. […] In the future our weapons will be decisive on the battlefield, but at present, as long as we can act legally, there is no reason for the Resistance movement to arm itself with guns or explosives.[1]*

However, the NRM is definitely a militant organization. Many of the core activists of the NRM have criminal records characterized by severe violence, and, in some cases, homicide. Activists train in street fighting and knife combat in NRM settings.[2] Many activists have acquired guns – legally or illegally – as preparation for a future racial war. There have also been two cases in recent years where NRM activists have carried out acts of violence with fatal outcomes and many cases of causing more or less severe bodily harm. The NRM has organized violent attacks against counter-demonstrators as well as against the police. NRM activists have also frequently made subtle death threats against politicians, journalists and others they consider enemies. Militancy and a readiness to make use of violence are clearly part of the identity of the NRM.

At the same time, the NRM has generally shown considerable restraint in its use of violence, often balancing on the border of illegality. Terrorism is not part of the NRM's action repertoire in the present situation – but the organization does not preclude the use of terrorist violence in the future. In order to understand this balancing act, this paper asks three questions:

1. When and why does the NRM leadership permit its members to use violence?
2. Why and how does the current NRM leadership restrain the organization's use of violence?
3. How does the NRM leadership respond to cases where NRM members carry out acts of severe violence

that clearly overstep the boundaries set by their leaders?

Our main finding is that the NRM leadership does not – at least in principle – have any moral constraints on political violence, including mass murder, and that the main reason why the NRM refrains from using terrorist methods is strategic calculation: these are perceived as counter-productive and likely to undermine the prospects of gaining popular support and opportunities to promulgate the NRM's political views via public and legal channels. As such, the NRM leaders are highly sensitive to the legal boundaries set by the government. However, they also continuously try to test and expand these boundaries through violent behaviour against the police and political enemies, and by honouring rather than punishing activists who overstep the boundaries officially drawn by the leadership.

The article proceeds as follows. We begin by briefly describing the emergence and transnational evolution of the NRM since the organization was founded in the late 1990s. Next, we look at the record of NRM violence that has been permitted or even encouraged by its leadership. In the third section, we analyse how the NRM's current leader reacted to the mass shooting of Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019. In doing so, we identify the types of logics used by the leadership to explain and justify the organization's brakes on violence. In section four, we look at how the leadership has reacted to incidents of severe violence that clearly fall outside the boundaries set by the leadership. Finally, we briefly discuss some theoretical and practical implications of our findings.

The Emergence and Transnational Evolution of the Nordic Resistance Movement

The NRM was originally established as the Swedish Resistance Movement by a handful of activists in 1997, including Klas Lund, who headed the organization until 2015.[3] Notably, Lund and his associates wanted to create a strong, hierarchical organization of highly dedicated members whose primary aim was to carry out propaganda in the public space, a form of elite vanguard meant to enlighten the people about the need for a racial revolution. This motivation came after Lund had been part of a failed attempt by the network known as *Vitt Ariskt Motstånd* (VAM, White Aryan Resistance) to spark a revolution through the strategy of leaderless resistance and terrorism – a strategy that ultimately landed Lund and several others in prison.[4] During his six years in prison, Lund had plenty of time to contemplate the means that would be most effective in generating a revolutionary outcome. He arrived at the conclusion that terrorism carried out by loosely organized and leaderless networks might not be so effective after all. Rather, a strong hierarchical organization with the long-term ambition of radicalizing people through steadfast propaganda and street activism was a better alternative.

The NRM can be characterized as a militant and action-oriented National Socialist organization, aiming to generate revolution, mainly through extra-parliamentary struggle. According to its founding members, its National Socialist worldview has been an essential part of the organization ever since its inception. During its early years, the NRM did not use the National Socialist label – for strategic reasons – but referred to its activists as "patriots". In 2006, however, the NRM leadership decided to "come out of the closet" and be open about its National Socialist foundations.[5]

Another characteristic of the NRM is its skilful organization (compared with similar groups in this landscape) and its relatively strict membership criteria.[6] To become a full member, you have to dedicate yourself completely to the organization and its day-to-day struggle. Accordingly, the NRM never had the ambition to grow fast but rather has been careful about recruiting what it sees as the "right" kind of people, meaning those who are fully dedicated, action-oriented, and who never question the organization's radical stance, in particular concerning questions of race and the Jews.

The NRM aims to create a Nordic nation for the Nordic people. A logical step forward was therefore to expand into the other Nordic countries. A first attempt took place in Norway in 2003, but failed. Then, in 2010, Haakon Forwald joined the Swedish branch as its only Norwegian member. He was soon promoted to leader of a resurrected Norwegian branch and given the task of rebuilding a network of Norwegian activists. During its

first years, the re-established Norwegian branch was involved in few public activities, and mostly engaged in night-time sticker raids. However, from 2016 onwards, this pattern changed and Norwegian activists started carrying out a number of public activities, such as marches through main streets and handing out flyers. This sharp increase in activity level appears to reflect a similar increase in Sweden, related to a change of leadership. Although several of the Norwegian core activists have been convicted of racist violence and other crimes in the past, the Norwegian branch of the NRM appears to have been less involved in violence and crime than is the case with the Swedish activists.[7]

The Finnish branch of the NRM *Suomen vastarintaliike* (The Finnish Resistance Movement) was founded by Esa Henrik Holappa in 2008. Holappa gradually disengaged from the organization and finally broke with it and the Nazi ideology in 2014, speaking out publicly against it. He is now considered by the NRM as a traitor and oath breaker. The Finnish branch became the second-largest branch of the NRM, but was banned as an organization by the Finnish courts, due to a violent attack on an opponent (with a fatal outcome) and the organization's response of honouring the perpetrator with an award. The temporary ban was confirmed by the Supreme Court in March 2019, and the final ban was confirmed in September 2020.[8] A new National Socialist organization "Kohti Vapautta!" (Towards Freedom!) was set up in anticipation of the ban but is also in the process of being banned, as a follow-up organization.[9]

The most recent addition to the NRM's transnational network (not counting a handful of activists in Iceland) is the Danish branch, (re-)established in 2017, after a failed earlier attempt at establishing a Danish branch had been made in 2013.[10] In October 2020, two NRM activists, one of them a regional "nest" leader, were convicted of desecrating 100 graves on a Jewish cemetery on the Crystal Night 2019. Police presented in court an encrypted Signal message on the nest leader's phone, stating:

> *Important information. There is a directive from [the top NRM leader] Simon Lindberg that all the Nordic countries join a pan-Nordic action on the crystal night between 8 and 9 November. We will anonymously attack Jewish targets. We go for Jews or Jewish businesses. Not half-Jews or Zionists. Your task the coming month is to find out whether there are any Jewish targets in your areas. This is top secret information.*

In addition to the desecration of Jewish graves in Denmark, Jewish institutions and businesses were vandalised with Star of David stickers and other antisemitic slogans and graffiti in the Nordic countries as well. The order to "attack Jewish targets" seems to be interpreted as incitement to vandalism against property rather than violence against people. However, arrests led to defections among leading Danish NRM activists. In another case, a former NRM nest leader was convicted of producing a remote-controlled bomb and an illegal slam gun.[11]

In the municipal elections in Sweden in 2014, the NRM was able to get two elected representatives into local councils in the towns of Borlänge and Ludvika by giving extra-person votes to its own candidates on the Sweden Democrats' election lists – an opportunity in the election system they took full advantage of. They used this elected platform to promulgate their views and also to harass other representatives.[12] Four years later, they tried to repeat the success by running candidates on their own NRM electoral lists in three municipalities, mobilizing activists for the campaign. This turned out to be a failure, with no candidates elected and only 2106 votes received at the national level. Frustrations over the defeat led to internal disputes about the prospect or futility of going for an electoral strategy.

This dispute culminated in a split in the organization in mid-2019, when a group of activists headed by the former NRM-leader Klas Lund, and including the leader of the Norwegian division Haakon Forwald and other prominent activists, left the NRM to establish a new group known as *Nordisk Styrka* (Nordic Strength). According to members of the new group, the split was caused by internal disagreements about strategy, mainly concerning whether the group should continue to pursue mainstream types of activities, such as large public demonstrations and maintaining a political party, or operate in more of a semi-clandestine fashion, as the NRM used to do.[13] At the time of writing, it is too early to tell what to make of this new group. However, the facts that it is being led by Klas Lund and that several key activists followed him suggest that it might become a

serious contender to the NRM, competing for support among a very limited pool of national socialist activists and sympathizers. Whether the split will weaken both organizations or lead to a competition over which group is more militant remains to be seen.

Permitted Violence

Under what conditions does the NRM leadership permit its members to use violence? What does the record of violence sanctioned or even organized by the NRM leadership look like? To answer these questions, we reviewed violent incidents recorded in the RTV dataset [14], statements by the NRM leadership and the NRM's activist handbook.

A full record of NRM violence does not exist. The RTV dataset only records the most severe types of right-wing violence, thereby excluding the majority of violent attacks committed by the NRM. The RTV dataset has, however, recorded 23 events between 2007 and 2019 committed by NRM members. Of these, 16 occurred in Sweden, six in Finland and one in Norway. By manually looking into each of these 23 events, we have found that at least ten of them were either attacks planned by local NRM branches or occurred as part of public events organized by the NRM. These include a major tear gas attack on a Pride parade in Helsinki, lethal attacks against people reacting to NRM public events and targeted attacks against left-wing activists and even politicians.

The NRM leadership makes clear that more extreme forms of violence (the use of guns and explosives, etc.) are not suitable in the present situation,[15] and that such modes of violence should be put on hold for a future revolutionary situation or when the great racial war breaks out. However, there are certainly forms of violence that the NRM condones. Violent self-defence is not only acceptable but desirable. NRM activists seem to seek out situations where they can provoke opponents, to give them the opportunity to "defend themselves" aggressively, and sometimes they actively initiate such confrontations. For example, in December 2013, some 40 NRM activists launched an attack with bottles and firecrackers on an anti-racist demonstration in Kärrtorp outside Stockholm. Among the anti-racist demonstrators were many families with children and elderly people. Twenty-three extreme-right activists (mostly from NRM, including several leaders) were convicted and sentenced to 6–8 months in prison (an antifascist activist received a long sentence for attempted homicide after stabbing an NRM activist with a knife).[16] Swedish NRM activists in particular have been involved in a number of assaults and violent attacks on minorities, political opponents and the police. Discussing methods for "spectacular actions" (violence, ingenuity, size and good-will actions) the activist handbook states:

> *The Resistance Movement's confrontations with the police or opponents will often result in great headlines. Distribution of pamphlets that ends in fights may then be classified as a spectacular action. However, since the use of violence is rarely or never planned, it will be difficult to classify the action as spectacular. The action becomes spectacular due to our firmness of principle and strength.[17]*

Another standard element in the NRM's action repertoire is to launch subtle threats against political opponents, national and local politicians, academics, journalists, police officers and civil servants they consider as enemies. Such individuals have been labelled "criminals" or "traitors of the people", with names or pictures on posters. The NRM has also distributed stickers with an image of a lamp post, a noose and the text "Reserved for traitors of the people". Activists glued these stickers outside the homes of individuals they wanted to intimidate. In doing so, the NRM practises a sort of low-scale psychological warfare, through which subtle threats and intimidation are used to scare or silence its enemies.[18] This has sometimes been effective: several local politicians and others have withdrawn from involvement in politics or the public debate as a result of such threats.[19]

Although the use of guns and explosives is (temporarily) banned by the NRM, preparations for such violence are condoned, as a future race war is considered inevitable. Many activists have acquired guns – legally or illegally. In 2018, an investigation by the Swedish police security service SÄPO found that NRM activists produced home-made pipe guns.[20] In Sweden, Norway and Finland, the police have seized legal and illegal guns from NRM members and retracted weapon licences. It turned out that many NRM members had been

active members of shooting clubs and had acquired guns and licences legally. With increased public concern about the NRM as an extremist and revolutionary movement, NRM members were excluded from shooting clubs and lost their access to legal guns.

Why Does the NRM Apply Restraints on Violence?

As explained in the introduction to this Special Issue, Busher et al. have proposed the following five logics which members of militant groups might draw upon to establish and maintain limits on their own violence:[21]

1) A strategic logic (violence is counterproductive in the present circumstances)
2) A moral logic (certain forms of violence are illegitimate)
3) A logic of ego maintenance (we are not a violent organization)
4) A logic of outgroup definition (softening views on putative outgroups)
5) An organizational logic (the organization evolves in ways that undermine the logics of violent escalation)

Which of these logics are typically applied by the NRM leadership to restrain the organization's use of violence? To answer this question, we conducted a textual analysis of the current NRM leader's response to the mass shooting of Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019. Shortly after these mass shootings, NRM's current leader Simon Lindberg made what must be considered an official statement on the attack, outlining the NRM's views on the use of large-scale violence.[22] While one should be careful about generalizing from one such statement only, we consider this statement to be fully in line with a number of previous statements from the NRM leadership about the organization's views on violence. Many such statements can be found in a book recently published by the NRM for its twentieth anniversary,[23] in various issues of its magazine *Nationell Motstånd*, published between 2003 and 2010, and on its website. The reason why we focus on this singular statement here is that, in a rather succinct manner, it summarizes NRM's view on mass-casualty violence in particular:

> *It is hard not to feel sympathy for the two main motifs [Brenton Tarrant] states in his manifesto. […] After all, it is really not strange that what happened today in New Zealand has happened. In fact, what is most remarkable is that this does not happen more often.*
>
> *It is clear that the moral reasoning can be discussed. […] some may think that it can never be justified to kill someone else. However, we whites have involuntarily been embroiled in a low-intensity extinction war across the West. In war, people die. Is it worse to kill someone physically than to lobby politically for, to enforce, and to play an active part in a policy that takes the life of a whole race? Furthermore, the assailant seems to have chosen his targets carefully to avoid hitting those that are completely innocent.*
>
> *By all this, however, I do not mean to uncritically praise the deed, because, even though I do not see it as something strange or automatically wrong on a moral level, at the same time I mean that this alone does not improve the situation for white people in either New Zealand or the world. […] Here in the Nordics, the civilian national struggle has momentum; the Nordic Resistance Movement is growing steadily and is gaining more and more influence. Furthermore, we are not completely banned here either, and, despite increased repression, we can still run the fight fairly effectively and legally as we wish. So we can succeed.*
>
> *This means that such methods as those in New Zealand become counterproductive here, as they lead to increased sympathy for our opponents and to the system gaining legitimacy for even harsher reprisals. […] This action will be used to mobilize public opinion against us in general, and to justify a ban on us. The irony […] is that, just by banning, the system creates an environment where the risk of us seeing more such actions increases significantly.*
>
> *If illegal methods are the only remaining way to go about making their voices heard, then it is even less strange or wrong if something illegal happens. In such a situation, I do not in any way condemn it in any case. On the other hand, I hope that any such future Nordic national partisans will aim higher and kick*

> *upwards at the global elite who are moving the pieces, rather than against the pieces themselves – but that is another question.*
>
> *The Nordic Resistance Movement does not deal with terror (however much the system would like us to do that, so that they have a good excuse to ban us). We are a revolutionary combat organization that acts civilly and legally. For that matter, we do not distance ourselves from white people who act – even though they act differently from us.*

Most strikingly, the NRM leadership does not – at least in principle – seem to have any moral constraints against mass murder (logic 2). Even the target selection in the Christchurch atrocity – killing random Muslim men, women and children – is considered morally justified in the context of defending the white race. However, the NRM leader hoped "future Nordic partisans would aim higher and kick the global elite" – an NRM euphemism for the Jews that are allegedly behind mass migration in order to destroy the white race. Moreover, there is no softening in the ways the NRM views hated outgroups such as Jews, Muslims and political enemies (logic 4). These enemy categories are considered sufficiently "guilty" to be legitimate targets of violence – at least in the context of an anticipated racial war.

The main reason why the NRM prefers to refrain from using terrorist methods in the present situation is predominantly strategic calculation (logic 1): these are seen as counter-productive. First and foremost, resorting to terrorism would undermine the NRM's prospects of gaining popular support. In the present situation, the NRM has ample opportunities to promulgate its political views through various legal channels, such as the Internet, rallies and democratic elections. Too much violence would lead to a public backlash and undermine support – and might also lead to a ban and repression of the organization and take away its opportunities to make use of legal methods in its revolutionary struggle. In that case, terrorism and murder would be the only remaining – and in its own eyes, justified – option for the NRM.

However, terrorism is clearly not a preferred choice for the NRM leadership (although some members are pushing to go in a more militant direction). The NRM's relative restraint in using lethal or terrorist violence might be – at least to some extent – a result of the founding leader Klas Lund's personal experience of being incarcerated for several years due to his involvement in murder and bank robberies as part of a terrorist strategy. In crime prevention theory, this is called specific deterrence.[24] Lund experienced the consequences of punishment on his own body and may have found it too costly to repeat such crimes in the future. This lesson (and similar experiences by other militants) had in turn the effect of general deterrence to others in the NRM, who observed that the risk of punishment might be too great. Not only would the personal costs of a terrorist strategy be too painful, it would also undermine the organization's capacity to carry out its political and revolutionary struggle.

> *[Critics in rival groups] call us "fake revolutionaries" because we did not take up guns by yesterday, putting the entire organization behind bars and achieving nothing. (Handbook for Activists in the Resistance Movement)*

NRM leaders and activists are very much aware of the legal boundaries set by the government and tune many of their actions as close to the limit of illegality as possible. For example, the NRM regularly engages in street-fighting with the police and political enemies on the left, thereby pushing the limits and testing the police response. This testing of boundaries is more apparent in Sweden than in Norway, possibly because the Norwegian police tend to be more proactive and preventive, whereas the Swedish police have a more reactive style.[25] These practices indicate that both legal boundaries and police responses have an effect.

When it comes to the logic of maintaining a specific self-image (3), the NRM tries to balance the internal fostering of a militant identity as a revolutionary combat organization with a more moderate image for external consumption of being an organization that "acts civilly and legally" in order to benefit from the opportunities provided by a democratic system they despise. This balancing act is risky. If it appears too timid, it risks internal rebellion from militants lusting for action (see the Gothenburg case discussed below); if it goes too far in promoting or accepting violence, the organization might be banned or at least lose access to many public

arenas and opportunities.[26]

This balancing act is closely linked to an organizational logic (5) that also seems to impact on NRM's restraints on violence. The NRM has invested a lot of effort in building a strong, (semi-)legal organization. The NRM leader Lindberg asserted that this strategy was fairly successful and promising. Although it considers itself an elite organization, the NRM leadership clearly has a long-term ambition of gaining broader public support in order to prepare the ground for a white revolution, with Hitler's Nazi party (NSDAP) as an obvious blueprint. To move towards that goal, the NRM has made use of a broad range of channels for disseminating propaganda, ranging from night-time sticker raids, distributing pamphlets from street stands, web pages, podcasts and radio channels through to public demonstrations, gathering up to 600 activists and supporters. Many of these actions are deliberately provocative, in order to create controversy and attract attention from the news media, which provides additional publicity and may reach a broader audience. In addition, the NRM has also had moderate success in getting activists elected as representatives in two municipal councils, giving them new opportunities for promulgating their views and getting attention. However, this is also a risky strategy for a militant organization: the miserable results in the 2018 elections in Sweden were a huge disappointment for the NRM and led to internal discontent and a large break-away group called Nordic Strength, consisting of those who had lost faith in this strategy.

To sum up, two out of Busher et al.'s five logics (2 and 4) do not seem to be deployed for restraining NRM from using violence, whereas logic 1 has had a major impact and logics 3 and 5 have had some impact.

Overstepping the Boundary – Reactions and Consequences

How does the NRM leadership respond to cases where NRM members carry out acts of severe violence, clearly overstepping the boundaries set by their leaders? To answer this question, we explored three such cases.

The NRM leadership has apparently established a strict policy to maintain the organization's rules against extreme violence:

> *Planning and carrying out offensive violent actions will lead to exclusion [from the NRM]. Offensive acts of violence are, in other words, not within the field of "own initiative". Violence should only be used in self-defence. (Handbook for Activists in the Resistance Movement)*

To what extent has this policy been enforced in practice when NRM activists have carried out severe offensive violent actions? Our three cases have been selected because they represent some of the most severe attacks committed by NRM members. Two of the events resulted in a fatal outcome, while the third had a clear terrorist dimension, due to the use of improvised explosive devices.

Case 1: The Vallentuna Killing

In 2012, three NRM activists got involved in a fight with a person in Vallentuna in Sweden, and kicked, beat and stabbed him to death. Two of the three perpetrators were arrested and one was convicted. However, the most active perpetrator went underground and has remained so ever since. He has figured on Europol's list of the top ten most wanted. In the aftermath of the attack, the NRM started its own investigation into the incident on "the issue of guilt", but the verdict was kept secret. Between the lines, it was clear that the NRM found the violence to be excessive but understandable. The main perpetrator remained well regarded within the NRM. In the twentieth anniversary book of the NRM, the incident and the main perpetrator are commented on:

> *The victim was, as stated, an unknown drug dealer and was experienced by many as troublesome, especially when he was under the influence. He held a grudge against "racists" and was often armed, as he was this evening as well. [The perpetrator] has not been convicted, but if he actually carried out the alleged act, there are obvious reasons to believe that he did it to avoid being knifed or shot to death. This does not excuse the excessive violence, but it does at least explain it. […] [The perpetrator] had and still has a good reputation*

> *among those who know him. He was one of the most experienced and brave activists in Stockholm at the time before he disappeared, and no one has re-evaluated this assessment. [Name of the perpetrator's local NRM leader] has repeatedly expressed his regret that he is no longer in the direct vicinity of the organization and wishes him all the best for the new life he has made for himself. […] Rumours about his death surface now and then but the Resistance Movement knows that he is alive and in good health.[27]*

Although there was apparently no evidence that the three NRM activists had acted in self-defence, the NRM leadership clearly used the claim of self-defence as an extenuating circumstance to avoid expelling the main perpetrator. The internal investigation appears to have concluded that he used excessive violence but the organization came up with sufficient reasons to excuse him and even praise him for his good qualities. Thus, he remained in good standing with the NRM, even if he had committed murder. The organization's ban on offensive violence and policy of excluding those who broke the ban did not seem to kick in in this case.

Case 2: The Helsinki Killing

A similar excuse was used by the NRM in another fatal case from Finland in 2017. The victim died one week after having been brutally kicked in the chest by an NRM activist and then hitting his head against the pavement. He was allegedly attacked because he spat on one of the NRM activists.

The perpetrator was in the first trial sentenced to two years for aggravated battery in the district court but was cleared of the charge of manslaughter. On appeal, the sentence was subsequently increased to two years and three months in a higher court, because the assault was racially motivated. During the Nordic Activist Days in late January 2017, the Finnish NRM leader Antti Niemi recounted the events like this:

> *2016 has obviously been strongly characterized by harassment against the organization from the media and the system, and in particular against the activist [perpetrator's name]. This was because a drug addict opponent [of NRM] died after a confrontation with [perpetrator's name] during a public activity in Helsinki. Due to this [perpetrator's name] was charged and sentenced to two years in prison, in spite of him being cleared from having anything to do with the death.*

The perpetrator was then awarded a distinction by the NRM "for his courage and his loyalty to the organization and his comrades and this was greeted by a standing ovation by all participants".[28]

On 30 November 2017, a district court banned the NRM in Finland, as it "flagrantly violated the principles of good practice". The aggravated assault and how the NRM awarded the perpetrator with a distinction were important arguments in this verdict. This verdict has subsequently been upheld in the higher courts. In March 2019, the Supreme Court temporarily banned the organization's activities, and it was finally confirmed by the Supreme Court in September 2020.[29] The ban has obviously had a serious impact on the activities of the Finish branch of the NRM.

Although the perpetrator of the assault in Helsinki was honoured by the NRM, later developments demonstrated that this kind of behaviour (by the perpetrator as well as the organization) in effect led to the proscription of the NRM in Finland. The NRM tried to circumvent the ban by setting up a new organization *Kohti Vapautta!* However, the Finnish police and court considered this organization to have the same members as the banned NRM, and therefore banned the Independence Day demonstration announced by this new group. Instead, the demonstration was formally organized by Soldiers of Odin in Finland, which had become closely affiliated with the NRM.[30] It is not clear what lessons the NRM drew from this. In any case, they never withdrew the award given to the perpetrator.

There are some common features in the ways the NRM leadership either justified or found extenuating circumstances for these two assaults with fatal outcomes. The leaders claimed that the victims had allegedly done something provocative towards the activists; that the victims were opponents of the NRM; and that the victims were drug addicts. It appears that, if the victim can be blamed for the outcome, fatal violence does not necessarily lead to expulsion of the perpetrators from the NRM.

Case 3: The Gothenburg Bombings

In 2017, one member and two former (but recent) members of the NRM were charged with three bombing attacks in Gothenburg between November 2016 and January 2017. The first device exploded outside the premises of the left-wing Syndicalist Forum Café, causing only material damage. The second explosive device detonated outside an asylum centre, seriously injuring a cleaner. However, the defendants were not convicted of this attack, because there was insufficient evidence. The third bomb, which had been placed outside an asylum centre, failed to explode.

The police investigation showed that two of the three suspected neo-Nazis facing trial had received paramilitary training in Russia shortly before the attacks. A Skype dialogue between two of the perpetrators on a mobile phone seized by the police also showed that they had become increasingly dissatisfied with the Swedish branch of the NRM and its leadership because of their reluctance to use violence to advance the revolution.[31] The trial demonstrated that there were dissenting views within the NRM about how much violence was needed and frustrations about the leadership's current restraining strategy. At least two of the three perpetrators believed that the revolution had to be a violent one, according to the prosecutor. The three perpetrators were convicted to between one year and ten months and six and a half years in prison for two of the three attacks, and were acquitted of the third attack.

Shortly after the attack on the Syndicalist Forum, the NRM published a statement on its website:

> *The Nordic Resistance Movement is not behind the attack on the Syndicalist Forum. The Nordic Resistance Movement is a political action organization and does not devote itself to this kind of activity. If we had devoted ourselves to or promoted blowing up book cafés it would have been impossible for us to continue legal political activities; we would all have been behind bars.[32]*

In another statement, the NRM leader Simon Lindberg declared that he had some understanding of these actions but they were not sanctioned by the organization. However, the NRM leaders refused to condemn members who had committed acts of crime.[33] This view is echoed in the *Handbook for Activists in the Resistance Movement*:

> *[…] the Resistance Movement acts every day. Not in the world of fantasy, but within the limits of what is realistic just now.[…] However, we do fully understand those few who really consider taking up arms against the system and therefore stay away from the Resistance Movement.*

At least two of the three convicted perpetrators did exactly this – they left the NRM before they carried out their attacks. It is not clear whether the third was expelled or quit on his own.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The NRM's restraints on violence were primarily based on highly pragmatic strategic considerations about what is seen as advantageous in the present situation, rather than on ethical concerns about what could be morally justified. The NRM leaders believe that large-scale violence will be ineffective and counter-productive in the current situation. They also want to avoid the NRM being banned as a terrorist organization or core members ending up in jail – which would jeopardize their revolutionary plans and their chance to exploit opportunities to recruit members and promulgate their views legally.

The NRM leadership therefore strive to maintain some distance from (former) members who carry out terrorist attacks or fatal violence. This distance has to be sufficient to avoid the organization being directly implicated in violent acts, which might jeopardize their opportunities to operate within the legal realm. However, the claimed policy that "planning and carrying out of offensive violent actions will lead to exclusion" does not seem to have been implemented. In the two fatal cases examined here, the NRM leaders emphasized the mitigating circumstances and praised the perpetrators for their courage rather than condemning them.

The NRM leadership is certainly not opposed to large-scale violence and terrorism in principle; external factors and strategic considerations put a limit on their use of violence for now. However, they state quite openly that this might be reconsidered if the strategic situation changes, for example if the organization were to be banned and opportunities to act legally closed. Political opponents and other "traitors to the people" as well as racial minorities would then be considered legitimate targets of violence.

Such statements of conditional restraint might be considered as a veiled threat from the NRM directed at the Nordic governments: "If you ban us, we will turn to terrorism!" However, the ban against the Finnish branch of the NRM has already been implemented and a terrorist response has not yet materialized. Whether the warning about a possible turn to terrorism is empty words remains to be seen.

Concerning Busher et al.'s five logics for restraining violence, our analysis of the NRM case shows that these logics seem to combine into two separate clusters, at least in this specific case. One set works as restraints: a strategic logic primarily, but also an organizational logic and to some extent a logic of ego maintenance restrained the NRM from using large-scale violence. The other set of logics did not have any restraining impact: neither a moral logic nor a logic of (a softening) outgroup definition served as moral restraints against mass-murder.

This clustering may result from the degree of militancy and cognitive closure in any given group. A more militant and cognitively closed group may be less likely to apply brakes such as a humanist morality or softening of views about their enemies that could have a restraining impact on their willingness to use violence. This does not mean that such groups do not consider themselves as upholding a high morality. Militant and cognitively closed groups typically believe that they subscribe to a higher morality than most others – a morality that justifies illegal and violent acts for the sake of creating something new and better.

As such, moral logics may also work to accelerate the use of violence,[34] and the same is likely to be true for the other mechanisms identified by Busher et al. For instance, strategic reasoning could serve to accelerate violence, if the reasoning found violence to be more advantageous than non-violence. A related question is whether the NRM should be considered as a barrier or as a conveyor belt to terrorism. Similar questions have been asked regarding radical Islamist organizations, and the answers have not been conclusive. Both mechanisms may be active simultaneously, and different groups have played opposite roles in this regard.[35] Up until now, the NRM has probably served more as a barrier to terrorist violence by reining in its more violence-prone activists. On the other hand, the NRM does prepare its members for large-scale violence in what they consider to be an inevitable racial war in the future.

Maintaining the NRM's boundaries against excessive violence is not only a task for the NRM's leadership but is even more so for governmental authorities, the police, the security services and the courts. The efforts of the NRM to test and expand the boundaries on violence should be pushed firmly back by enforcing the rule of law. Equally important, intimidating politicians and others into silence – even if this is done by subtle threats – is challenging democracy just as much as actual violence. The police and lawmakers should draw – and maintain – clear boundaries against such attacks on democracy.

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Notes

[1] *Handbook for Activists in the Resistance Movement* (Nordfront förlag, 2016) has been openly for sale from the NRM homepages, but is currently not available (apparently). Cited and translated from the Norwegian edition.

[2] See the NRK documentary *Rasekrigerne* (Racial Warriors) in which participants at an NRM camp train by fighting with (fake) knives in tournaments where the winner manages to give his opponent a "fatal" stab. URL: https://tv.nrk.no/serie/brennpunkt/MDDP11001717/06-12-2017

[3] Although the organization only changed its name to the Nordic Resistance Movement in 2016, it will be referred to as the NRM throughout this article for the sake of simplicity.

[4] For more details about VAM's early history, see Helene Lööw (2009), *Nazismen i Sverige 1980-1999*. Stockholm: Ordfront.

[5] The Nordic Resistance Movement (2018), *Motståndsrörelsen: 20 År Av Revolutionär Kamp*. Grängesberg: Nordfront Förlag, 68–73.

[6] *The Handbook for Activists in the Nordic Resistance Movement*. See also an article from 2019 by the NRM leader Simon Lindberg: "New Organizational Structure in the Nordic Resistance Movement", *Nordfront*, 4 February 2019. URL: https://www.nordfront.se/ny-organisationsstruktur-inom-nordiska-motstandsrorelsen.smr

[7] Concerning the criminal records of Swedish NRM activists, see Magnus Ranstorp and Filip Ahlin (2020), *Från Nordiska motståndsrörelsen till alternativhögern – en studie om radikalnationalistiska miljöer i Sverige.* Stockholm: CATS/Försvarshögskolan, 185–188. URL: https://www.fhs.se/arkiv/nyheter/2020-08-25-ny-studie-beskriver-radikalnationalistiska-miljon-i-sverige.html

[8] Yle, "Banned Neo-Nazi Group Assembles, Nine Detained", Yle Uutiset, 21 October 2018. URL: https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/banned_neo-nazi_group_assembles_nine_detained/10467826; Yle, "Nordiska motståndsrörelsen fick besvärstillstand – men föreningens verksamhet förbjuds", Yle Uutiset, 28 March 2019,URL: https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2019/03/28/nordiska-motstandsrorelsen-fick-besvarstillstand-men-foreningens-verksamhet; Yle, "Finnish Neo-Naxi groups's appeal rejected, ban on organization confirmed», Yle Uutiset, 22 September 2020, URL: https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/finnish_neo-nazi_groups_appeal_rejected_ban_on_organisation_confirmed/11556969

[9] Yle "Supreme Court: The Police Suspect that the NRM has broken proscription", Svenska.yle,fi, 12 May 2019,URL: https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2019/05/12/hs-polisen-misstanker-att-nordiska-motstandsrorelsen-brutit-mot-verksamhetsforbud

[10] Nordfront, "Nu er det på høje tid at få startet Den Nordiske Modstandsbevægelse i Danmark!", Nordfront.dk, 28 October 2017,URL: https://www.nordfront.dk/paa-hoeje-tid-faa-startet-nordisk-modstandsbevaegelses-danmark/; Simon Lindberg, "Intervju Med En Representant För Motståndsrörelsen i Danmark", Nordfront.se, 8 June 2013, https://www.nordfront.se/intervju-med-en-representant-for-motstandsrorelsen-i-danmark.smr.

[11] "Svensk nazistledare pekas ut: Beordrade stor attack", Kvällsposten, 22 October 2020, URL: https://www.expressen.se/kvallsposten/krim/svensk-nazistledare-pekas-ut-gav-order-om-den-stora-attacken/; "Svensk nazileder gav ordre til krystalnattaktion", Redox, 11 October 2020,URL: https://redox.dk/nyheder/svensk-nazileder-gav-ordrer-til-krystalnatsaktion/; "Den nazistiske bombemager fra Hundested" Arbejderen, 29 May 2020, URL: https://arbejderen.dk/indland/den-nazistiske-bombemager-fra-hundested

[12] For details, see Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "What is the problem with the Nordic Resistance Movement?" Right-Now!, 7 June 2018, URL: https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2018/the-nordic-resistance-movement.html. In municipal elections in Sweden, the parties provide a ranked electoral list of candidates. The voters may mark a preferred candidate on the list, and a candidate with many personal votes may move up from a low to a higher rank and end up being elected.

[13] Nordisk Styrke, NS Radio #1, URL: https://nordiskstyrke.org/ns-radio-1-nordisk-styrke/. An article by Håkon Forwald, former leader of NRM Norway and now one of the leaders of Nordic Strength, argued that demonstrations, public meetings and handing out leaflets was ineffective in the present situation and that more spectacular and targeted online and offline activities were more effective. URL: https://nordiskstyrke.org/propaganda-og-kampmetoder/ The NRM leader Simon Lindberg claimed that an attempted coup by a group around the previous NRM leader Klas Lund to take over leadership of the organization had been stopped. URL: https://www.spreaker.com/user/nordiskradio/ledarperspektiv-51-vi-aer-tillbaka-kuppf

[14] Jacob Aasland Ravndal (2016), "Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Introducing the RTV Dataset", *Per-*

spectives on Terrorism 10(3), 2-15.

[15] See e.g. this article by the editor-in-chief of the NRM homepage (English edition), Martin Saxlind, "Political soldiers", The Nordic Resistance Movement, 17 July 2020, URL: https://nordicresistancemovement.org/political-soldiers/

[16] "NRM leaders speak out regarding the attack in Kärrtorp", Aftonbladet, 9 November 2017,URL: https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/m7oVq/nmr-ledare-talar-ut-om-attacken-i-karrtorp

[17] *Handbook for Activists in the Resistance Movement*, op. cit., p. 42, translated from the Norwegian edition, 2016.

[18] Jacob Aasland Ravndal (2018), "Right-Wing Terrorism and Militancy in the Nordic Countries: A Comparative Case Study", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30(5), 772–792.

[19] See Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "What is the problem with the Nordic Resistance Movement?", RightNow!, June 7 2018, URL: https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2018/the-nordic-resistance-movement.html

[20] Often called "slam guns". One leading activist, in charge of the NRM homepage, had constructed a briefcase with a built-in concealed pistol that could be fired from the briefcase handle. Harald S. Klungtveit (2020), *Nazister blant oss: På innsiden av den nye høyreekstremismen*. Oslo: Kagge forlag, 129–135.

[21] Joel Busher, Donald Holbrook and Graham Macklin (2019), "The Internal Brakes on Violent Escalation: A Typology", *Behavioural Science of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 11(1), 3–25.

[22] Simon Lindberg (2019), "Thoughts on the mosque shootings in New Zealand and any parallels to the Nordic struggle", *Nordfront.se*, 16 March 2019, (translated from the slightly condensed Norwegian version), URL: https://www.nordfront.se/tankar-om-moskeskjutningarna-i-nya-zeeland.smr

[23] *Motståndsrörelsen – 20 År Av Revolutionär Kamp*, op. cit.

[24] Tore Bjørgo (2016), *Preventing Crime: A Holistic Approach*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 16.

[25] Jennie Sivenbring and Robin Andersson Malmros (2019), *Mixing Logics: Multiagency Approaches for Countering Violent Extremism*. Gothenburg: Segerstedtinstitutet, University of Gothenburg, 62.

[26] This balancing act between legal activism and illegal militancy is a classic dilemma for extreme-right movements. For a discussion about this "adaption problem", see Jaap van Donselaar (1993a), "Post-war Fascism in the Netherlands", *Crime, Law and Social Change,* 19, 87–100; and J. van Donselaar (1993b), "The Extreme Right and Racist Violence in the Netherlands", in Tore Bjørgo and Rob Witte (1993), *Racist Violence in Europe*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.

[27] *Motståndsrörelsen: 20 år i kamp*, op. cit., 137–139 [our translation].

[28] Editors of Frihetskamp, "Our potential – Activist days 2017", *Frihetskamp*, 31 January 2017, https://www.frihetskamp.net/vart-potensial-aktivistdagene-2017/

[29] See note 8.

[30] Tommi Kotonen (2019), "The Soldiers of Odin Finland: From a local movement to an international franchise", in Tore Bjørgo and Miroslav Mareš (eds.), *Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities*. Oxon: Routledge.

[31] Göteborgs TR B 618–17 Aktbil 207, Förundersökningsprotokoll (23), 202–204 (Investigation protocol, acquired from Gothenburg District Court).

[32] Editors of Nordfront, "Comments regarding explosion against leftist premises", *Nordfront*, 20 January 2017, URL: https://www.nordfront.se/kommentar-angaende-explosion-mot-vansterlokal.smr

[33] *Motståndsrörelsen: 20 år i kamp*, op. cit., 287.

[34] Alan Page Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai (2014), *Virtuous Violence: Hurting and Killing to Create, Sustain, End, and Honor Social Relationships*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[35] Lorenzo Vidino (2010), "The Role of Non-Violent Islamists in Europe", *CTC Centennial,* 3(11), URL:https://www.ctc.usma.edu/the-role-of-non-violent-islamists-in-europe/; Michael Kenney, "Al-Muhajiroun may be appalling, but it is not a conveyor belt to terrorism", *Political Violence at a Glance*, 5 October 2018, URL: https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2018/10/05/al-muhajiroun-may-be-appalling-but-it-is-not-a-conveyor-belt-to-terrorism/

The Internal Brakes on Violent Escalation within the British Extreme Right in the 1990s

by Graham Macklin

Abstract

It is perhaps counter-intuitive to ponder why the extreme right milieu, which regularly espouses violent apocalyptic jeremiads regarding the impending threat to race and nation, has not generated as much violence as it would appear capable of. This article explores this question, using a case study of the British extreme right in the 1990s, a period in which there was violent street conflict with anti-fascist activists. It focusses in particular upon the British National Party, as that organisation sought to become a legitimate political party whilst simultaneously being entangled in violent street confrontations with anti-fascists, on the one hand, and conflict with militants on its own "radical flank" who baulked at the party's new direction, on the other. Specifically, this article explores the role internal rather than external "brakes" might have played in limiting violent escalation in a "scene" in which a certain level of violence was endemic. Utilising the typology of "internal brakes" developed by Busher, Macklin and Holbrook, which highlights five distinct, though often overlapping, "logics" that work to restrain violent escalation, the article discusses the processes that worked to restrain rather than escalate violence. It does so in order to demonstrate how this typology can be used as an analytical tool for conceptualising how the internal restrains on violence might function within other political milieu as well.

Keywords: Internal brakes, violent escalation, non-violence, extreme right, group dynamics

Introduction

Extreme right-wing groups rarely do as much violence as their rhetoric would suggest that they might.[1] Such a statement might seem counter-intuitive upon first reading. After all one can easily cite countless examples of politically motivated violence and terrorism perpetrated by such groups and individuals that would appear to confound rather than confirm this assertion. Relatively speaking, however, very few groups, extreme right or otherwise, have recourse to lethal force as the tool of first resort.[2] Even organisations and networks whose stock in trade is terrorism still seek to manage and regulate their violence, albeit often for a variety of quite different reasons.[3] Whilst there is wealth of research regarding how terrorism "declines" or "ends" and how violent groups deescalate their violence,[4] there is rather less research on why and moreover *how* some groups restrain violence in the first place, or at least seek to ensure that it does not escalate beyond a certain point.[5]

Rather than focussing on the myriad instances of violent escalation by extreme right actors that preoccupy counter-terrorism officials and policy makers across Europe and the United States at present, this article focusses instead on a different question. What are the intragroup mechanisms and processes through which extreme right organisations actually exercise restraint upon violent escalation? Through a historical case study of the British extreme right in the 1990s, a period characterised by violent factionalism within the milieu and intense street conflict with anti-fascist activists outside it, this article highlights five "internal brakes" that might have served to restrain or repress greater forms of violence from emerging within the milieu. "Internal brakes" are herein defined as practices, "through which actors who are recognised as group members seek either: a) to inhibit directly the adoption or diffusion of more violent tactics by other group members; or b) foment strategic decisions and (sub)cultural practices the logical consequences of which are to inhibit the adoption or diffusion of more violent tactics."[6]

Each of the brakes outlined in this article conformed to a different though often overlapping "logic" that could be observed within the case study as working to limit greater violence, or at least presented non-escalation as a viable option to activists. These brakes, around which this article is structured, are as follows:

- *Brake One* – The identification of more- or less violent strategies of action as being as or more effective

that more violent alternatives. (*Strategic logic*);

- *Brake Two* – Construction of moral norms and evaluations that inhibit certain forms of violence and the emotional impulses towards violence (e.g. revenge) (*Moral logic*);
- *Brake Three* – Self-identification as a group that is either non-violent or uses only limited forms of violence (*Ego maintenance*);
- *Brake Four* – Boundary softening in relation to putative out-groups (*Out-group definition*);
- *Brake Five* – Organisational developments that either a) alter the moral and strategic equations in favour of non- or limited violence, b) institutionalise less violent collective identities and/or processes of boundary softening, and/or c) reduce the likelihood of unplanned violence (*Organisational logic*).

Methodology and Case Selection

This categorisation derives from a collaborative CREST-funded project entitled *The Internal Brakes on Violent Escalation: A Descriptive Typology*, co-authored with Joel Busher and Donald Holbrook in 2019. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* subsequently published a refined version of this typology later that same year. Space prohibits a more detailed explanation of either the project or the typology and so interested readers are enjoined to consult both those publications for further information.[7]

The current article demonstrates how this typology can be applied to an ideological/historical case study to understand more about how internal brakes functioned within the extreme right. It does not represent an uncritical application of the typology to a case study, however. Instead, it provides an example of how a historical case study can inform theory building. The original typology derived in part from three case studies – one on the animal rights movement, another on international jihadism and a third one on the British extreme right, the research for which informs the current article. Methodologically, the relationship between the historical case studies and the development of the theoretical framework was an iterative one. The first step, once case studies were selected (based upon a "most-different case comparative strategy"[8]) was to conduct a thorough review of the relevant theoretical and analytical literature. This ranged across several disciplines, including social movement studies, terrorism studies, peace studies, and the sociological and psychological literatures on processes of violence. Collectively, the research team interrogated these literatures for insight into the processes and mechanisms that might illuminate how groups and individuals inhibited rather than facilitated violence. We had been mindful of this in selecting our case studies too, choosing three sets of ideological actors that engaged in very different levels of violence. The underlying intention was to address, or at least mitigate concerns, that "theories, derived largely from examples of groups that turned to violence, may tend to over-predict violence."[9]

From our literature review, we developed a general coding framework. We used the framework to code our case studies and in turn used the case studies to hone the typology by "coding-up" i.e. identifying those practices within our case studies that could be said to be exerting a "brake" on violence – or at least the escalation of a certain form of violence. As we began to identify the practices that seemed to inhibit violence across our case studies, we used these to interrogate our initial framework and to add new codes to it as and when these emerged. These were further refined through an ongoing engagement with the theoretical literature. The typology went through fifteen different iterations as a result of this process, leaving us with the five categories that informed both the typology and this article.[10]

The sources for this case study derive from a survey of the secondary academic literature on the British extreme right as well as memoirs written by former or still active activists, contemporary media reports, television documentaries, as well as archival research into the principal publications produced by the groups discussed herein. One obvious limitation in the study is the lack of interview data with activists themselves, which would quite possibly reveal more about how brakes on violent escalation might work when activists are moments away from violence or indeed in the midst of it. Activist autobiographies, distorted though they might be by issues of memory, self-censorship, or the fact that many of the authors of such memoirs are now actively working against

the groups they were once part of, can still provide a level of insight into how internal brakes on violence functioned at an individual level, however. Whilst these testimonies require critical reading, many of them give quite candid accounts of their violence that do not necessarily reflect well on their former selves. They have thus been included here to highlight some of the sorts of visceral emotional responses that participating in violence could have for the perpetrator and the way in which such events could serve to decelerate involvement in violence rather than accelerate it – though such accounts are often limited to discussing personal choices rather than group dynamics.

Street Violence between the British Extreme Right and Anti-Fascists during the 1990s.

The implosion of the National Front (NF) following the 1979 general election caused the extreme right to fragment. The most important of the many factions to emerge from this tumult was the British National Party (BNP), founded in 1982 by the former NF chairman, John Tyndall. Although for the majority of its early life the BNP was less a legitimate political party than a "street gang", by the late 1980s it had come to fill the void left by the ongoing atrophy of the NF as a mass political organisation.[11] The demise of the NF saw anti-fascist groups demobilise too. The Anti-Nazi League (ANL), founded in 1977 to combat the NF, was wound down whilst the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which had stood behind the group, also decommissioned its "squads" – groups of activists who would physically defend ANL activities from attack.[12] Surplus to requirements, the SWP later expelled many of these activists. Physical opposition to the extreme right did not cease, however. Many activists re-united under the banner of Red Action (RA) in 1981, which engaged in sporadic street clashes with the extreme right. It was only after an attack upon an open-air concert staged by Labour-controlled Greater London Council in 1984, however, that RA formed its own "mobile combat unit"[13] to undertake offensive violence against the extreme right. The following year RA became a core component of Anti-Fascist Action (AFA), a coalition of anti-fascist groups formed on 28 July 1985 to physically and ideologically oppose a rise in extreme right activity.[14]

From 1985 onwards there were numerous violent encounters, the most notable being an AFA attack on skinheads gathering at the re-direction point for a Blood & Honour concert in Hyde Park in 1989 and the "Battle of Waterloo" in 1992, when a running battle was fought on and around the concourse of Waterloo Station in London. Whilst the street violence, even when weapons such as iron bars, bats and CS gas were used, remained relatively stable insofar as the overarching repertoire was concerned, there were instances of escalation including the firebombing of activists homes and attacks against property.

In the midst of this ongoing street violence, the BNP launched its "Rights for Whites" campaign in London's East End, hoping to reposition itself as "the legitimate defender of local white residents."[15] The campaign, which began in 1990 amidst a wider "white backlash" against "multiculturalism,"[16] culminated with the party gaining a council seat on the Isle of Dogs in 1993.[17] The BNP's political progress led AFA to retrain its focus upon the party as the principal threat emanating from the extreme right. Other groups also entered the fray. The SWP re-launched the ANL whilst the Anti-Racist Alliance was also launched. AFA perceived the latter as "protest" groups who would do little to "stop" the extreme right. Copsey argues that, as part of a broader intra-movement contest, AFA sought "to differentiate itself from this competition by further emphasising its physical mettle."[18]

In 1992, in response to anti-fascist direct action against party activities, the BNP formed a "Stewards Group." This soon become known as Combat 18 (C18), its numerology signifying its ideological allegiance: 1 = A; 8 = H; AH = Adolf Hitler. The relationship between the BNP and its progeny soon soured, however. As early as the spring of 1993 C18 berated the BNP leadership for following the "failed tactics of the 1970s" [19] whilst advocating a revolutionary path itself. The BNP victory on the Isle of Dogs failed to mollify C18 who derided the party's electoral strategy as a "complete and utter failure."[20] By the end of the year Tyndall proscribed C18 as a "hostile organisation".[21]

This failed to stem the challenge to Tyndall's leadership, however. His personal authority and the efficacy of the electoral strategy he advocated came under increasing pressure as numerous activists, their hopes dashed by electoral defeat (the BNP lost their council seat the following year), found C18's claims to be a revolutionary vanguard preparing for "race war" increasingly alluring. Tyndall's loss of control over C18, whose militants physically attacked his own organisers on several occasions, and the ongoing violent clashes with anti-fascists, would appear to indicate that the internal brakes on violent escalation were beginning to erode or in some instances fail altogether during the period in question. Indeed, C18 became notorious in 1997 after attempting, with the help of Danish colleagues, to perpetrate a letter bomb campaign against political opponents and celebrities in mixed-race relationships. Two years later David Copeland, active in the National Socialist Movement, a group that evolved from C18, detonated three nail bombs in London in April 1999, his devices exploding, without warning or demand, in areas historically associated with London's Afro-Caribbean, Bengali and LGBTQ communities. In his final attack Copeland murdered three people, including a pregnant woman and her unborn child, and injured 79 people four of whom lost limbs.

However, if one takes a broader view of the milieu, the groups within it, and the political goals they were trying to achieve, it becomes possible to see more clearly that the five "internal brakes" on violence were all present during this period as the BNP in particular continued its efforts to move *away* from street violence. This was a transition aided by the subsequent dissolution of AFA and RA. Indeed, even in the paradigmatic case of the London bombings where any such restraints on lethal violence surely failed at an individual level, in the aftermath of the attack leading actors quickly restated these restraints within the milieu, though their words and actions rarely related to moral qualms about violence. It is to a more detailed exploration of how these brakes manifested themselves that this article now turns.

Brake One: Strategic Logic

Strategic logic impelled many of the decisions taken, particularly at an organisational level, not to engage in greater violence. Indeed, that the BNP leadership identified "non-violent" strategies as being the more likely means of attaining their political goals shaped how they perceived the political utility of other forms of violence. For party leaders, who had convictions for quasi-paramilitary activity in the 1960s, or, more recently, convictions for explosives offences, the political efficacy of non-violence was an insight perhaps gained only from previous exposure to the legal perils of "revolutionary" activity. This strategic logic was reinforced by a growing awareness that, defiant rhetoric aside, the party could not "out violence" its anti-fascist opponents during the street conflict that dogged its every activity.

During the 1990s, the extreme right had neither the "fastidious attention to detail" nor the "practised caution" of their anti-fascist opponents when it came to planning and executing street violence.[22] Nor could they compete when it came to intelligence gathering. High alcohol usage within the milieu appears to have played its part in diminishing the capacity of groups like C18 to organise violence or gather "anti-anti-fascist" intelligence with quite the same efficiency as its opponents.[23] Whilst numerous studies have highlighted that alcohol and substance abuse increase the risk of casual violence, they have also acted as a barrier (at least in an American context) for activists transitioning from acts of spontaneous street violence to premeditated mass casualty terrorism.[24] Or to put it another way, activist cultures and lifestyles can inadvertently strengthen restraint at one level of violence whilst simultaneously acting as a solvent upon such brakes at another level. This points to the importance of understanding how processes of internal restraint are shaped and often complicated by group cultures and practices.

From a strategic perspective, extreme right activists also understood that escalating their responses to their anti-fascist opponents risked increasing State repression of their own activities. During the course of the decade and beyond, new technologies led activists to understand the personal costs of engaging in political violence differently: the growing ubiquity of CCTV and mobile phone cameras increased risk of identification, apprehension and prosecution, whilst increased legal penalties served as a further deterrent for others. Fear of arrest caused some C18 activists to self-censor their worst rhetorical excesses. Whilst preparing the third

issue of *Combat 18*, an 88-page racist tirade replete with bomb making instructions, leading C18 activist Will Browning had written "kill 'em all" next to a list of the names of left-wing activists. "The original draft had included the names and addresses of 300 MPs, something [C18 leader] Charlie Sargent had removed in a fit of panic".[25] Not everyone shared such concerns, however, as the subsequent arrests of those who produced *The Stormer*, highlighted.[26]

Similar articulations of risk were evident in the aftermath of C18's failed letter bomb campaign in 1997. Despite mounting pressure on the group, Browning allegedly sought to plan another campaign the following year, travelling to Germany to discuss the idea with German counterparts. One of those present voiced disquiet about the prospects of their getting away with such a venture, forcing Browning to abandon the idea.[27] Indeed even some of the "theoreticians" within the "radical flank" understood that insofar as the fantasy of armed insurrection was concerned, "the time was not yet right for such plans: we needed the people first, properly motivated, in their thousands, and we had dozens."[28]

Conspiratorial racial anti-Semitism, the ideological prism through which many extreme right activists interpret the world, can have a radicalising effect that leads towards violence but there is also evidence that the paranoia it is capable of inducing at the individual level could also exert a paralysing effect on violence escalation. There were occasions in which militant action was considered against an anti-fascist magazine but quickly abandoned because the would-be perpetrators convinced themselves that "Mossad" would wreak revenge upon them if they did stage an attack.[29]

Strategically, there was also an awareness that undue violent escalation might induce a potential backlash from supporters and the public that was counter-productive to their goals. For much of the 1980s, extreme right activists had argued that "party time is over."[30] The electoral hegemony of the Conservative Party had assured that, for the remainder of the decade, there was no electoral road to success. Thus violent stratagems such as "leaderless resistance" [31] quickly became popular within the milieu though, as research highlights, just because such violent ideas are widely disseminated does not mean that they will be automatically adopted as the basis of political action.[32] Though BNP leader John Tyndall agreed with those in the radical flank of the wider "movement" that there was no electoral route out of the political ghetto, he rejected violent militancy as a panacea, preferring to dig in and await a more favourable political climate. Importantly, he sought to entrench a particular set of political practices and repertoires of action within the BNP early on in its life cycle that would prove hard to shift once they had become embedded.[33] This created a certain path dependency for the BNP, meaning that whilst its activists often engaged in violence as part of their activism, the level and type of violence they employed was deemed "sufficient" not to warrant further escalation.

The BNP "Rights for Whites" campaign, which culminated in the election of the party's first local councillor in 1993, occasioned a great deal of violence, but this street violence never morphed into terrorism against their anti-fascist opponents. Indeed the Isle of Dogs election result further entrenched the shift *away* from violence as party "modernisers" pivoted to defend their gain, as much from their own activists as anything else. *Spearhead* and *British Nationalist*, the BNP's two publications, were at pains to highlight the political opportunity this moment offered the party if it played its cards right. As the BNP refocussed upon electioneering, party cadres also began to internalise the need to move away from violence, which ultimately forced their anti-fascist opponents to do likewise, causing a cumulative de-escalation in violence as the arena of combat shifted from the street corner to the ballot box. The dissolution of "direct action" groups like AFA further facilitated this cumulative de-escalation.[34]

Whilst party modernisers sought to protect the party from itself, they also sought to alter public perceptions, which, ultimately, became something of a self-fulfilling prophecy since the more the BNP distanced itself from violent conflict the more it could claim not to be a violent group. This was particularly necessary for the party's political development since BNP strategists understood that, whilst many voters were receptive to the party's anti-immigration platform, its reputation for violence and thuggery repelled many more.

The BNP sought to address this question by strategically re-orientating itself. This saw the party going so far as to reject its "march and grow" strategy, the mainstay of the extreme right action repertoire for decades. In its place, the party instituted a new "hearts and minds" approach based upon local community organising. As the BNP's national organiser highlighted at a conference on 29 January 1994, because the BNP was now "enjoying much higher levels of support, it was important to behave in a responsible and restrained manner, to prove that the BNP was a serious party worthy of electoral support."[35] Three months later, the party staged a press conference to announce that there would be "no more marches, meetings, punch-ups." Whilst this reflected the ongoing impact of anti-fascist "direct action" against the BNP, party organisers also articulated its wider strategic imperative: street violence "hindered our political progress" whilst simultaneously being "the only thing holding our extreme opponents together."[36]

A tactical rather than moral decision, for Tyndall it was also contextual. Armed insurgency simply would not work in Britain, he told another national socialist activist three months later (as he knew from his conviction for quasi-paramilitary activity in 1962). That did not mean that he rejected such tactics, only that they were not applicable in a British national context. Indeed, having debated violent strategies with William Pierce, leader of the National Alliance and author of *The Turner Diaries*, Tyndall conceded that, "were I in Dr. Pierce's shoes I may well favour doing exactly what he is doing."[37]

Despite this strategic orientation away from violence, in the short term violence actually intensified, in part because AFA sought to "clear fascists out of working class areas" in the wake of the Isle of Dogs victory.[38] During the course of 1994 persons unknown sent a parcel bomb to the BNP headquarters which injured the official who opened it. In another incident that month, a BNP activist, canvassing in Newnham, lost an eye during a confrontation with anti-fascists. The following month a group of men attacked the BNP press officer in his home, whilst during the summer of 1995 the party's head of administration also had his home raided by a gang of assailants who made off with three computers.[39]

The strategy of non-confrontation took some time to embed on the extreme right too. In December 1994, extreme right activists sent a letter bomb to *Searchlight*, an anti-fascist magazine. C18 also firebombed the home of an ANL activist in Gravesend, Kent. Police raids on the homes of several C18 militants during 1995 led to the seizure of bomb-making manuals, instruction books for snipers, and documents highlighting the group's surveillance of targets including journalists who had worked on a *World in Action* exposé of its activities. It is impossible to know how serious the intentions of this group were before police raids ended their possibility for action. In contrast, the BNP, rather than investing in capabilities for perpetrating violence, continued on its trajectory *away* from violence; training its representatives on the doorstep to explain how the group abjured from racism and violence in order to build connections with the public and to distance themselves from sub-revolutionary violence. However, as the subsequent history of C18 highlighted, despite the best efforts of the BNP to "modernise" the fact that a "radical flank" existed meant that violence was never within the purview of one party or person to control or manage. Processes of escalation and de-escalation were never uniform across the milieu, for once violence became contrary to the strategic interests of one party, those who remained wedded to its use as a means to an end simply joined new groups more amenable to their personal peccadillos; thereby displacing violent militancy from one part of the "scene" to another.

Brake Two: Moral Logic

Moral norms and principles problematize certain forms of violence or require its use to be justified. Emotional barriers to violence, including confrontational tension and fear also help to forestall activists from entering into the "tunnel of violence" and, as Randall Collins argues, can cause violence to be "aborted" before it materialises.[40] Despite being willing to employ brutal violence in street fights, many activists adhered to a broader set of moral "norms" and "codes" that dictated their targets, choice of weapons, and the level of violence that was deemed justifiable to themselves and fellow activists in any given situation. In their research on the United States, Simi and Windisch [41] highlight that the general norms governing extreme right violence are similar to those governing bar room brawling or the football terrace.[42] This is born out in the narratives of taking

part in violence that can be found in memoirs of both extreme right and anti-fascist activists germane to this case study.

Political violence usually took place within certain expected and recognised parameters. Breaching these, often in the heat of the moment, could offend these internalised sets of norms. Recalling his involvement in football violence, one extreme right activist stated: "At one point, I was fighting two Millwall blokes when one of our mob stuck a screwdriver into the cheek of one of them. Fuck that; I didn't mind having a punch-up, but this was over the top."[43] It is important to emphasise, however, that context is everything and can have a wide-ranging impact on perceptions of what is and is not morally justified. The self-same activist who recoiled in horror from the use of a screwdriver in a street brawl was later jailed for gun-running to Loyalist paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland.[44]

Moral injunctions against violent escalation or at least the method by which violence is escalated were also observable in the aftermath of David Copeland's nail bomb campaign in London in April 1999.[45] Copeland had been a member of the National Socialist Movement (NSM). Following the atrocity, the group's leader immediately dissolved the organisation denouncing Copeland's terrorism as "un-Aryan" – signalling that at one level the group believed that it adhered to a certain mode of behaviour that Copeland's indiscriminate terrorism had violated.[46] This serves to highlight that even when internal brakes on violence fail activists are often quick to reassert them, though in this instance self-preservation was also likely a factor.

Whilst there were certainly those who applauded Copeland's violence, others found it hard to justify when the victims included a (white) pregnant woman and her unborn child. This highlights that "who" a group identifies as a legitimate or illegitimate target for violence matters. Such a definition can help reinforce or reassert moral norms within a group that lead away from particular forms of violence. The "wanton barbarity" of Copeland's bombing campaign was condemned by Colin Jordan, considered by many as a leading theoretician of National Socialist terrorism, because Copeland had targeted "innocent" people – the general public who had no culpability for the problems Jordan perceived were afflicting race and nation. Had Copeland attacked instead the "prime culprits" reasoned Jordan, then his terrorism would have been morally justifiable since these individuals would have been "fairly and properly punished." As it was, Copeland's "misdirected mayhem" left those Jordan deemed *legitimate* targets "unscathed" whilst the strategically counterproductive nature of his violence meant that "we have been damaged along with Copeland's victims. Altogether a bad business".[47]

This bifurcation of deserving and undeserving victims could be seen within the extreme right not just with regards to the victims of terrorism but also during more everyday incidences of political violence. The impact of such moral categorisations on braking processes was evident in an account of an aborted arson attack upon a property believed to be connected with Irish Republicanism, which ceased when the activists involved realised that a family was living upstairs, something they had not previously contemplated. "If you were going to go to jail for murder or manslaughter," reasoned this activist, "you might as well make the targets worthwhile ones."[48] Such moral categorisations insofar as they are observable in autobiographies are not straightforward. Another activist remembered baulking at an "unprovoked" attack upon a mixed-race couple by fellow activists but was largely unrepentant in recalling attacks against left-wing activists.[49] For others the focus was narrower still. Street fights with AFA activists were felt to be legitimate but violent attacks upon left-wing newspaper sellers less so – such violence "went too far" because these activists, unlike hardened AFA activists, were unable to defend themselves.[50]

In other instances, acts of violence against illegitimate targets conflicted with preconceived notions of manhood and masculinity that activists believed themselves to adhere to. Recalling an extreme right attack upon a community meeting at Welling Library in 1989 that hospitalised seventeen people, the majority of whom were women, one participant recalled how his participation in such violence alongside Terry Blackham, the National Front organiser, had affected them both. "Afterwards I agreed with Blackham that we would never mentioned what happened in Welling Library that night. It physically shook him, which with hindsight, I find hard to believe. At the time, however, I thought we were both going to be sick immediately after we left the

library."[51] Again, this was not a question of too much violence (Blackham was subsequently jailed for gun-running to Loyalist paramilitaries), it was a reflection of the fact that the violence was against a target that upset their own self-image and the moral codes they had believed they adhered to.

Being engaged in violence against targets that are perceived as illegitimate in some way created a complex emotional feedback loop for the other activist involved in the violence, Matthew Collins. Participation in the assault caused a deep sense of shame and guilt that conflicted with his self-identity (see brake 3). "I began to realise that this was what race wars were about," he later recalled, "the innocent attacked and their dignity destroyed."[52] Guilt would ultimately propel Collins to collaborate with anti-fascists and he subsequently worked as a "mole" against his former colleagues. The change of heart was not immediate, according to his autobiography:

> *Sure I had days where I was wracked with guilt and self-pity, but this is what I did and this is what I was part of. I know it was wrong, but there really didn't seem to be anything else and my head was buzzing with the thrill of being a pimply politician for one half of my day and part of a vicious gang of thugs the next.[53]*

This latter comment highlights that violence, even if morally repugnant to one's sense of self, can still prove too exciting to give up, at least in the short term. Violence against unexpected targets could also induce a "moral shock" that would lead others to leave the movement. When C18 fell into fratricidal strife in 1997, in which one of its leaders murdered another prominent activist, several key activists drifted out of the group, feeling deeply disillusioned that petty personal rivalry had led to killing.

Brake Three: Logic of Ego-Maintenance

Many activists within extreme right groups do not necessarily perceive themselves to be full-blown racist revolutionaries. As one former NF activist recalled:

> *We had a lot of tough talkers, lunatics and hard nuts but we hardly ran large scale terrorist operations. We took, on the whole, a voyeuristic and occasionally helpful interest in our colleague's violent terrorism and occasionally the odd idiot got himself caught playing with a gun in his bedroom or back garden, but we were responsible for little more state subversion than perhaps a gang of third division football hooligans. We were criminally inclined pub brawlers and occasional drunken racist attackers.… Politically, we were little more than a poorly organised pressure valve built around obsessive personality cults.[54]*

Not identifying with a certain form of violence or perceiving oneself as a certain type of group served to limit efforts to develop such capabilities in the first place. Tyndall's narrative about BNP violence always emphasised that it was "defensive" or, *in extremis*, when confronted with incontrovertible proof, dismissed evidence of violence instigated by his own activists as "very rare." Several leading party figures had serious criminal convictions that the BNP always sought to minimise or mitigate when questioned in public. Tyndall dismissed a conviction of one of his lieutenants under the Explosives Act in 1985 as "foolish" whilst the conviction of his National Activities Organiser for a racist attack in 1993 he explained away as a "frame up" of which the man was completely "innocent."[55]

Such denials were of course politically expedient but such leadership statements and others like them also served to reaffirm to party activists themselves that their own sense of serving a nobler purpose remained intact. More broadly, at a political and cultural level, the BNP self-identified as the political voice of a forgotten and disenfranchised "white working class" rather than as a group waging armed insurgency in support of "white revolution". Its arguments in this respect also softened though its commitment to an all-white Britain did not. Such political campaigns took place within the context of the milieu's evolving narrative arc that was shifting away from claims of "white power" towards arguments for "ethno-plurality" and a self-definition of themselves as a "civil rights" movement simply seeking "Rights for Whites".

In line with the strategic logic of Brake 1, this self-identification saw the BNP begin to distance itself from groups like C18 whose actions damaged its efforts to "modernise" itself. Indeed BNP party manuals and rules of

conduct officially urged BNP activists to keep those who spoke the "language of violence" at "arm's length."[56] Internally, the BNP also circulated the message that C18 was an MI5 "honey trap" designed to ensnare unwitting activists. This was part of a broader effort by BNP leaders to counter the appeal of "revolutionary" violence as espoused by C18 amongst some of its own membership. Such a message also served to locate the responsibility for acts of violence to *outside* the milieu, projecting it onto the "State." Such conspiratorial theorising was evident in the wake of the Copeland bombings, serving as a means of cleansing the extreme right's self-image of the stigma of violence, at least to its own satisfaction. Indeed, the BNP claim that such acts of extreme right terrorism were, in reality, perpetrated by a "state-sponsored 'pseudo-gang,'"[57] also highlights how conspiracy theories can work to buttress the logic of ego maintenance by seeking to dissuade colleagues from participation in the activities of more extreme groups.

Personal disillusionment and de-identification with violent groups was another way in which the restraints on violence were applied within the milieu. Following the failed C18 letter bomb campaign in 1997, one leading C18 activist recalled realising that, after his clique began discussing plans for a follow up, "my heart wasn't in it anymore." Thereafter, he began to take stock and realised the "futility" of what he was engaged in, which ultimately led him to leave the group.[58]

For the BNP, self-identification as a group that was ostensibly "non-violent" meant that, on paper at least, there were mechanisms for sanctioning activists who advocated or undertook more extreme acts of violence than the party's established action repertoire allowed for. However, the application of this particular set of brakes was heavily reliant upon the wider political context and party leaders had to weigh disciplinary decisions against a range of factors.

Eschewing violence for strategic and political reasons had to be weighed in the balance with its appeal to, and use by, party activists. Numerically small in number, party activists were thus a scarce resource. Successfully managing political violence, even if it transgressed political priorities, was thus a complex balancing act for leaders since they were ever mindful that an unpopular decision might precipitate a haemorrhaging of members to a rival group if they acted too harshly. Thus, BNP leader John Tyndall, whilst tolerant of a certain level of "defensive" violence anyway, often sought accommodation with party militants rather than confrontation. This was particularly evident during the mid-1990s as he sought to staunch the flow of BNP activists to C18. Though he had proscribed C18 and denounced the group's leadership – though pointedly not its members – Tyndall was much less willing to sanction his own activists who were also involved in its activities at a grassroots level, for fear of alienating the self-same people that he relied upon to carry out BNP activities. If he acted too harshly against those ignoring his proscription, Tyndall risked tipping the balance of power in C18's favour, thereby diminishing his own political authority within the milieu. In some instances he had no real ability to manage such violence anyway, since many activists had a malleable sense of party identification: group acronyms often simply served as a badge of convenience, activists identifying as "BNP" or "C18" depending on the activity it best suited.[59]

Within the milieu, respect and prestige accrued to activists who possessed a record of established militancy rather than the reverse. Criminal convictions often lent legitimacy and credibility to an activists' personal standing within the milieu. Indeed rather than being a cause for sanction, association with violence often enhanced an individual's reputation. It certainly proved no bar to promotion in the party structure. However, a track-record of proven militancy also meant that these activists did not need to "prove" themselves through further violence, since their ability on this score was not in question. Having established such a reputation, and acquired the "respect" that flowed from it, the physical authority of an activist could also serve as a brake for violence or indeed as an accelerant, depending on the context of a violent clash. Many such figures served as "stewards" at party activities because they could be relied upon to control violence, but also mete it out if the occasion required.[60]

A key aspect pertaining to the ability of such activists to control and modulate street violence was an expectation that the violence itself would conform to a certain well-worn type. As one former activist noted, street

violence was "endemic" to extreme right activism and activists became habituated to it.[61] Activists knew what to expect and, equally importantly, what not to expect. Prior experience of street violence conditioned expectations of what to expect during future clashes. There were, a former anti-fascist activist recognised, unwritten "rules of engagement," which activists on both sides broadly adhered to, though there were some notable breaches.[62] Violence therefore remained within these recognisable parameters, meaning that, though activists often went to confrontations armed with hammers, bats, knives and other tools, limited expectations of greater violence meant there was no desire to upscale their tactical repertoire by using firearms during such encounters. However, this type of internal restraint might equally reflect the difficulties of obtaining a firearm due to Britain's stringent firearms legislation.

When tactical escalation did occur, for instance with the formation of C18 in 1992, the activists involved, initially at least, remained bound by the same collective notion of street violence as the BNP. Indeed, on the few occasions that they brawled with AFA, C18 hoped for a "tear-up" but did not expect anyone to be killed.[63] However, within the radical flank, brakes on violence quickly waned as the group began producing "hit lists" and exhorting their followers to kill political opponents, their publications providing them with the technical wherewithal to do so by printing bomb-making instructions. Their unimpeded rhetorical excesses aside, in real life the group frequently failed to professionalise its activities: its efforts to firebomb a political opponents' home displayed a distinct amateurishness for a group that styled itself as a "terror" cell.[64] Even C18's most infamous act of political violence, the 1997 letter bomb campaign, required the group to outsource the construction of the devices to Danish activists, reflecting a mixture of security consciousness but also a failure by the group to invest in such lethal capabilities itself.

Brake Four: Logic of Out-Group Definition

The inability to dehumanise political opponents or racial enemies completely can serve as a powerful brake on violence for some individuals. Recent studies have highlighted that even "violent talk" that de-humanises individuals can have a "therapeutic" and cathartic effect insofar as the "performative" nature of such narratives enable the speaker and their audience to let off steam. That said, whilst "violent talk" might have a moderating impact in some instances, clearly there will always be those for whom "talk is cheap".[65] There is some anecdotal evidence that violent talk in the aftermath of a terrorist atrocity can, however, lead other activists to question their involvement. To take one recent example, an activist in National Action (NA), a group banned for being concerned with terrorism in December 2016, recalled that it was his proximity to murder that first gave him pause to consider the nature of the group he was involved in. After an extreme right activist murdered Jo Cox MP earlier that year, NA had glorified her killer in a series of tweets that would later lead to its proscription. "I thought, *I'm* connected to this person who's tweeting it and celebrating it," noted the NA activist.[66]

A similar, though more dramatic example of where the logic of outgroup definition played a pivotal role in preventing a terrorist attack can be found in the autobiography of Kerry Noble, previously of the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord. Noble was on the verge of bombing a "gay church" in 1984 when he simply dallied too long whilst priming his device and began to re-humanise those around him. This left him unable to carry out his planned atrocity.[67]

Insofar as this case study is concerned, the strategic impediments to needing or indeed wanting to adopt greater violence in the first place (Brake 1) also led to softening of boundaries that would eventually embed across the BNP and not just at an individual level. As the party began to "modernise" to gain public support, it also began phasing out activities that might associate it with violence and undermine these electoral ambitions, though this process took over a decade to complete. BNP publications contained none of the racist and anti-Semitic invective that saturated C18 newsletters and magazines. That said, although C18 publications dehumanised their racial enemies, individual activists retaining a grudging respect for their anti-fascist opponents, based largely on their physical bravery during violent confrontations.[68] However, the extent to which this shaped wider attitudes to violence is unknown.

Both extreme right and anti-fascist activists were engaged in a battle for what they perceived to be the hearts and minds of the working class, whether racialized for the cause of race and nation or as potential agents in the broader class struggle against capitalism. This had important ramifications with regards the potential for escalating conflict. Carter's study of cumulative extremism in Northern Ireland highlights that Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries were able to escalate the conflict through attacks upon their opponents support base i.e. indiscriminately targeting Catholics and Protestants to provoke further conflict.[69] There was no similar dynamic at play in this case study, since targeting an opponent's wider constituency of support would, in effect, have entailed waging war one on oneself.

Compared with C18, or at least its core activist group, the BNP was an outward facing political group. Whilst it might deride the general public as "sheeple" for not flocking to their standard, they remained committed to engaging with the British electorate, not rejecting them; to win their electoral support through doorstep campaigning and community action. This meant that there was no internal pressure from the party to isolate itself from the wider society or indeed to "burn bridges" socially with those outside the movement. In comparison C18, which was contemptuous of the wider public, was ideologically inspired by utopian dreams of a white "homeland" to be established in Essex, though in reality this scheme to withdraw from society went nowhere.

Another internal restraint related to out-group definition was a reluctance on the part of the BNP to demonise the police as the enemy, even if party leaders remained contemptuous of its "political" leadership, which, they argued, was part of a wider "establishment" plot to subvert the nation. Such respect was almost non-existent in the case of C18 whose publications regularly denigrated the police as "scum" working for "ZOG" ("Zionist Occupation Government") and the despised "system" that they wanted to overthrow. Even here, however, dehumanisation could be tempered by personal experience. Following his arrest in 1998, David Myatt, one of the most ardent advocates for racial revolution, was impressed by the "professional attitude" of the police and the "courteous" manner in which he was treated which "made me revise my attitude toward the Police."[70]

Brake Five: Organisational Logic

Whilst the establishment of C18 represented an effort by the BNP to invest in developing a capability for greater violence, conversely, as this relationship quickly soured, the internal restraints on violence were reapplied because it made sense to do so from an organisational standpoint. As the BNP committed itself to electoralism, not only did C18 become surplus to requirements, but even some of its own activities, including public meetings and marches became "somewhat counterproductive," since they attracted opposition. Tyndall's proscription of C18 was another reflection of the BNP's effort to de-invest from violence, though as already noted above, this was often more honoured in the breach than in the observance.

C18 also seems to have undergone its own organisational shift away from certain forms of violence. Initially the group had tried to cultivate links to Northern Ireland and Loyalist para-militarism which might have begat greater violence. Yet its break with the BNP coincided with the group re-focussing its energies upon football hooliganism which, whilst violent, was also a form of violence that remained within recognisable parameters. It was when these parameters changed, for instance, "when small groups of fascists and anti-fascists chanced upon each other in back-streets, well away from the police,"[71] that the most violent encounters often took place; a form of what Randall Collins [72] calls the "forward panic" pathway to violence, as the two groups fought tooth and nail with one another to re-establish their "emotional dominance" of the situation.

As noted above, the style and form of street violence could largely be anticipated and therefore "managed" by participants at set-piece events. Both the extreme right and anti-fascists employing a system of "Stewards" to marshal marches and to defend them from violence. These "security" arrangements were not evenly spread across the BNP, however, as some branches were notably more adept than others. Whilst the "stewards" also ensured a "defensive" capacity, such a corpus of activists, usually chosen through self-selection, could also contain the kernel for "offensive" violence, as was the case when the BNP "Stewards' Group" morphed into C18.

Decisions about how to fulfil their goals also affected internal restraints on violence. The BNP, for instance, foregrounded its more modest intermediate objective of contesting local elections whilst de-prioritising its longer term "revolutionary" goal of replacing Britain's liberal democracy with a white ethno-state whereas – rhetorically at least – C18 did not. This is not to argue that BNP renounced its revolutionary goals, merely to assert that the path it chose to achieve it was incremental rather than "revolutionary".

What perhaps also helped limit violence was a certain level of ideological heterodoxy within BNP publications. Whilst Tyndall personally controlled magazines such as *Spearhead,* they also functioned as a comparatively open forum for ideological discussion. The BNP leader also tolerated dissenting publications like *The Patriot* (though the extent to which he was aware, initially at least, of its overarching agenda is unclear). An important question in this regard hinges upon whether or not such forums succeeded in exerting a brake on more militantly-inclined activists by acculturating them to any of the five logics discussed here. It is not possible to answer this question with the available data, however. It is notable though that Tyndall's tighter control over the political structure of the BNP, which he ran as his personal fiefdom, did cause some tensions, particularly for newer activists with different strategic views, some of whom felt that their concerns and ideas were crowded out by Tyndall's clique. Those with tactical differences were forced to operate outside the BNP once the breach with C18 became irreparable, highlighting that restraint in one part of the movement can simply displace violence to another part.

Another brake that limited violent escalation, one that might be particularly pertinent to the extreme right given its long history of fissiparous fragmentation, is the concentration of a group's energy upon *internal* movement rivals. This arguably reduced its capacity to prosecute violence against *external* enemies. This is evident in the case of C18. Having failed to usurp Tyndall's leadership of the BNP, C18 extended its control over the financially lucrative Blood & Honour nazi music "scene." This served to magnify internal tensions over money, personal prestige and reputation amongst the group's core activists. The result was a factional feud that culminated in murder in 1997 and the group's dissolution. The impact of this fratricidal struggle drained C18 of its capacity for "revolutionary" violence. Charlie Sargent's killing of Chris Castle, a close friend of rival leader Will Browning, led his more revolutionary-inclined faction to focus solely on obtaining "retribution" at the expense of wider movement goals. This took its toll. Several leading activists walked away, sensing that Browning was "bad news" to be around. "I know it sounds awful," one former C18 activist stated, "but really Chris dying probably saved lives because that put an end to any plans for race war."[73]

Conclusion

This case study of the internal restraints on violent escalation within the British extreme right in the 1990s has highlighted five observable internal brakes that have played a role at one time or another to limit violence within the milieu. Not all of these brakes are evident in every instance. Some appear in isolation and, at other times, several of them appear to overlap. Nor has every activist adhered to all of these brakes all of the time and nor, in all likelihood, have they had the same level of meaning for them. It is also likely that, as this case study suggested, certain brakes are more salient at certain times in constraining violence. Indeed, in this instance Brake one (the identification of less violent strategies of action as being as or more effective than violent alternatives) was the one that framed the overarching political trajectory of the BNP as it wrestled with its own radical flank and the ongoing assault on its activities by anti-fascist activists. It is worth noting too that this is a historical case study of the processes at play within these groups at a particular point in time. The 1990s were not a vacuum and violent contestation between extreme right and anti-fascist groups has occurred before and indeed since.

If this case study represents a historical snapshot of how internal brakes on violence might have functioned at a particular point in time within a specific cluster of groups, it is worth restating that the typology around which its findings are structured is more dynamic. As previously mentioned in the methodology section, this typology was derived iteratively from three very different ideological case studies with very different propensities towards violence. The underlying intention of using such diverse case studies was not to create a "checklist" (since what

Brakes mean, why, and when, still requires interpretation and analysis to understand their importance) but simply to widen the typology's broader applicability so that its insights would extend beyond those of a single case study or a theoretical literature review. Further comparison across different actor types operating under different external conditions would undoubtedly prove a fruitful avenue for further enquiry since it could help us better understand how different external pressures have shaped the implementation of internal restraints on violence, or caused them to weaken or fail. Such research, which this Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* helps to facilitate, might also potentially illuminate how different configurations of such brakes function together at different times and in different situations to limit violence or, indeed, how certain combinations might be more or less robust. It might also illuminate whether certain types of group, whether defined by organisational form or ideology, might be more or less prone to its mechanisms of restraint weakening or collapsing than others.

What would be equally profitable would be more in-group comparisons across the same ideological movement. The "far right" for example is not a homogeneous entity ideologically, organisationally, strategically, or tactically. A wider survey of how internal brakes function across the "movement" as a whole – either within one country or across a more comparative axis – might help researchers better conceptualise which groups within a given political milieu have the weakest internal restraints on violence and are thus more problematic from the perspective of countering violent extremism. One might also enquire as to how the logics and limits of violence differ within the numerous anti-fascist groups ranged against them. Whilst this is beyond the scope of this article, those interested in how "antifa" groups in the United States exercise restraint can consult Copsey's contribution to this Special Issue.

Another area into which this nascent research agenda on the internal brakes on violence could expand relates to the interplay between these five logics. How do they condition and shape one another, for example? Further research might elaborate how these internal restraints function as violent escalation becomes an *imminent* possibility for activists. This is where our knowledge is at its most opaque. Interview data or ethnographic research might help to elucidate how and why these brakes have functioned (or failed) in the past as activists have gotten closer to planning or initiating acts of violence. At present, beyond a smattering of anecdotes contained within activist autobiographies, we know little about how brakes on violence function in greater proximity to the moment of violence: in other words how they are supported, sublimated or suborned at the point of no return. Indeed, researchers and analysts need a greater understanding and awareness of the conditions under which such brakes on violence are weakened or can be made to fail by those within the group seeking tactical escalation. Brakes might fail because of activities by activists within the milieu, who favour radical repertoires, but equally they might be made to fail because of external pressures brought to bear on a group, whether intentionally or through their misapplication, by police or government agencies. External actors might pay greater heed to where their actions can bolster rather than undermine those mechanisms and processes that can serve to limit violent escalation from within.

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Notes

[1] This article draws on the author's research for *The Internal Brakes on Violent Escalation: A Descriptive Typology*, co-authored with Joel Busher and Donald Holbrook. That project was funded by The Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST), an independent centre commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and funded in part by the UK security and intelligence agencies (ESRC Award: ES/N009614/1).

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On the Permissibility of Homicidal Violence: Perspectives from Former U.S. White Supremacists

by Steven Windisch, Pete Simi, Kathleen M. Blee, and Matthew DeMichele

Abstract

Drawing upon in-depth life-history interviews with 91 North American-based former white supremacists, we examine how participants perceive homicidal violence as either an appropriate or inappropriate political strategy. Based on the current findings, participants considered homicidal violence as largely inappropriate due to moral concerns and its politically ineffective nature but also discussed how homicidal violence could be an appropriate defensive measure in RAHOWA (Racial Holy War) or through divine mandate. Capturing how white supremacists frame the permissibility of homicidal violence is a step toward better understanding the "upper limit" or thresholds for violence among members who are trying to construct and negotiate a collective identity that involves violent and aggressive worldviews.

Keywords: Violence, white supremacy, life-history interviews, restraint, modus operandi

Introduction

On June 17, 2015, Dylan Roof walked into the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and killed nine African Americans in an attempt to ignite a race war. Two years later, a "Unite the Right" rally was held in Charlottesville, Virginia, amidst the backdrop of the controversy generated by the removal of Confederate monuments throughout the United States. At the rally, self-identified white supremacist James Alex Fields Jr. drove his car into a crowd of counter-protesters, killing Heather Heyer and injuring nearly 40 other people. One year later, on October 27, 2018, Robert Bowers entered the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and killed eleven worshipers. Each of these attacks represents white supremacists' efforts to catalyze social change based on their extremist and racist ideology.[1]

Despite the deadly and tragic nature of these violent attacks, there is broad recognition among academics that homicidal violence among extremists is both rare and difficult to commit.[2] For purposes of the current study, homicidal violence refers to ideologically motivated violence that is intended to be lethal. This may involve homicidal acts that are group-based and are the direct function of extremist activities (e.g., territoriality, retaliation) as well as homicidal violence that is the result of an individual member's actions.[3] In recent years, terrorism scholars have identified "barriers" or "breaks" that help constrain extremists from committing a higher number of violent incidents, such as personal obligations and organizational factors.[4] Yet, crucial questions remain about white supremacists' perceptions of homicidal violence, and the struggle they encounter trying to construct and negotiate a collective identity that involves violent and aggressive worldviews. The prospect of committing violence presents natural challenges among adherents of radical ideologies because a potential point of conflict becomes knowing what types of action are permissible.

To build on this line of research, we rely on in-depth life-history interviews with 91 North American-based former white supremacist extremists (WSE), who unite around genocidal fantasies against racial, religious, and sexual minorities, and have extensive histories of involvement in violent activism, to examine factors that may influence their perceptions of when homicidal violence is either an appropriate or inappropriate political strategy.[5] This article is part of a larger study focused on the life course experiences among a sample of former white supremacists.[6] Capturing how WSE frame the permissibility of homicidal violence is a step toward better understanding the "upper limit" or threshold for violence among members who are trying to construct and negotiate a collective identity that involves violent and aggressive worldviews.

"Barriers" and "Breaks" to Extremist Violence

Although white supremacist culture is not exclusively violent, much of their world is focused on the promotion of violence. Being a member of a white supremacist group is intrinsically linked to doing violence in the name of the group and unconditionally supporting other extremist members. Yet, the type of violence promoted varies across the white supremacist movement. For extremists tied to vigilantism, "splinter cells" and "lone wolves," their violence often involves more carefully planned types of violence such as bombings and mass-shootings that are set in motion prior to the immediate encounter.[7] These individuals believe they are more effective working alone rather than within the framework of a group because they can be more mobile and work under the cloak of anonymity without infiltration from law enforcement. In addition to white supremacists who stockpile high-powered weapons and participate in terror plots, white supremacists are also closely tied to street violence, which resembles conventional gang conflicts including less sophisticated weaponry,[8] such as generic physical assaults, drug feuds, and hate crimes.[9]

Regardless of the type of violence, individuals entering extremism do not begin this process as a blank slate but rather become extremists with existing histories of violent victimization and individual dispositions.[10] Prior research highlights individual preferences surrounding the use of interpersonal violence. Members describe it as a masculine endeavor and a mechanism for achieving personal pleasure and to dramatically represent oneself.[11] Individual preferences, however, are only part of the story. Extremists are also embedded within social networks distinguished by specific ideological and subcultural values, norms, and practices. Subcultural norms are an important source of influence supporting the use of violence to resolve conflict.[12] For instance, white supremacists believe they are fierce warriors fighting to save the white race from genocide, and, if need be, martyrs who are feared and hated by their opponents.[13] This mentality celebrates going to battle and inflicting bodily harm, which underscores the importance of white supremacist ideology in producing and sustaining violence.[14]The combination of individual preferences and subcultural norms has contributed to widespread extremist violence, including cross-burnings, lynchings, vandalism, church arsons, identity theft, murder, armored car robberies, physical assaults, home invasions, and other acts of terrorism.[15]

While white supremacists unite around a variety of violent criminal activities, it appears that there is an "upper limit" or threshold among some members on committing homicidal violence.[16] Even though no single factor can completely prevent terrorism, prior research has identified an array of constraints contributing to the low base rate of homicidal violence. For instance, individual commitments to family and work have been found to alter a person's routine activities and constrain unstructured socialization time, which reduces the potential for homicidal violence. At the same time, the extremist must consider the costs of committing an act of terrorism (e.g., incarceration) and the risk associated with losing their investments in conventional behavior.[17] Moreover, moral, emotional, and cognitive concerns (e.g., fear, anxiety) have been found to reduce the likelihood of homicidal violence.[18] Contrary to the common perception that extremists are "crazy" individuals determined to kill as many people as possible, terrorism scholars have found that extremists often struggle to justify the use of violence against innocent bystanders.[19]

Organizational factors, such as leadership and organizational developments, have also been found to reduce the likelihood of homicidal violence.[20] For instance, leaders in certain organizations establish parameters that prohibit extremist violence because they view it as counterproductive and fear the negative publicity will undermine public support.[21] Instead, these organizations encourage individuals to concentrate their energy toward lower-level street violence or non-violent political strategies such as marches and recruiting.[22] Reductions in homicidal violence have also been found when extremist organizations allocate resources (e.g., time, money, personnel) toward targeting movement rivals and resolving internal conflict.[23]

Finally, factors external to extremist individuals and groups operate as constraints to homicidal violence. For instance, prior research has proposed that enacting "target hardening" strategies such as stationing armed guards or installing security cameras can decrease the target's degree of exposure and expected loss, both of which are associated with the potential for an attack by violent extremist groups.[24] In conjunction with these external constraints, law enforcement officials have taken steps at the local, state, and federal levels to surveil

and infiltrate extremist organizations as a strategy to disrupt planning and minimize opportunities for violent action.[25] To build on these lines of research, we examine our participants' life-history narratives to better understand their perceptions related to when homicidal violence is considered "appropriate" and "inappropriate."

Methodology

The current sample consists of 91 former members of US white supremacist groups. Participants were interviewed in the places they now live, with 87 located in 24 states across all regions of the country and 4 in Canada. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 61 years (M = 41.5; SD = 8.6) and included 70 men and 21 women. Thirteen participants described their current socioeconomic status as lower class, 42 as working class, 31 as middle class, and 5 as upper class. In terms of involvement, participation in white supremacism ranged from three to twenty-one years (M = 9.9; SD = 6.8). A large portion of participants had extensive histories of criminal conduct, including property offenses (e.g., shoplifting) and a variety of violent offenses such as murder, attempted murder, street fights, violent initiation rituals, and bomb-making. Of the 91 participants, 63 reported a history of extremist violence, and 48 had spent time in prison.

As there is no way to compile an exhaustive list of former members to serve as a sampling frame, we identified interviewees by snowball sampling from multiple starts to ensure variety in the location and type of extremist group.[26] We developed initial contacts for the snowball chains through a variety of means, including our research team's prior research with active and inactive white supremacists, by identifying former extremists with a public presence (e.g., media, books), and by using referrals by our project partners.[27] As multiple individuals were used to generate unique snowballs, only a small segment of the participants were acquainted with each other.

Interviews were conducted in private settings (e.g., private residences) and public settings (e.g., restaurants). Most of the interview was spent eliciting an in-depth life-history to produce narratives that reflect the intersectionality of identity, ideology, and life experiences.[28] The interviews included structured questions about the subject's family background, involvement, and disengagement, with probes to encourage subjects to elaborate on aspects of their life histories. These insights would not have been available through secondary sources and movement propaganda.[29] The interviews lasted between four and more than eight hours and generated 10,882 pages of transcripts, which indicate the level of detail generated through the life histories. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with minor edits. Finally, all names of research participants used here are pseudonyms.

We analyzed the life-history interview data using a modified grounded theory approach,[30] which allows researchers to combine a more open-ended, inductive approach while also relying on existing literatures and frameworks to guide the research. The initial data coding began by reading entire interview transcripts line-by-line to determine differences and similarities within and across the sample. Inductive codes emerged from the initial phase of line-by-line analysis.[31] Deductive codes were extracted from scholarly literature on restraint, violence, and related topics. After the initial codes were developed, we compared and contrasted themes, noting relations between first-level data and more general categories.[32]

Several limitations of this study are important to mention. First, the retrospective nature of life-history interviews raises questions about validity and reliability due to memory erosion, distortion, and selective recall.[33] The practice of remembering is a reconstructive process where memories of events are typically reinterpreted during each recall.[34] As such, it is possible that our participants' current understanding and recall of their former perspective about violence might include more condemnation or dismissal of their willingness to commit violence and perhaps less careful engagement with or recall of their violent activism as a white supremacist member. In addition to memory erosion, participants may feel ashamed, stigmatized, and guilty about their past violent performances, and therefore, unwilling to directly and accurately engage with this topic. Although the retrospective nature of life-history interviews introduces potential bias, all memories are subject to manipulation.[35] Therefore, this limitation characterizes any study that involves memory processing. Furthermore,

the data analysis in this study is focused less on determining specific facts and more about emphasizing the perceptions of when homicidal violence is either an appropriate or inappropriate political strategy. To minimize this limitation, interviewers frequently probed participants for more information using various types of memory anchors (e.g., birthdays, specific school years, etc.), conducted follow-up interviews when possible, and triangulated responses between the life-history interviews and our semi-structured interview questionnaire.

Second, individuals in the current study no longer identify as "White power" and are no longer affiliated with organized hate groups. The participants see themselves as "formers" or something equivalent to a former ("I'm not involved anymore"; "I moved on"). In some cases, individuals have been disengaged for more than a decade and have experienced substantial changes in their social and cognitive orientations (e.g., interracial marriage; conversion to Buddhism). Since the current study relies on former white supremacists, it is possible that their current relationship with their "former" extremist identity may affect how they think and talk about past violence. For instance, it is possible that participants minimized the extent to which they or their group participated in extremist violence. Despite this limitation, the use of former extremists to understand the complex processes associated with extremism has provided valuable insight that would not have been available through secondary sources and movement propaganda. Doing so provides researchers with a unique insider's perspective into an array of pressing issues that may not be addressed without the insights of formers extremists. [36] Finally, due to the relatively hidden nature of this population, the sample was derived through snowball techniques and, as a result, is not representative, which prevents generalizing from these findings. The goal of a grounded theory approach, however, is to develop a conceptual explanation that closely fits the data (or incidents), which the concepts are intended to represent. Although grounded theory is not intended to provide generalizations, the hypotheses developed can be tested at a later point.

Results

For this study, we are interested in our participants' perception of homicidal violence as an appropriate and inappropriate political strategy. We define "appropriate" behavior as actions that, given certain conditions, align with individual and organizational norms and codes of conduct; whereas "inappropriate" behavior refers to actions that violate individual and organizational norms and codes of conduct. In the following sections, we examine the emergent criteria by which our participants evaluated the permissibility of homicidal violence.

Homicidal Violence as Appropriate

Across the sample, participants perceived homicidal violence as an appropriate political strategy when used as a measure of self-defense. A willingness to frame violence as a defensive measure is consistent with WSE's belief in a racial holy war (referred to as "RAWOHA").[37] According to RAHOWA, Whites have been threatened for centuries by "race-mixing," political liberalization, and religious tolerance. Over time, the accumulation of these threats will lead to a war between Whites and all other races.[38] Only when non-Whites and other "sub-humans" are segregated, or at least subordinated to White authority, will RAHOWA end.[39] In line with RAHOWA, participants reported defensive preparations such as stockpiling weapons and food as well as receiving specialized survival and weapons training. With that said, some participants were unwilling to initiate RAHOWA and discussed how the use of homicidal violence would only be appropriate if someone else took aggressive action first. For example,

> *Again, it's like if we had to defend ourselves that is one thing, but no one wants to start a war… You are waiting for somebody else to throw the first punch and then it's safe to go jump in… There's a certain part of the mind that just needs evidence… anytime you heard of a Rodney King or something that was brewing racial tensions like you just hoped that would be the spark. In our minds, it was like if this sparks enough now we can get involved and we can change things. (Joel, Interview 65, 10/5/2015)*

Joel's account underscores a central theme of our participants' narratives in which homicidal violence was considered an appropriate measure of self-defense or means of retaliation. This view has a long history in traditional just war theory, which holds that, while it is wrong to intentionally assault the innocent, those who are not considered innocent forfeit their immunity from attack.[40] By framing homicidal violence as a defensive measure, it is easier for Joel to suppress moral concerns and cognitive controls (e.g., fear, hesitation) and view his targets as willful participants who have committed a transgression. In doing so, homicidal violence becomes acceptable and even obligatory. Similar to Joel, other participants suggested homicidal violence would be an appropriate strategy during RAHOWA. For instance,

> *There was no war going on, you know, we were not in a battlefield conflict. If we were in a full-on race war, yeah, it's time to go fight but we're not in a war, so to go bomb a synagogue, there was really no reason for it… We're in a velvet revolution, which is a war of words and small action. I am not sure what the catalyst to a large-scale revolution would be or will be as far as RAHOWA goes, that can be anything. But it was not the time we were in. (Alton, Interview 66, 10/23/2015)*

Similar to Joel, Alton suggests that homicidal violence is appropriate for RAHOWA. However, since Alton believes the United States is currently engulfed in a "velvet revolution," local actions (i.e., interpersonal violence against minorities, "gay bashing") are more beneficial forms of activism. This finding is in line with Busher and colleagues' who found that extremist organizations often pursue more intermediate objectives while deprioritizing revolutionary goals.[41] Moreover, while Alton and Joel suggest that homicidal violence is appropriate as a defensive measure in times of "battlefield conflict," this only occurs insofar as a group accepts that RAHOWA has begun. Both participants' accounts underscore the subjective nature of what classifies as a "catalyst" or "spark." For instance, indicators that RAHOWA has begun are open to interpretation and may range from an intrusion of outgroup members into the extremist's workplace, neighborhood, or community to national flashpoints such as the Los Angeles riots or the passage of laws that regulate Second Amendment rights.[42] The key takeaway from these findings is that the target's provocation helps provide a mutual focus among attackers, which suppresses moral, cognitive, and emotional controls (e.g., personal responsibility, guilt, hesitation) and helps justify the use of homicidal violence.[43]

In addition to self-defense, participants discussed how homicidal violence could be appropriate if it is required by divine mandate. It is important to note that WSE do not only see their racial supremacy in ordinary human terms but consider their perceived superiority as a reflection of the cosmic fight between good and evil. For instance, Christian Identity believers define "non-Whites" as evil incarnate and promote racial violence as acts ordained by God. They see Blacks, Latinos, and Asians, and other non-Whites as lower-order subspecies of "pre-Adamic mudpeople" and, therefore, not fully human. Christian Identity adds to this interpretation the notion that Jews were descended from Satan and resulted from Eve's copulation with the serpent. Identity believers imagine they are warriors in a righteous battle against the Jewish conspiracy to eradicate the White race.[44] At the core of this belief system is the conviction that non-Whites have fundamentally corrupted the world, and that Whites have a moral obligation to participate in its cleansing destruction.[45] While some pragmatically and rhetorically condemned violence, these individuals appeal to a higher authority because they invariably see the outcome of violent activism in positive terms, as beneficial for both themselves, their society, and the cosmos. For example, Keith discusses reconciling the "purpose of God" against his own preference for non-confrontation and ultimately concluding that such action is necessary for the return of Jesus.

> *The only way I could justify it was in my theology. We believed that God was instrumental in everything. Everything was a sign from God. We prayed, "God, if this is what you want us to do, tell us. If it is not what you want us to do, cause something to happen." … The conflict for me was trying to reconcile the purpose of God versus my own basic nature of wanting peace more than war… I resisted it absolutely, but God wants us to do it, so I have to cross that hurdle of not being afraid. You got to go through this before Jesus comes back and sets up the kingdom. (Keith, Interview 2, 5/4/2013)*

Clearly, Keith struggles with committing homicidal violence, and while he does not reject the moral standards that govern human life, his divine loyalty takes precedence. In doing so, Keith rationalizes that his actions are

for the greater good and must be carried out before Jesus can return and start a new kingdom. While it is true that apocalyptic signs can lead to violence, this only occurs insofar as a group accepts that event as a "sign." Based on Keith's narrative, signs from the divine can function as both accelerators and barriers to homicidal violence. In addition to strict scriptural doctrine, participants adhered to more general mandates to defend the White race. Much of this discussion involved the well-known white supremacist slogan referred to as the 14 words: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children".[46] The 14 words has become a movement doctrine that legitimizes preemptive self-defense and has evolved into a doctrine supporting the use of violence in the name of racial preservation. For example,

> *For the people that advocated violence, they see it as self-defense like, "Our race is dying and we need to do something to stand up for our people." There was definitely a lot of talk about race war and the whole 14 words thing… very thankful it never came to that. I had a wife and a kid. I wanted to protect them. The [LA] riots had just happened. I knew the race war could kick off any minute… Honestly, murder was not my thing, but I was prepared for trying to save the future for White children. (Chase, Interview 14, 11/1/2013)*

While opposed to committing murder, Chase appeals to higher loyalties and accepts the appropriateness of such action as a means of securing a future for White children. The meaning of the 14 words doctrine is far from clear, and white supremacists have historically offered a body of interpretations on the subject. For some, the 14 words doctrine represents a mandate to raise future generations of White children in accordance with white supremacist values. Such efforts involve socializing children through boundary maintenance efforts by filtering peer and media influences and working to control friendship selection and media messages their children receive.[47] For others, the 14 words doctrine represents a moral duty to secure their children's future through the use of violence. As such, similar to their views of the Oklahoma City bombing (when 198 people were killed, among them many children, and more than 680 injured in 1995 by Timothy McVeigh), the diverse interpretations of the 14 words doctrine underscore its indeterminate nature for constraining or accelerating homicidal violence among extremists. The key takeaway from these findings is the importance of participating in a group that encourages more lethal forms of violence.

Homicidal Violence as Inappropriate

Next, we turn to investigate the conditions in which homicidal violence was considered inappropriate. Across the sample, participants discussed moral concerns as a reason for viewing homicidal violence as inappropriate. Although participants described committing a wide range of violent performances, including acts motivated by ideology (e.g., "gay-bashings," "bum-rolling") as well as more generic violence (e.g., neighborhood violence, school fights), a portion of the sample did not support "extreme" violence such as murders and bombings.[48] Based on the data, a portion of participants (N = 63; 69.2%) in our sample suggest an apparent capacity to harm other people, yet this aptitude did not necessarily translate into a willingness or ability to kill their enemies. For instance, the following participant discusses avoiding more severe forms of violence because he was unable to suppress and overcome specific moral considerations related to murder.

> *I don't want to kill. I don't mind getting in a fist-a-cuff with somebody but blowing shit up, no… Now I mean, I knew that the government had done some pretty shitty things, you know. At that time, they had Ruby Ridge, I mean, same with Waco. That was just fucked up, no matter how you looked at it, on both sides, but no, as far as me, I didn't get into the extreme radical thought of kill everybody. (Sonny, Interview 53, 9/5/15)*

It is important to note that the condemnation of homicidal violence does not represent an unwillingness to commit violence, but rather represents an interpretive code where certain types of violence are permissible, and others are prohibited. In fact, some white supremacists adhered to a version of the street culture that glorified fist fighting over other types of violence.[49] For these participants, interpersonal violence was more sensual and intimate, which provided them a sense of personalization they could not attain with other types of violence (e.g., shootings, bombings).[50] Similar to other participants, Sonny's progression toward homicidal violence did not extend past considerations or radical talk as he struggled with the absolute and destructive na-

ture of such action. Sonny explains that he was willing to physically assault someone but would not have been able to execute bombings or other acts of lethal violence. From this perspective, more severe forms of violence such as murder (e.g. lynchings) or mass-casualty violence may require a higher degree of radicalization than street-level and interpersonal violence.[51] For other participants, observing the deadly aftermath of actual attacks such as the Oklahoma City bombing generated similar moral objections. For instance,

> *The Order, I looked up to those guys… That is what we wanted and talked about doing, but when we saw all the children, the reality of all that shit sunk in… sure, we could justify killing a secretary by saying, "anybody who greases the gears of tyranny is not innocent." But try and explain to me how those kids are not innocent. Even the most devout Nazi brain couldn't justify it. (Karl, Interview 76, 1/9/2016)*

Karl's account represents an element of the street culture in which violence against "innocent bystanders" or "civilians" (e.g., women, children, elderly) is considered inappropriate.[52] Although Karl brainstormed ideas for overthrowing the government, a moral breach occurred when he learned that children were killed in the Oklahoma City bombing. From this perspective, killing children represents an "upper limit" or threshold to violence that Karl was not willing to cross because of their innocence and inability to defend themselves.[53] At this point in the process, when participants are unable to justify the use of violence, a recalculation occurs that limits the acceptability of homicidal violence.

In addition to moral considerations, participants discussed how pragmatic concerns reduced the permissibility of homicidal violence. While many participants ideologically believed that violent force would eventually be required to establish a White homeland, they pragmatically and rhetorically condemned violence because they saw it as self-defeating. For these individuals, mainstreaming the white supremacist movement and gaining social and political power (rather than physical power) is the most efficient way of generating long-term change. For example,

> *I think the FBI was overbearing. I look at the government like a monster, like Frankenstein. The more you intimidate the monster, the more he is going to knock you out of the way… you can't fucking touch them blow to blow in any way, shape, or form. I mean one man taking down a federal building isn't going to stop anything… We should be recruiting people of standing. We need to get people working the infrastructure of the country in our groups like the judges and cops. (Damon, Interview 72, 11/22/2015)*

For Damon, homicidal violence is inappropriate because such actions are perilous against the vast resources and power of the federal government. Similar to other participants, Damon prides himself on being smart and cautious, running a legitimate business, and having a strategy for claiming victory in a future race war.[54] Rather than going "blow to blow" against the federal government, Damon suggests white supremacists must strategically defeat their enemies by projecting a positive public image that will help mainstream the white supremacist movement and attract high-quality members such as judges and law enforcement officers. Like other participants, Damon described the Oklahoma City bombing as "counterproductive," "pointless," and "idiotic" despite the fact that Timothy McVeigh is simultaneously described by white supremacists as a "martyr" for the cause. The diverse opinions of the Oklahoma City bombing underscore the indeterminate nature of the factors that constrain homicidal violence among extremists. Along the same lines, participants considered homicidal violence as inappropriate because it could damage the movement's public image, and therefore, hinder recruitment efforts.[55] For example,

> *More people are going to respect what you're saying if you do it in a smart, respectful manner. They're not going to listen to you if you blow up buildings full of innocent people. You're making yourself look like an idiot, and you're making the message look like an idiot… plus I never wanted to go to jail, you know, what good are you sitting in prison? Say like something did happen, then you'd be sitting in some cell and wouldn't be out there to fight. For what? For dumb shit. (Melissa, Interview 47, 7/21/2015)*

Similar to Damon, Melissa suggests the white supremacist movement must pragmatically generate long-term social and political change by utilizing non-violent strategies such as political marches and recruitment. Such actions will allow the white supremacist movement to appeal to an increasing number of conservative mid-

dle-class Whites. In addition to explaining how homicidal violence could jeopardize the group's public image and recruitment efforts, Melissa pragmatically weighs the costs of committing homicidal violence against the risk of potential incarceration.[56] For some participants, fear of incarceration constrained their radicalization toward homicidal violence since they had "something to lose" should they violate the law and become formally sanctioned.[57] Other participants expressed concerns that acting violent may create a model or script that their children would mimic. These and other reasons illustrate how fear is a general factor with multiple manifestations that has the potential to reduce the permissibility of homicidal violence.

Conclusion

Despite wide recognition among academics that homicidal violence is rare, few studies offer explanations of the factors that constrain extremists from committing a higher number of violent incidents.[58] To address this issue, we examined how participants perceive homicidal violence as an appropriate or inappropriate political strategy. Based on our findings, participants discussed how homicidal violence could be an appropriate defensive measure in RAHOWA or through divine mandate but also considered homicidal violence as largely inappropriate due to moral concerns and its politically ineffective nature. It is important to note that the condemnation of homicidal violence does not represent an unwillingness to commit violence, but rather represents an interpretive code where certain types of violence are permissible, and others are prohibited. Despite nonparticipation in homicidal violence, most of the individuals in our sample (N = 63; 69%) were involved in other types of violence such as ideologically-motivated attacks, interpersonal disputes, and violence related to economic incentives. Considering this, we caution against any conclusions that our participants' absence of homicidal violence translates into a lack of violent potential.

The distinction between when homicidal violence is appropriate and inappropriate has important theoretical implications. In particular, the current study highlights the indeterminate nature of factors that, for some encourage violence and others, constrain violence. It is difficult to determine the exact factors that mitigate against involvement in violence as some of our participants rhetorically condemned homicidal violence but proposed conditions in which they would consider such actions appropriate. For instance, a portion of the sample pragmatically condemned homicidal violence because they felt long-term change would be achieved through social and political power rather than physical power, while at the same time suggesting homicidal violence as a form of self-defense is sensible. Participants also expressed conflicting moral standards by indicating that homicidal violence is inappropriate as it can result in the death of innocent women, children, and the elderly, while simultaneously suggesting that such actions are appropriate if they represent fulfilling moral obligations to future generations of the White race. As future research examines the factors that constrain extremist violence, efforts should be made to weigh the relative prevalence of these constraining barriers. In doing so, researchers can take additional steps toward understanding which factor or factors represent the "upper limit" or threshold for homicidal violence.

Finally, capturing how white supremacists frame the permissibility of homicidal violence reveals important markers useful for policy. In particular, the current study highlights inconsistencies between what people say and do. For members of extremist groups, talk is one of the most concrete manifestations of how adherents construct and negotiate a collective identity that involves violent and aggressive worldviews. While a majority of the sample reported participating in "violent talk" in which members expressed White power ideology by invoking the use of violence as well as discussing hypothetical homicidal attacks, only a small minority moved beyond brainstorming to practical proposals of assassinations, bombings and/or shooting sprees that involve detailed coordination.[59] While such interactions provided members with a sense of doing, these discussions did not necessarily involve a direct correspondence between a person's words and future behavior. In these situations, talk may become the action as actors exchange these extreme statements with an understanding that the words are not meant as literal expressions of future behavior.

Such a finding should give those who assume consistency between words and action pause. While dehumanizing language is essential to the escalation process toward violence because it removes moral constraints that prevent humans from harming each other, the relationship between words and violence is complicated by potential discrepancies between words expressed during "radical talk" and a person's underlying perceptions or attitudes that may constrain violent behavior. For example, a person whose general attitude may include the idea that homicidal violence is counterproductive may also engage in radical talk that glorifies homicidal violence and includes expressing ideas related to committing homicidal violence. All of this points to the need for additional empirical and theoretical investigation of the complex dynamics and conditions that may promote and/or simultaneously constrain homicidal violence.

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Internal Debates, Doubts and Discussions on the Scope of Jihadi Violence: The Case of the Turnup Terror Squad

by Donald Holbrook

Abstract

Do Islamist extremists express any doubts on the use of violence? This article seeks to address this question by studying private conversations between Islamist militant sympathisers, including ISIS supporters and those who went on to plan acts of terrorism. It identifies internal brakes on violent escalation from these threads and groups these according to four overlapping debates concerning group identity, targeting and exclusion, family and friendship dynamics, and knowledge acquisition. It examines how these brakes relate to logics of strategy, morals, ego-maintenance, out-group boundaries and organisation, shedding light on the interplay between macro-, meso-, and micro-level dynamics and developments in the in-group's external environment. It finds that while consensus regarding the legitimacy of mass-casualty terrorism remained consistent, disagreements emerged regarding the exclusion and targeting of members of the faith community, knowledge acquisition and evidence, the legality and morality of public executions, and the impact of organisational splits. Yet, the article also finds that despite these differences, in-group cohesion was not undermined, and violence may have been redirected, rather than abandoned, as a result of braking dynamics.

Keywords: Terrorism, Islamist extremism, jihadism, internal brakes, Telegram, *takfir*, identity

Introduction

In autumn 2014, counterterrorism police in London arrested two young British men who had been in the advanced stages of planning terrorist attacks in the city. School friends Tarik Hassane and Suhaib Majeed, both 22, had planned to use a small motorcycle and illegally acquired firearms to carry out a drive-by shooting, most likely targeting soldiers or police officers. Majeed was arrested first, in late September, after he had collected a gun, ammunition and a silencer from contacts in the criminal underworld. Hassane was arrested two weeks later, after returning to the UK from Khartoum, where he had been studying medicine. Majeed was a physics student at King's College London and chairman of its Islamic Society. The pair, and their social circle, were said to have had contacts with Islamist militants fighting in Syria, which Hassane claimed to have visited a year prior to his arrest, where he practiced using firearms. He pledged allegiance to the leader of the Islamic State group (ISIS), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in July 2014, a few days after Baghdadi declared himself 'caliph' of the Islamic State. It is unclear when Hassane and Majeed, or their associates, began developing their attack plans, but prosecutors argued that their intent and capability to carry out these acts had been established beyond any doubt. In March 2016, they were convicted and sentenced to life in prison.[1]

This is thus a case involving individuals with declared sympathies for one of the most violent militant organisations of recent times, who had successfully acquired the means to carry out lethal acts of violence and were foiled in the final stages of executing their plan. At first, therefore, it may seem counter-intuitive to examine this case for any evidence of internal brakes on violent escalation, or self-imposed efforts to restrain or limit violence. Yet, as I hope to demonstrate below, this case reveals important instances where members of the in-group questioned or sought to temper the level of violence being endorsed or deployed.[2] These doubts, disquiets and efforts of moderation emerged at the outer reaches of the ideological milieu with which the perpetrators and their associates identified: the Islamist militant movement that spawned groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

These individuals had already accepted the legitimacy of mass casualty terrorism, but were open to debates about its timing, direction and scope. These peripheries are arguably particularly worthy of analysis with respect to internal brakes on violence, since they highlight the nuances of braking contexts and the relevance of this framework across the spectrum of political violence, including different *degrees* of lethal violence. This case involves individuals who tried to carry out acts of terrorism, so the 'brakes' that can be highlighted are not binary questions about whether or not lethal violence can or should be used. Instead, conversations about restraint were more complex and centred on the levels of violence with which members were comfortable.

The dynamics discussed below are also important because they reveal examples of pre-existing notions about the legitimate scope of violence being tested by new developments, interpretations or information. Furthermore, the debates described in this article are significant because they incorporate macro-, meso- and micro-perspectives whereby individual concerns expressed among group members reflect broader organization-level developments (meso), which in turn are shaped in part by major strategic and ideological shifts within the wider Salafi-jihadi or Islamist militant milieu (macro)—especially the emergence of ISIS and related intra-militant disputes about legitimate violence.[3] While this article concentrates on debates among a close-knit group of individuals, therefore, it sheds light on the interplay between these micro-level dimensions and broader meso- and macro-level developments. Finally, the perspectives adopted in this article are important as they rely on private and candid exchanges between individuals actively involved in planning acts of terrorism, captured during the time these plans were being formulated, thus giving us a rare glimpse of these internal dynamics.

The data that is analysed consists of 3,200 online private messages that were sent via the social networking platform Telegram, between July and September 2014, involving the two convicted individuals and twenty-eight of their additional associates who had also declared their support for Salafi jihadism and were members of a chat group called Turnup Terror Squad. Documents containing these threads were prepared by the prosecution and presented at court during the trial of the two subjects and were accessed by the author after their conviction.[4]

While the nature of this case—involving declared ISIS supporters planning acts of terrorism—sheds important light on internal braking dynamics that still might be found at such extremes, its timing brings added significance which is worthy of brief elucidation.

2014 was one of the most tumultuous years in the modern history of Islamist militancy. The Islamic State group, which had declared its independence from Al-Qaeda in 2013, was finally disowned by the latter in February 2014, accentuating the disunity within the movement. ISIS reached what was arguably the peak of its power in June when it captured Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city. Its leader declared himself caliph whilst other rivals denounced his authority. Members and sympathisers of this movement were presented with stark choices and conflicting interpretations of events and decisions, and the religious, political or practical justifications behind them. There were fundamental divisions over the strategy, legality, and morality of militancy, represented by the violent excess of ISIS, on the one hand, and Al-Qaeda's vision for a milder, more restrained - but ultimately more sustainable - campaign of violence, on the other.[5]

The Telegram members in this study were confronted with this reality, prompting divergent - and often conflicting - expressions of group loyalty and support. ISIS's excesses triggered further debates about the appropriate and legitimate scope of violence and members questioned their ability and authority to contribute to these different groups and agendas. Different internal braking dynamics could thus be detected in these threads, where members engaged in frank discussions about the Islamist militant universe and their place in it. These dynamics are described in detail below and discussed in relation to our understanding on the internal brakes on violent escalation.

First, though, it is important to set out the position of the Telegram members with respect to the use of violence and targeting, given the heterogeneity of groups and arguments around them. As mentioned, these individuals

were at the outer reaches of Salafi-jihadism, but it is important to explain what that looked like in this case, what was considered 'normal', and thus to highlight more clearly how, when and where those norms were tested or where resistance to escalation emerged.

Extremist Positioning

The Turnup Terror Squad, perhaps as the name suggests, recognised and apparently cherished its fringe position and referred to other members of the faith community as "moderates" who had been led astray. They spoke of "sending Awlaki"—a reference to Anwar al-Awlaki, the Yemeni-American extremist preacher who joined Al-Qaeda—to correct the errors of the "moderates" via his published lectures and sermons that were frequently shared, and quoted from, on the forum.

Members of the Telegram group shared other extremist content too, including ISIS videos, which they uploaded onto YouTube, and religious edicts on the need for jihad. Their position on violence was clear: they celebrated acts of terrorism and terrorist groups and their leaders. One member commented: "I just told my english [*sic*] teacher publicly that I support 911"—a reference to the September 2001 attacks in the United States. Others engaged in debates about who had been a more important figure, Awlaki or Usama bin Ladin, the erstwhile leader of Al-Qaeda. Members shared pictures of themselves viewing or brandishing jihadi propaganda under the heading "ScholarSelfies".[6]

Fighting, violence, "jihad fisabeel allah" (war in the name of God) was openly endorsed and celebrated and the group was urged to help the jihadists either by joining them, sending money, supporting their families or at least speaking "good about them."[7]

There was complete contempt for non-Muslims too. One participant in these threads complained about the "filthy najis [unclean]" that he had encountered at his local supermarket in the UK. Another wrote in a separate context: "let's do a amaliya [operation] on kuffar [unbelievers] whilst they're shopping." "I'm down," his friend replied, "send them straight to jahanam [hell] and save whoever we can and help them on to path to Jannah [heaven]."[8]

Attitudes towards other Muslims were similarly disdainful. Hassane warned one of his friends that he would "make a TK" (*takfir*) - or declare him an unbeliever - if he continued to go to a Sufi mosque.[9] Several spoke of their dismay when a group of British Imams published a video condemning ISIS: "uk sunni + shia against isis smh [shaking my head]", one remarked. Of women in Islam, one Turnup participant wrote that they had *udhr*, an excuse, for their ignorance "because they're all dumb bitches." His friend replied: "Effffff women."[10]

Specific issues and themes were raised too. One group member was asked: "what do you think of Democracy?" He replied, "I think that its [*sic*] shirk [idolatry] and everyone in the parliament are kuffar [unbelievers]". The issue of a covenant of security was discussed too. This refers to verbal or written contracts or agreements (*'ahd*) between people promising mutual peace and security (*aman*) between them, based on the prophetic method, rendered void if either side violates the compact.[11] In a post from early August, Majeed, quoting from an Islamic scholar, wrote: "There is no such thing as a visa being a covenant, especially with countries that have openly declared war on Islam, and even if it was a covenant they would have broken it already because they have laws that protect the insulting of the Prophet […] and this is enough to wage Jihad on them let alone other things". His friends and associates echoed these sentiments, confirming that they reflected the position of "triple A" (Awlaki) and "obl" (bin Ladin).[12]

To be clear, these issues - on *takfir*, covenant of security and related topics - reflect major and bitter debates about relations between believers and unbelievers, the composition of those categories, and the nature of conflict between them, that have raged and shaped different currents of Islamist militancy for decades.[13]

Members of the Turnup Terror Squad absorbed some of these debates, tried to understand and interpret them and relate to their reality, as they saw it.

Internal Brakes

Despite the universality of extremist sympathies within this group of friends, however, some doubts, distractions and objections could be detected in these threads that brought into question the level of violence that could or ought to be endorsed. The context of these conversations can be grouped into four overlapping categories. First, there were concerns over group membership and identity that reflected the increasingly fractured world of Islamist militancy where Al-Qaeda and ISIS had emerged as major rivals, effectively splitting this world into two camps with very different visions on the way forward, as mentioned. Second, there were debates about targeting and the boundaries of the in-group and out-group, particularly in relation to the aforementioned *takfir*. Third, members reported quarrels and concerns over family and friends, the prospect of "converting" them to a jihadi mindset or the frustration of encountering their disapproval for the extremist outbursts of group members. Fourth, members questioned their level of knowledge, understanding and access to information, and how this might affect their position and ability to act and make decisions.

Let us unwrap these in sequence, while remembering that these debates often fused together. For example, group participants might seek to respond to the out-group definitions of external organisations and leaders, that might, in turn, prompt disputes with friends or searches for relevant evidence. For purposes of clarity, however, it is useful to discuss these separately in more detail.

Group Identity

In early July 2014, Hassane wrote a message on the Turnup Telegram group saying: "guys I gave bayah [pledge of allegiance] btw."[14] He had given his fealty to the leader of ISIS, and urged his friends to do the same. But a civil war had broken out among Islamist militants fighting in Syria and beyond, which coloured and confused debates about group loyalties at the grassroots. Some members of Turnup promoted the Al-Nusra Front instead, which was Al-Qaeda's ally at the time and ISIS' chief rival in Syria. "Go listen to Joulani's speech", one critic of the Al-Nusra front was told, referring to Abu Muhammad al-Joulani, the leader of the group. Al-Nusra was going to become an Islamic Emirate in Syria, "in the next few weeks", group members were told. "I don't like JN [Jabhat al-Nusra]", another user retorted. The Al-Nusra Front represented the "weirdest case", a third member reflected, they "looked so promising" and "were intelligent", but ultimately a disappointment.[15]

There was disappointment about the direction taken by Al-Qaeda after the death of bin Ladin too. One member of the Turnup Terror Squad posted a video by Al-Qaeda's new leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who had been the group's second-in-command for many years. "Az getting old, you can tell he's ageing from when we first saw him", one user responded. Others felt Al-Qaeda's stance against ISIS undermined the Caliphate and the unity among the jihadists, whilst one user complained that "Jn is a disgrace to al Qaeda", for denouncing members of ISIS.[16]

ISIS, its leader, its military achievements and nascent state - as well as the propaganda output that glorified these accomplishments - were repeatedly promoted and celebrated on these threads. "I don't like people who chat crap about the Khilafah," one user commented. "It is fully established", another agreed.[17]

Yet the group was also criticised. Notably, and despite calls from Hassane and others for complete and unwavering support for the new "caliph", these divergent views appeared to be tolerated. Debate was not shut down and there appeared to be a degree of flexibility as far as group loyalty was concerned, despite the bitterness of the disputes that were unfolding between Islamist militant groups in the Levant, and their backers globally. Whilst this flexibility may have helped members to stay involved in the Turnup Terror Squad despite their differences,

it may also have muddled perceptions about the direction of Islamist militancy, and its outer limits.

Majeed, Hassane's long-term friend and co-conspirator, was far less keen on ISIS, for example. In one post he wrote: "I read somewhere dawla [ISIS] make takfir on Hamas," which Majeed admired, adding nine cry-face emojis. Others wondered whether the controversy the group had attracted among other Salafis and jihadists was in some way warranted. "It seems like a lot of knowledgable [*sic*] disapprove of the khilafah", one user pointed out. Later, reinforcing this sentiment, Majeed informed 'Turnup' members that Muhammad al-Hasan al-Dedew, a prominent Salafi scholar from Mauritania, had "ripped" the "caliphate", denouncing its leader. "I'm baffled", one member commented. "So he's not Amir of every Muslim in the world?" asked another, referring to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. "That's what he [Dedew] was [saying]", Majeed replied. In response, some members tried to defend ISIS. "The knowledgeable people who disapprove of it have been refuted hardddd. By books & PDFs", one user commented, without giving specifics. Those who criticised ISIS were not "fully aware" of what was going on in the "caliphate", another suggested.[18]

Meanwhile, calls for unity among jihadists were universal. Referring to Zawahiri, a Turnup member commented: "if the aq man etc give bay'a then khalas [enough] 100% [the caliphate is] correct". "Why don't they [Al-Qaeda] and make us all united?" his associate asked. Majeed wrote in another post: "If everyone unites that will be sick, inshaAllah it happens, 2015 gonna be one peak year boy."[19]

But there were questions about the extent to which ISIS had contributed to the disunity, which in itself would be seen as a grave sin. Responding to criticism of the Al-Nusra Front, one member of the Turnup Terror Squad wrote: "Disunity came from people in dawla sayin you are either with us or this will happen to you". Turning this argument on its head, an ISIS supporter replied: "fighting them [ISIS] causes more bloodshed and disunity. A khilafa can become ligit simply by the strength of the leader", he argued. Reflecting on the group's record of violence, the ISIS critic retorted: "People don't want to risk killing Muslims". "Then they should realise that staying disunited will cause the death of more muslims," the ISIS supporter replied. "I don't think the khilafa is 100% legit", the critic warned. A third member then joined the conversation: "I think the Khilafah is 100% legit. And the best way for unity is the Khilafah. And if IS make mistake you should make baraa'a [disavow] from the mistake not from the group as many have done". "The sahaabah [companions of the prophet] [made] mistakes in their time when they done J [jihad]," he added.[20]

But the debate continued and turned to the morals of ISIS' actions. "Don't ever get gassed [beguiled] and think the way dowla beheads ppl is good", the original instigator of the discussion wrote, adding: "It's completely contradictory to the sunnah [prophetic method]". He continued: "And the displaying heads in public is not from the sunnah at all. Abu bakr [ibn Uthman] was shown a head and he rejected it. They [the companions of the prophet] said the Persians and Romans do this [beheading]". A fourth member of Turnup then joined the conversation, claiming "Isis are like alhajjaj ibn yusuf". This is a reference to an Umayyad governor of Iraq and Persia who was known for his harsh tactics and brutal treatment of his adversaries. Notably, the comparison between ISIS' leaders and ibn Yusuf featured repeatedly in denunciations of ISIS by other jihadists such as Ayman al-Zawahiri.[21] The staunch supporters of ISIS were put on the defensive: they suggested that some mistakes may have been made in relation to beheadings and accepted that there were legitimate disagreements over the public execution of US journalist James Foley, beheaded just five days before these discussions took place.[22]

The original ISIS critic pressed his point further: "Beheading ppl in this crazy manner. Parading the heads is not something normal. Having little kids hold heads is not normal. Taking picture with [their] heads isn't normal". The ISIS supporter finally conceded: "Yeah beheading needs to be addressed". Seeking common ground, the ISIS critic noted that ultimately unity among the jihadists was key and that the "kuffar" were "loving" these quarrels, adding "#DivideAndConquer". Perhaps in an effort to lighten the mood, he called the ISIS supporter a "blind dowla fanboy haha". "Loooool I'm supporting the haqq [the truth]", he replied, adding he would now point to a hundred mistakes that the Al-Nusra Front had made, referring to the ISIS critic's declared support

for that group.

Targeting

These disagreements over group alignment and the implications of identifying with particular rival factions touched upon the issue of targeting and in particular the excommunication (*takfir*) of fellow Muslims. This was a thread that ran through these captured conversations. Members of the Turnup Terror Squad often seemed eager to declare co-religionists unbelievers if they felt their belief was insincere. They wielded *takfir* quite literally as a rhetorical weapon against other believers, with the implication that once they were declared non-Muslim, they could in turn be targeted with violence. One user commented in response to criticism of ISIS, "I'm loading my TK [takfir] gun."[23] In approaching the concept of *takfir* so casually, the group followed a longer tradition of near boundless excommunication that had come to define sectarian militant groups like ISIS and highlight internal disputes among jihadists.[24]

Turnup participants repeatedly announced that they were "doing TK" on various individuals and groups based on what they had heard about their actions or beliefs. They even threatened to "do TK" on those who failed to "do TK" when exposed to transgressions, a notion sometimes referred to as "chain *takfir*".[25] These debates were informed by some of the thinking that has shaped contemporary approaches to *takfir*, in particular the ten "nullifiers" in Islam developed by 18th century Islamist reformist Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, concerning deeds and thoughts that would render Muslims non-believers.[26] Turnup members declared the King of Saudi Arabia a non-Muslim, for instance, because he had become guilty of Wahhab's eighth nullifier, supporting the polytheists against the Muslims.

In discussing "TK", the group would also explore limitations on the application of *takfir*, which given its implications for targeting are essential for any emergent brakes on violence or its justification. Members debated historical and theological precedent that would qualify the application of *takfir*, such as the excuse of ignorance - *Udhr bil-Jahl* - whereby *takfir* would be inapplicable if the person who had erred simply didn't know any better. Some pointed to exegesis that suggested that even if such ignorance was corrected, *takfir* could still not be declared because the misinterpretations could be too deep-rooted. One Turnup member quoted Abu Qatadah, a prominent Salafi cleric and critic of ISIS:

> We cannot make takfir on someone once we expose to them the errors in their ta'weel [interpretation]. This is because we don't know whether they accept our arguments deep down in the heart, so they may still believe in their ta'weel. Ibn Tammiyah [d. 1328 CE] refrained from making takfir on the people at his time who rejected the attributes of Allah, for this reason.[27]

Others noted the importance of establishing the evidence before implementing *takfir* or its punishments. Referring to a hypothetical case of how to deal with an incarcerated transgressor, one member wrote: "I would qeem the hujja [establish the truth] before I behead him." Others pointed out that such punishment would only be lawful if power over the transgressor was absolute and the above caveats, concerning the excuse of ignorance and entrenched misinterpretation, had been addressed.[28]

Ultimately, the Turnup members agreed that the issue of *takfir* was fraught with difficulty: "I need to study the fiqh [jurisprudence] of TK", one commented. "You will never finish it lol", another replied. But there was recognition of the harmful consequences of excessive *takfir* too. "Makin TK aint a joke," one user cautioned, "its [*sic*] a BMT [Big Man Ting]." "We love making tk dont we?" another wrote. One member pointed out: "You don't want to make tk. We want ppl to be muslims."[29]

The notion of targeting non-Muslims was a less controversial topic. Members of the Telegram group celebrated acts of terrorism against non-combatants, as noted above, and accepted - without exception - the legitimacy of violence against unarmed adversaries. Yet, some statements to this effect appeared to test the outer limits of

such targeting of non-Muslims too. "Can u target women and children like specifically", one member of Turnup asked, before qualifying: "if she is a leader of kufr [disbelief] […] an assassination". "How is a child goin to be a leader of kufr", his associate retorted. "Calm down akhi [brother]", another urged. A third member noted that according to Muhammad ibn al-Uthaymeen, a Saudi Salafi scholar, non-combatants could be killed only as an act of reciprocity, in response to an enemy's targeting of the faith community's non-combatants: "we can do the same to them as they do to us", the member wrote.[30]

In light of this understanding, however, other questions remained. The case of abducted British aid worker Alan Henning, whose death had already been rumoured by late September 2014, was raised towards the end of these Telegram discussions. "Is it true Alan henning had a covenant with muslimeen?" Majeed wrote shortly before he was arrested, implying his killing would be unlawful. Another contributor wondered why his aid convoy had been "unable" to find a Muslim driver, suggesting the episode could have been avoided. ISIS released a video showing Henning's execution on 3rd October.[31]

Family and Friends

Greater complexity was added to debates about targeting and excommunication when the position of close friends and family was considered in this regard. Several threads from the Turnup Terror Squad pointed to members' frustration as they encountered opposition from relatives to their extremist sympathies. One Telegram participant told his friends that he had argued with his uncle about the illegitimacy of the government where he resided, claiming they did not rule by sharia. The uncle dismissed these thoughts: "he was like […] focus on your studies". Remarkably, another member then replied: "Hujja [proof] has been made… his blood is halal [permissible] and baraa'a from [disavow] him". Family opposition, therefore, did not always translate into brakes.[32]

Other messages, though, suggested that such family quarrels often irked group members. Referencing a conversation about Usama bin Ladin, universally revered among this group, one participant complained: "Lol my mum was like he killed innocent people. She was like 'Id [*sic*] never kill someone innocent, Muslim of kafir". 'He made a big mistake'. My brother & sister were like 'HES A TERRORIST'." Others responded recounting similar experiences: "I'm having bare arguments with my fam. They don't give me a chance to [speak]", one member complained. "I told them that jews and christians goin to hell", he continued. His associate replied: "Allah made takfeer on them in several ayat so if allah and the messenger […] made takfeer on anyone we do it aswell [*sic*]". "I think my mum thinks ahl al kitab [people of the book: Jews, Christians] aren't kuffar", a third participant wrote. A fourth member then joined the conversation reporting that his father had reprimanded him saying: "who are you to call someone a kafir u dont knw if one day he myt [*sic*] become a good muslim even if he commits act of kufr". His friend replied: "your dad refuted himself :([He] ain't muslim [*sic*]". But the son seemed less keen to disavow his father, replying simply: "[it] is complicated man."[33]

This conversation flared up again a few weeks later. The Telegram member had had another argument with his father, this time about the Kurds, who were at that moment spearheading the fight against ISIS in northern Iraq. His father supported the Kurds, pointing to their suffering under the reign of Saddam Hussein, whilst the son was a declared and enthusiastic supporter of ISIS. People were too "nationalistic", Majeed complained.[34]

Confrontations with, or interventions from, friends were reported too. Majeed told fellow group participants about a friend in Syria who "calls Isis Khawarij and hates them."[35] Another said one of his best friends was from Raqqa, which ISIS had claimed as its "capital", and hated the group "with all his heart". "Smh [shaking my head]" one friend replied. "Im [*sic*] currently loading my tk gun...." wrote another. Yet another friend of a group member was reported as being "soo anti-isis." "Lol ignore him", his associate urged. "He is a sick guy tho", the other replied, pointing out he supported other "J groups" such as Al-Qaeda. "Lol then he's not up to date with J [jihad]", his friend retorted. "And brainwashed", the other member agreed.[36]

Members of Turnup also spoke in jest about their interactions with family, knowing that they would encounter objections to their views on jihad and violence. "Anytime I get on an ayah [verse] about jihad I'm gonna ask my mum what it means haha", one member joked. Another wrote: "Oi I was like to my mom in going turkey to turn up with my friends she was like ok. Then she was like u wanna go to syria from there. I was like looooooool."[37]

Recognition that close friends and family did not share the extremist expressions of the group had other manifestations too. Several members described efforts to "recruit" those closest to them and convince them of the merits of their cause. One Turnup member was asked whether his sister was "on manhaj," or the correct path. "She knows little about islam. So no", he replied, though he noted: "she doesn't speak when i big up obl [bin Ladin] and that. And she knows how sick j is in islam". But on the other hand, he noted, she had Shia friends. "I need to remind her to read the wala wal bara [loyalty and disavowal] books". "From what I'm hearing from you now, ur sister is open to manhaj", a fellow Telegram participant responded, adding: "Give her AA", Anwar al-Awlaki. Others described similar efforts to convince family and friends. One user talked of sending a book by Abdullah Azzam, a seminal figure of modern jihad, to his mother. "I'm radicalising my friend", one member wrote. "Im radicalising my lil bro", wrote another. The presence of loved-ones who were seen as "jahil", religiously ignorant, was thus a bugbear, and one that group members sought to address by sharing propaganda, extremist literature and engaging in debate, whilst also resisting or ignoring criticism and denunciation of the extremist position they had adopted.[38]

Knowledge

A limiting factor as far as the Turnup members' extremist expressions were concerned, however, was their incomplete understanding of the world around them and their place in it, which caused some confusion about the roles and positions they could adopt and the consequences of such decisions. One participant who had engaged in a long thread about his intention to declare the King of Saudi Arabia a non-Muslim, then asked: "Do I have to know Arabic to make takfeer on the king?"[39]

Even though Hassane went on to develop plans to carry out an attack in London in the autumn, after his declaration of fealty to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in July 2014, he seemed initially unsure of what this decision would entail. "I gave bayah u know," he wrote. "So what now?" Majeed asked. "Yeah now I'm just carrying on medicine and that's my ameer [leader] lol", Hassane replied. Majeed asked again: "Lool don't you need to make hijrah? [emigrate to the caliphate]". "Shaykh said medicine is permissible", Hassane remarked. Majeed then asked which other professions might be permissible, but Hassane didn't respond.[40]

Whilst establishing facts was seen as important, the group members often struggled to reach a consensus about what these facts might be and the evidence behind these. Rumours abound and the evaluation of sources caused headaches which affected debates about the key issues described above, such as group identity and targeting. Reflecting Salafi norms, the group was keen to rely on scripture and scholarly evidence from the formative years of Islam, but often struggled to apply or interpret these. Whilst the principle of living according to the precedent set by the first faith communities was universally accepted, what this meant in practice was unclear.

Debating whether the Al-Nusra Front in Syria had transgressed, for instance, Turnup members sought to rely on the example set by the pious forefathers when they tried to resolve disputes. But they disagreed on what these mechanisms of conflict resolution had looked like at the time, including the composition of consultative assemblies. Ali ibn Talib, the fourth caliph, had been present at a particular assembly one participant insisted. "He wasn't," another replied. "Ali was there I checked," the other retorted. "Where'd u check?" came the reply. "Multiple sources," he said. "Show me one," the other insisted, but received no reply.[41]

The authenticity of more contemporary statements was questioned too. There was a debate about how the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" - the Taliban in Afghanistan - had responded to developments in Syria, with claims and counterclaims about the validity of certain statements. "This whole thing can be a big fake", one

member commented.[42]

Unsurprisingly, group participants used the forum as a sounding board for their ideas or asked for tips on religious edicts. One member wrote: "quick whats [*sic*] the hadith [prophet's record] that the non Muslim is not safe until he accepts Islam. I forgot the hadeeth and cant [*sic*] find it." "Kitab al iman", his friend replied, adding: "It's very sahih [authentic] lol". Some members also gave updates on their efforts to acquire more knowledge and the challenges this entailed. Majeed wrote: "I'm reading abu qatadas 21 pages on the khilafah, 5 pages in I'm done bruv, tiring work". "Keep it up bruh", his friend urged.[43]

Some sources of knowledge and inspiration, however, also came from less obvious directions. At one point, a group member posted a link to an article on *Vice* news titled "British Fighter in Syria Describes Angels and a Battlefield 'Miracle'", about a video from a British jihadist fighting in Syria who said he experienced divine intervention during an attack on a government checkpoint.[44] Other forum members praised the apparent miracle and reposted the story, as if it was a piece of Islamist propaganda. "I felt an immense love for this brother," one of them wrote. Other aspects of mainstream news, however, were often treated with suspicion. "Never believe the media unless it's confirmed by the Muslims", one member wrote. Another complained about the "moderates" lack of evidence on issues such as *takfir*, commenting: "when you ask them for evidence they being [*sic*] BBC, CNN, AlJazeera. Eff that![45]

Majeed initiated another thread in late July that revealed more profound doubts about jihad and their ability to embrace it. He wrote: "sometimes I think that we talk about j so much we've convinced ourselves were going to get shahadah [martyrdom] and that's it. But reality is, with what I do I'm not gonna get it". His friend echoed these concerns and wondered whether they had been "deceived" into focusing too much on jihad, at the expense of other elements of their faith. "I'm not saying it's not a massive part", Majeed continued, referring to jihad, but added: "It is when we talk about it so much we feel like it's the only part to the deen [religion]. When there's so many things that we have to do before we ever get there. […] I'm saying Allah won't give us shahadah if were wastemans to begin with. We end up becoming ahl al kalam. Ppl who just speak". "Yeah i know wat you mean", his friend agreed. Majeed asked: "Like do we really know the fiqh of salah [jurisprudence of prayer] or the fiqh of inheritance or fiqh of hajj". "Let us worry about developing a relationship with quran and having good manners", his friend replied, adding: "I have knowledge that I'm not applying so I'm not concerned with learning more". But Majeed seemed unconvinced: "This year I haven't forgotten about j but I've neglected everything else. I get this motivation to do Quran. Then it dies out for so long". A few weeks later he would finalise his plans to carry out acts of terrorism.[46]

Discussion

In these threads we have caught glimpses behind the scenes of the mostly frank and unguarded conversations between advocates of Islamist militancy. Yet, it should be stressed that this picture is incomplete, especially in relation to the involvement of key participants in violence. The two principal subjects whose case unveiled these exchanges became involved in the planning of acts of terrorism towards the end of this timeline, at least by autumn 2014, but the involvement of their Turnup friends in similar activities remains unknown.

Tying expressions to actions, in short, especially thoughts on violence to efforts to employ it, is inherently difficult. The "brakes" we can extract from these threads, therefore, are more abstract, illustrative of the types of issues that might cause concern among a grassroot group of Islamist extremists. Nevertheless, these discussions reveal insights that are of clear relevance to internal efforts to limit or qualify violence. The "internal brakes" typology developed by Busher, Holbrook and Macklin identified five related logics upon which such brakes on violence were based: strategy ('what works?'), morals ('what's right?'), ego-maintenance ('who are we?'), out-group definitions ('who are they?') and organisation ('what can/do we do?').[47] The Telegram threads provide numerous insights into how this framework applies at the outer reaches of Islamist extremism, and political

violence more generally.

Whilst some manifestations of violence against non-combatants were accepted by all 30 Turnup members, expressions were also made that could be interpreted as brakes on its escalation. These concerned - or were prompted by - thoughts regarding group identity, targeting, family and friends, and knowledge acquisition and deficits. Some of these rested on strategic logics: roles such as medicine were considered as alternatives to combat in support of the nascent 'state' created by ISIS, and there was protracted debate about the potential blowback from excessive use of *takfir* - excommunication. Moral logics played a major role: members expressed their disquiet regarding beheadings and the violent excesses of ISIS. Legality was a central, and related, question, prompting conversations about evidence and source material used to establish or critique the legitimacy of particular decisions.

As regards the logic of ego-maintenance, loyalty to different militant groups, such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, the Al-Nusra Front, and Hamas, demarcated different approaches towards violence and, in the case of anti-ISIS groups, delineated certain brakes on violence that incorporated the position of these organisations and highlighted the excesses of ISIS. On an individual level, attitudes towards *takfir* - and in turn the labelling of those who were too cavalier with the concept as takfiri - further shaped these self-perceptions. Notions of *takfir* were also central to the out-group logics of these brakes. Whilst the term was liberally applied, there was recognition that allowances had to be made for non-Muslims to become Muslim, and that such transitions ought to be encouraged, whilst for those believers who had allegedly transgressed there were debates about the justifications that could be made in their defence, such as their ignorance of the 'correct' interpretations. Out-group definitions were challenged, however, when it came to family and close friends who rejected extremism. Several members suggested they had a closer bond with their fellow Turnup associates or like-minded individuals than with their blood family as the latter contradicted their ideological positioning.

As for organisational logics, while the Turnup debates reflected the bitter disputes between jihadi organisations globally, particularly the Al-Qaeda – ISIS rivalry, this disunity did not appear to threaten the cohesion of the Turnup Terror Squad. Members did not abandon the group despite divergent opinions on group loyalties and remained cordial despite their different positions in this regard. Greater challenges, however, were posed by resource limitations, not in explicit ways but rather in terms of the absence of knowledge or the time required to absorb the theological precedent that some members felt they needed to become Salafi-jihadists.

Conclusion

Through these private Telegram threads, we gain a unique insight into the discussions and debates that take place internally between individuals seeking to plan acts of terrorism and their immediate friends and associates. Few studies have managed to shed light on these dynamics. Such level of granularity, however, drawing on primary evidence in particular, is essential given the complexity of factors leading to terrorism and its rarity and 'abnormality' in terms of outcomes. Indeed, the study illustrates how an initial or superficial glance at the Turnup Terror Squad, their group affiliations and sources of ideological inspiration would have presented a very partial and misleading picture of the reality on the ground.

On the surface, Turnup members might have seemed resolute, having declared their support for major Islamist terrorist organisations, whose propaganda they shared and uploaded online. They were confident enough to dismiss other Muslims - including family - as ignorant or even unbelievers and to condemn non-Muslims to death. They cherished their extremist positioning, spoke of the "moderate" Muslim mainstream that they considered misguided and talked of "radicalising" others.

Yet, beneath the surface there were doubts. There were doubts about the terrorist organisations to whom they had declared their loyalty: about their legitimacy and the morality of their actions. There was concern over

disunity among militants and what this meant for the implementation of jihad in practice. Other believers were excommunicated wantonly, but questions remained about *takfir* and how to apply it. Some recognised that wielding the "tk gun" too liberally would harm the community, but seemed unsure about how to rein in this excess. There was consensus that knowledge was key in order to navigate this extremist space, but deep uncertainty remained about whether members had the right information, whether they could interpret the knowledge they had, whether their sources were valid and what the implication of getting it wrong might be. There was, at times, moral outrage over some of the actions of the Islamist extremists that otherwise were promoted, ISIS especially, and particularly in response to staged beheadings of people deemed to be "innocents." Disquiet remained too about interventions from family and friends, how to respond to them and what that meant for these relationships.

However, this study also shows that even when doubts emerge, the result is not necessarily the abandonment of violence, but either the dismissal of doubts or a redirection of violence. The complexity of individuals' relationship with the ideology of extremist groups is also revealed. This seems dependent not only on the nature of the material they consume, but also their interpretation of it and the circumstances of their exposure. Furthermore, the study serves as a reminder of the complexity and non-linearity of the relationship between consumption of, or exposure to, extremist ideas and involvement in violence.

The study, therefore, raises questions regarding the extent to which brakes were ultimately successful in tempering violence. After all, the two principal subjects went on to plan acts of terrorism and their Turnup associates seemed unwavering in their support for revolutionary violence when Hassane and Majeed were arrested. Certainly, Majeed's concern that he had become too obsessed with jihad at the expense of his understanding of other core pillars of his faith did not result in him abandoning his plans to become involved in violence. Interventions from family and friends did not appear to have a braking effect either, though these were clearly framed as *external* attempts at braking violence, rather than internal. Members' comments certainly suggested, however, that they caused discomfort within the in-group.

This study also helps to illustrate how the interplay between internal brakes and changing context can be seen unfolding at multiple levels: within intra-personal and intra-group practice.[48] The fusion of macro-, meso- and micro-level dynamics was particularly notable. For instance, the Turnup exchanges pointed to in-group resilience at the micro level in response to potential brakes - organisational splits - that were taking place at the meso- (organisational) and macro-(ideological) levels. Despite the bitterness of these organisational disputes and the depth of ideological divergence, the Turnup group retained sufficient flexibility in this regard to absorb these differences.

Temporality is another dynamic that can be unpacked. Whilst external developments such as ISIS' declaration of a caliphate and concomitant demands of fealty impacted Hassane and shaped other group perceptions, its subsequent actions prompted others to question their position on sensitive issues such as the execution and dismembering of abductees, including James Foley and Alan Henning. ISIS' successes thus helped shape the subjects' worldview while its excesses led some to question the organisation's fit within the broader family of Islamist militancy. These cycles were rapid, covering a period of just a few weeks, accelerated by a constant news cycle and the Turnup members' constant social media presence where new events were interpreted and compared against existing perceptions of the world and their place in it.[49]

Ultimately, this case reveals that even at what may be considered a universally extremist realm - where mass casualty violence against civilians is accepted and promoted - brakes, or attempted brakes on the precise execution of such violence or its justifications emerge. From a counter-terrorism perspective, the case thus offers perhaps encouraging signs that attitudes towards violence at such peripheries are not set in stone, that some issues, *takfir* especially, remain deeply controversial, and that there is scope for moral outrage or existing moral norms to be tested. Conversely, however, the case also reveals that whilst these dynamics could evolve into successful and comprehensive brakes on violence, the result may not be to abandon violence, but rather to

channel lethal use of force into different directions that the perpetrators view as ultimately more sustainable.

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Notes

[] *The Guardian* (2016) 'Two British students jailed for plotting Isis-style drive-by shootings', (22nd April); Richard Spillet et al. (2016) 'Middle-class jihadists plotting bloodbath on London streets', *Daily Mail Online, URL:* https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3497125/Terror-pair-face-jail-plotting-gun-British-soldiers.html; Duncan Gardham (2016) 'Terror medics who recruited British doctors', *The Times* (24th March).

[2] Joel Busher, Donald Holbrook, Graham Macklin (2019) 'The Internal Brakes on Violent Escalation', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (February), URL: https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/internal-brakes-full-report/) [as of June 2020].

[3] Donatella Della Porta (2013) *Clandestine Political Violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Steven K. Worden SK and Robert D. Benford (1986) 'Frame alignment processes, micromobilization and movement participation', *American Sociological Review* 51, pp. 464-482.

[4] Hereafter referred to as R v Hassane/Majeed. This work builds on existing research concerning primary source material and involvement in terrorism. C.f. Donald Holbrook (2017) 'What Types of Media do Terrorists Collect?' *ICCT Research Paper* (September).

[5] Donald Holbrook (2017) *Al-Qaeda 2.0: A Critical Reader*, London: Hurst.

[6] R v Hassane/Majeed (2016). 'Turnup Terror Squad' Telegram threads. HM Courts & Tribunals Service.

[7] R v Hassane/Majeed (2016).

[8] Ibid.

[9] *Takfir* is usually defined as 'excommunication' and involves declaring someone an unbeliever, based on judgements of actions and thoughts considered to be such serious violations of religion so as to constitute *kufr*, unbelief. Joas Wagemakers (2012) *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[10] R v Hassane/Majeed (2016).

[11] Abdul Mun'em Mustafa Halimah Abu Basir (al-Tartusi) (no date) 'Covenants and Security in Islam' (*al-'ahd wa'l 'aman fi islaam*) available from URL: http://www.en.altartosi.com/Covenants.pdf (as of September 2020). What exactly constitutes 'agreement' and 'violation' of that agreement, remains hotly contested.

[12] R v Hassane/Majeed (2016).

[13] Brynjar Lia (2009) '"Destructive Doctrinarians": Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's Critique of the Salafis in the Jihadi Current', in: Roel Meijer (Ed.) (2009) *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, London: Hurst; Petter Nesser (2011) 'Ideologies of Jihad in Europe', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 23:2, 173-200, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2010.537587; Assaf Moghadam, Brian Fishman (2011) (Eds.) *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures*, Abingdon: Routledge; Quintan Wiktorowicz (2005) 'A Genealogy of Radical Islam', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 28:2, pp. 75-97, DOI: 10.1080/10576100590905057.

[14] *Bay'a* is defined as "pronouncement of allegiance to a ruler", Roel Meijer (Ed.) (2009): viii. As with other concepts dictating relations between people, it is hotly contested among Islamist militants and one of the key issues behind the split between Al-Qaeda and ISIS that revolved, among other things, about the degree to which declared fealty was 'inherited' by successors even when allegiance had been declared to their predecessors. Cf.. Donald Holbrook (2017).

[15] R v Hassane/Majeed (2016).

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Holbrook (2017), pp. 204, 264, 282.

[22] R v Hassane/Majeed (2016).

[23] Ibid.

[24] Roel Meijer (Ed.) (2009) *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, London: Hurst.

[25] Vera Mironova, Ekaterina Sergatskova, and Karam Alhamad (2017) 'The Bloody Split Within ISIS Inside the Group's Crackdown on Ultra-Extremists' *Foreign Affairs* (8th December).

[26] 'Abdul-'Azeez bin 'Abdillaah Ar-Raajihee (2003) *Explanation of The Nullifiers of Islaam of the Imaam and Mujaddid - Muhammad bin 'Abdil-Wahhaab,* Al-Ibaanah Book Publishing.

[27] R v Hassane/Majeed (2016).

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Referring to a group which denounced the authority of Ali ibn Talib, though often a euphemism for extremists.

[36] R v Hassane/Majeed (2016).

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Alice Speri (2014) 'British Fighter in Syria Describes Angels and a Battlefield 'Miracle" *Vice News* (July), URL: https://www.

vice.com/en_us/article/vbnjjd/british-fighter-in-syria-describes-angels-and-a-battlefield-miracle?utm_source=vicenewstwitter.

[45] R v Hassane/Majeed (2016).

[46] Ibid.

[47] Busher, Holbrook, Macklin (2019).

[48] Joel Busher, Donald Holbrook, Graham Macklin (forthcoming) 'How the 'internal brakes' on violent escalation work and fail: Towards a basic conceptual framework for understanding intra-group processes of restraint in militant groups', in progress.

[49] David Snow and Robert D. Benford (1992) 'Master Frames and Cycles of Protest', in: Aldon Morris & Carol Mueller (Eds.), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

A Downward Scale Shift? The Case of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

by Silvia Carenzi

Abstract

This article seeks to explain how Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), al-Qa'ida's former affiliate in Syria, adopted an increasingly locally-focused strategy. Drawing on the social movement literature, HTS's trajectory is conceptualized as a process of "downward scale shift. This article sets out a series of mechanisms that give rise to this process. In doing so, it serves to illustrate that while ideology is a key element in shaping militant groups' political behavior, insofar as it informs their strategies and their definition of enemies, militants' choices are also influenced by their interaction with other actors and the environment, and their own understanding of emerging opportunities and threats.

Keywords: Jihadism, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, social movements, scale shift.

Introduction: The Political Preferences of Jihadi Groups

The decision to "go global" is not a default choice for jihadists.[1] Transnational political violence is not "born as such"[2] and scaling up attacks, geographically speaking, is not a "natural" and unavoidable outcome, but rather is the result of a process marked by political agency,[3] involving militants' interactions with other actors and the environment.[4]

Jihadists' debates on whether priority should be assigned to the near or the far enemy (*al-'aduw al-qarib* and *al-'aduw al-ba'id*, respectively) [5] date back to the 1970s–1980s. The distinction was introduced by 'Abd al-Salam al-Faraj, a key figure from the Egyptian militant group al-Jihad. In his influential treatise *al-jihad al-farida al-gha'iba* ("Jihad: The Neglected Duty"), he advocated prioritizing the near over the far enemy [6] - with the latter at the time signifying Israel rather than the United States or other Western countries. Such views broadly reflected the orientation of the wider militant Islamist panoply active in those years. During the mid-to-late 1990s,[7] a small segment of the global jihadi community, spearheaded by al-Qa'ida's Osama bin Laden and Tanzim al-Jihad's Ayman al-Zawahiri, would alter the traditional enemy hierarchy, as well as the very meaning of "far enemy". They deemed it necessary to strike the United States first, so that governments in the MENA region - regarded by jihadists as puppets of Western countries - would fall,[8] thereby giving rise to a greater emphasis on international targeting. Nonetheless, this move was met with criticism and opposition not only within the broader jihadi landscape, but even within the al-Qa'ida group itself: for strategic reasons, for doctrinal reasons, and because the Taliban leadership hosting al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan did not approve of such attacks and the resulting media exposure.[9] Within the jihadi community, debates persisted on which strategy should be pursued.[10] In particular, since the 2000s, we have witnessed a process of ideological hybridization within the jihadi landscape.[11] Groups have increasingly resorted to mixed, "glocal" strategies, combining local emphasis and international ambitions - blurring even further the theoretical and fuzzy distinction between the near and the far enemy.

So why do jihadi groups embrace local and/or global-focused strategies? And specifically, why may a particular jihadi group opt for an increasingly locally-focused strategy? Literature on the target selection of terrorist groups has often emphasized how ideology affects the choices of such organizations. As Drake argues, ideology is what shapes their worldview and value system, allowing them to discriminate between their in-group and out-group, i.e. friends and enemies, and to identify what/who constitutes a legitimate target. Ideology, then, informs the group's strategy, which in turn aims to achieve its political objectives. Nonetheless, ideology alone is not sufficient to explain militant groups' choices.[12] Groups subscribing to the same ideological family may opt for different choices in targeting. Within the left-wing ideological family in Italy, for example, the Red Brigades tended to target factories or political figures more frequently than the other smaller groups such as

Nuclei Armati Proletari or Reparti Comunisti d'Attacco, who had a far more limited geographic and functional scope – largely a reflection of the potential constituencies the groups were seeking to address.[13] With regards to right-wing political violence, groups operating in Italy, especially during the "Years of Lead", differed from like-minded groups in other Western countries in their targeting choices, with the former tending to target leftist actors rather than members of ethnic minorities.[14] Similarly, within the jihadi ideological family, IS' emphasis on sectarian targeting, prioritizing attacks against Shi'a Muslims, stands in contrast to al-Qa'ida,[15] as has the decision of IS to strike against Iran. For a fuller explanation we therefore must look beyond doctrine and permanent values, to also consider opportunistic dynamics and operational conditions.[16] Indeed, target selection "can best be regarded as a process by which the terrorist's freedom of action is narrowed down by the influence of various factors"[17]: the group's need to retain support and avoid alienating its base; its capabilities; and the security environment in which it operates.[18]

This article attempts to explain how Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) adopted an increasingly locally-focused strategy over time. HTS is worthy of attention in light of its peculiar trajectory within the jihadi landscape. While its genesis was rooted in al-Qa'ida, it subsequently relinquished its allegiance to the latter, progressively bringing about what seems a "third paradigm" of jihadism. The origins of the group can be traced back to July–August 2011. At that time, the Military Council of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) decided to dispatch a group of militants to Syria, to form a local branch: Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl al-Sham (JAN), the "predecessor" of HTS. The establishment of JAN was formally announced in a video released in January 2012.[19]

It is important to recognize that JAN's formation and evolution happened at a time when al-Qa'ida itself was leaning towards a more local-oriented strategy.[20] From the second half of the 2000s, in the wake of its setbacks in Iraq, it had started to recast its strategic thinking towards a more "population-centric" direction. The Arab Spring and the political environment that emerged from the revolts fed into this process [21] as they highlighted the need for militants to embed themselves within their local socio-political context,[22] and emphasized aspects such as the provision of services to the population and territorial governance. However, al-Qa'ida strategic refocusing, taken alone, does not fully explain the trajectory of HTS. In fact, other jihadi groups made different strategic choices. IS, for example, at some point accomplished an upward scale shift orchestrating attacks in far-away areas, while maintaining a "glocal identity". Al-Qa'ida's affiliate in Yemen (al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, AQAP), while embracing localism, has also not completely foregone its transnational ambitions, and claimed an attack on a naval base in Pensacola, US - perpetrated as recently as December 2019. HTS, on the other hand, has gradually adopted a strategy with a more explicitly local focus. This can be seen in the evolution of its rhetoric and behavior towards other actors over time. For instance, in its first video released in January 2012, while emphasizing the fight against the Assad regime, JAN did not shy away from calling out the US and Western countries, as well as Turkey and the Arab League - deemed "patrons" of the *taghut* (tyrant, i.e. the (Syrian) regime).[23] This stands in contrast with the discourse that HTS has embraced in more recent years,[24] as well as its present-day engagement with Turkey. This article examines why HTS followed this particular trajectory.

The analysis draws together research on political violence and social movement studies -adopting a relational and dynamic approach. I contend that such an approach is appropriate as jihadi movements are often multi-dimensional actors, rather than mere terrorist groups.[25] Drawing on social movement studies, I understand HTS's adoption of an increasingly locally-focused strategy to constitute a form of "downward scale shift". This article aims to identify relevant mechanisms that can explain how this process unfolded in the case of HTS. In doing so, the article seeks to both provide an empirical case study, and generate insight about an under-researched but potentially valuable concept within the study of social movements and political violence. The case study of HTS is analyzed through the method of process tracing. The analysis draws on both secondary literature and primary sources, i.e. documents and statements retrieved from the Internet and social media, especially Telegram and Aaron Y. Zelin's portal "Jihadology".

Scale Shift

Scale shift is a process that leads contentious action to "a higher or a lower level than its initiation" - respectively, an upward or downward scale shift.[26] Within social movement studies, describing scale shift as a process means understanding it as a sequence of mechanisms, where "mechanisms" are understood as a "delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations", and "processes" are understood as sequences of mechanisms.[27] As a minimum it entails a target shift on the part of contentious actors, but it goes beyond that, also generating "new alliances […] and changes in the foci of claims and perhaps even new identities".[28] Indeed, targets shifts are often accompanied by other dynamics, encompassing, for instance, changes in the discourse of contentious actors.

The process of upward scale shift has received some scholarly attention, giving rise to descriptive models that identify its recurring mechanisms. For instance, in the model proposed by Tarrow (2005, cf. Figure below), upward scale shift is understood as a process made up of at least five mechanisms:

1. coordination, implying the collaboration of contentious actors in diverse geographical areas;
2. brokerage, i.e. the connection of two previously unrelated actors through a third party, an intermediary;
3. theorization, enabling the "abstraction of a core causal idea from a particular reality into a general frame that can be applied to other realities";
4. a shift in the claims advocated by contentious actors, and a shift in object(s) (i.e. targets);
5. finally, in some cases, also a shift in the identity of such actors.[29]

One example Tarrow provides of this model in action is al-Qa'ida's global direction during the 1990s. Here, he draws particular attention to the role of the Afghan conflict, as it allowed the brokerage of a range of militants from across the globe, and the effect of repression and selective cooptation on the part of various regimes, leading militants to embrace broader claims (with an object and claim shift).[30]

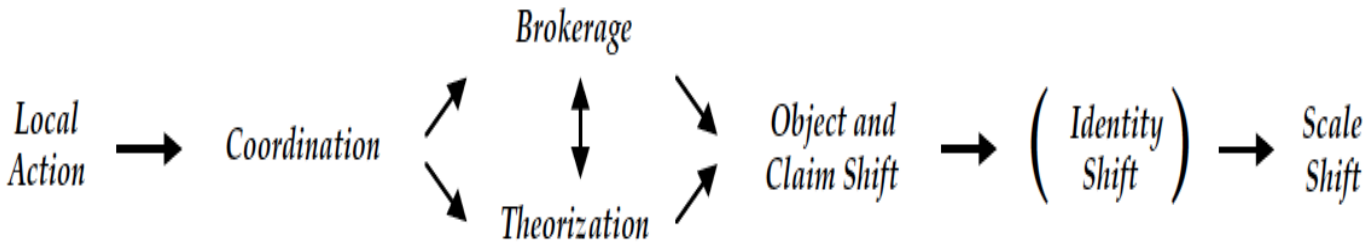

Figure 1: A Descriptive Model of Scale Shift, from S. Tarrow, The New Transnational Activism (see note 3), p. 123.

The question then is, what a downward scale shift might look like. Unlike upward scale shift, downward scale shift is still under-researched within social movement studies.[31] Tarrow describes it as a "transfer of collective action from a higher to a lower level independent of the agencies of the higher-level coordination". If upward scale shift moves claims and targets of contention to a higher level (e.g. from the sub-national to the national level; from the national to the transnational level), downward scale shift, in contrast, "allows lower-level activists to take on local targets and make local claims in new and different ways".[32] McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly suggest that this process is constituted by mechanisms akin to those seen in upward scale shift, but "in different concatenations".[33] It has been proposed that a crucial mechanisms in downward scale shift might be "certification", whereby the actor in question is validated by external authorities.[34] To date, however, there has not been a systematic investigation of how downward scale shift unfolds.

The analysis presented here can therefore be understood both as an exploration of the particular case of HTS, and as a preliminary exploration of how downward scale shift unfolds. Specifically, by reviewing the evolution of HTS, I seek to identify relevant mechanisms that could explain its trajectory - trying to ascertain if any of the mechanisms observed in upward scale shift can also be spotted in the reverse process, and to investigate the presence of other, specific mechanisms. Some of the mechanisms that shall be identified here have been observed across other case studies, involving not only militant groups, but also other kinds of contentious actors, including non-violent ones.[35] The discussion focuses primarily on the period from 2016-2018 as this is the period where it seems HTS's process of downward scale shift unfolded. Of course, such developments seldom happen out of the blue, and some of the roots of this process can be traced back further. However, it is held here that it is during the period under consideration that one can observe the critical junctures relevant to understanding this process. Of particular importance, 2016 was the moment when the "predecessor" of HTS, Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl al-Sham (JAN), al-Qa'ida's affiliate in Syria, first rebranded itself and announced it was severing its ties with al-Qa'ida.

Uncomfortable Ties? The Rebranding of JAN, 2016

In an interview given to al-Jazeera in 2015, while accusing the West of supporting the regime, JAN's leader Abu Muhammad al-Julani explicitly declared that the group harbored no intention of targeting the so-called "far enemy" unless attacked - denying reports regarding the existence of an alleged "Khorasan group" [36] that was planning external attacks.[37] In July 2016, JAN leader al-Julani, along with prominent member Abu 'Abd Allah al-Shami, declared in a video message that JAN had been dissolved and replaced by Jabhat Fath al-Sham (JFS), and that the new group did not have "external ties", i.e. it was no longer affiliated to al-Qa'ida. At first, the announcement was presented as a move approved by the al-Qa'ida central leadership. Specifically, Abu al-Khayr al-Masri, the then al-Qa'ida second-in-command, based in Syria at the time of the events, gave his conditional approval to al-Julani's decision, meaning he blessed the project as long as al-Zawahiri did not have objections. However, it later became clear that this was not the case: in the following months al-Zawahiri expressed his utter rejection of JFS (and apparently, al-Masri accordingly withdrew his endorsement).[38] In spite of al-Zawahiri's rebuttal, al-Julani did not reverse his decision, but rather continued pursuing the breakaway path. In January 2017, the group announced its second rebranding and reshuffle, becoming HTS.

Why did JAN morph into JFS, and why did it happen at that particular moment? From a social movement perspective, three mechanisms operating on two different levels seem to be especially relevant. The first mechanism is related to the relationship between the movement (in this case, the Syrian militant Islamist and jihadi [39] movement) and its political environment. The other two mechanisms, however, are related to relations within both the national and the transnational movement.

Spirals of Political Opportunity and Threat

The first mechanism that should be considered is known in social movement literature as *spirals of political opportunity and threat*. These relate to the political environment, entailing "sequences of environmental change, interpretation of that change, action, and counteraction, repeated as one action alters another actor's environment".[40] Such spirals involve all those developments that "alter the political conditions" in which the relevant actors are embedded, affecting their strategic positioning and, in turn, their strategies of contention. [41] They have been observed across a range of situations; inter alia, as one of the defining mechanisms explaining trajectories towards radicalization of militant groups of different kinds at a given point. Likewise, a "reverse" of these spirals might be able to explain a lack of radicalization/"non-radicalization" of some groups. [42] In the case of JAN and its successors, this robust mechanism can be observed throughout the period from 2016 onwards - as the group faced, and through interaction contributed to creating, several "windows" of opportunity/threat altering its positioning within the local environment. This author views these windows as central to understanding JAN's downward scale shift.

In 2015-16, JAN/JFS found itself under increasing external pressure, due to shifting dynamics in the Syrian

arena and at the international level. In those years, in fact, the Syrian insurgency in general was starting to see its position dwindle, as the regime was taking control of more territories - especially after the September 2015 Russian intervention - and, remarkably, engaging in an offensive to capture the rebel stronghold of Aleppo in 2016.[43] Moreover, just before the July 2016 announcement, there were rumors that the US and Russia were preparing an offensive to specifically target JAN.[44] Given that in 2014 IS had started to be targeted by an international coalition, for JAN this was grounds for concern. This is even more true considering the fact that, in those years, militants from JAN, such as its senior leader, Muhsin al-Fadhli, were targeted and killed by the US (as the US government alleged that it was targeting members of the purported "Khorasan group").[45]

Brokerage and "Uncoupling"

Two other mechanisms also came into play at this time, emerging at the intra-movement level: brokerage (between JAN and locally embedded organizations belonging to the militant Islamist milieu in Syria), and "uncoupling" (between JAN and al-Qa'ida central). As previously mentioned in the paragraph on scale shift, brokerage is defined as the connection of two previously unconnected or less connected actors. While it plays an important role in processes of upward scale shift, it has been suggested that it could also foster the reverse process, i.e. downward scale shift.[46] On the other hand, what might tentatively be call "uncoupling" is what appears as the reverse mechanism of coordination (the latter being a typical feature of upward scale shift, cf. Figure 1). It is the mechanism by which organizations based in different geographical arenas which used to coordinate policies with each other, cease to do so.

A form of *brokerage* between JAN and other militant Islamist organizations seems to be one of the key dynamics that prompted the former to morph into JFS (and, later on, into HTS), and to remodulate its political preferences more decisively. JAN had been starting to form alliances with other insurgent groups since 2012.[47] A significant step was taken in 2015, when the Jaysh al-Fath coalition was set up, comprised of JAN along with other militant Islamist groups. However, under increased pressure at the time, what JAN intended to attain was a full-blown merger, most notably with Ahrar al-Sham, and negotiations were underway in 2016. In the view of HTS, building a unified Islamic-oriented front was the preliminary step in moving towards its supposed political objective: establishing an Islamic state in the Levant governed by *sharia,* as had been stated since its very foundation [48] and in the "creed and methodology" laid out by JAN's then *shar'i* Sami al-'Uraydi in 2013.[49] This unified body would have allowed them to overcome the fragmentation of the insurgent ecosphere - thus strengthening the overall positioning of the Syrian rebel milieu vis-à-vis enemies, primarily the regime, especially given the latter's advances towards rebel-held territory.[50] In its pursuit of unity, the leadership of JAN "insisted on unified, hegemonic order and rejected a united but multipolar movement structure", as "the[ir] objective was to create a unitary hegemonic leader, not another united alliance of peer groups".[51] Finally, given reports of forthcoming US-Russian raids, embedding itself within the wider insurgency might have made it harder for those countries to target JAN.[52]

However, tighter forms of cooperation between militant organizations, especially mergers, can be jeopardized by ideological divergences.[53] One of the most prominent issues differentiating JAN from (most) local militant Islamist actors, and thus hindering closer cooperation and integration within the Syrian insurgent milieu, was the nexus between JAN and transnational jihadism, i.e. its ties to al-Qa'ida.[54] By associating themselves with an al-Qa'ida-affiliated actor, insurgent groups would have run several risks: ending up being blacklisted and seeing their financial support shrink; validating the regime's narrative and discrediting the Syrian revolution.[55] Affiliation with al-Qa'ida was therefore becoming increasingly uncomfortable for both JAN and its potential allies. Hence the decision of JAN to rebrand itself and announce its split from al-Qa'ida ("*uncoupling*"). The statement circulated by Ahrar al-Sham following JFS's announcement is illustrative: they celebrated the establishment of JFS and its separation from al-Qa'ida, welcoming the fact that the "brothers" from JAN accepted "their advice", and hoping that this could prompt further rebel cohesion.[56]

The true nature of the July 2016 announcement is still debated: some analysts suggest that a more "pragmatic" wing within JAN had finally managed to convince al-Julani of the dangers posed by allegiance to al-Qa'ida; others contend that, from the very beginning, the decision was mostly conceived for media purposes, to keep

relations with al-Qa'ida away from the spotlight.[57] In either case, this step proved to be a critical juncture insofar as it brought about wide-ranging consequences and anticipated the future trajectory of the group.

HTS and Engagement with Turkey throughout 2017-2018

To understand the developments that unfolded from the end of 2016 onwards, after the opposition's loss of Aleppo, and how these events affected the trajectory of JFS/HTS, two further sets of mechanisms seem especially relevant. Firstly, similar to the 2015-16 period, new shifts in environmental conditions - i.e. new *opportunity/threat spirals* - impacted upon the relationship between HTS and other actors. Secondly, HTS opened a dialogue with an external actor, i.e. Turkey, possibly triggering a mechanism called *certification*.

New Spirals of Opportunity/Threat

Alliance-building efforts involving militant Islamist groups did not fare well, with JFS and Ahrar al-Sham failing to reach a full merger. Fighting between those two "camps" erupted in January 2017. On the one hand, JFS merged with other minor factions (including Harakat Nur al-Din al-Zinki, Liwa al-Haqq, Jaysh al-Sunna, and Jabhat Ansar al-Din) to form Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). On the other hand, other small non-jihadi groups joined Ahrar al-Sham (in response to the offensive JFS waged against them). HTS proceeded to consolidate its influence in the area of Idlib, confronting Ahrar al-Sham, which had by then become its main rival. The conflict between the two escalated to an unprecedented level in July 2017, when Ahrar al-Sham suffered a significant defeat at the hands of HTS. In subsequent months, HTS would focus on widening its governance capabilities, contributing to setting up the Syrian Salvation Government (*hukumat al-inqadh al-suriyya*).[58] HTS was thus assuming a preeminent position in the area.[59]

However, HTS's consolidation was coupled with several challenges. At the international level, talks were taking place within the framework of the Astana process, establishing four de-escalation zones including the area of Idlib. At the same time, reports of a potential Turkish offensive against HTS were become increasingly frequent.[60] Following inter-factional fighting, HTS was also becoming increasingly distrusted by other rebel groups, as they accused it of "dominating" (*taghallub*) them.[61] The internal problems were twofold. Besides the deteriorating relationship with the broader Syrian militant Islamist milieu - leading to the defection of factions such as Nur al-Din al-Zinki over the course of the year,[62] - there was the issue of defections by al-Qa'ida loyalists, who were dissatisfied with the path taken by HTS. Tensions escalated as the al-Qa'ida loyalist Sami al-'Uraydi and HTS's 'Atun engaged in a public dispute over the transformation of JAN/JFS/HTS;[63] and again in October 2017, when HTS engaged in talks with Turkey (see below). This was anathema to al-Qa'ida and its supporters. Moreover, in November 2017, HTS launched a wave of arrests against senior al-Qa'ida loyalists in Syria (only to release them at a later stage).[64] Their increasing dissatisfaction with the course HTS had embarked upon - seen as a betrayal of jihadi ideology - , would lead al-Qa'ida loyalists to announce in February 2018 the establishment of a new organization: Tanzim Hurras al-Din (HaD). Headed by overall leader Abu Hammam al-Shami with *shar'i* Sami al-'Uraydi as second-in-command, it presented itself as the al-Qa'ida branch in Syria (although at the time of writing it has not been recognized as a formal affiliate). Since then, the relationship between HTS and HaD has experienced ebbs and flows, swaying between episodes of tension and initiatives of reconciliation - at least, until very recently.[65]

Certification

As anticipated, in October 2017, HTS engaged in talks with Turkey to negotiate its military intervention in north western Syria. The deployment of Turkish troops and the establishment of observation posts in the region occurred in coordination with HTS - something which would have been inconceivable in previous years. Given the multiple challenges it was facing, the HTS leadership probably thought that avoiding clashing with Turkey was the most viable option. In fact, had HTS not found a modus vivendi with Turkey, its prospects vis-à-vis the regime and Russia would have been rather gloomy. This leads us to the second key dynamics sustaining the downward trajectory of the group: an ongoing, albeit for the time being incomplete,[66] mechanism of

certification of HTS vis-à-vis external actors.

Certification is the mechanism by which an actor, along with his performance and claims, is validated by one (or more) authoritative actors.[67] In the literature on contentious politics, it has been highlighted as one of the mechanisms enabling "downscaling" (not necessarily in the context of violent action),[68] and also as a potentially relevant mechanism for both radicalization and de-radicalization processes in the case of violent actors.[69] Certification has to do with the recognition of a certain actor as a potential interlocutor, hence with issues of legitimacy and/or rehabilitation. Therefore, actors aspiring to be certified might recalibrate their discourse and behavior to achieve a formal or informal "recognition". In the case of HTS - a group that used to be part of a transnational network - decisions such as severing ties with al-Qa'ida and marginalizing pro-al-Qa'ida components, adopting an increasingly local-oriented stance, and lastly, negotiating with Turkey, seemed to signal an unfolding mechanism of certification vis-à-vis Turkey, and the international community at large.[70] For its part, Turkey's approach to HTS has been a complex and nuanced one, mirroring a "divide and conquer" attitude: it sought to engage and empower the most pragmatic wing of HTS, and to marginalize the hardline, less prone-to-dialogue components.[71] This certainly had an effect on HTS's trajectory too.

In parallel, there was a notable evolution in HTS's rhetoric towards "external actors", primarily Turkey. In a video aired in February 2017, the group had charted its founding principles, including the notion of "establishing balanced relations with relevant parties" (*iqamat 'alaqat mutawazina ma' al-jihat al-mu'aththira*).[72] This aspect would be echoed consistently in the future, offering an ideological foundation to engagement with third parties. Legitimizing a military intervention by external actors has been even more problematic from a jihadi perspective. Therefore, over time, several figures from HTS sought to do so.[73] In an interview with Khayr Umma Foundation, when questioned on issues such as the Turkish presence in northwest Syria, prominent cleric Abu Qatada al-Filastini (who is not formally affiliated to HTS, but can be regarded as an external authoritative reference for the group) mentioned the need to observe reality (*waqi'*), i.e. the current circumstances, and to take into consideration both the best interest of the community (*maslaha*) and the provisions of jurisprudence (*fiqh*).[74] The Telegram comments posted in May 2018 by prominent HTS *shar'i* Abu al-Fath al-Farghali were also especially relevant, stating that the Turkish observation posts were legitimate as long as certain conditions were respected: namely, HTS military superiority; Turkish non-interference in administration issues; and HTS's monopoly on decisions regarding war and peace.[75]

The subsequent period was characterized by dynamics similar to those seen throughout 2017: a cycle of shifting operational conditions putting pressure on HTS (namely, the ceasefire framework falling through and the Syrian regime gaining ground); a new ceasefire agreement; HTS trying to adapt to circumstances and providing an ideological basis for its choices. Throughout February–July 2018, the regime made advances in Latakia, Hama, and Aleppo, and seemed to be on the point of launching a full-blown offensive in Idlib. In September 2018 a new deal was signed by Russia and Turkey in Sochi, reiterating the provisions of the Astana framework, including Turkey's commitment to eradicate terrorist groups in the demilitarized area as well as joint Russian-Turkish patrols.[76]

In June 2018, the HTS General Shar'i Council released a statement on "Jihad and legitimate politics between the constants and variables", referring to relations with third countries in general. It stated that while there were some fixed principles (such as relying on *jihad* and focusing on *shari'a* as a reference), some aspects, notably capabilities, could change over time; and thus specific rulings on what was permissible could be adapted accordingly. In particular, it reiterated that establishing relations with third countries could be a legitimate move as long as it advanced the interest of *jihad*, and was not clearly forbidden by law.[77] After the Sochi agreement, HTS released a statement condemning the role and the intentions of Russia, but also thanking those who protected the liberated areas and prevented an all-out offensive[78]. This was a clear reference to Turkey.

Recent Developments: towards a Completion of the Downward Scale Shift?

It is possible that developments in 2019 and 2020 have marked new steps in HTS's unfolding process of downward scale shift. The offensives launched by the Syrian regime in April 2019 and December 2019 accelerated a shift in power dynamics in the region of Idlib, leading HTS to increasingly lose influence vis-à-vis Turkey. A ceasefire agreement was concluded by Turkey and Russia on 5 March 2020, creating a safe corridor along the M4 highway, to be jointly patrolled by Russian and Turkish troops.[79] While at first tensions erupted, with HTS launching initiatives to disrupt these patrols, the group leadership went on to display a more pragmatic stance at a later stage.[80] HTS's attitude towards the March deal was met with fierce opposition by the pro-al-Qa'ida constellation led by HaD. Their convoluted relationship seems to have reached a tipping point by the summer of 2020, as tensions between the two groups escalated. In June 2020, HaD set up checkpoints and established a new al-Qa'ida-aligned operations room (Fathbutu, "Be Steadfast", with groups Jabhat Ansar al-Din, Jama'at Ansar al-Islam, Tansiqiyyat al-Jihad, and Liwa' al-Muqatilin al-Ansar).[81] In response, HTS cracked down on HaD and its military bases. Furthermore, prominent figures who had defected from HTS and joined Fathbutu were arrested – persons like Abu Malik al-Talli (founder of Liwa' al-Muqatilin), and Abu Salah al-Uzbeki.[82] In the following months, several senior members from HaD were detained by HTS, such as Fadl Allah al-Libi and 'Abd al-Karim al-Makki, as well as Abu Yahya al-Jaza'iri (once affiliated to HaD, but expelled in June 2019).[83]

HTS's crackdown might suggest that the group is increasingly aligning with Turkey's choices,[84] particularly in light of its increasing dependence on Ankara. It is still an open question whether HTS's readjustment of its political preferences is triggering or could trigger an *identity shift*, described as the final stage of scale shift - especially as it seems that HTS is advocating a "third model" of jihadism, an alternative to both IS and al-Qa'ida.[85] Related to this, an additional question is whether the "third model" embraced by HTS might be viable in the medium-to-long term or if it will inevitably be a temporary experiment. Should the group manage to further downscale, i.e. to continue pursuing the certification path (and possibly establish closer relations with countries such as Turkey), this might even challenge the jihadi nature *stricto sensu* of HTS's project, since the rejection of political processes is a key tenet of jihadi ideology. This potential completion of a process of downward scale shift is summarized in Figure 2 (below).

The future of the group is contingent upon several factors. For one thing, decisions at the leadership level might not receive the support of its base.[86] At the intra-group level, engagement with Turkey has always posed a challenge to the cohesion of the group. In past years, some figures - especially the more "purist" among HTS's ranks - had eventually decided to defect at some point (e.g. senior *shar'i* Abu Yaqzan al-Masri[87]), and recent developments have prompted further defections. Secondly, there is the issue of HTS's relationship with the local population, which over the years has become increasingly strained as the group has been accused of violations and of systematically detaining its detractors. Finally, there is the bigger conundrum relating to the future of northwest Syria and in particular, the role of Turkey.

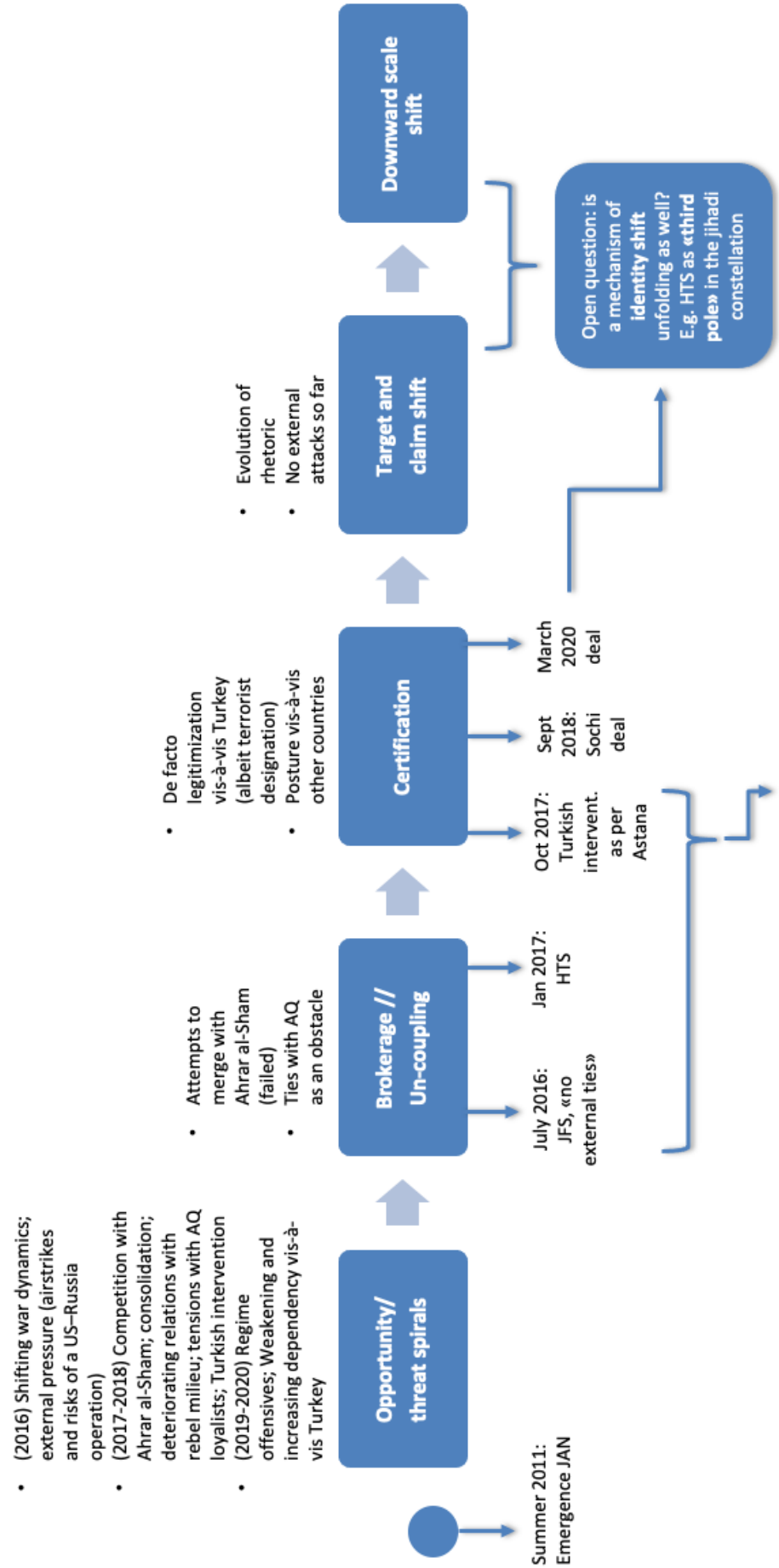

Figure 2: From JAN to HTS: A Tentative Model of Downward Scale Shift in the Case of HTS.

Concluding Remarks

In general, what the downward trajectory of HTS highlights is the fluidity of jihadi groups and, above all, their adaptiveness to operational conditions, especially local dynamics, which impact upon a group's adoption of local, global, or glocal-oriented strategies. Taken alone, doctrine cannot explain why jihadi groups resort to such strategies at a given point in time. In fact, considerations of opportunity might drive them to pursue strategically convenient, yet ideologically problematic choices and subsequently to resort to a reinterpretation of doctrine to legitimize them.[88] It seems that this is what happened in the case of HTS. As seen above, at various stages, the group found itself under pressure, facing potential challenges stemming from a number of factors - including shifting war dynamics, external pressure, and relations with other insurgent groups. Its moves towards an increasingly locally-focused strategy have been an attempt to come to terms with reality and adapt to operational circumstances. As an ideologue close to HTS, Abu Mahmud al-Filastini, put it, it was a matter of "jurisprudence of reality" (*fiqh al-waqi'*).[89] Embracing transnational ambitions would probably have jeopardized not only HTS's political objectives, but possibly its very survival too. As a consequence, prominent leaders and ideological authorities attempted to justify from a doctrinal perspective the group's potentially controversial choices, including its engagement with Turkey. They cited the need to act in the best interests of jihad and the revolution - mentioning how jihad entails both constant principles and adaptability to the strategic context.

The mechanisms observed in the case of HTS might hopefully provide relevant insights for other militant groups, especially - but not exclusively - jihadi actors. However, caution is required when generalizing, given the limits of a single case study design and the heterogeneity of the jihadi movement. Additional case studies within the jihadi movement, and ideally also a comparative analysis involving different kinds of militant actors, would be required to probe the explanatory power of the specific mechanisms identified here. Such a comparison would be of great importance - especially as there are signs that HTS could have set a precedent for other jihadi groups, such as al-Qa'ida in the Arabic Peninsula and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin. Such groups, perhaps, might take into consideration more "pragmatic" choices as well.[90]

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Notes

[1] Regarding the definition of "jihadism", there is a lack of consensus among scholars. Herein, I will rely on Stenersen's definition of jihadism as "a subcategory of militant Islamism, characterized by use of violence (framed as 'jihād') to achieve political aims; and rejection of the nation state and international order". - Anne Stenersen, "Jihadism After the 'Caliphate': Towards a New Typology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2018, 3, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2018.1552118. I will also take advantage of a social movement understanding of "jihadism": cf. footnote 25. The legitimacy and the validity of this term is sometimes contested. Occasionally, authors resort to other phrases, the meanings of which partially or greatly overlap with that of "jihadism": e.g. "violent Islamism", "militant Islamism", etc. Cf. Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study

of Militant Islamism," in Roel Meijer, (Ed.) *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, 244-266, London: Hurst Publishers, 2009.

[2] Charles Tilly & Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 195.

[3] Cf. Rebecca Kolins Givan, Kenneth M. Roberts, & Sarah A. Soule, "Introduction: The Dimensions of Diffusion"; in: Rebecca Kolins Givan, Kenneth M. Roberts, & Sarah A. Soule (Eds.), *The Diffusion of Social Movements: Actors, Mechanisms, and Political Effects*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 3; cf. also: Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 138.

[4] See Eitan Y. Alimi, Lorenzo Bosi & Chares Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization. A Relational and Comparative Perspective,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

[5] The phrases "going global" and/or "attacking the far enemy" could be interpreted in various ways. Herein, I take such expressions to signify "external", "out-of-area" attacks, i.e. perpetrated by a given group in areas where it normally does not operate (e.g. the 2001 World Trade Center attacks).

[6] Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam al-Faraj, *Jihad, the Absent Obligation*, Birmingham: Maktabah al-Ansaar Publications [English translation of Id., Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam al-Faraj, *jihad: al-fariḍa al-gha'iba*. Cairo: NP, 1981]. Faraj was influenced by the thought of Sayyid Qutb. Qutb was one of the key ideologues that shaped the underpinnings of contemporary jihadism, especially by introducing concepts like *hakimiyya* (sovereignity of God), *jahiliyya* (ignorance (of God's authority)), and *jihad*. See Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, London: Saqi Books, 1985; Sayed Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb: The Theory of Jahiliyyah*, London: Routledge, 2006; John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

[7] The 2001 attacks were preceded by other attacks against US/US-linked targets in the 1990s. Moreover, in 1994-1995, the Algerian Group Islamique Armé (GIA) staged several operations in France.

[8] For an in-depth account of the dynamics that led al-Qa'ida to focus on the "far enemy" over the late 1990s, see Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. This process is generally linked to these aspects: the 1979 USSR invasion of Afghanistan and the dynamics it engendered (the ideological cross-breeding it fostered, as well as the massive transnational mobilization of foreign fighters); the deployment of US troops in Saudi Arabia in 1990, which nourished anti-Western sentiments and reinforced the jihadists' frame of threat; the failure of the campaigns waged against local regimes by militant Islamist groups e.g. in Algeria and in Egypt during the 1990s. Moreover, struggles against local regimes might have been harder to organise, as noted in Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. See also Thomas Hegghammer, *The Caravan: Abdallah Azzam and the Rise of Global Jihad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 327.

[9] Tore R. Hamming, "Polemical and Fratricidal Jihadists: A Historical Examination of Debates, Contestation and Infighting Within the Sunni Jihadi Movement", International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR), 2019, pp. 34-36.

[10] Steven Brooke, "The Near and Far Enemy Debate," in: Assaf Moghadam & Brian Fishman (Eds.), *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011.

[11] Ibid.; Thomas Hegghammer, "The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups", *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, *9*(26), 2009.

[12] C. J. M. Drake, *Terrorists' Target Selection*, London: Macmillan, 1998, chapters 3-4; Ranya Ahmed, "Terrorist Ideologies and Target Selection", *Journal of Applied Security Research*, *13*(3), pp. 376-390, 2018; Cato Hemmingby & Tore Bjørgo, *The Dynamics of a Terrorist Targeting Process: Anders B. Breivik and the 22 July Attacks in Norway.* Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016, 12-18. Other studies on target selection include: Victor Asal, Karl Rethemeyer, Ian Anderson, Allyson Stein, Jeffrey Rizzo & Matthew Rozea, "The Softest of Targets: A Study on Terrorist Target Selection", *Journal of Applied Security Research*, *4*(3), 2009; Brandt & Sandler, "What Do Transnational Terrorists Target? Has It Changed? Are We Safer?", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *54*(2), 2010; Sara M. T. Polo, "The Quality of Terrorist Violence: Explaining the Logic of Terrorist Target Choice", *Journal of Peace Research*, *57*(2), 2020.

[13] Donatella Della Porta, "I Militanti delle Organizzazioni Terroriste di Sinistra in Italia," *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica*, *17*(1), 1987, pp. 33-36.

[14] Leonard Weinberg, "Italian Neo-Fascist Terrorism: A Comparative Perspective," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 7(1), 1995, pp. 221-238.

[15] Andrea Plebani & Paolo Maggiolini, "The Centrality of the Enemy in al-Baghdadi's Caliphate"; in: Monica Maggioni, & Paolo Magri (Eds.), *Twitter and Jihad: the Communication Strategy of ISIS*, Novi Ligure: Epoké, 2015.

[16] See Anne Stenersen, "Jihadism after the 'Caliphate'", op. cit., pp. 5-7. See. also Tore R. Hamming, "Jihadi Competition and Political Preferences," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *11*(6), p. 75.

[17] C. J. M. Drake, op. cit., p. 175.

[18] Ibid., pp. 176-177.

[19] Hassan Abu Hanieh & Mohammad Abu-Rumman, *The 'Islamic State' Organization: the Sunni Crisis and the Struggle of Global Jihadism*, Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015, pp. 107-108, p. 186. On the evolution of jihadism in Syria after 2011, see Charles Lister, *The Syrian jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*, London: Hurst & Company, 2017.

[20] Tore R. Hamming, "Jihadi Competition and Political Preferences", op. cit., 71; cf. also Anne Stenersen, "Thirty Years After its Foundation–Where Is al-Qaida Going?", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *11*(6), 2017. In particular, since 2010, the near enemy has ranked highest in al-Qa'ida's enemy hierarchy. Indeed, while al-Qa'ida is commonly portrayed as a group essentially focused on international attacks, the reality is more nuanced. It is more accurate to say that, *in some periods of time*, the organization has prioritized external attacks. Following 2001, the group had established branches in various areas of the globe: see Barak Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise: The Expansion of al-Qaeda and Its Consequences*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

[21] Anne Stenersen, "Thirty Years After its Foundation–Where Is al-Qaida Going", op. cit., p. 6.

[22] Hassan Abu Hanieh & Mohammad Abu-Rumman, op. cit.,p.114; Jérôme Drevon, "The Jihadi Social Movement: Between Internal Hegemonic Drive, Local Realities, and Transnational Aspirations," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *11*(6), 2017, p. 60.

[23] "Al-Manārah al-Bayḍā' Foundation for Media Production presents: 'Declaration of the Support Front (Jabhat al-Nuṣrah): For the People of Syria from the Mujāhidīn of Syria in the Fields of Jihād,'" *Jihadology*, 24 January 2012; URL: https://jihadology.net/2012/01/24/al-manarah-al-bayḍa-foundation-for-media-production-presents-for-the-people-of-syria-from-the-mujahidin-of-syria-in-the-fields-of-jihad-jabhah-al-nuṣrah-the-front-of-victory/.

[24] See e.g. International Crisis Group, "The Jihadist Factor in Syria's Idlib: A Conversation with Abu Muhammad al-Jolani," February 20, 2020; URL: https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/jihadist-factor-syrias-idlib-conversation-abu-muhammad-al-jolani; Aymenn Al-Tamimi, "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's Abu Abdullah al-Shami on Meeting Western Analysts," *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog*, March 10, 2020; URL: http://www.aymennjawad.org/2020/03/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-abu-abdullah-al-shami-on.

[25] Tore R. Hamming, "The Al Qaeda - Islamic State Rivalry: Competition Yes, but No Competitive Escalation", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, in press, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2017.1342634. I am adopting a social movement understanding of the concept of (Sunni) jihadism, as suggested by Hamming, regarding it as "a social movement family with its general foundation in Sunni theology, more specifically in the concept and practice of Jihad, and to some extent in the specific doctrine of Salafism" (p. 3). With the concept of "social movement family", I am indicating "a set of coexisting movements" "that, regardless of their specific or individual goals, have similar basic demands and a common constituency"". - Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis, of Italy and Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [1995], 3.

[26] Sidney Tarrow, "Dynamics of Diffusion: Mechanisms, Institutions, and Scale Shift"; in: Rebecca Kolins Givan, Kenneth M. Roberts, & Sarah A. Soule (Eds.), op. cit., p. 214.

[27] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, & Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 24.

[28] Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*, op. cit., p. 121.

[29] Ibid., pp. 121-124.

[30] Ibid., pp. 124-128.

[31] See e.g. Jiri Navratil, "Domesticating Social Justice Activism in the Global Era? The Process of Reconfiguring the Czech Social Justice Movement in Times of Crisis", *Studies in Social Justice*, *8*(2), 2014, p. 186; Rose Spalding, "Transnational Networks and National Action: El Salvador's Antimining Movement," in Eduardo Silva (Ed.), *Transnational Activism and National Movements in Latin America: Bridging the Divide*, New York & London: Routledge, 2013, footnote 4, p. 19.

[32] Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*, p. 132.

[33] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, & Charles Tilly, op. cit., p. 332.

[34] Conny Roggeband, "Transnational Networks and Institutions: How Diffusion Shaped the Politicization of Sexual Harassment in Europe"; in: Rebecca Kolins Givan, Kenneth M. Roberts, & Sarah A. Soule (Eds.), op. cit., p. 20; see also Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*, op. cit. The mechanism has been introduced in *Dynamics of Contention*: see Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, & Charles Tilly, op. cit., p. 145.

[35] Cf. Charles Tilly & Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, p. 195.

[36] Although this name has often surfaced in statements from US officials, a number of researchers contend that no group of this

kind actually existed: Adam Taylor, "Hey, remember the Khorasan group? Its leader is dead," *The Washington Post*, 22 July 2015; URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/07/22/hey-remember-the-khorasan-group-its-leader-is-dead/.

[37] Al Jazeera, *"Bila hudud – Abu Muhammad al-Julani amir Jabhat al-Nusra"* [Without Borders (program) – Abu Muhammad al-Julani, the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra], YouTube, 27 May 2015,URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hwQT43vFZA.

[38] On the dispute between JFS/HTS and al-Qa'ida/al-Qa'ida loyalists, see Aymenn al-Tamimi's series "The Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham-al-Qaeda Dispute: Primary Texts"; URL: https://www.aymennjawad.org/.

[39] Cf. footnote 1.

[40] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, & Charles Tilly, op. cit., 243.

[41] Eitan Y. Alimi, Lorenzo Bosi & Chares Demetriou, "Relational Dynamics and Processes of Radicalization: A Comparative Framework," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, *17*(1), 2012, p. 10.

[42] Eitan Y. Alimi, Lorenzo Bosi & Chares Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, op. cit. The authors define radicalization as a "process through which a social movement organization (SMO) shifts from predominantly nonviolent tactics of contention to tactics that include violent means, as well as the subsequent process of contention maintaining and possibly intensifying the newly introduced violence" (p. 11).

[43] Charles Lister, "How al-Qa'ida Lost Control of its Syrian Affiliate: The Inside Story", *CTC Sentinel*, *11*(2), 2018, p. 1.

[44] Aymenn Al-Tamimi, "From Jabhat al-Nusra to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham: Evolution, Approach and Future", Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung/Al-Nahrain Center For Strategic Studies, 29 June 2018, pp. 10-11.

[45] Adam Taylor, op. cit.

[46] Mentioned in Conny Roggeband, op. cit., p. 20.

[47] Charles Lister, "The Syria Effect: Al-Qaeda Fractures, Hudson Institute," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, *25*, February 2020, pp. 52-53.

[48] Charles Lister, "How al-Qa'ida Lost Control of its Syrian Affiliate," op. cit.

[49] In 2017, al-'Uraydi would abandon HTS. The "creed and metholodgy": al-Manārah al-Bayḍā' Foundation for Media Production presents a new video message from Jabhah al-Nuṣrah: "Our Manhaj and Our 'Aqīdah: A Meeting with Dr. Sāmī al 'Arīdī"," *Jihadology*, 21 October 2013; URL: https://jihadology.net/2013/10/21/al-manarah-al-bayḍa-foundation-for-media-production-presents-a-new-video-message-from-jabhah-al-nuṣrah-our-manhaj-and-our-aqidah-a-meeting-with-dr-sami-al-aridi/.

[50] Cf. Aymenn Al-Tamimi, "From Jabhat al-Nusra to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham", op. cit.; Charles Lister, "How al-Qaida Lost Control of its Syrian Affiliate", op. cit.

[51] Sam Heller, "The Strategic Logic of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *6*(11), 2017,p. 145.

[52] Aymenn Al-Tamimi, "From Jabhat al-Nusra to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham," op. cit., pp. 10-11.

[53] Assaf Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017, pp. 107-108.

[54] Back in 2012, although al-Julani renewed his *bay'a* ("oath of allegiance") to ISI's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, it was agreed that the Syrian offshoot would conceal its allegiance to al-Qa'ida. Nevertheless, the organization was designated as terrorist group by the US in December 2012. Finally, in spring 2013, those links were publicly acknowledged, following the dispute between ISIS on the one hand, and JAN and al-Qa'ida on the other hand. In February 2014, al-Qa'ida officially disowned ISIS. Cf. Hassan Abu Hanieh & Mohammad Abu-Rumman, op. cit., chapter 2.

[55] Aymenn Al-Tamimi, "From Jabhat al-Nusra to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham," op. cit., p. 7.

[56] "New Statement from Ḥarakat Aḥrār al-Shām al-Islāmīyyah: 'Welcoming the Disengagement from al-Qā'idah and the Declaration of Jabhat Fataḥ al-Shām,'" *Jihadology*, 29 July 2016; URL: https://jihadology.net/2016/07/29/new-statement-from-ḥarakat-aḥrar-al-sham-al-islamiyyah-welcoming-the-disengagement-from-al-qaidah-and-the-declaration-of-jabhat-fataḥ-al-sham/.

[57] Aymenn Al-Tamimi, "From Jabhat al-Nusra to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham," op. cit., pp. 8-10.

[58] Ibid., pp. 12-16.

[59] As Drevon observes, "[o]nly by becoming a local hegemon that foreign states must recognize can HTS avoid a military confrontation with the Syrian regime and its allies.": Jérôme Drevon, "Renouncing al-Qaeda and the prospects for engagement", *The*

Middle East Institute, 6 February 2019; URL: https://www.mei.edu/publications/renouncing-al-qaeda-and-prospects-engagement. A full hegemony was attained at a later stage, at the beginning of 2019, when HTS liquidated Nur al-Din al-Zinki.

[60] Ahmad Abazeid, "The Battle for Idlib", *SyriaSource*, Atlantic Council, 16 May 2017; URL: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/the-battle-for-idlib/.

[61] Cf. Aymenn Al-Tamimi, "From Jabhat al-Nusra to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham," op. cit.

[62] Walid Al Nofal & Tariq Adely, "Nour e-Din a-Zinki Defects from HTS, Citing Unwillingness to End Rebel Infighting", *Syria Direct*, 20 July 2017; URL: https://syriadirect.org/news/nour-e-din-a-zinki-defects-from-hts-citing-unwillingness-to-end-rebel-infighting/.

[63] Aymenn Al-Tamimi's series "The Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham-al-Qaeda Dispute: Primary Texts"; URL: https://www.aymennjawad.org/.

[64] Charles Lister, "How al-Qa'ida Lost Control of its Syrian Affiliate," op. cit., p. 7.

[65] On Hurras al-Din, see Aaron Y. Zelin, "Huras al-Din: The Overlooked al-Qaeda Group in Syria", *PolicyWatch 3188*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 24 September 2019; URL: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/huras-al-din-the-overlooked-al-qaeda-group-in-syria; Tore R. Hamming, "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's Internal Conflict and Renewed Tensions with Hurras al-Deen", *Jihadica*, 15 February 2019; URL: http://www.jihadica.com/hayat-tahrir-al-shams-internal-conflict-and-renewed-tensions-with-hurras-al-deen/; Omran for Strategic Studies (Prepared by Navvar Şaban), *tanzim hurras al-din… al-nash'a wa al-dinamiyyat wa al-ittijahat al-mustaqbaliyya* [Tanzim Hurras al-Din: Genesis, Dynamics, and Future Trends], 9 June 2020; URL: https://www.omrandirasat.org/ا-تاداصتقا-ريرا-ظنتم-يميدلا-نيدلا-سارح-ةأشنلا-و-تايمانيدلا-و-تاداجتها-لمشلا-بقيبس-يف-ةيبلي.html; Hassan Abu Hanieh, *"hurras al-din" wa takyifat "al-qa'ida" fi suria* [Hurras al-Din and the Adaptations of al-Qa'ida in Syria], Arabi21, 11 March 2018; URL: https://arabi21.com/story/1077834/سارح-نيدلا-تافيكتو-قدعاقلا-يف-سوريا#author_565.

[66] I say "incomplete" as in 2018 HTS has been designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey and the US.

[67] Sidney Tarrow, The New Transnational Activism, p. 194.

[68] Mentioned in Conny Roggeband, p. 20.

[69] Eitan Y. Alimi, Lorenzo Bosi & Chares Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, op. cit., p. 248.

[70] Cf. Jérôme Drevon, "Renouncing al-Qaeda and the Prospects for Engagement," op. cit.

[71] Charles Lister, "Is Idlib Set for Internal Strife?" Middle East Institute, 1 May 2020; URL: https://www.mei.edu/publications/idlib-set-internal-strife.

[72] "New video message from Hayy'at Taḥrīr al-Shām: 'Learn About Hayy'at Taḥrīr al-Shām,'" *Jihadology*, 14 February 2017; URL: https://jihadology.net/2017/02/14/new-video-message-from-hayyat-taḥrir-al-sham-learn-about-hayyat-taḥrir-al-sham/.

[73] Tore R. Hamming, "How Turkey and the Election of Erdogan Are Fragmenting the Jihadi Movement", *Jihadica*, 6 July 2018; URL: http://www.jihadica.com/how-turkey-and-the-election-of-erdogan-are-fragmenting-the-jihadi-movement/.

[74] "New Release from Khayr al-Umma Foundation: 'Meeting with Shaykh Abū Qatādah al-Filisṭīnī'", *Jihadology*, 16 October 2017; URL: https://jihadology.net/2017/10/16/new-release-from-khayr-ummah-foundation-meeting-with-shaykh-abu-qatadah-al-filiṣtini/.

[75] Tore R. Hamming, "How Turkey and the Election of Erdogan are Fragmenting the Jihadi Movement", op. cit.; Aymenn Al-Tamimi, "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's Relationship With Turkey: Primary Texts", Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog, 3 June 2018; URL: http://www.aymennjawad.org/2018/06/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-relationship-with-turkey.

[76] International Crisis Group, "Silencing the Guns in Syria's Idlib", *Middle East Report N°213*, 15 May 2020, pp. 12-13.

[77] "New Statement from Hayy'at Taḥrīr al-Shām: 'Jihād and Legitimate Politics: Between the Constants and the Variables", *Jihadology*, 8 June 2018; URL: https://jihadology.net/2018/06/08/new-statement-from-hayat-taḥrir-al-sham-jihad-and-legitimate-politics-between-the-constants-and-the-variables/.

[78] Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, *thawrat al-sham lan tamut* [The Revolution of the Levant Will Not Die], 14 October 2018 (Telegram).

[79] Charles Lister, "Is Idlib Set for Internal Strife?", op. cit. Once again, HTS thanked the Turkish government for its role in the revolution: Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, *ittifaqiyyat musku… sarab jadid* [The Moscow Agreement… a New Mirage], 7 March 2020 (Telegram).

[80] Fehim Tastekin, "Is Hayat Tahrir al-Sham doing Turkey's job in Idlib?", *Al Monitor*, 28 June 2020; URL: https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/06/turkey-russia-syria-idlib-is-hts-doing-job-of-ankara.html; Orwa Ajjoub, "HTS and al-Qaeda in Syria:

Reconciling the irreconcilable", *The Middle East Institute,* 15 July 2020; URL: https://www.mei.edu/publications/hts-and-al-qaeda-syria-reconciling-irreconcilable.

[81] Previously, HaD was part of the "And Rouse the Believers" (*Wa Harrid al-Mu'minin*) operations room, set up in October 2018 and comprising also Jabhat Ansar al-Din and Jama'at Ansar al-Islam. Cf. Aymenn Al-Tamimi, "New Jihadist Operations Room in Northwest Syria: ' So Be Steadfast", Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog, 12 June 2020; URL: http://www.aymennjawad.org/2020/06/new-jihadist-operations-room-in-nwsyria-so-be.

[82] See Fehim Tastekin, op. cit. Cf. also Enab Baladi, *thalat ittifaqiyyat fi manatiq mukhtalifa bayna "hurras al-din" wa "tahrir al-sham"* [Three Agreements in Different Districts Between "Hurras al-Din" and "Tahrir al-Sham"], 27 June 2020; URL: https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/396566.

[83] Jusoor For Studies, "The Security Dimension of Exerting Pressure on Hurras al-Din: Methods and Aims," *In Focus*, 7 October 2020; URL: https://jusoor.co/details/The%20security%20dimension%20of%20exerting%20pressure%20on%20Hurras%20al-Din..%20Methods%20and%20Aims/779/en. Al-Jaza'iri belonged to the more radical wing of HaD, comprising other members who had been expelled from the group at some point—such as Abu al-Yaman al-Wazzani, Abu Mus'ab al-Libi, Abu 'Amr al-Tunisi, and Abu Dhir al-Masri. Al-Tunisi was killed in a US airstrike at the end of June 2019. Until recently, it was believed that also al-Jaza'iri and al-Masri had been targeted in that raid. See these tweets by Lister and Ayyoub: Charles Lister, "@Charles_Lister", [Twitter feed online], https://twitter.com/Charles_Lister/status/1145695559682072578?s=20; Orwa Ajjoub, "@OAjjoub", [Twitter feed online], https://twitter.com/OAjjoub/status/1317168764132229124?s=20.

[84] Fehim Tastekin, op. cit.

[85] Aaron Y. Zelin, "Living Long Enough To See Yourself Become The Villain: The Case of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi," *Jihadica*, 9 September, 2020; URL: http://www.jihadica.com/living-long-enough/.

[86] In a speech given to HTS' fighters, al-Farghali lamented the weakening position of HTS vis-à-vis Turkey, and defined Turkish troops in Idlib as "apostates"- somehow in contrast with the tones of HTS' public statements in previous years. A possible explanation is that he intended to "cater to a rank and file that has been acculturated" to a more rigid doctrine. See: Sam Heller, "Leak Reveals Jihadists' Weakening Grip in Syria's Idlib," *War on the Rocks*, 10 April 2020; URL: https://warontherocks.com/2020/04/leak-reveals-jihadists-weakening-grip-in-syrias-idlib/.

[87] Enab Baladi, "Al-Julani starts getting rid of anti-pragmatism trend," 4 February 2019; URL: https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2019/02/al-julani-starts-getting-rid-of-anti-pragmatism-trend/.

[88] Cf. Anne Stenersen, "Jihadism after the 'Caliphate", p. 7.

[89] For instance, the concept is mentioned in: "New Release from Abu Maḥmud al-Filisṭini: The Jihadi Movement Between the Jurisprudence of Balances and the Jurisprudence of Comparisons," *Jihadology*, 28 July 2018; URL: https://jihadology.net/2017/07/28/new-release-from-abu-maḥmud-al-filisṭini-the-jihadi-movement-between-the-jurisprudence-of-balances-and-the-jurisprudence-of-comparisons/. Another important concept addressed in this release is the notion of *fiqh al-muwazanat*— "jurisprudence of balances", establishing a balance between the common good (*maslaha*) and what is harmful (*mafsada*) – which is based upon *fiqh al-waqi'*.

[90] Charles Lister, "Al-Qaeda's Leaders Are Dying, But a Greater Challenge Looms", *Jihadica*, 20 November 2020; URL: https://www.jihadica.com/al-qaedas-leaders-are-dying-but-a-greater-challenge-looms/.

Crossing the Rubicon: The Limits of Insurgent Violence in Kabardino-Balkaria

by Mark Youngman

Abstract

In the 2000s, relations between an overt Islamic social movement and religious and political authorities in the southern Russian republic of Kabardino-Balkaria became increasingly antagonistic. Eventually, the movement's leadership and a significant part of its membership transitioned to full-blown insurgency. Most assessments of these developments focus on the embrace of violence, placing it in the context of the regionalisation and radicalisation of conflict in Chechnya. Equally important, however, are the limits of this violence. For many years, the movement's leaders publicly opposed the idea of armed struggle and, even when they finally embraced it, violence for several years remained more restrained than seen elsewhere in the region. Drawing on the theoretical work of Busher, Holbrook and Macklin, this article argues that a series of intra-movement factors acted as internal brakes on violent escalation and contributed to this relative restraint and its eventual breakdown. Four closely related brakes are particularly important: the movement's social origins and ties; attitudes regarding the moral permissibility of violence; views on the strategic benefits of violence; and the personal authority of leaders. This case illustrates how internal dynamics can limit as well as facilitate violence, and how disrupting these dynamics can exacerbate instability.

Keywords: North Caucasus, Kabardino-Balkaria, Russia, insurgency, leadership, terrorism

Introduction

It is easy to treat political violence in binary terms, classifying actors as either violent or non-violent. The decision to employ violence then becomes of great significance, with actors crossing the proverbial Rubicon and taking a critical, irrevocable step. Much like the Rubicon river in Italy, however, the threshold to violence is a symbolic and psychological barrier, not a practical one. Actors can move backwards and forwards across it, and they can differ in how far beyond they are prepared to travel. We therefore need to differentiate between violent groups and examine both how they came to cross their particular Rubicon and how they behave on the other side. Part of this, as this Special Issue recognises, involves examining why groups impose constraints on violence even after they have accepted its legitimacy.

Developments in Kabardino-Balkaria, a republic in Russia's North Caucasus, provide us with an ideal opportunity for examining this important topic. In the 2000s, conflict escalated between an overt Islamic social movement, the Kabardino-Balkarian Jama'at (KBJ), and local religious and political authorities. Eventually, the KBJ's leadership and much of its membership transitioned to insurgency, forming part of a regional jihadist front. To date, this process has predominantly been viewed through the prism of the spread of conflict from nearby Chechnya.[1] This focus, while logical, tells only part of the story. Even after the transition, insurgent violence remained relatively restrained. Only after the insurgency had operated for several years did apparent restraints deteriorate and did violence escalate.

This article seeks to understand the reasons for restraint and its eventual erosion. Drawing on the theoretical contribution of Busher, Holbrook and Macklin that has inspired this Special Issue,[2] it argues that intra-movement factors acted as internal brakes on violent escalation. Four closely related brakes were particularly significant: the movement's social origins and ties; articulated attitudes on the moral permissibility of violence; views on the strategic benefits of violence; and the personal authority of individual leaders. This case illustrates how internal dynamics can limit violence even after a movement has crossed their Rubicon, and how disrupting these dynamics can negatively impact stability.

The article is structured as follows. The first section profiles the religious dynamics of Kabardino-Balkaria and the escalating conflict between the KBJ and religious and political authorities. The second section details the character of insurgent activity, contextualising violence against evidence of restraint. The final section introduces the concept of internal brakes and the data informing this analysis, before examining in turn each of the brakes that appeared to shape political violence in Kabardino-Balkaria. The article concludes by considering the implications and limitations of these findings.

Religion and Conflict in Kabardino-Balkaria

The rise of jihadism in Kabardino-Balkaria needs to be placed in the context of the republic's unique socio-political and religious dynamics. In the 1990s, the penetration of Islam remained limited and ethnic competition rather than religion provided the primary political cleavage.[3] There were few functioning religious institutions in operation when the Soviet Union collapsed, and cultural practices often did not align with core Islamic principles.[4] As late as 2012, only 54.6% of survey respondents identified as Muslim, a much lower figure than elsewhere in the region.[5] Nevertheless, religion gradually assumed an increasingly important role in social and political life, as evidenced by the growing number of functioning mosques – 11 in 1987, 96 in 1999 and 132 in 2007 – and people travelling abroad for a religious education.[6] To a certain extent, as ethno-nationalism declined as a political force, it was supplanted by religion.[7]

As this process developed, a divide emerged between the old religious establishment and a new generation of believers.[8] On one side, the local coordinating religious body, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (DUM KBR, hereafter DUM), aligned itself closely with the political establishment on a broad range of social and political issues. In return, it was allowed to gradually establish a de jure monopoly over officially sanctioned Islam.[9] On the other side, this new generation, sometimes referred to as New Muslims, sought to bolster the socio-political role of Islam. They criticised deviations from 'true' Islam, the evident religious ignorance of older imams, and shortcomings in the realm of da'wa (proselytization) and social activism.[10] Indeed, the leaders of the New Muslims often surpassed their DUM counterparts in religious learning, having obtained a theological education either in the republic, elsewhere in the region, or abroad.[11] This mirrored a process seen across the region, whereby,a group of young Muslims challenged an established religious community, arguing that the latter's way of believing as well as the way of living were not correct according to Islamic norms.[12]

At the same time, New Muslims became deeply disillusioned with the state, questioning the widespread corruption, clientelism, and lack of opportunities that spread into all spheres of life.[13] The DUM's close association with the authorities made it, for many, part of the problem. By contrast, Shari'ah law came to be seen as offering "a magic solution".[14] By the late 1990s, these challengers had coalesced into a broad social movement known as the Kabardino-Balkarian Jama'at (KBJ), led by Musa Mukozhev and his deputy, Anzor Astemirov. The KBJ called on people to embrace a 'genuine' Islamic identity and morality and sought to regulate members' lives through its interpretation of Shari'ah.[15]

Relations between the KBJ and the political and religious authorities became increasingly antagonistic. Generally hostile to dissent, state authorities adopted increasingly repressive measures towards religious believers in general and the KBJ in particular. The DUM openly collaborated with such repression, which was conducted under the guise of combatting Islamic extremism.[16] In 2000, prosecutors closed numerous religious institutions, including an Islamic Centre that served as one of Mukozhev's main platforms.[17] The DUM simultaneously attempted to shut down the mosque where he preached and curtail the autonomy and rights of any actors not under its direct control.[18] Between summer 2003 and summer 2005, repression escalated as the authorities launched an 'anti-Wahhabism' campaign[19] – 'Wahhabism' being the ill-defined regional nomenclature for all Salafi and non-traditional religious believers. KBJ-affiliated mosques and prayer houses were closed, while other mosques operated restricted opening hours and endured the monitoring of employees and attendees.[20] Although almost all practicing Muslims experienced some discrimination, the weight of these repressive measures targeted a small number of KBJ groups in particular.[21]

The campaign against Islamic extremism occurred against the backdrop of conflict in Chechnya and sporadic jihadist violence linked to Kabardino-Balkaria. Senior rebels from the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI), most notably Shamil Basayev, repeatedly sought to extend conflict beyond Chechnya to the broader region. Some people travelled from Kabardino-Balkaria to Chechnya to fight, while Basayev travelled in the opposite direction in autumn 2003 to persuade locals to open up a jihadist front in the republic.[22] Prior to the emergence of a full-blown insurgency, Zhukov identifies four groups of varying sizes as being briefly active between 1997 and 2005 (see Appendix). Some were implicated in terrorism outside the region, others in preparing to wage jihad in the republic; one reportedly arranged Basayev's visit.[23]

In 2004-2005, these parallel stories of religious conflict and insurgent activity became fully intertwined. In late 2004, Mukozhev and Astemirov disappeared underground. On 13-14 October 2005, they resurfaced as leaders of a major insurgent attack on the republican capital, Nalchik. The attack was claimed by Basayev and co-led by Ilyas Gorchkhanov, head of the Ingushetian Sector of the ChRI's recently created regional military structure, the Caucasus Front. It was a seminal event in the history of the republic, the repercussions of which traumatized the republic for many years. It also signalled the emergence of a full-scale insurgency, with Astemirov and Mukozhev declaring themselves, respectively, to be emir and deputy emir of the Caucasus Front's new Kabardino-Balkarian Sector – the cadres of which were comprised in large part of former KBJ members. In October 2007, the regionalization and Islamization of the North Caucasus insurgency was completed with the replacement of both ChRI and Caucasus Front with the explicitly jihadist proto-state, the Caucasus Emirate (Imarat Kavkaz, IK). Kabardino-Balkaria – or, in the language of the insurgency, the United Vilayyat of Kabarda, Balkaria and Karachay (OVKBK) [24] – became one of the IK's four key provinces.

The Character and Limits of Insurgent Violence

The members of the KBJ who transitioned to insurgent activity crossed a Rubicon in engaging in armed violence against the state. At the same time, they differed significantly from regional counterparts in how far beyond that Rubicon they travelled. Data from prominent human rights organization Memorial illustrates that security service casualties were lower in Kabardino-Balkaria than elsewhere, including during the IK's peak years of 2008-2010 (see Figure 1).

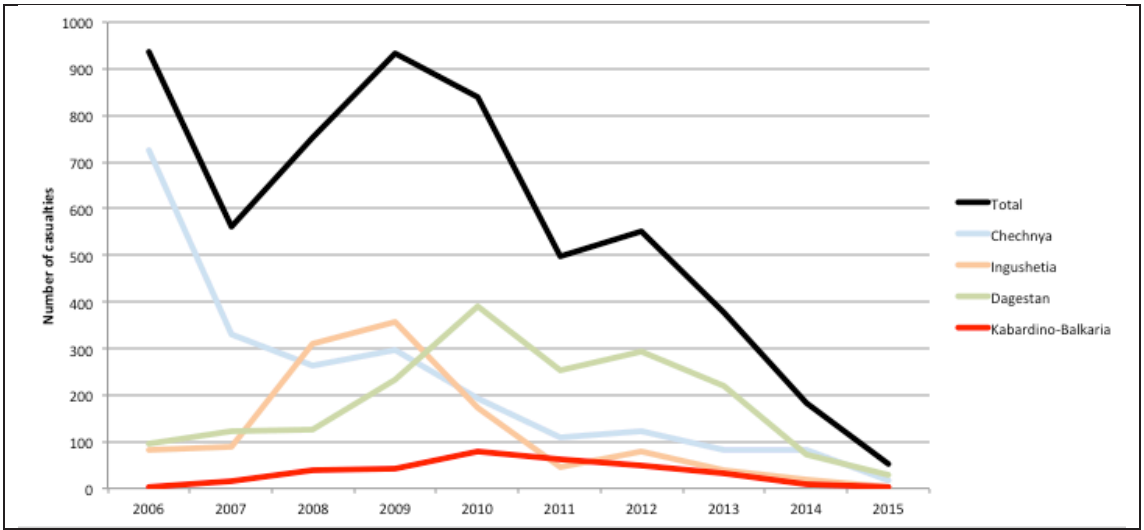

Figure 1: Security service casualties by republic, 2006-2015. Visualisation based on data from Memorial.[25]

Nor was it the case that violence was focused elsewhere: An author-compiled dataset of reporting by local news outlet Caucasian Knot [26] shows that the majority of casualties of violent incidents were either insurgents or security services (see Figure 2). The republic did not witness any suicide attacks,[27] and there were few attacks with a clear religious or ethnic dimension, particularly in the insurgency's early years. Thus, while political

violence was undoubtedly present, there were distinct limits to that violence.

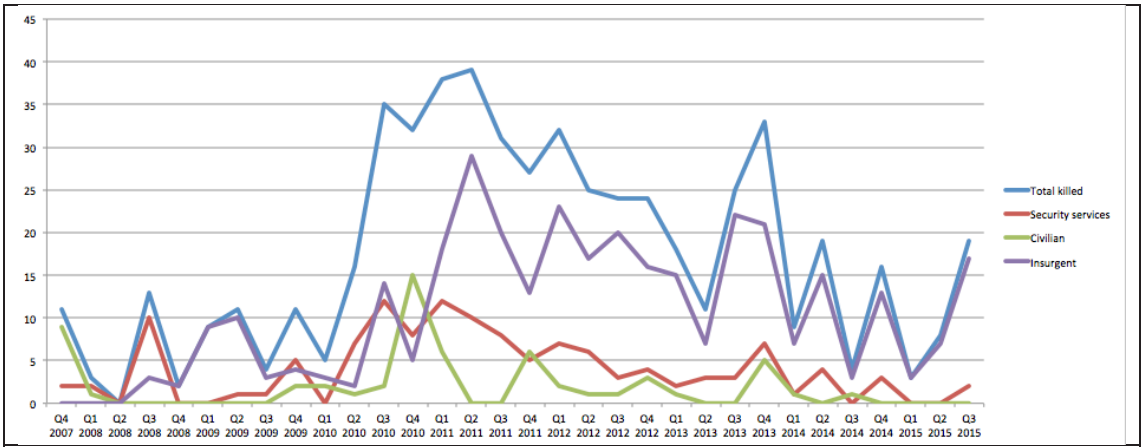

Figure 2: Number of people killed by category per quarter (Oct 07-Aug 15) in Kabardino-Balkaria. Visualisation based on author-compiled incident database of *Caucasian Knot* reporting.

Attitudes to violence did not cease to evolve with the transition to insurgency. Astemirov led the OVKBK until his death in March 2010, and violence until that point remained low. Under his successor, Asker Dzhappuyev (killed April 2011), both the levels and scope of violence increased considerably (see Figure 3), with a broader range of actors designated as accomplices of the infidel state. Religious and ethnic attacks increased – including the December 2010 murders of the republic's mufti, Anas Psikhachev, and prominent Circassian nationalist and historian Aslan Tsipinov – and there was a geographic expansion of violence beyond Nalchik.[28]

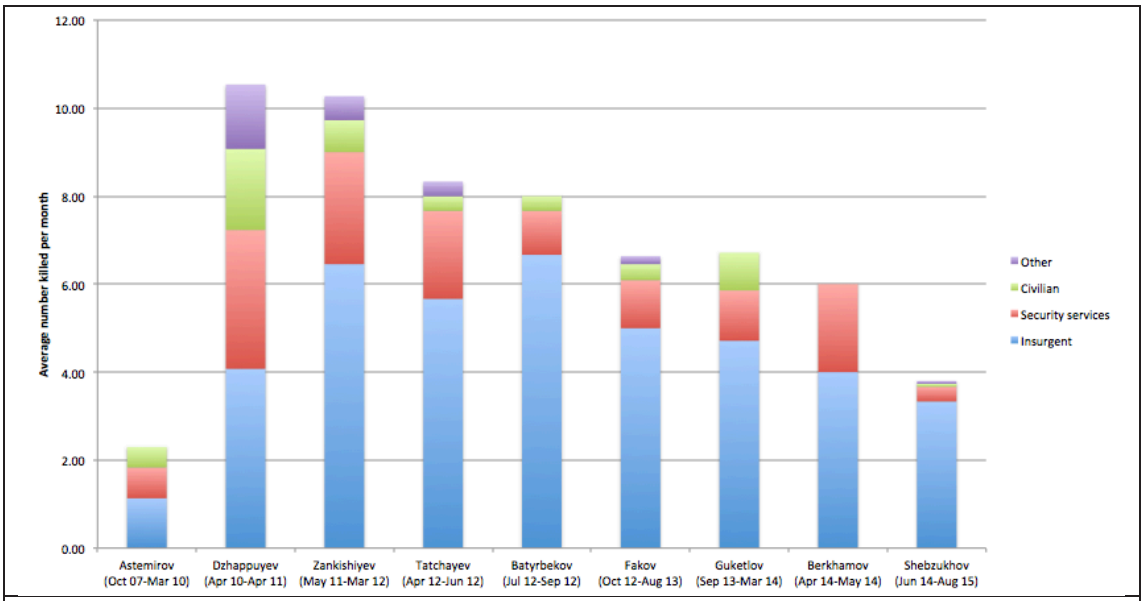

Figure 3: Average number of people killed per month of rebel leader's tenure. Visualisation based on author-compiled incident database of *Caucasian Knot* reporting.[29]

These trends continued during the tenure of subsequent leaders: Alim Zankishiyev (killed March 2012); Timur Tatchayev (killed June 2012); Ruslan Batyrbekov (killed September 2012); Khasanbi Fakov (killed August 2013); Tengiz Guketlov (killed March 2014); and Astemir Berkhamov (killed May 2014). Only under the last recognized leader, Zalim Shebzukov (killed August 2016), did violence return to close to its Astemirov-era levels, although by this point the insurgency's capacity was significantly diminished. Indeed, arguably post-Astemirov and definitely post-Dzhappuyev, violence was largely security-service driven, and insurgent losses accounted for the single largest category of casualties (see Figure 4).

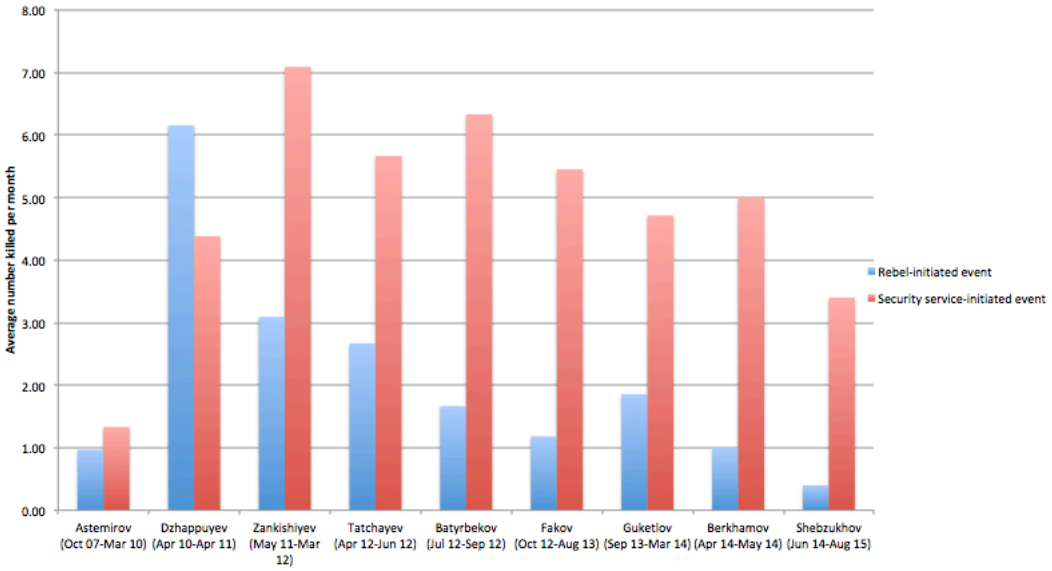

Figure 4: Average number of people killed per month of rebel leader's tenure by event initiator. Visualisation based on author-compiled incident database of Caucasian Knot reporting.[30]

The Internal Brakes on Political Violence

Kabardino-Balkaria poses a triple puzzle to efforts to understand the limits of political violence. Why did the KBJ's leadership resist calls to engage in armed struggle for so long, only to then reverse its position and switch to insurgent activity – along with large parts of the membership? Why did the insurgency, having embraced violence, nevertheless exercise considerable restraint? And why did that restraint ultimately disappear? To answer these questions, this article draws on Busher, Holbrook and Macklin's concept of internal brakes on violent escalation, which seeks to understand why "most groups do less violence than they are capable of." They define such brakes as,

> The practices through which actors who are recognised as group members seek either: (a) to inhibit directly the adoption or diffusion of more violent tactics by other group members; or (b) foment strategic decisions and (sub)cultural practices the logical consequences of which are to inhibit the adoption or diffusion of more violent tactics.[31]

Applying and extending their typology of five internal brakes or logics (strategic, moral, ego maintenance, outgroup definition, and organisational) provides us with a mechanism for resolving the triple puzzle raised by political violence in Kabardino-Balkaria. We can, after all, point to the important role played by internal factors in shaping KBJ and OVKBK attitudes to violence. On the one hand, the leadership articulated changing positions on violence, and patterns of violence correlated with changes in both those views and the leadership itself. On the other hand, changes cannot be adequately explained by capabilities: there is no evidence for an increase in insurgent capacity under Dzhappuyev, and the smaller insurgency in neighbouring Ingushetia perpetrated much higher levels of violence, including a sustained suicide attack campaign. While inherent to the concept of internal brakes is the recognition that these are not the only important factors – in this case, security service activity was at least as important – consideration of them is necessary to develop a complete picture of political violence in the republic.

In order to assess these internal brakes, this article draws on several sources. First, due acknowledgement needs to be offered to existing literature on the KBJ and OVKBK, most notably rich ethnographic studies by Zhukov, and Shterin and Yarlykapov. The aim in this article is not on the whole to challenge these authors' findings, but rather to bring this work into conversation with the emerging and important literature on restraint. Second, Busher, Holbrook and Macklin's typology has been used as a coding schema to assess 73 statements issued by

the movement's leaders between 2003 and 2015. Finally, it draws on the author's PhD research into the ideology of the IK, which, in addition to examining many of these statements, investigated the internal movement dynamics and external operating environments that shaped this ideology. Analysis of these sources identifies four internal brakes that were key to explaining the evolving manifestations of restraint and its eventual disappearance, and several areas where the theoretical concept of brakes could be further developed.

Brake One: The Social Embeddedness of the KBJ and OVKBK

The KBJ represented one of the largest post-Soviet social movements to emerge in the region, operating extensive networks at the village, city, and central level. At its peak, it boasted a membership of several thousand, out of a population of just over 850,000.[32] It was simultaneously integrated into and separated from society, engaging in social activism while seeking to create separate, self-governed spaces. This duality defined the movement, creating "complex relationships of inclusion and exclusion" [34] – something aptly illustrated by the paradox of the KBJ being a significant socio-political actor, but little being known about its internal life.[33]

These social ties arguably conditioned the KBJ's attitudes to violence. As Shterin and Yarlykapov argue, its partial integration into society "contributed to the leadership's desire for legitimacy" in that society.[34] The KBJ's leadership based their claim to legitimacy in part on disassociating the movement from violence and claiming to act within the law. The authorities' attempts to delegitimise the movement, by contrast, centred on establishing a link to violent movements elsewhere and the broad threat of Islamic extremism. However, as the KBJ moved towards embracing violence, these ties to external actors began to be eroded. For example, in an environment of increasing repression, the KBJ's leaders banned its members from contact with the DUM and attending DUM mosques.[35] At the same, time, the web of social ties was too complex to be simply cut. Members of the KBJ and DUM continued to attend each other's ceremonies, and the closure of KBJ prayer rooms forced many members to violate the ban and thus maintain social contact with the DUM.[37] The KBJ was also a diffuse movement, with some parts policing their boundaries more strictly than others.

The Nalchik attack illustrates how social ties, while weakened, persisted until the transition, and how violence could reverberate through them. As Zhukov notes, Kabardino-Balkaria is a place, '….where familial ties are traditionally strong, [and] hundreds of people who are linked by blood ties in a short period of time found themselves 'on different sides of the barricades.'[38]

Both Circassian and Balkar culture have detailed norms of conduct that govern social relations that were not easily broken.[36] Shterin and Yarlykapov argue for treating the KBJ and OVKBK as separate movements, distinguished in part by their degree of social separation.[39] This argument has clear merits in rejecting the move to violence as linear and inevitable, but risks obscuring how pre-insurgent ties continued to exert an influence on the movement post-transition to violence. Due to its overt origins, the Kabardino-Balkarian insurgency had more ties to broader society that could be strained or broken compared to its clandestine-from-inception regional counterparts. Moreover, kinship ties that cross political and ideological boundaries can reasonably be argued to exercise greater influence in cultures that place high value on them, compared to more individualistic ones. The transition to violence also involved a fundamental redefinition of in- and out-groups, and personal ties between KBJ members who did and did not make the transition were, if they did not persist, broken only recently. Since the psychological shadow of ties can persist well beyond their practical termination, the OVKBK's origins appear significant to understanding its attitude to violence.

Evidence for the ongoing influence of these social ties comes from the OVKBK's articulated position on violence. During Astemirov's tenure, insurgent statements consistently distinguished between the federal enemy and those who came from local communities. However they were characterized, these two categories were never collapsed into a single identity, and leaders allowed for the possibility of the local 'them' becoming 'us.'[41] Mukozhev observed that among the local police there were people who "work honestly, fight crime, drug addiction and corruption,"[42] and these people were not the enemy. Similarly, Astemirov asserted that the insurgency did "not have a problem with the infidel's tax inspectorate or their military commissariat," but was instead fighting Russian special forces.[43] Local service to the 'enemy' was sharply criticized, but by itself it did not make someone an enemy.

The longer the insurgency was in operation, the more these distinctions eroded. In one of his last statements, for example, Astemirov was more critical of local law enforcement and officials and claimed their attitude had become increasingly "anti-Islamic" over time.[44] His successor, Dzhappuyev, called on local law enforcers to leave their jobs if they wanted to avoid becoming victims of violence – reflecting a shift in where the burden of responsibility for restraining violence was placed.[45] Dzhappuyev also accused the security services of attempting to sow social disharmony and deliberately targeting the OVKBK's social ties by targeting the relatives of insurgents – something he claimed would lead to retaliation in kind.[46] Yet both Astemirov and Dzhappuyev were consistent in demonstrating a concern for how their actions were perceived by local communities, extensively justifying individual attacks. Eventually, however, those who had previously maintained social ties were killed and replaced by individuals recruited directly into the insurgency. One illustration of the extent of the OVKBK's social isolation under later leaders was the lack of explanation offered for attacks, which arguably reflected a loss of and lack of interest in local audiences.

Fully accounting for these social ties, using Busher, Holbrook and Macklin's framework is challenging, suggesting this is one area requiring further conceptual development. On the one hand, they identify "boundary softening in relation to putative out-groups" as a key brake, part of which involves resisting generalisations about opponents.[47] Astemirov's and Mukozhev's statements certainly testify to such resistance. On the other hand, there is something deeper – going beyond the cognitive processes and deliberate strategies that are the focus of the framework and relating to the actual composition of the networks and groups themselves – that also needs to be accounted for to fully capture the role of social ties in restraining violence. Research by Staniland and della Porta shows how pre-conflict networks can shape subsequent behaviours and practices, including recruitment, resources, and movement structure.[48] In the case of the OVKBK, we can see how these also shaped attitudes to violence. At the same time, the erosion of these social ties was manifested not so much in changes in how attacks were justified, as by whether they were justified at all.

Brake Two: Moral Imperatives of Leadership

Busher, Holbrook and Macklin's typology draws attention to the potential existence of moral logics about "whether it is right to use violence and, if so, under what conditions," and how these can work to constrain violence through formal communiqués or informal interactions.[49] A focus on the subsequent embrace of violence can easily obscure the importance of such moral brakes during the KBJ's existence. After all, as Shterin and Yarlykapov note,

> For almost a decade its leaders, Musa Mukozhev and Anzor Astemirov, systematically resisted pressures both from inside the movement and from its opponents, rejecting any extreme ways of expressing their beliefs.[50]

Mukozhev repeatedly rejected the legitimacy of waging jihad in Kabardino-Balkaria, distancing the KBJ from armed groups. As late as September 2004, he insisted that the movement was committed, despite worsening circumstances, to operating within the law:

> In recent years we have become more and more convinced: Muslims do not have rights. None. We have tried and to this day we continue to try to resolve our problems through legal means.[51]

There is, moreover, no compelling evidence that physical violence was a group norm at this time, rather than a reflection of individual positions.[52]

The sincerity and strength of this brake has been the subject of considerable debate, given subsequent events.[53] Prior to the transition, there were regular public rejections of extremist elements within the KBJ, and many analysts at the time cast doubt on the KBJ's links to underground groups. At the same time, of the four violent groups identified by Zhukov as operating 1998-2005, all but one emerged from the KBJ (the first predated it). Moreover, later statements by Mukozhev and Astemirov contradict earlier ones, suggesting links with Basayev predate the open embrace of insurgency. Thus, even if one were to prioritise the voice of actors themselves, the question arises as to which voice to prioritise.

Resolving this debate – were it even possible, given than many of those involved are now dead – is beyond the remit of this article. Yet focusing exclusively on the truthfulness of the disassociation is to miss an important point: the process of disassociation shaped the KBJ's engagement with its operating environment regardless of whether it was truthful or not.[54] The authorities' persecution of the movement despite its rejection of violence influenced public perceptions of its legitimacy, such that blame for the Nalchik attack did not fall exclusively on the insurgents – a fact accepted even by Kabardino-Balkarian President Arsen Kanokov, who admitted police crackdowns could have triggered it.[55] By the mid-2000s, practising Muslims were essentially faced with an unenviable choice: leave the republic, conceal their practice, or fight. Open manifestations of religious belief became incompatible with peaceful participation in socio-political life, and the local authorities did not distinguish between violent and non-violent strands of 'non-traditional' Islam, essentially targeting any rivals to the DUM.[56] While it is often contended that the New Muslims returned from abroad with radical ideas, often it was "the younger Muslims' mere opposition to 'traditional' Islam, after experiencing its normative variant in the Middle East, that was perceived as militant."[57] This likely influenced patterns of recruitment into the KBJ and the emerging insurgency, and with it attitudes to violence. As repression increased, so too did the flow of people underground (both towards armed groups and clandestine religious practice).[58] Any effort to paint illegal action as immoral and illegitimate becomes less compelling when the state itself operates on the wrong side of the law. Whereas in 2001 calls to armed jihad had failed to gain significant traction, by late 2004 such ideas found much more fertile soil,[59] and Mukozhev spoke about how it was becoming increasingly difficult to restrain young people from retaliating.[60]

These moral brakes certainly deteriorated significantly with the transition to insurgency, but they did not evaporate entirely. Astemirov, for example, extensively engaged with the question of the legitimacy of applying the concept of defensive jihad to the circumstances of the North Caucasus and Kabardino-Balkaria.[61] The question of legitimacy was now, of course, being decided in favour of violence, but this nevertheless imposed moral constraints on its application – it was not, in Astemirov's reading, a mandate for unrestrained violence. During Astemirov's tenure, other leadership statements sought to emphasise the targeted nature of violence and efforts to avoid civilian casualties.[62] Although such statements served a clear propaganda purpose, they nevertheless stood in stark contrast to the much more aggressive statements issued by counterparts in Dagestan at this time.[63] Moreover, as Figure 2 shows, the articulated desire to avoid civilian casualties was reflected in patterns of violence.

Dzhappuyev's statements as leader testify to the erosion of this moral brake. Although he continued to insist that insurgents actively avoided civilian casualties,[64] he increasingly placed responsibility for avoiding injury on the civilians themselves, calling on them to avoid places where the security services gathered. He also redrew the line between civilian and enemy as he insisted that "Muslims have today no right to be civilians while war is being fought between the infidels and the Muslims."[65] The increase in civilian casualties during Dzhappuyev's tenure stemmed predominantly from this redefinition, with targeting of those accused of collaborating with the security services and the state and those employed by state bodies other than the security services. As time progressed, the boundaries of what constituted a legitimate target expanded in line with the movement's distance from society.

Brake Three: Strategic Imperatives of the Leadership

Intertwined with moral brakes, it is often possible to identify strategic brakes that focus on the question of "what works?" or "how best can we achieve our objectives?" – indeed, these feature prominently in discussions of radical groups.[66] In the case of Kabardino-Balkaria, the evidence for the existence of a strategic brake is much less contentious than that for a moral one. Both the KBJ's and the OVKBK's position on violence was consistently articulated with reference to evolving strategic calculations. The aforementioned position on legitimacy is both moral and strategic in nature, and Mukozhev and Astemirov were never pacifists: they did not reject the legitimacy of armed struggle in general. Mukozhev, for example, rejected Basayev's repeated calls to arms not because he rejected the legitimacy of the Chechen struggle, but on the basis that "it is not our war."[67] He spoke of banning open discussion of the repercussions of persecution, because this would "be interpreted by the security services as a threat to the current authorities, and repressions will follow."[68]

The KBJ's leadership also "strongly rejected the use of violence for the sake of spreading the Islamic faith and setting up an Islamic state," arguing that the low level religiosity in the republic meant the time was not right to implement *Shari'ah* law.[69] These were as much strategic rejections of violence as moral ones. They focused on a rejection of jihad not as an abstraction, but as applicable to current circumstances, and they prioritized da'wa rather than force as the best means of reaching people. Speaking at a roundtable in Moscow in 2003, Astemirov warned that discrimination against Muslims could have "unpredictable consequences," but also spoke of how "patience had brought its result: mosques have opened, several court cases have been won."[70] By 2005, in the environment of heightened persecution, this confidence by the KBJ leadership in the efficacy of engaging with the authorities and following a legal path had undoubtedly faded.

Following the transition to insurgent activity, Astemirov did not articulate a drastic new position on the legitimacy of violence in general, but rather argued the circumstances had changed to make it appropriate. In Astemirov's reading, jihad was not more important than the other pillars of Islam, but moved to the fore in certain circumstances – those facing the OVKBK being, of course, just such.[71] He placed particular emphasis on the purposefulness of violence:

> Today partisan war is not the purposeless destruction of infidels and damage to their property, but a deliberate strategy that does not allow the infidels to definitely become established on the ground and spread debauchery and corruption.[72]

Strategic concerns also clearly came to the fore in relation to appeals to particular communities. Astemirov, for example, adopted a broadly conciliatory position on ethno-nationalism: although he criticized nationalist celebrations, he predominantly portrayed nationalist sentiment as misguided and prioritised Islamic over nationalist identities, rather than portraying nationalists as legitimate targets for violence.[73] At the same time, he sought to co-opt support for broad Circassian nationalism, attempting to demonstrate an alignment of interests by accusing Moscow of interfering in Abkhazian affairs,[74] and eulogizing and claiming the backing of prominent nationalist figure and former Abkhazian Defence Minister Sultan Sosnaliyev.[75] Such appeals were clear manifestations of the strategic brake of attempting "to build or maintain ties with strategically useful allies who are not supportive of violent escalation."[76] This conciliatory position began to erode under Dzhappuyev, including with the assassination of Tsipinov. However, it is noticeable that the insurgency did not specifically target, rhetorically or in practice, ethnic Russian communities – a decision that can be interpreted in part as a strategic effort to avoid provoking a heavy-handed security service response, and in part as an effort to avoid alienating potential supplementary support communities.[77]

This highlights an important point in considering the evolution of the OVKBK: for the early leadership, violence was never a goal in and of itself and, unlike in other parts of the movement, it was never embraced gratuitously. Rather, the choice was presented in terms of what offered the best means of achieving goals at a given time. Astemirov sought to emphasize the restraint shown by insurgents:

> We work according to a different programme, which does not stipulate military activity at the current stage. We do not practice excessive violence except when necessary. We do not see enemies in the local population. We prefer to turn people toward the true path rather than to kill them.[78]

Whatever one thinks of the moral legitimacy of the decision to engage in violence, Astemirov and Dzhappuyev arguably provide ample evidence to demonstrate their position was a carefully considered and rationalised one. Each insurgent operation was justified in detail, and considerable efforts were made to portray individual victims of violence as deserving of their fate [79] – to portray violence, in other words, as targeted rather than indiscriminate. This stands in stark contrast to the post-Dzhappuyev leadership, at least until the emergence of Shebzukhov: these new leaders devoted far more time to the practice of violence than they did to articulating a strategic rationale for it.

Brake Four: The Authority of the Leadership

Both moral and strategic brakes centred on the position adopted by the leaders of the KBJ and OVKBK. Yet

the significance of these was dependent on a fourth brake: The authority of the leadership itself. To appreciate the degree of influence that Mukozhev and Astemirov in particular were able to exercise, we first need to consider the nature of the KBJ itself. This operated on a three-tiered structure (see Figure 5): At the base were local neighbourhood jama'ats, of which there were at least 40; at the middle-level stood a city- or village-level shura, or council; and at the apex stood a shura for the KBJ as a whole. Each level appointed an emir as leader, who then formed the membership of the next tier up in the hierarchy – with the KBJ shura's emir becoming the overall leader of the KBJ itself. For the entirety of the KBJ's existence, this senior-most role was occupied by Mukozhev.[80]

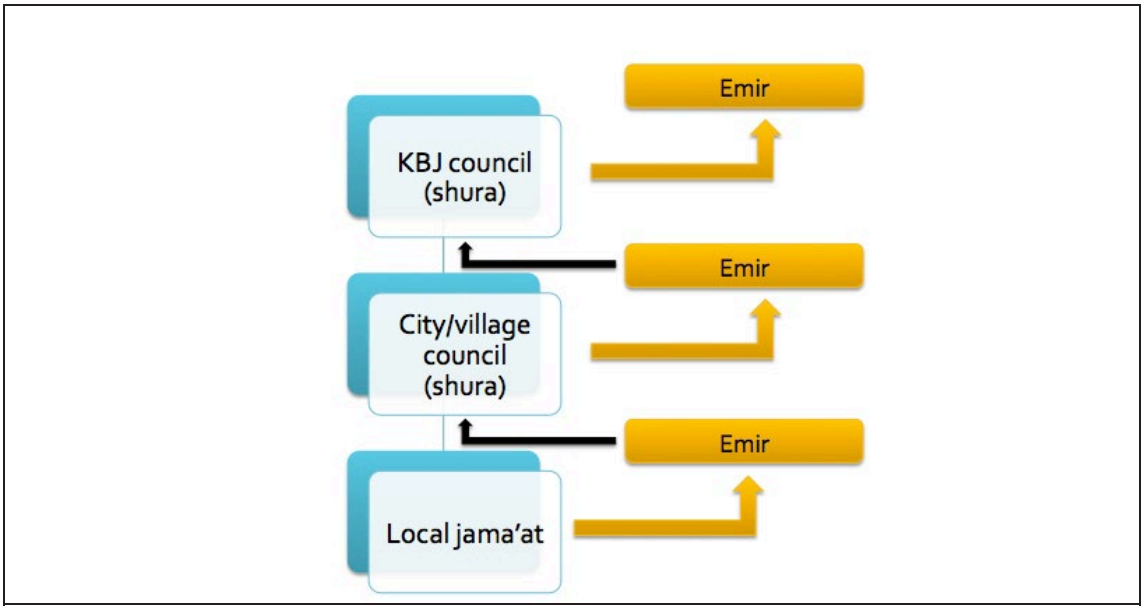

Figure 5. The leadership structure of the KBJ

At the local level, membership was fluid: There were no admission protocols or membership cards, and the role the jama'at played in the life of members varied. Membership was instead contingent on participating in the public and social life of the movement, acknowledging the exclusive authority of the local and overall KBJ emir, and accepting the hierarchical nature of the movement.[81] Recognition of authority was thus not merely a feature of the movement, it was arguably central to the movement's very existence.[82] The KBJ emir's authority was essentially elective authoritarianism: members could raise questions for discussion, but the emirs could also forbid discussion, and open criticism of the leaders was rare. Members could choose to reject the emir's authority, but only at the cost of membership itself.[83] This strictly hierarchical structure was preserved under the OVKBK, albeit with Mukozhev and Astemirov switching roles. Astemirov repeatedly insisted on the importance of leadership by and subordination to an emir,[84] drawing on his interpretation of scripture.

The functioning of this brake needs to be considered in the context of the personal qualities of the leaders, since this invariably impacted receptiveness to this doctrinal position on authority. Both Mukozhev and Astemirov were charismatic and capable of articulating sophisticated positions on the legitimacy of violence and non-violence. While the concept of charisma is complicated and often confused, the role of personal qualities nevertheless remains highly important to the exercise of leadership.[85] One of the important changes to occur in the OVKBK post-Astemirov was a decline in the capabilities of leadership. Dzhappuyev, for example, lacked Mukozhev's and Astemirov's theological training; although he devoted considerable time to articulating a position on developments, he lacked the rhetorical skills and personal authority of either. The next in line, Zankishiyev, was severely deficient as an orator, struggling to string together coherent ideas and sentences, and several leaders who followed him made very few public statements. Thus the fourth brake continued to reinforce the moral and strategic ones, but in a negative way: Leaders post-Astemirov did not so much change the rationale for violence as fail to provide one. In eliminating Mukozhev and Astemirov, the security services killed two key insurgent ideologues, but they also killed the people who were best placed to control the

movement and act as brakes on violence. After their deaths, developments and the escalation of conflict were driven as much by external movement factors as they were by internal ones.

On a theoretical level, this brake is again difficult to account for using Busher, Holbrook and Macklin's typology because, as with social embeddedness, it relates as much to the characteristics of groups and actors as to the rationales they articulated. We can draw a qualified link to the ego maintenance (self-identification) brake, in so far as both the KBJ and OVKBK saw subordination to an emir as an important practice of 'true' Islamic movements. The actual functioning of the brake, however, differs from this conceptualisation: In their typology, the authors focus on direct restraints on violence, whereby groups do not engage in violence because it does not fit with their self-image.[86] In the case of the KBJ, such a direct role is limited, although Mukozhev did disassociate the movement from violent groups and talk about expelling extremists from its ranks[87]; in the case of the OVKBK, this direct role is entirely absent. Rather, for both movements, the self-identification brake exerted an indirect influence, reinforcing the moral and strategic ones. The requirement of clear leadership and strict subordination did not in and of itself establish a position on the merits or otherwise of violence. Instead, it ensured that the position established through those other brakes had practical significance. Without considering it, therefore, we are unable to understand how and why moral and strategic brakes were able to operate effectively.

Conclusion

This article has sought to contribute to the emerging literature on internal brakes on violent escalation through a study of a movement that transitioned from an overt social movement to armed insurgency. Drawing on the typology developed by Busher, Holbrook and Macklin, it has identified four main internal brakes: the movement's social origins and ties; attitudes to the moral permissibility of violence; leadership views on the strategic benefits of violence; and the personal authority of leaders. Each of these brakes worked in conjunction with the others: we cannot talk about these individual brakes in isolation from one another or from broader environmental conditions but instead – much like the brakes of a car, we need to consider them as forming part of a complex system. If moral and strategic logics functioned as brake pads, then it was the nature of the leadership that controlled their operation, and the interaction between the rest of the vehicle and the road that conditioned them. Just as they operated in conjunction with one another, so too did they deteriorate together. They do not exclusively explain the trajectory of violence, but they do contribute an important piece of the puzzle.

This case study also has important implications and opens up further avenues for enquiry. Conceptually, these brakes imperfectly map onto the original typology: while they capture well for articulated rationales, they do not adequately account for the social relationships and organizational characteristics of the movement itself. Affording greater attention to such features may offer a fruitful avenue for refining and developing the typology.

The case study also highlights the importance of differentiating within violent movements. By focusing on the decision of KBJ leaders and members to engage in armed struggle against the state and transform into the OVKBK, we can easily lose sight of how close they remained to their Rubicon of violence in comparison to regional counterparts. The internal brakes in operation during the tenures of Mukozhev and Astemirov mean it could have been easier to find a pathway to reconciliation than would have been the case either in somewhere like Dagestan or at a later stage of the conflict in Kabardino-Balkaria itself. Such reconciliation may not have been possible, but it was at least conceivable. Instead, disrupting the internal dynamics and eroding the brakes that were in operation served to facilitate violence and significantly undermine stability, at least in the short term.

Appendix: Jihadist Groups Active in Kabardino-Balkaria prior to the Nalchik Attack[88]

1997-1998: A small group led by Anzor Atabiyev, accused of murdering two police officers in March 1997, was eliminated in a special operation in August 1998. Little is known of the activities of the group.

2000-2001: A group led by the Bekkayev brothers called for armed jihad against the authorities. It reportedly consisted of at least 300 members, though these figures cannot be verified. Some members of the group were put on trial, but the fate of the leaders is unknown.

2000-2003: A small group led by Zaurkhan Shogenov called for jihad in the republic. Several group members were arrested in connection with terrorist attacks outside the republic, and the Shogenov group organized Basayev's visit to the republic. Shogenov himself was killed in September 2003.

2003-2005: In August 2004, a Chechen rebel website reported that a Yarmuk Jama'at was preparing to wage jihad in the republic. Security services clashed with a group that they accused of killing tourists from Stavropol, and they linked the group both to the Kavkazcenter statement and Muslim Atayev, accused of attacking a police officer in May 2003. A series of attacks in the republic was attributed to Yarmuk, before Atayev was killed in January 2005.

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Notes

[1] For a broader discussion of the evolution of conflict in the region and key literature dealing with it, see Julie Wilhelmsen and Mark Youngman, 'Violent Mobilization and Non-Mobilization in the North Caucasus,' Perspectives on Terrorism, 14:2 (2020), pp. 2-10.

[2] Joel Busher, Donald Holbrook and Graham Macklin, 'The internal brakes on violent escalation: a typology', Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, 11:1 (2018), pp. 3-25.

[3] The Kabardins belong to the Circassian ethnic group, the boundaries of which are fiercely contested but which also includes the Cherkess of Karachayevo-Cherkessia and the Adygeans of the eponymous republic. The Balkars are a Turkic people who share a language and culture with the neighbouring Karachays. See Sufian Zhemukhov, 'The birth of modern Circassian nationalism', Nationalities Papers, 40:4 (2012), pp. 503-524; Chen Bram, '"Re-Islamisation" and Ethno-Nationalism: the Circassians (Adyghe) of the Northwestern Caucasus and Their Diaspora', in Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 28-49; Chen Bram and Moshe Gammer, 'Radical Islamism, Traditional Islam and Ethno-Nationalism in the Northern Caucasus', Middle Eastern Studies, 49:2 (2013), pp. 296-337; Galina Yemelianova, 'Kinship, ethnicity and religion in post-Communist societies: Russia's autonomous republic of Kabardino-Balkariya', Ethnicities, 5:1 (2005), pp. 51-82.

[4] Irina L. Babich, 'Islam and the Legal System in the Northwestern Caucasus,' in Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 19-27; Kaflan Khanbabyev, 'Islam and Islamic Radicalism in Dagestan', in Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 82-111.

[5] Arena Atlas of Religions and Nationalities of the Russian, based on MegaFOM nationwide poll conducted 29 May-25 June 2012 in 79 subjects of the Russian Federation. Data available at URL: http://sreda.org/en/arena. Of the remainder, 15.6% identified as Orthodox, 11.8% as non-denominational religious, and 6.6% as atheist. The republic's three main ethnic groups are Kabardin, Russian and Balkar, accounting, according to the 2010 census, for 57.2%, 22.5% and 12.7% of the population respectively. The Kabardins and Balkars are nominally Muslim and historically associated with the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, although pagan and Christian practices remain widespread.

[6] Vladimir Bobrovnikov, 'Al-Azhar and Shari'a Courts in Twentieth Century Caucasus,' Middle Eastern Studies, 37:4 (2001), pp. 1-24; Svetlana Akkiyeva, Islam v Kabardino-Balkarii, (Moscow: Logos, 2009); Svetlana Akkiyeva, 'Islamskiye uchebnyye zavedeniya i musulmanskoye obrazovaniye na Severnom Kavkaze: Sostoyaniye i perspektivy', in Islam v multikulturnom mire (Kazan: Kazan University, 2014), pp. 330-342.

[7] Akkiyeva, Islam v Kabardino-Balkarii, op.cit.. This is not to argue that ethno-nationalism disappeared – Circassian nationalism remained a significant arena of contestation, particularly around the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi – but that its character and political role changed. See, for example, Zhemukhov, op.cit.

[8] Akkiyeva, 'Islamskiye uchebnyye zavedeniya,' op.cit.

[9] Akhmet Yarlykapov, 'The radicalization of North Caucasian Muslims,' in Russia and Islam: State, Society and Radicalism (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2010), pp. 137-154; Akkiyeva, Islam v Kabardino-Balkarii, op.cit; Aleksandr Zhukov, 'Kabardino-Balkariya: Na puti k katastrofe. Predposylki vooruzhennogo vstupleniya v Nalchike 13-14 Oktyabra 2005 goda,' Memorial (2008), accessed at URL: http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/142989.

[10] Akkiyeva, Islam v Kabardino-Balkarii, op.cit.; Zhukov, 'Kabardino-Balkariya: Na puti k katastrofe'; Marat Shterin and Akhmet Yarlykapov, 'Reconsidering Radicalisation and Terrorism: The New Muslims Movement in Kabardino-Balkaria and its Path to Violence,' Religion, State and Society, 39:2-3 (2011), pp. 303-325; Geraldine Fagan, 'A word of justice: Islam and state repression in the North-West Caucasus,' Central Asian Survey, 33:1 (2014), pp. 29-46; Regnum, '"Basayeva provezli cherez granitsu militsionery": Intervyu lidera musulmanskoy obshchiny Kabardino-Balkarii Mussy Mukhozheva,' 29 September 2004, accessed at URL: https://regnum.ru/news/polit/333321.html.

[11] Akkiyeva, Islam v Kabardino-Balkarii, op.cit.

[12] Irina Starodubrovskaya, 'Islamic Conflict and Violence in Local Communities: Lessons from the North Caucasus', Perspectives on Terrorism, 14:2 (2020), p. 83.

[13] Fagan, op.cit.; Jan Koehler, Alexey Gunya, Murat Shogenov and Asker Tumov, 'Violence and the Dynamics of Political Settlements in Post-Soviet Kabardino-Balkaria,' Perspectives on Terrorism, 14:2 (2020), p. 98.

[14] Bobrovnikov, op.cit., p. 15.

[15] Shterin and Yarlykapov, op.cit.

[16] Zhukov, op.cit.

[17] Akkiyeva, Islam v Kabardino-Balkarii, op.cit.

[18] Akkiyeva, Islam v Kabardino-Balkarii, op.cit.; Zhukov, op.cit.

[19] Zhukov, op.cit.

[20] Zhukov, op.cit.

[21] Zhukov, op.cit.

[22] Zhukov, op.cit.

[23] Zhukov, op.cit.

[24] For simplicity's sake, throughout the text this author uses OVKBK to refer to the Kabardino-Balkarian insurgency as existed post-Nalchik attack, although it did not formally adopt this name until the proclamation of the IK. Technically, the OVKBK also incorporated the neighbouring republic of Karachayevo-Cherkessia, but in reality the overwhelming majority of insurgent activity and membership was concentrated within the boundaries of Kabardino-Balkaria. Vilayyat means province and alludes to the administrative divisions of the historical caliphate, though which one is an open question. Usually, it is presumed to be a reference to the Rashidun Caliphate, governed by the Rightly Guided Caliphs who succeeded the Prophet Muhammad. However, it could also be a reference to the post-Tanzimat Ottoman Caliphate. Although, as one of the reviewers of this article noted, the latter is seen as a poor model by contemporary Salafis, the North Caucasus insurgency was influenced by actors and debates within Turkey and, in its early years, debated whether the official language of the IK should be Turkish, suggesting that the primacy of the former reference point cannot be taken for granted.

[25] 'Byulletin Pravozashchitnogo tsentra "Memoriala". Situatsiya v zone konflikta na Severnom Kavkaze: Otsenka pravozashchitnikov. Zima 2015-2016 gg.,' accessed at URL:https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-27.

[26] Caucasian Knot only started producing its own statistical summaries from 2010 onwards. However, it has routinely reported on events in the region across the entire lifespan of the IK and – although any single source will have limitations – it represents by far the

most reliable and consistent source of information.

[27] This excludes incidents in which suspected rebels reportedly accidently blew themselves up in the course of either planning attacks or special operations, some of which were initially reported as suicide attacks.

[28] John O'Loughlin, Edward C. Holland, and Frank D.W. Witmer, 'The changing geography of violence in the North Caucasus of Russia, 1999-2011: Regional trends and local dynamics in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria', Eurasian Geography and Economics, 52:5 (2011), pp. 596- 630.

[29] Statistics reflect the date ranges in brackets, not the exact tenure of the rebel leaders: Although clear dates of death are available, it is not possible to tell exactly when a new leader assumed command, and the tenures of Astemirov and Shebzukhov extend beyond the range covered by the data.

[30] Rebel-initiated events include improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, small arms attacks, and suicide attacks; security service-initiated events include special operations, successful detentions, and failed attempts at detention. Classification is based on how Caucasian Knot reported the event and cannot be independently verified.

[31] Busher, Holbrook and Macklin, op.cit., p.5.

[32] Zhukov, op.cit.

[33] Zhukov, op.cit.

[34] Shterin and Yarlykapov, op.cit., p. 321.

[35] Zhukov, op.cit.

[36] B.Kh Bgazhnokov, Sotsialnaya organizatsiya semi: po materialam istoricheskoy etnografii adygov (Nalchik: KBIGI, 2010); M.D. Karaketov and Kh.-M.A. Sabanchiyev (eds), Karachayevtsy. Balkartsy (Moscow: Nauka, 2014).

[37] Zhukov, op.cit.

[38] Zhukov, op.cit.

[39] Shterin and Yarlykapov, op.cit., p. 321.

[40] Kavkazcenter, 'Press-reliz komandovaniya Obyedinennogo Vilayyata Kabardy, Balkarii i Karachay,' 2008. Exact sourcing information, such as URLs, for all insurgency-produced material has been withheld due to the nature of the material.

[41] Mark Youngman, 'Interpreting the ideological evolution of an insurgency: Lessons from the North Caucasus, 2007-2015,' PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2019, accessed at URL: https://etheses.bham.ac.uk//id/eprint/9372/; Mark Youngman, 'Ideology Along the Contours of Power: The Case of the Caucasus Emirate,' Perspectives on Terrorism, 14:2 (2020), pp. 11-26.

[42] Kavkazcenter, 'Dzhikhad v Kabardino-Balkarii obyazatelen,' 2005.

[43] Fatima Tlisova, 'Exclusive interview with Anzor Astemirov, March 2009,' Jamestown Foundation, 20 March 2009, accessed at URL: https://jamestown.org/program/exclusive-interview-with-anzor-astemirov-march-2009/#sthash.E9GQLCHH.dpuf; Kavkazcenter, 'Munafiki prinosyat bolshe vreda, chem kafiry,' 2007.

[44] Islam Din, 'Otvety na voprosy kadiya Imarata Kavkaz, amira Obyedinennogo Vilayyata Kabardy Balkarii and Karachaya Sayfullakha,' 2009.

[45] Islam Din, 'Razyasneniye amira Abdullakha o situatsii v Vilayyate KBK. Imarat Kavkaz,' 2010.

[46] Islam Din, 'Obrashcheniye Valiya Vilayyata KBK Abdullakha. Imarat Kavkaz,' 2010.

[47] Busher, Holbrook and Macklin, op.cit., p.16.

[48 Paul Staniland, Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse (London: Cornell University Press, 2014). Donatella della Porta, Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, Social Movements: An Introduction, Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

[49] Busher, Holbrook and Macklin, op.cit., p.13.

[50] Shterin and Yarlykapov, op.cit., p. 305.

[51] Regnum, op.cit.

[52] Shterin and Yarlykapov, op.cit., pp. 316-317.

[53] For the competing perspectives, see Zhukov, op.cit.; Shterin and Yarlykapov, op.cit.; Gordon M. Hahn Russia's Islamic Threat (London: Yale University Press, 2007).

[54] Joel Busher makes a similar argument in his research on the English Defence League, noting that how activists position themselves in relation to other groups and their attendant ideological and strategic positions can have a tangible impact on their processes of mobilisation, their tactical repertoires and ultimately the trajectory of the group, even if that positioning is overwhelmingly strategic or knowingly untrue: see 'Why even misleading identity claims matter: the evolution of the English Defence League,' Political Studies, 66:2 (2018), pp. 323-338; see also Joel Busher, Gareth Harris and Graham Macklin, 'Chicken suits and other aspects of situated credibility contests: explaining local trajectories of anti-minority activism', Social Movement Studies, 18:2 (2019), pp. 193-214.

[55] The Moscow Times, '59 Suspects Go on Trial in Nalchik,' 12 October 2007, accessed at URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20071014212901/http://www.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2007/10/12/011.html.

[56] Fagan, op.cit.

[57] Fagan, op.cit., p. 30.

[58] Zhukov, op.cit.

[59] Zhukov, op.cit.

[60] Fagan, op.cit.

[61] Youngman, 'Interpreting the ideological evolution of an insurgency,' op.cit., p 261.

[62] Kavkazcenter, "'Pobeda delayet dzhikhad privlekatelnym,'" 2008; Islam Din, 'Obrashcheniye k sotrudnikam militsii i drugikh spetssluzhb,' 2009.

[63] Youngman, 'Interpreting the ideological evolution of an insurgency,' op.cit.

[64] Islam Din, 'Obrashcheniye Amira Obyedinennogo Vilayyata KBK Abdullakha Askera Dzhappuyeva,' 2010; Islam Din, 'Amir Abdullakh: "Razyasneniye po povodu podryva ippodroma,"' 2010; Islam Din, 'Obrashcheniye Valiya Vilayyata KBK Abdullakha. Imarat Kavkaz,' 2010.

[65] Islam Din, 'Amir Abdullakh: "Razyasneniye po povodu podryva ippodroma,"' 2010.

[66] Busher, Holbrook and Macklin, op.cit., p.8.

[67] Versiya, 'Amir Musa Mukozhev: Moskve vse ravno, shto budet s Nalchikom,' 13 August 2007, accessed at URL: https://versia.ru/chelovek-podozrevaemyj-v-organizacii-napadeniya-na-nalchik-dal-intervyu-versii.

[68] Regnum, op.cit.

[69] Domitilla Sagramoso and Galina Yemilianova, 'Islam and Ethno-nationalism in the North-Western Caucasus,' in Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2009), p. 124.

[70] Denis Katayev, 'Vystupleniye na kruglom stole: Prava natsionalnykh menshinstv v Rossii: illyuzii i realnost,' Gazeta Yuga, 26 March 2003, accessed at URL: http://www.gazetayuga.ru/archive/2003/26.htm.

[71] Kavkazcenter, 'Oproverzheniye dovodov otsizhivayushchikhsya samoporazhentsev,' 2008.

[72] Kavkazcenter, 'Oproverzheniye dovodov otsizhivayushchikhsya samoporazhentsev,' op.cit.

[73] Youngman, 'Interpreting the ideological evolution of an insurgency,' op.cit.

[74] Kavkazcenter, 'Amir Seyfullakh: "O gnilom zapakhe natsionalizma,"' 2008.

[75] Tlisova, op.cit.; Islam Din, 'Anzor Astemirov ob Sosnaliyev: "On vsegda khotel umeret v boyu…,"' 2009.

[76] Busher, Holbrook and Macklin, op.cit., p.10.

[77] Although they never represented a key support community, the IK's leadership attempted – in some notable cases, successfully – to appeal to ethnic Russian converts to Islam. Of course, ethnic Russians were victims of violence in the republic, but they do not appear to have been singled out as targets.

[78] Tlisova, op.cit.

[79] Kavkazcenter, "'Pobeda delayet dzhikhad privlekatelnym,'" op.cit.; Islam Din, 'Amir Sayfullakh: "Barakat Shakhidov,"' 2009.

[80] Zhukov, op.cit.

[81] Zhukov, op.cit.

[82] Zhukov, op.cit.

[83] Zhukov, op.cit.

[84] Kavkazcenter, 'Amir Seyfullakh o protsesse podgotovki k provozglasheniyu Kavkazskogo Emirata,' 2007; Kavkazcenter, 'Oproverzheniye dovodov otsizhivayushchikhsya samoporazhentsev,' op.cit.

[85] David C. Hofmann and Lorne L. Dawson, 'The Neglected Role of Charismatic Authority in the Study of Terrorist Groups and Radicalization,' Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 37:4 (2014), pp. 348-368; Mark Youngman and Cerwyn Moore, 'Replacing the Standard Bearer: Theorizing Leadership Transition in Insurgent Movements', forthcoming.

[86] Busher, Holbrook and Macklin, op.cit., p.13.

[87] Regnum, op.cit.; Kavkazcenter, 'Musa Mukozhev: "Vyydya na Dzhikhad, my obreli nastoyashchuyu svobodu,"' 2006.

[88s] Zhukov, op.cit.

Violence and Restraint within Antifa: A View from the United States

by Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill

Abstract

In recent months recurrent calls have been made by conservative right-wing politicians to designate Antifa a "domestic terrorist organization" in the United States. Fixated on the spectacle of its Black Bloc tactics they have equated Antifa, what is essentially an ad-hoc, non-hierarchical, geographically dispersed social movement comprised of local autonomous activist groups, with organized violent extremists. And yet, the evidence for such an equation has been mostly limited to a handful of instances that usually bare the hallmarks of political exaggeration or are alternatively attributable to individuals loosely associated with the Antifa movement. Why is this so? How do militant anti-fascists in the US understand violence and exercise restraint in their use of it? This article seeks an answer to these questions based on interviews with activists from Portland's Rose City Antifa, one of the United States' most well-known Antifa groups, and an analysis of a collection of the group's Tweets. It reveals that Antifa exercises considerable restraint, internally and externally, with regards to both the literal and rhetorical use of violence within its street and digital activism. In turn it calls upon others to exercise reciprocal levels of restraint by ceasing their labelling of Antifa as a "domestic terrorist" organization.

Keywords: Antifa, anti-fascism, restraint, violence, terrorism, street activism, digital activism

> I would say if we describe violence as being like, you know, a Richard Spencer face punch, I would say based on simply being a fascist, all fascists deserve, at a minimum, a Richard Spencer face punch.[1]
>
> I don't think that people necessarily will go off the handle. Like I don't really see a huge risk of like anti-fascists becoming like bloodthirsty maniacs or something.[2]

Introduction

On 31 May 2020, in the wake of the mass protest that followed the death of African American George Floyd, Donald Trump tweeted that the US Government will be designating Antifa a "terrorist" organization.[3] This threat was neither sudden nor unexpected. Trump's inauguration in January 2017 had emboldened the US far right (also known as the "Alt-Right"), and Antifa - the countermovement comprised of militant anti-fascist activists – had pushed back. Before long, Antifa had shot to both national and international prominence. Oxford Languages shortlisted the word "Antifa" as its "Word of the Year 2017",[4] with usage frequency having peaked in August 2017 when, at a "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, a white supremacist murdered 32-year-old anti-fascist Heather Heyer. Trump's response to Charlottesville was to apportion blame to both sides, a deliberate exercise in "false equivalency" according to his critics. Sensing an opportunity, right-wing provocateur "MicroChip", dubbed "Trumpbot overlord,"[5] initiated an online petition calling on the Federal Government to formally declare Antifa a "terror group – on the grounds of principle, integrity, morality and safety." The petition's popularity – 368,423 signed it – occasioned significant media coverage from conservative media outlets such as Fox News.[6] The aim, according to "MicroChip," was to shift the post-Charlottesville narrative, to re-unite conservative opinion, "and prop up antifa as a punching bag."[7]

Antifa has been a recipient of numerous "punches" from conservative right-wingers ever since. A Republican-sponsored Congressional Bill (H.R. 6054), cited as the "Unmasking Antifa Act of 2018," called for an amendment to title 18 of the United States Code to provide for enhanced penalties for committing an offence while wearing "a disguise, including a mask."[8] The following year, two Republican senators, Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and Bill

Cassidy (R-Louisiana) introduced Senate Resolution 279 calling for "groups and organizations across the country who act under the banner of Antifa to be designated as domestic terrorist organizations".[9] Cruz had written to the US Department of Justice and FBI on 23 July 2019 requesting that Antifa be subject to criminal investigation. He penned the following:

> Antifa's violence is widespread and well-known. Earlier this month, the "Rose City" chapter of the domestic terrorist organization "Antifa" rampaged through Portland, Oregon, stealing and destroying property, disrupting traffic, and assaulting civilians. One journalist, Andy Ngo, was attacked so severely that he was hospitalized for a brain hemorrhage. This weekend, Willem Van Spronsen, an Antifa terrorist, attacked a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement center in Tacoma, Washington, igniting a vehicle and attempting to ignite a propane tank. This mayhem follows previous armed attacks and rioting by Antifa in Portland, as well as the arsons, destruction of property, batteries, and related crimes by Antifa following President Trump's inauguration.[10]

Two days later, in the House of Representatives Rep. Brian K. Fitzpatrick (Pennsylvania, 1st Congressional District) introduced House Resolution 525 calling on the House to strongly condemn the violent actions of Antifa; to recognize that Antifa engages in "domestic terrorism"; and to urge the President and the President's Cabinet to use all available resources to address the Antifa threat.[11] On 27 July 2019 Trump tweeted:

> Consideration is being given to declaring ANTIFA, the gutless Radical Left Wack Jobs who go around hitting (only non-fighters) people over the heads with baseball bats, a major Organization of Terror. [12]

There is much here, of course, that is bravado, bluster and bogeyman caricature. The US Federal government does not hold the necessary executive authority to designate a domestic group a "terrorist organization" (it can only declare foreign groups "terrorist"). Such a move would also run counter to the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of association. It would be unconstitutional to criminalize on the basis of membership of a domestic ideological organization. What is more, Antifa is not even a formal organization as such – a fact noted by FBI Director, Christopher Wray, in his response to Ted Cruz at a Senate Committee hearing in July 2019.[13]

This brings us to the essential point of our article. It is, for sure, merely stating the obvious that Antifa is not a "major organization of terror." Applying the guidelines of the Global Terrorism Database, Gary LaFree has already demonstrated that Antifa neither constitutes a single highly organized group, nor does it engage in terrorism.[14] Since 9/11, right-wing extremists in the US have been responsible for the politically motivated deaths of 110 people while those affiliated to Antifa have killed no one.[15] This "zero" statistic has been recently challenged, however, by the killing of a Patriot Prayer supporter, Aaron J. Danielson, in Portland on 29 August 2020. During a pro-Trump caravan demonstration, an altercation led to a fatal shooting. The suspect, Michael Reinoehl, declared himself "100% anti-fascist". Reinoehl, who several days later was shot by a federal fugitive task force, had given an interview to *Vice News* in which he claimed that he had acted in self-defence. Yet Reinoehl, although a self-declared Antifa supporter, was not, it seems, a Rose City Antifa (RCA) member. "I'm not a member of anything" Reinoehl revealed in his *Vice* interview.[16]

Yet, *stricto sensu*, according to US legal definitions, Antifa does engage in domestic "terrorist violence". Section 802 of the USA PATRIOT Act (2001) defines "domestic terrorism", *inter alia*, as acts "dangerous to human life", which is so broad that it can include relatively minor civil disobedience actions associated with street protest.[17] So in the wake of the riots following Floyd's death, the US Attorney General William Barr considered it legitimate to declare that the "violence instigated and carried out by Antifa and other similar groups in connection with the rioting is domestic terrorism and will be treated accordingly."[18] On 4 June 2020, the FBI Director remarked that "We're seeing people who are exploiting this situation to pursue violent, extremist agendas - anarchists like Antifa and other agitators."[19]

Despite this claim, federal prosecutors could not link any Floyd protest arrests to Antifa. The only links found were to an "accelerationist" far right encouraging others to infiltrate the protest, and use "cocktails, chainsaws and firearms" against the police in order to start the "boogaloo" (a second Civil War). By early September 2020 around 300 arrests had been made across the US in relation to the Floyd protest. Of those arrested, around one third had been in Portland. However, none of the court documents from federal cases in the city referenced Antifa or the wider anti-fascist movement; and more than 70 per cent were for minor citations and misdemeanours, not felonies.[20]

Yet it is undoubtedly true that militant anti-fascists do engage in political violence, which they could, in theory, escalate to more lethal acts. In Greece, for example, in November 2013, two members of Golden Dawn were shot dead by suspected anti-fascists. So, it is not only in a narrow US technical-legal sense that an article on Antifa speaks to terrorism studies. The Antifa slogan "by any means necessary" carries a commitment to leave open all available tactics, including, hypothetically, the intensification of violence should the need arise. "One primary factor correlated with the demand for anti-fascists is the supply of fascism and racism," as one observer noted, so if the supply escalates then logic dictates that demand for more militant anti-fascist responses should escalate too.[21] In the literature on movement-countermovement dynamics, this relationship has been described as "curvilinear" (a pattern of correspondence where the success of the former generates more demand for the latter).[22] Through elaboration of our case study, Portland, in the Pacific Northwest, we will consider the use violence in the context of the tactics and strategies that social movement scholars term "repertoires of contention", that is to say, "distinctive constellations of tactics and strategies developed over time and used by protest groups to act collectively in order to make claims on individuals and groups".[23]

Prior to Trump's election, in April 2016, the US Department for Homeland Security and FBI had already projected that, should "Fascist, nationalist, racist, or anti-immigrant parties obtain greater prominence or local political power in the United States", this could trigger a violent, and potentially lethal, anti-racist backlash from "anarchist extremists".[24] According to a joint intelligence assessment across an approximate four-year period, January 2010-July 2014, criminal acts by US "anarchist extremists" had "tended to be low-level, non-violent incidents, such as vandalisms — and when US-based anarchist extremists commit violent acts they are generally aimed at [symbolic] property." When militant anti-fascist activity did occur – of all reported US anarchist extremist violent incidents during this period only 7 per cent was related to "anti-racism" – activists had "sought out violent confrontations with white supremacists at public locations such as at rallies, concerts, or meetings".[25] In other words, in such confrontational encounters, persons – bodies – rather than property become the target of oppositional violence.

In putting their "bodies on the line," militant anti-fascists aspire to defeat fascist organizing, to de-stabilize it, and ultimately de-mobilize it. At its root, anti-fascist militancy is the promise to effect intimidation, humiliation and de-moralization upon fascists. This involves a physical commitment to "no platforming" (preventing a person or persons, or organisation(s), regarded as having fascist or fascistic views from expressing those views). This physical commitment, in the form of "direct action", is distinct from more liberal forms of anti-fascism, which are less confrontational, and often make appeals to institutionalized political actors and to the state. Stanislav Vysotsky is right to point out, "It is this willingness to engage in direct confrontation and violence that defines this movement as militant as opposed to other movements that choose to oppose white supremacists through non-confrontational demonstrative actions and juridical cooperation with the state".[26]

When asked what he understood by the term "militant anti-fascism", one Portland-based Antifa activist told us:

> I mean anti-fascism based in direct action that is not beholden to the state […] So one that is not afraid of engaging in violence or aggression against fascism that understands […] no platforming as probably one of the most effective tactics in fighting fascism, that no platforming means denying fascists the street, denying them speaking.[27]

For anti-fascist militants, since quasi-militaristic tactics are deemed historically effective, the anti-fascist struggle demands their periodic deployment. "The idea", as one Portland activist said, "that you could engage in a successful and effective anti-fascism in the face of like true, like, fascist organizing that was non-militant and could also be that successful is simply historically inaccurate".[28] Yet, as we shall see, there are definite limits to their fight against fascism. In other words, their violence is not so open-ended or unlimited as the slogan "by any means necessary" implies. Why is this so? How do militant anti-fascists in the US understand violence and exercise *restraint* in their use of it?

Antifa: Our Subject

Antifa, short for "anti-fascist", is a self-designation. Its etymological provenance is German, a derivation of the militant Communist Party-sponsored organization, *Antifaschistische Aktion*, active during 1932-33. Yet today's "Antifa" groups have no direct historical lineage to this Communist-sponsored organization. In fact, there is no political party affiliation, no central organization, no central leadership, and no prescribed doctrine beyond a shared belief that "fascism" must be defeated. Antifa is thus *reactive* (in the sense of reacting to a perceived "fascist" threat) and might be best understood as "essentially an ad hoc sociopolitical movement designed to address a specific problem".[29]

For the purposes of this study, Antifa is considered a militant, non-hierarchical, geographically dispersed social movement comprised of local autonomous activist groups.[30] It is also a transnational movement not spatially restricted to the US, although the US is obviously our concern here. In 2017 it was estimated that some two hundred local Antifa groups operated within the US.[31] However, due to their "closed" nature, activist numbers are impossible to quantify, and certain groups are more active and established than others.

Some Antifa groups operate within the loose structure of a peer-to-peer national network, the "Torch Network", and share common "Points of Unity". There are others, however, that remain outside this network. The Torch Points of Unity are as follows:

1. We disrupt fascist and far right organizing and activity.
2. We don't rely on the cops or courts to do our work for us. […]
3. We oppose all forms of oppression and exploitation. […]
4. We hold ourselves accountable personally and collectively to live up to our ideals and values.
5. We not only support each other within the network, but we also support people outside the network who we believe have similar aims of principles. […][32]

Core activists are typically drawn from the radical left eco-system of autonomous anarchists and left libertarians, but Antifa also draws participation from communists and socialists. Antifa does not operate in a vacuum but as part of a wider coalition of forces, which comprises both militant and non-militant anti-fascists. Notwithstanding outliers, the majority of Antifa activists fall within the age range of 25-35. There is evidence of gender parity; an over-representation of those identifying as Queer; and a predominantly white ethnicity.[33]

In the public imagination, Antifa's notoriety is derived from the spectacle of the Black Bloc, an anarchist tactic in which groups of protestors don black clothing and masks in order to conceal their identities. In the US context, adoption of this tactic, which had its origins in the European autonomist scene, occurred largely as a consequence of the coming together of the militant anti-fascist movement with the anti-globalization movement in the wake of the WTO Seattle protests in 1999. Taking inspiration from the anarchist Black Bloc tactic of "N30", on 12 January 2002, at the so-called "Battle of York" in Pennsylvania, militant anti-fascists from Anti-Racist Action (the precursor to Antifa) formed an anti-fascist Black Bloc for the first time in order to confront a white supremacist demonstration. This "battle", where one white supremacist fired a handgun and another ran over a female anti-racist, would set the precedent for subsequent direct action against fascists.

Bloc members typically carry both "defensive" (banners, shields, gas masks, goggles, helmets, bandannas, etc.) and "offensive" gear (spray paint, smoke bomb projectiles, Molotov cocktails, slingshots etc.). Tactically, the Bloc is deemed particularly useful when engaging in illegal activity, such as physically confronting the far right or the police (through obscuring the identity of protestors it offers anonymity, making it harder for the police to identify individuals for future prosecution, or target specific individuals during the action itself). The Bloc is also intended to send a message of defiance to the police, and a message of intimidation to the opposition. For those in the wider anti-fascist coalition who might be present, whether allies or potential allies, it offers security and reassurance. Bloc advocates draw a clear distinction between this type of militant activity and clandestine terrorism: "One of the many objectionable qualities of clandestine terrorism is that, at best, it is still a spectator sport; a bloc, on the other hand, can be a participatory and contagious radicalizing experience".[34] For conservative right-wing detractors, however, the Bloc has become an object of fixation: the symbol of subversive, insurrectionary terror.

Our Methods

Although shaped by locality, Antifa will typically deploy a mix of street protest and digital activism with the latter and not the former, accounting for the vast majority of everyday activity. The focus of this "everyday anti-fascism" is cyber-shaming, or "doxing" (revealing personal information about a far-right activist to the public, sometimes rendered as "doxxing"). This article therefore uses a mixed-methods approach in order to capture both offline and online activity. In the first place, it draws from qualitative, semi-structured interviews with activists from RCA in Portland, and the city's broader anti-fascist coalition. Interviews were carried out in October 2019 and February 2020 under conditions of strict anonymity.

Space precludes a history of the contestation between anti-fascists and the far right in Portland, but RCA is one of, if not the most active, and well-established Antifa group in the US. Originally founded in 2007, RCA has been subject to significant national and international media attention. A right-wing conservative social media "provocateur," Andy Ngo, who was physically assaulted at one of its counterdemonstrations, is credited with having done much to publicize and demonize the group amongst mainstream opinion in the United States.[35]

Additionally, the article makes use of a sample of 3971 tweets (including 2484 retweets) shared by RCA's Twitter account (@RoseCityAntifa) between 13 March 2018 and 28 August 2019 and collected using Tweepy (2019) in accordance with Twitter's regulations.[36] Specifically, the 648 tweets (including 279 retweets) from within this sample which featured variants of "violence," "attack," "assault," "fight," and "terror" were subject to close reading.[37] These more "militant" tweets were then analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively according to the traditions of techno-culturally orientated critical discourse analysis.[38] Particular attention was paid to whom RCA attributed these words and in turn how they exercised rhetorical restraint when using this public facing social media platform in order to engage new audiences. While consent to carry out the analysis of these tweets was not legally required given Twitter regulations, RCA activists were informed of this element of the research prior to participating in the qualitative interviews.[39]

Locating the Place of Violence: our Point of Departure

Needless to say, the violent disruption of "fascist" assembly is an axiom of movement praxis. As one RCA activist put it, "it's not just about punching a Nazi in the face. It's also punching a Nazi in the face and making sure they don't come back again. And you don't have to do it every year".[40] Yet even if violence is so deeply ingrained in praxis, it is also moderated through reference to how Antifa defines "fascism" as its primary antagonist.

Antifa do not hold fast to a narrowly agreed definition of fascism. While many in Antifa would agree that a core ideological tenet of fascism is ultra-nationalism, in practice "fascism," a "slippery animal," tends to

be approached more in terms of everyday "reactionary" social forces and tendencies, such as racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, the scapegoating and marginalizing of oppressed groups, and police brutality. That said, militant anti-fascists in the US have generally kept their focus on the political space that is commonly viewed as "far right".[41] The problem today, of course, is the blurring of boundaries between the far right and the Trump-supporting conservative right: groups such as the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer, which claim not to be racist or fascist. For Antifa, it would be "obviously amiss for anti-fascist activists to ignore such auxiliaries and attempts at obfuscation," but what this means is that Antifa does "nevertheless struggle with intellectually dishonest conflation".[42] Inevitably, (and with some justification) this invites accusations that Antifa is "notoriously generous in distributing the fascist label".[43]

Antifa, as an anti-fascist oppositional movement, defines its violence in relative terms and so its violence is necessarily tempered by the movement's relationship to "fascism" (by what it is struggling against). The legitimacy of anti-fascist action is thus drawn from the illegitimacy of its opponent. So, for Antifa, a key, if not *the* key, unique defining feature of "fascism" is an overwhelming predilection for violence: "Fascists are gonna do what fascists do, which is try to kill all proponents of freedom".[44] As the website of Portland's RCA had stated,

> Fascism is marked by its reliance on violence or threats of violence to impose views on others, and its propensity to create compliance through terror.[45]

As one RCA activist told us, fascism is "a political movement that feels that it gains power through violence and power through intimidation […] that's kind of the core of what I would call a fascist politics".[46] "Without physical force," so the Antifa argument runs, "fascism will come to power, and the aggressive violence that will occur both on its way to power and after that power is acquired will be so world-historically horrific that aggression is justified".[47]

Yet, and this is an important consideration, if anti-fascists were to fetishize their violence, the danger is that it would undermine their ethical and ideological challenge to fascism, give credibility to the idea of the unity of the radical extremes ("false equivalency"), only attract those interested in violence, and encourage male hegemony and chauvinism (a problem that has traditionally beset militant anti-fascism). As one RCA respondent said, "You can't just have violence for the sake of violence or whatever".[48] There is also the further concern that a serious escalation in violence will invite overwhelming governmental repression. Hence, as one RCA activist predicted, this would lead to "a very concerted state effort to identify and repress and then imprison, and I think it would very quickly lead to the dissolution of militant anti-fascist groups as organized and as activist groups".[49]

When rationalizing their recourse to violence, Antifa will view it as *pre-emptive*, to protect the marginalized and the oppressed from the violence inherent to fascist organizing. This counter-violence is understood primarily as a form of community *self-defense*, deploying physical force to counter or forestall an immediate threat of violence to marginalized communities: people of color, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, LGBTQ+, and so on.[50] However, what is also clear is this defensive response does not preclude the initiation of physical force and so "It's fairly, fairly simple […] 'proactive self-defense' is what we do".[51]

Anti-fascist writer Natasha Lennard puts it this way:

> Anti-fascist violence is thus a counterviolence, not an instigation of violence onto a terrain of existing peace. A situation in which fascists can gather to preach hate and chant "blood and soil" - this is a background state of violence. The problem we face, then, is not so much that of *necessary violence* as it is one of *impossible non-violence*. [52]

So, if non-violence is *impossible*, it does beg the question: what are its limits?

At this point, it is worth considering how anti-fascists understand respective intent. As one anti-fascist writer explained:

> Fascists, by being Fascists, have announced their affiliation with many of the worst crimes in human history. In some ways, they are *worse* than the average member of the actual nazi party was, because they look back at Hitler's crimes and revere it in *full knowledge* of what it wrought.[53]

In other words, "Nazis tell us their intent: they want genocide. And when they get the chance, they act on this intent".[54] Advocates of anti-fascist violence understand their violence differently: "Now let's look at the intention of anti-fascist violence. There are two goals: to protect people and to show force and strength in an attempt to discourage the nazis".[55] In this sense, the intent behind anti-fascist violence is to *reduce* overall harm (as seen through a communitarian ethical lens). This suggests a limiting principle at work here: fascism is an inherently violent ideology; it is *exceptional*; violence against the makers of that ideology is justified in the context of the protection of the vulnerable. It follows that lethal conflict escalation would eliminate the qualitative difference between anti-fascism and fascism. Simply put, it would undermine the normative basis for Antifa's argument that fascism is truly *exceptional* in its use of violence.

Conflict dynamics are not static, of course, and militant anti-fascists scale their *reaction* to the perceived threat from their adversaries. In the words of one militant anti-fascist activist:

> You fight them by writing letters and making phone calls so you don't have to fight them with fists. You fight them with fists so you don't have to fight them with knives. You fight them with knives so you don't have to fight them with guns. You fight them with guns so you don't have to fight them with tanks.[56]

We are told that the weapons of choice for fascists are pipes and guns, whereas anti-fascists only carry sticks, shields, smoke-bombs and fireworks. Yet, as one writer put it, the "fairly obvious reality" is that "firearms are a fact of life when it comes to social movements in the US."[57]

Anti-fascists do carry (concealed) firearms (and there have been cases of open carry too). RCA's praxis is to carry concealed firearms and its "direct action" group do train activists in firearm use. Moreover, the radical left is not minded to support gun control, which is often associated with reinforcing white supremacy: "rather than reducing violence in communities of color, such [gun control] laws give racist cops one more thing with which to harass, detain, arrest and brutalize people of color."[58] The anarchist milieu generally supports the principle of community armed self-defense, and "see guns as part of a community armed self-defense to be used at appropriate times and places, just like other tools and tactics."[59] Indeed for some radical-left groups, such as Redneck Revolt, firearms culture is critical to building cross-racial solidarity amongst the working class.[60] Even so, there is little indication that Antifa subscribes to the insurrectionary notion that it should now use guns offensively, to build and sustain counter-power, and "rise up in arms". Tellingly, in 2017, when there was a case of activists in Great Lakes Antifa (GLA) engaging in "aesthetic militancy," and "needlessly escalating dynamics" by "offering weapons, body armor and training" to new recruits, GLA found itself ostracized.[61]

But what of the relationship between militant anti-fascism and wider revolutionary or insurrectionary struggle? As one critic put it "anti-fascism without revolution guarantees capitalism's continuing misery and devastation".[62] In the context of the right's upswing under Trump, there are those who might well seek a shift from a purely defensive to a more *offensive*, system-oppositional approach. Influenced by the work of radical French political theorist Gilles Dauve (pen-name: Jean Barrot), those radical-leftists who remain critical of Antifa claim that "everyday anti-fascism" has become a distraction from revolution so that "anti-fascism" is, in Dauve's words, "the worst product of fascism."[63] Tellingly, however, as Antifa activists from Philadelphia and New York have responded, Antifa sees itself a subset of the anarchist movement, and as such it is "a piece of, but not replacement for the larger radical vision." This means that Antifa's focus of intent still remains overwhelmingly *defensive,* "a bulwark against the most ideologically reactionary forms of the Far Right".[64] For sure, Antifa

activists would agree that violence is inherent to the logic of capitalism and so the struggle is "three-way" (against fascism and the capitalist state), but fascism (as the most reactionary form) exposes that violence to an exceptional degree.

Revolution, as one RCA activist put it, "is not really what we're here to talk about. What we're here to talk about is how can we disrupt these groups. How can we basically pull the wheels off their cart".[65] So "if we were worried about, you know, the intricacies of what, you know, a revolutionary party should look like for example, then we'd get kind go off into the weeds and we wouldn't be focused on the actual thing that we're doing".[66] This is not some popularity struggle, "We're not here to get the majority of people in the country behind us. We're not here to elect candidates. We're not here to build a lasting political organization. What we're here to do is prevent groups like the Proud Boys from beating up people in the street".[67]

Internal Culture

When thinking about restraint, we also need to factor-in group internal movement dynamics. There is shared recognition that Antifa should not initiate violence for the sake of it, and that amongst the anarchist and anti-authoritarian libertarian left, humanism rather than hate, is a core tenet.[68] This speaks to what social movement scholars call anarchist "prefiguration" (the use of value-appropriate means to pursue value-based goals).[69] In other words, tactical means should reflect the future society being sought.

The internal culture is also one that encourages discussion of the moral and strategic limits of violence. Criminologist Stanislav Vysotsky offers an apt summary of this culture, which is worth quoting here:

> Antifa activists do not make tactical decisions lightly. Militant groups are organized around an affinity group model that stresses direct democracy and accountability. Tactical decisions are made collectively by group members in meetings where their relative merits and disadvantages are thoroughly discussed. Group members vote on potential actions striving for consensus in decision-making in order to maintain maximum tactical unity. The internal processes of antifa groups reflect more than a desire for collective reinforcement, but are driven by a commitment to decentralizing power and avoiding hierarchical control. In this sense, the very process of tactical choice is fundamentally antifascist. [70]

Significantly, an internal culture of horizontal consensus gives space for the expression of a variety of concerns regarding the use of violence, but it also means that no single individual can dictate tactical decisions (in this case, violent escalation).

Specifically, in relation to RCA, there are also structural mechanisms in place to mitigate the possibility that one or more of its activists might venture off-piste and deviate from group norms. There is a lengthy, six-month membership process, and

> […] a pretty intense screening process […] Making sure they're not a loose cannon. They don't have like a lot of mental health stuff going on. How they can act in a group, like are they able to make decisions collectively? […] And then there's you know, you go through a program, the program last six months, you have a mentor. There are classes twice a month that are two hours long. And there's like reading. It's also to see if people can work.[71]

All this suggests that the potential for the escalation of violence is limited. But what if state repression were intensified?

> Like there's a tendency to want to hide and be like, OK, well, we'll just go further underground and be more militant. But most groups with that approach are more heavily targeted because then you're, you don't have any solidarity. You don't have any community support.[72]

Retaining local anti-fascist solidarities is an important strategic consideration. As a spokesperson for PopMob (Popular Mobilization), an ostensibly non-violent anti-fascist organization that is part of the wider anti-fascist coalition in Portland, told us:

> […] we support the Black Bloc. And they are oftentimes they are our frontlines. They put their bodies between us and the fascists, whether we're talking civilian fascists or the fascists in uniform. So basically, we feel like we would not be safe out there demonstrating if not for the frontlines […] We don't see it as a separation between like us and them.[73]

Part of the PopMob message is to de-stigmatize (militant) anti-fascism. Any serious escalation of violence from RCA would undermine this message. PopMob did not start out,

> […] working specifically with RCA, for instance. RC[A] would have their event and we would have our event and we would meet like once beforehand, just be like, here's what we're doing, here's what we're doing. But we didn't like, have a close relationship. But I was really invested from the beginning and trying to build that relationship because of this historic, like, separation between the militant and like, quote, 'non-militant' anti-fascists.[74]

Where Antifa is depicted by the conservative right as a synonym for terrorist violence, it is also incumbent on activists not to lionize their violence lest it give exaggerated representations of the movement further credibility. For sure, as many an activist will tell you, "It feels good to punch a Nazi" and expressive violence is not a brake but an accelerator. To one critic, "It's not propaganda by the right that's ostracized Antifa. It's their own actions. It's the webzines that call for slitting the throats of fascists that make Antifa a synonym for violence".[75] And yet, as we will reveal below, the RCA does not seek rhetorical glory. As one RCA activist explained,

> Yeah, like we don't apologize, and we let it be known that we're OK with that stuff, but we never bragged about it. We had a very much an internal culture, kind of like, you know, security, modesty. We're here for the cause, not like to blow our own horn. And also, we didn't want that kind of overly macho public image.[76]

Rhetorical Restraint, Militant Language and the Politics of Naming

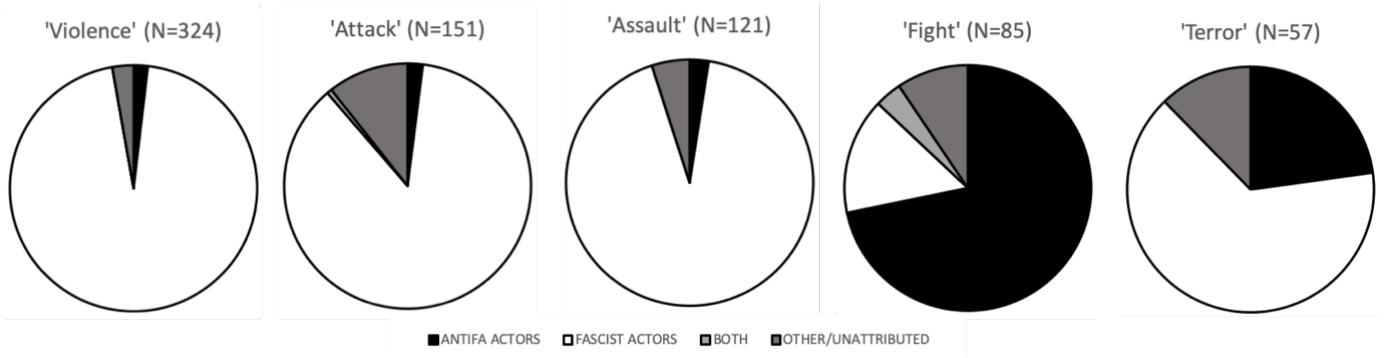
The rhetorical restraint that RCA employs publicly is conveyed in the militant language that they use on Twitter and the manner by which this contributes to a politics of naming. Our sub-sample of 648 RCA tweets and retweets reveals the breadth of actors they consider to be Antifa's main adversaries, in other words, their understanding of what contemporary fascism is, including actors considered both explicitly "fascist" and/or complicit in "fascist" causes and ideologies. Among these adversaries were: fascist, far right, right-wing, white supremacist, white nationalist, Nazi and neo-Nazi groups in general; specific activist movements falling under the umbrella of these groupings; individuals active or associated with these movements; as well as Republican politicians like Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, and police forces including most prevalently the Portland Police Bureau (PPB).[77]

Overall, the ten most frequent key words to appear across the 648 tweets were: "violent" (192), "proud" (154), "patriot" (146), "violence" (141), "right" (138), "prayer" (131), "joey" (91), "far" (91), "boys" (89), and "fascist" (84), suggesting how violence was rhetorically attributed most to the locally active far-right Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer movements and the latter's founder Joey Gibson.[78] Significantly, in 95 per cent (309) of the tweets containing variants of the word "violence," violence was attributed to Antifa's "fascist" adversaries (Figure 1).

The rhetorical connection between violence and these "fascist" actors was so strong that even in some tweets where the violent perpetrator was not explicitly identified as, or associated with, a "fascist" adversary, it could

be assumed that the intention was that this perpetrator be understood as "fascist" due to their use of violence.[79] In many other instances, "fascist" adversaries were described using the violent adjective but with no further explanation of their acts of violence. Elsewhere, evidence of specific "fascist" acts of violence was foregrounded including physical and sexual assaults which led to individuals being criminally prosecuted and an attack on a Portland bar, Cider Riot, known to be an anti-fascist gathering place. Similar patterns were conveyed by the use of variants of the word "attack" and "assault," where 87 per cent (131) and 93 per cent (112) of tweets respectively linked these to "fascist" actors (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Militant word variants and their use in connection to Antifa and "Fascist" Actors



In just 12 tweets were variants of "violence," "attack," and "assault" connected solely to Antifa actors or their allies. As the examples below illustrate, in these instances RCA primarily contested accusations that they were part of a violent movement, and thus anti-fascist violence mainly appeared in inverted commas.

> A Patriot Prayer follower was caught in the leaked planning logs for the Unite the Right II rally on the anniversary of the murder of Heather Heyer, but he's making up stories about "the escalation of violence we saw this week from the left."[80]
>
> The idea that antifascists are mindless thugs who attack random people is a beloved trope of the right which sadly many liberals parrot. The "both sides" idea that antifascists are the moral equivalent of fascists is another common fallacy. These have to be countered rigorously.
>
> This is not the only such recent inaccuracy by Ngo: to get his followers worked up in the days prior to June 29th, he also falsely claimed on Twitter that RCA's public call-to-action "singled [him] out to be assaulted."

In fact, within the sub-sample, RCA's militancy never led to any explicit incitements to enact physical violence, the result no doubt of a combination of both internal and external breaks on escalation, insofar as this might not only have led to the group's alienation but also to Twitter suspending their account.[81]

The actions that RCA did encourage were in most instances related to sharing information that might support doxing efforts and participating in call-ins designed to get known "fascists" fired from their jobs. There were also rare references to punching and "milkshaking" adversaries.[82] These reflected the now widely circulating rallying cries to punch or "milkshake" a Nazi along with their associated hashtags and memes, but again there were no concrete incitements to actually punch or milkshake adversaries.[83] Thus, those in charge of @RoseCityAntifa may have been sensitive to the possibility that their adversaries might report their content to Twitter moderators and call for the account's suspension.

Clearly, RCA exercise *restraint* in their rhetoric when others around them are not necessarily doing the same. Equally, it should be noted that the restraint that the group displays when using Twitter – a publicly accessible

social media platform – may not be mirrored in any of the more private and secure social media platforms that they may use for coordinating direct action. The aforementioned doxing and call-in actions could be said to partly constitute RCA's militancy – their forms of "violence" – although these were also most often couched in the more restrained rhetoric of a predominantly symbolic "fight" against fascism and its violence as the example below illustrates:

> We all need to take a role in the fight against the far right & its violence. This requires antifa activists doxxing & pressuring fascist propagandists & everyday people speaking against the stoking of fear & resentment against scapegoated groups.

As Figure 1 shows, the pattern in the attribution of violence is reversed when it comes to variants of the word "fight". In this case 72% (61) of the tweets identified Antifa actors and allies as the "fighters". These tweets stressed the *reactive* nature of anti-fascism – its fight *against* fascism – often under the discursive banner of "our community".

> On June 30th, antifascists in Portland defended our community from Proud Boys intent on wiping the left from the streets. Help support those injured in the fight, either by donating or buying a t-shirt on our webstore.

> Our biggest strength is our solidarity. We have it and the nazis and fascists don't. When we stand together and support each other, we make our community stronger for the next fight. If you can't be out in the street, this is a way to show solidarity with those who are.

Even if some of these tweets subtly implied the use of physical force, this force was always framed as reactive and connected to discourses of self-defense in order to be justified.[84] By extension, RCA argued that any attempt to designate it and its allies' fight against fascism as "terrorism" should also necessitate the labelling of whole communities as "terrorists." This is most clearly indicated by the tweet below, which repeated part of the statement released by RCA and its allies in response to the July 2018 resolution to designate Antifa a "domestic terrorist organization".[85]

> Fighting against the oppression, bigotry, and violence that we call fascism requires ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Stopping fascist activity is a goal common to all people of conscience. These Senators would call us all domestic terrorists.

Statements like these also characterized all of the tweets (13) within which variants of the word "terror" were used in connection to Antifa actors, namely to refer to, or refute, the labelling of Antifa as a "terrorist" organization (Figure 1). Attempts to designate Antifa a "domestic terrorist organization" are clear examples of the "politics of naming" and its associated discursive conflicts.[86] Highlighted by the adage that "one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter," *naming* is political because it helps recruit support via discursively creating in- and out-groups and because it can justify action and "the legitimacy of violent acts".[87]

There are of course two sides to this particular discursive battle. On one side, attempts to label Antifa "terrorists" have taken advantage of the Bush administration's open declaration of a "war on terror" without specifying the source of that terror in order to deny the legality of Antifa and relegate the movement to lawlessness.[88] On the other, RCA's framing of its militancy in terms of a moral struggle and self-defense is more reminiscent of the "freedom fighter" label.

Interestingly, while refuting accusations of terrorism, RCA did not appropriate the "terrorist" designation to any large degree within the discursive arsenals that they trained upon their "fascist" adversaries, opting instead to emphasize these adversaries' illegitimate use of violence. While 65% (37) of the tweets containing variants of the word "terror" attributed this terror to fascist actors, overall terror was invoked less frequently than the other

militant words. Variants of "terror" were used not only sparingly but also with sensitivity. While occasionally used in a more general sense to highlight how far-right groups "terrorize" communities, overall the use of the word was mostly reserved for those far-right groups already officially designated as domestic terror groups or for those instances of high-profile, extreme far-right violence popularly understood as terrorist attacks. For example,

> Yesterday's terrorist attack was awful. We need to recognize the threat that people espousing ideas of anti-Semitism and genocide pose to our communities. We need to stop them before they cause harm.

RCA's moderated use of variants of the word "terror," their seeming reluctance to discursively weaponize it against their adversaries, can be interpreted as further evidence of their rhetorical restraint.

Conclusion

Drawing this article to its close, let us return to the "domestic terrorism" that Ted Cruz referenced: the first is the physical attack on right-wing provocateur Andy Ngo in Portland – the "unofficial PR spokesperson" for the far-right Proud Boys, according to Rose City Antifa (RCA). In June 2020, Ngo filed a lawsuit against the RCA and five named defendants. As a result of the defendants' actions, Ngo alleged that he had "suffered harm to his person, causing injuries to his head and body, including bruising […] suffered severe pain, discomfort, and emotional distress, as well as inconvenience and interference with everyday activities". This "required medical care and ongoing medical treatment."[89] RCA demurred from responding on social media to breaking news of this $900,000 lawsuit. Neither was the "martyrdom" of Willem Van Spronsen lauded after he had attempted to set fire to several vehicles, outbuildings and a propane tank outside the Northwest Immigrant Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington. What is more, RCA's website was also silent on the killing of Aaron Danielson by self-declared anti-fascist, Michael Reinoehl.

This is not to deny that there may be some belligerent voices within Antifa who are less restrained and are prepared to support an escalation of violence. Further research is needed on comparing attitudes to violence (and restraints on it) amongst other Antifa-affiliated groups in the US. But there is no sense at the moment of this writing of any inexorable slide toward mass casualty terrorism. During the George Floyd protests, Twitter shut down multiple *fake* Antifa accounts that were inciting violence, and which originated with the far right, not the far left.[90]

Significantly, our analysis shows that militant anti-fascist responses are not going unchecked and that groups like RCA regularly exercise restraint internally and publicly, both in a literal and rhetorical sense. For sure, even if most of their "everyday anti-fascism" is non-violent, militant anti-fascists use violence in confronting targets. Indeed, this commitment to a combative response is absolutely essential to group identity because it signifies "the core distinction between them and other militant anti-fascists," as Vysotsky says. [91] It is surely impossible to imagine a militant anti-fascism without a willingness to use physical force. Yet at the same time, the claim that their oppositional target – the "fascists" – are defined by an ultra-violent credo imposes a value-based, prefigurative boundary on militant anti-fascists in both their use, and rhetorical representation, of violence (as do value-based concerns over the fetishization of violence and hyper-masculinity). Strategic concerns factor too, such as the risk that violent escalation will lead either to group isolation from the wider anti-fascist coalition, or to dissolution as a result of increasing state repression. Internal cultures of decision-making and recruitment structures (which in the case of RCA are elaborate) function as further dynamics of restraint. So, let us acknowledge the exercise of restraint here and call on others to exercise some restraint in their labelling of Antifa as a "domestic terrorist" organization.

This brings us to some very final reflections on the broader relevance of our case for existing research on political violence and social movement activism. What we have discussed here is the significance of *restraint* in Antifa's protest repertoire. "Movement organizations," as one sociologist reflects, "are inclined to adopt tactics

that express or reflect their shared identity, beliefs, and experience".[92] The collective identity of Antifa as an anarchist and left-libertarian radical social movement is clearly setting boundaries when it comes to escalating violence (particularly to lethal violence). This underscores the importance of collective identities in defining tactical choices in social movements. As Dana Williams points out, "Repertoires enable and often limit what people can do".[93] The emphasis of our discussion has been on how *internal* tactical and rhetorical strategies *limit* violence.

In their recent article on the use of restraint in violent escalation, Joel Busher, Donald Holbrook and Graham Macklin, identified a series of internal brakes on violent escalation. Our research confirms the applicability of their functional typology, especially with regard to strategic and value-based concerns.[94] Looking ahead, significant changes in the *external* socio-political environment (the impact of the global pandemic; ecological crisis; the outcome of 2020 presidential election) might still radicalize the future repertoires of militant anti-fascists. Even so, it is always worth bearing in mind that repertoires, as Williams qualifies, "do not guarantee any kind of action"; they are at best "probabilistic not deterministic".[95]

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Notes

[1] Interview with Rose City Antifa (RCA) activist, RCA02, 17 October 2019.

[2] Interview with RCA activist, RCA05, 15 February 2020.

[3] Trump, Donald, J. Twitter, 31 May 2020, URL: https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1267129644228247552&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tweetbinder.com%2Fblog%2Ftrump-twitter%2F. According to a Tweet Binder report, to date, this was the most liked and retweeted tweet that Trump shared in 2020.

[4] See 'Word of the Year Shortlist 2017', URL: https://languages.oup.com/2017-shortlist/.

[5] Described as such by a Republican strategist, see Jesse Singal, 'The Alt-Right Took Over Twitter Through the Sheer Force of its Obsessiveness', New York Intelligencer, 5 April 2017, see URL: https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/04/the-alt-right-took-over-

twitter-through-sheer-obsession.html.

[6] The petition declared that "Terrorism is defined as "the use of violence and intimidation in pursuit of political aims". This definition is the same definition used to declare ISIS and other groups, as terrorist organizations. AntiFa has earned this title due to its violent actions in multiple cities and their influence in the killings of multiple police officers throughout the United States. It is time for the pentagon to be consistent in its actions – and just as they rightfully declared ISIS a terror group, they must declare AntiFa a terror group – on the grounds of principle, integrity, morality, and safety', see URL: https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/formally-recognize-antifa-terrorist-organization-0 (created by M.A. on 17 August 2017).

[7] See Shawn Musgrave, 'White House 'antifa' petition written by pro-Trump troll', politico.com, 24 August 2017, URL: https://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/24/antifa-white-house-petition-trump-troll-241990 .

[8] 115th Congress, 2D Session, H.R. 6054, URL: https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/6054/text .

[9] 'S.Res.279 - A resolution calling for the designation of Antifa as a domestic terrorist organization', URL: https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-resolution/279 .

[10] 'Cruz asks DoJ to pursue Antifa and local authorities for RICO violations', URL: http://hardnoxandfriends.com/2019/07/24/cruz-asks-doj-to-pursue-antifa-and-local-authorities-for-rico-violations/ .

[11] H.Res.525. Calling for the designation of Antifa as a domestic terrorist organization, URL: https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/525 .

[12] Trump, Donald. J. Twitter, 27 July 2019, URL: https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1267129644228247552&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tweetbinder.com%2Fblog%2Ftrump-twitter%2F.

[13] Response by Wray to Cruz, 23 July 2019, see URL: https://www.cruz.senate.gov/?p=press_release&id=4600 .

[14] See Gary LaFree, 'Is Antifa a Terrorist Group?', Society, 55:3, May/June 2018, pp. 248-252.

[15] See Peter Bergen, 'Trumps crazy designation of Antifa as terrorist organization', CNN Opinion 1 June 2020, URL: https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/31/opinions/trump-antifa-domestic-terrorist-bergen/index.html .

[16] See 'Man Linked to Killing at a Portland Protest Says He Acted in Self-Defense', URL: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/v7g8vb/man-linked-to-killing-at-a-portland-protest-says-he-acted-in-self-defense .

[17] Cruz had also urged the FBI to open an investigation into Antifa under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO).

[18] Office of the Attorney General, Press Release Number: 20-500: 31 May 2020, URL: https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-william-p-barrs-statement-riots-and-domestic-terrorism .

[19] See 'FBI Director Christopher Wray's Remarks at Press Conference Regarding Civil Unrest in Wake of George Floyd's Death', FBI Press Release, 4 June 2020, URL: https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-director-christopher-wrays-remarks-at-press-conference-regarding-civil-unrest-in-wake-of-george-floyds-death.

[20] See Ryan Lucas, Review Of Federal Charges In Portland Unrest Shows Most Are Misdemeanors', 5 September 2020, URL: https://www.npr.org/2020/09/05/909245646/review-of-federal-charges-in-portland-unrest-show-most-are-misdemeanors?t=1600423612805 .

[21] Matthew Knouff, An Outsider's Guide to Antifa, Volume Two: Politics, Philosophy and History (Conscious Cluckery, 2012), p. 65.

[22] See David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg, 'Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity', American Journal of Sociology, 101:6, 1996, pp. 1682-1660.

[23] Verta Taylor and Nella Van Dyke, "'Get Up, Stand Up" Tactical Repertoires of Social Movements', in David A. Snow, Sarah. A. Soule & Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.) The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), pp. 262-293.

[24] See Homeland Security/FBI, U//FOUO, Baseline Comparison of US and Foreign Anarchist Extremist Movements, 4 April 2016, URL: https://www.oodaloop.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Comparison_of_US_and_Foreign_Anarchist_Extremists_Movements.pdf, p. 14.

[25] Ibid., p. 2 & p. 12.

[26] Stanislav Vysotsky, 'The Influence of Threat on Tactical Choices of Militant Anti-Fascist Activists', Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements, 5: 2, 2013, pp. 263-294.

[27] Interview with RCA03.

[28] Interview with RCA02.

[29] Matthew Knouff, op. cit, p.19.

[30] Some take Antifa to refer to 'anti-fascists' in a broader sense and do not necessarily discriminate between militant and non-militant forms.

[31] See 'What you need to know about antifa', Jewish Telegraphic Agency 25 August 2017, URL: https://www.jta.org/2017/08/16/united-states/what-you-need-to-know-about-antifa-the-group-that-fought-white-supremacists-in-charlottesville.

[32] See Torch Points of Unity, emphasis as original, URL: https://torchantifa.org/points-of-unity/.

[33] See Stanislav Vysotsky, American Antifa: The Tactics, Culture & Practice of Militant Antifascism (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

[34] See Crimethinc. Action Faction, Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook (Salem OR: Crimeth Inc Workers' Collective, 2017) p. 90.

[35] See EJ Dickson, 'How a Right-Wing Troll Managed to Manipulate the Mainstream Media', Rolling Stone September 2019, URL: https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/andy-ngo-right-wing-troll-antifa-877914/.

[36] These regulations permit the collection of approximately 3200 of an account's most recent tweets. Collections were run on 14th June 2019, 25th July 2019, and 28th August 2019 and then compiled. Collecting data from Twitter in this way is subject to a number of general limitations (see Stine Lomborg and Anja Bechmann, 'Using APIs for Data Collection on Social Media', The Information Society, 30:4, 2014, pp. 256-265) related to their inherent dynamism. As it was not possible to run continuous collections, tweets may have been posted and then deleted during the sample period without entering the data sample.

[37] 324 tweets contained variants of "violence"; 151 tweets contained variants of "attack"; 121 contained variants of "assault"; 85 tweets contained variants of "fight"; 57 tweets contained variants of "terror"". Variants of these different words could co-occur explaining why their sum exceeds the sample size.

[38] Norman Fairclough, Language and Power (London: Longman, 1989); Andre Brock, 'Critical technocultural discourse analysis', New Media & Society, 20:3, 2016, pp. 1012-1030.

[39] The ethical consequences of analysing tweets were taken seriously even if these were partially mitigated by the anonymity afforded to the @RoseCityAntifa account. While the case-study design of the article prevented the anonymisation of this account, efforts were taken to anonymise those individuals that were retweeted or mentioned besides public figures. This occasionally necessitated the adaption of some of the tweets reproduced in this article's analysis – in order to complicate the identification of those tweets via the Twitter's search function.

[40] Interview with RCA01, 17 October 2019.

[41] William Gilles, 'Antifa Activists as the Truest Defenders of Free Speech', in James Tuttle (Ed.) Fighting Fascism; Anti-fascism, Free Speech and Political Violence (Center for a Stateless Society: Kindle Direct Publishing, 2019), pp. 185-254.

[42] Ibid., p. 220.

[43] Diana Johnstone, 'The United States is Experiencing a Major Political Crisis and Antifa is Making Things Worse', in Eamon Doyle (Ed.) Antifa and the Radical Left (New York: Greenhaven Publishing, 2019), pp. 103-109.

[44] William Gilles, op. cit., p. 240.

[45] See 'FAQ', URL: http://rosecityantifa.org/faq/ (available through web.archive.org).

[46] Interview with RCA01.

[47] Jason Lee Byas (2019), 'Holding our Ground: A Critique of the Ethics & Strategy of Violence against Fascist Assembly', in James Tuttle, op. cit., p. 262.

[48] Interview with RCA05.

[49] Interview with RCA03.

[50] For further discussion of militant anti-fascism as community self-defense, see Devin Zane Shaw, Philosophy of Antifascism (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

[51] Interview with RCA01.

[52] Natasha Lennard, Being Numerous: Essays on Non-Fascist Life (New York: Verso, 2019) p. 22.

[53] Jason Lee Byas (2019), 'Fighting Fascism in A Complex World', in James Tuttle, op cit., p. 445.

[54] Alex McHugh, 'A Meditation on Violence', in James Tuttle, op. cit., p. 355.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Murray, Baltimore ARA activist, cited in Mark Bray, Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook (New York: Melville House, 2017) p. 169.

[57] Neal Shirley/North Carolina Piece Corps, 'Politicians Love Gun Control: Reframing the Debate around Gun Owenership', in Scott Crow (ed.) Setting Sights: Histories and Reflections on Community and Armed Self-Defense (Oakland, CA; PM Press, 2018) p. 24.

[58] Ibid., p. 26.

[59] Scott Crow, 'On Violence, Disasters, Defense, and Transformation: Setting Sights for the Future' in Scott Crow, op. cit., p. 228

[60] See Dave Strano, 'Toward a Redneck Revolt', in Scott Crow, op. cit,, pp. 263-267.

[61] See 'Great Lakes Antifa can fuck right off', URL: https://greatlaskesantifa.com; see also 'Beware Great Lakes Antifa: Greatly Lack Accountability', URL: https://greatlylackingaccountability.blackblogs.org .

[62] Michael Staudenmaier cited in J. Clark, Three-Way Fight: Revolutionary Anti-fascism and Armed Self-Defense (2016), pp. 14-15.

[63] Jean Barrot, Fascism/Anti-Fascism (BM Active: London, 2001), p. 4.

[64] "What do U.S. Anti-Fascists Really Believe? A Reply to "On Antifa: Some Critical Notes", URL: https://itsgoingdown.org/u-s-antifascists-actually-believe-reply-antifa-critical-notes/.

[65] Interview with RCA03.

[66] Interview with RCA01.

[67] Ibid.

[68] The Southern Poverty Law Center refuse to designate Antifa a hate group: 'groups that engage in anti-fascist violence such as Antifa, for example, differ from hate groups in that they are not typically organized around bigotry against people', see URL: https://www.splcenter.org/20200318/frequently-asked-questions-about-hate-groups#antifa.

[69] Dana M. Williams, 'Tactics: Conceptions of Social Change, Revolution, and Anarchist Organisation', in C. Levy and M.S. Adams (eds.) The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism (New York: Palgrave, 2019) pp. 107-123.

[70] Stanislav Vysotsky, American Antifa, op.cit., p. 97.

[71] Interview with RCA05.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Interview PopMOB activist, PopMOB01, 14 October 2019.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Sean Sullivan (2019), 'Like the Radicals of the 1960s, Antifa Groups will fade into irrelevancy', in Eamon Doyle, op. cit., p. 165.

[76] Interview with RCA05.

[77] Other actors are also linked to violence. For example, in one retweet Bitcoin is presented as violence itself.

[78] The ten most frequent key words across the full sample of 3971 tweets were: "right" (494), "patriot" (446), "proud" (432), "prayer" (386), "neo" (377), "nazi" (377), "white" (377), "boys" (297), "news" (289), "far" (284). This suggests similar content to the 648 militant sub-sample but without its tighter focus on discourses of violence.

[79] Instances such as these were still categorised at unattributed.

[80] This tweet has been adapted in order to anonymise the Patriot Prayer follower in question.

[81] Chicago Antifascist Action's Twitter account was suspended between June and August 2019 potentially for glorifying Willem Van Spronsen's Molotov cocktail attack on an ICE Facility in Washington.

[82] 14 tweets in the main sample featured variants of the word "punch", 17 tweets featured variants of "milkshake".

[83] The first of these can be traced to the punching of Richard Spencer in January 2017 during Trump's presidential inauguration. The second started in the UK in May 2019 when a number of far-right figures including "Tommy Robinson", Carl Benjamin and Nigel Farage were "milkshaked" by counter-protestors while campaigning for the European elections. In June 2019 the repertoire moved to the USA (indicating the transnationality of the Antifa movement), and in Portland during a demonstration on 30 June 2019 Andy Ngo was "milkshaked" after being punched and covered in silly string by Antifa activists. In the immediate aftermath of the latter event, and in an attempt to exaggerate the perceived violence of "milkshaking", far-right actors claimed that the milkshake had contained quick drying cement. Although these claims were initially amplified by the PPB they were later proven to be a hoax.

[84] This sentiment is echoed by RCA's email address, which contains the phrase "fight them back" and appeared in 17 of the "fight" tweets.

[85] 'Statement on the Far-Right's Attempt to Criminalize Protest of Concentration Camp Deaths and Hate Groups', 25 July 2019. The full statement is available at URL: https://rosecityantifa.org/articles/statement-against-criminalizing-protest/ (available on web.archive.org).

[86] Michael V Bhatia, 'Fighting words: Naming terrorists, bandits, rebels and other violent actors,' Third World Quarterly, 26:1, 2005, pp.5-22.

[87] Ibid., p.13.

[88] Ibid.

[89] A copy of the lawsuit 'Ngo V. Rose City Antifa Lawsuit', 4 July 2019, URL: https://libertycenter.org/pf/justice-for-andy-ngo/?fbclid=IwAR3zNLUmbBnPP9-AiXyAo0k8Y2pN_6uZLruWZGqtmXlTkzA24I0MGBbWtoY .

[90] See Graham Kates, 'Twitter says fake "Antifa" account was run by white supremacists", CBS News 2 June 2020, URL: https://www.cbsnews.com/news/twitter-fake-antifa-acount-white-supremacists-removal/.

[91] Stanislav Vysotsky, American Antifa, op.cit., p. 95.

[92] Lee Smithey, 'Social Movement Strategy, Tactics and Collective Identity', Sociology Compass, 3:4, 2009, pp. 658-671.

[93] Dana Williams, op cit., p. 107.

[94] See Joel Busher, Donald Holbrook and Graham Macklin, 'The internal brakes on violent escalation: a typology', Behavioural Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, 11:1, 2019, pp. 3-25.

[95] Dana Williams, op. cit., p. 107.

From the Armed Struggle against the Dictatorship to the Socialist Revolution: The Narrative Restraints to Lethal Violence among Radical Left Organisations in Portugal

by Raquel da Silva and Ana Sofia Ferreira

Abstract

This article presents a historical case study of three armed organisations that operated in Portugal before and after the April Revolution of 1974. This event put an end to Estado Novo's authoritarian regime, starting a period of transition to democracy. The armed organisations operating during Estado Novo sought, essentially, to combat the dictatorship and the Colonial War. These organisations channelled their actions towards the destruction of the regime's repressive and colonial apparatus, but refused to use lethal violence. During the transition to democracy, disillusionment caused by the negative outcome of the revolutionary process and the end of the utopia of the socialist revolution led some sectors of the radical left to return to armed struggle. This time, such actors targeted both property and human beings but were highly selective in their targeting. We analyse the narratives of restraint of former militants from across these groups, and consider how they were shaped by the evolving socio-political context. In the case of the pre-revolution organisations, we found two collectively accepted narratives inscribed in their genesis: lethal violence as counterproductive and lethal violence as philosophically and ideologically problematic. In the case of the post-revolution organisation we found one restraint narrative shared by the collective: indiscriminate lethal violence is counterproductive. Some militants also developed a restraint narrative that centred on disappointment with the organisation for its perceived operational failures. This study is based on a narrative analysis of data dispersed across personal and public archives, writings, and memoirs of individuals directly and indirectly involved in the armed struggle, with data collected through interviews with former politically violent militants.

Keywords: Portugal, radical left, ARA, BR, FP-25

Introduction

In this article, we examine the narratives of restraint on lethal violence in the context of three armed organisations that operated in Portugal form the 1960s through to the 1980s. Firstly, we explain why political violence by non-state actors was scant and erratic in Portugal during most of the twentieth century, which was dominated by *Estado Novo*, a repressive authoritarian regime. Secondly, we explore how dominant socio-political narratives influenced internal mechanisms and processes regarding the type of, and limits to, the violence committed by three different armed organisations: the ARA (*Ação Revolucionária Armada* [Armed Revolutionary Action]) and the BR (*Brigadas Revolucionárias* [Revolutionary Brigades]), which acted during the dictatorship; and the FP-25 (*Forças Populares do 25 de Abril* [Popular Forces of the 25th of April]), which acted in a period of consolidated democracy. In doing so, we aim to understand why, and to what extent, radical left armed organisations in contemporary Portugal restrained their use of lethal violence.

The breadth and variety of our data allows us to offer a valuable snapshot of the main narratives of restraint to lethal violence shared by former militants who were part of the three armed organisations under analysis. We identify factors which pushed specific organisations not to be lethal (ARA and BR), to be selectively lethal (FP-25), and not to engage in indiscriminatory acts of violence (all three organisations). We also investigate the dominant historical narrative guiding the ideology behind the creation of the armed organisations, to determine what distinguishes lethal and non-lethal organisations that are ideologically similar, as we concur with Smith and Monforte that "the stories people tell are constructed from resources that emerge from outside them and these stories need to be considered as culturally and relationally constructed".[1] Thus, this case study broadens the literature beyond the focus on religious organisations, particularly those connected to al-

Qaeda- and/or Islamic State-inspired terrorism, presenting the case of three armed radical left organisations that have received little scholarly attention. It also examines the interplay between a range of strategic and moral considerations in the context of restraint that have been put forward and explored by other scholars.[2]

This research article is based on a qualitative methodology, which triangulates data dispersed across personal and public archives, writings, and memoirs of individuals directly and indirectly involved in the Portuguese armed struggle in the twentieth century, with data collected through interviews with former ARA, BR, and FP-25 militants. A total of 24 interviews were collected independently by both authors in the context of larger research projects.[3] They both followed a similar semi-structured schedule. This included questions about the use of violence and was used in a flexible way to help stimulate reflection on important topics related to past engagement in the armed struggle, while allowing each interviewee to guide the course of the conversation and to choose what to recount and how. In this study, we employed thematic narrative analysis to identify the accounts related to the commission of violence, and analyse how stories on restraint and escalation of violence draw on, or attempt to, resist socio-political narrative resources, as stories not only work "for people," but also work "on people," leading their construction and understanding of reality, and their course of action.[4]

The Socio-Political Context of the Contemporary Radical Left Armed Struggle in Portugal (1962-1986)

Estado Novo was the longest standing dictatorship in Western Europe (1926-1974). Despite being a typical dictatorship of the fascist era, during its long duration, as the world around it changed it had to adapt to survive.[5] From the early 1950s, social changes caused by economic and industrial development, rural exodus, and emigration to other European countries allowed the growth of the middle class and accelerated the schooling of the masses. This, in combination with increasing access to information about what was happening in the world, altered public attitudes and opinion, and ultimately fostered opposition to the regime.[6]

In 1968, António de Oliveira Salazar, the regime's mastermind, was incapacitated after falling from a chair. He was replaced by Marcelo Caetano as President of the Council, giving rise to the so-called *Primavera Marcelista* (Marcelist Spring). This was a short period in which a number of reforms made it look like the dictatorial situation in Portugal was changing and that the Colonial War could end. However, the beginning of 1970 brought renewed political repression and the determination to carry on waging war in the colonies. This raised societal tensions and contributed to the opposition's radicalisation.[7] The Colonial War was key in the radicalisation of the political struggle in Portugal and the move towards armed violence. It began in February 1961, in Angola, spreading rapidly to Guinea, in January 1963, and to Mozambique, in August 1964, dragging on seemingly with no end in sight. Military recruitment, of more than 900.000 young people, was a decisive factor in the massive emigration of these years. In total 16% of the population (1.4 million) emigrated between 1961 and 1974, two thirds of whom emigrated illegally, including 250.000 fleeing military service. For large sectors of society, the demand for an end to the war began to mark their political activities and encouraged them to challenge the regime.[8] In this context, revolutionary radical left organisations multiplied, attempting to train young guerrillas and collect weapons.[9]

Three organisations decided to engage in armed struggle: the LUAR (*Liga Unitária de Ação Revolucionária* [League of Unity and Armed Revolution]), the ARA and the BR. In this article, we do not analyse the LUAR because this organisation lacks the connections that existed among the three other organisations under analysis, both in ideological and operational terms. LUAR's full structure was based abroad, especially in Paris and Belgium, and all its attempts at armed actions in Portugal were halted by the political police. The LUAR renounced the armed struggle shortly after the April Revolution.[10] The ARA and the BR, as explored in the following sections, carried out armed actions motivated by anti-fascist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist positions, but did not resort to lethal violence before the April Revolution.

The revolutionary process triggered by the April Revolution was led by radical left groups, both those who carried out armed actions and those who only theorised about their need during the dictatorship. Their aim was

for the workers to seize power and construct a socialist society.[11] This revolutionary movement sought new forms of democratic organisation and expressions of popular power, which manifested itself in the occupation of hundreds of factories, vacant houses, and large landowners' properties in the south of Portugal. It also manifested itself in the Agrarian Reform, and the nationalisation of the main strategic sectors of the economy.[12]

However, on the 25th November 1975, a military coup led by a coalition of moderate and conservative sectors put an end to the revolutionary process started on the 25th April 1974, which comprised a profound defeat for the radical left. From then on, a new phase began with the consolidation of a representative democracy, with its own institutions, whose legitimacy derived from the popular vote and whose political agents tried to stop and deflate revolutionary transformations, even if these had been constitutionally enshrined (e.g., the Agrarian Reform, the nationalisation of banking).[13] The radical left were frustrated by the end of the revolutionary experience, the beginning of the institutionalisation of democracy, the preparation of Portugal's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) and, in due course, by the enormous economic crisis that led to interventions of the IMF in 1977 and in 1983. Furthermore, these developments fuelled a belief within the radical left that Portugal was facing a new fascist offensive, prompting some within this left faction to consider a return to armed struggle.[14] This gave rise to the formation of the FP-25 in 1980, which carried out both lethal and non-lethal acts of political violence. In the subsequent sections we analyse in detail the direction taken by these organisations, as well as the limits that they imposed on the violence committed, and how this was influenced by the dominant socio-political narrative resources surrounding them.

The ARA (*Ação Revolucionária Armada [Armed Revolutionary Action]*)

As the armed wing of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), the ARA constituted a semi-autonomous organisation. It followed the party's political instructions, but also had its own board, which took independent decisions regarding specific armed actions.[15] Although the decision to establish the ARA was made in 1964, its armed activity only began in 1970.[16] The delay was related to factors such as the need for rigorous and time-consuming preparations, the existence of strong political repression, and uncertainty within the PCP about the use of armed struggle: some supported armed actions as the only way to overthrow a violent regime, while others preferred traditional mass struggle, in line with Soviet Union directives.[17]

Since its First Illegal Congress in 1943, the PCP had propagated the need for a national uprising as a means of overthrowing the dictatorship. It condoned the possible use of armed actions, as long as it was directed by the party, in a context of radicalisation and intensification of the mass struggle.[18] However, in the troubled period that followed the Second World War, the use of violence to overthrow the regime was not a priority, with the PCP defending a peaceful and agreed transition under the leadership of Júlio Fogaça, which started in 1949 due to the imprisonment of the secretary-general of the PCP, Álvaro Cunhal.[19] The latter, after his jailbreak on the 3rd of September 1960, fiercely criticised this political orientation and brought renewed focus on armed insurrection.[20] However, the party found itself in a difficult situation having to balance: 1) internal criticism from Cunhal regarding the 'right-wing deviation' that occurred during his time in prison; 2) the international communist movement's line of peaceful coexistence adopted by the Soviet Union; 3) a group of militants demanding radical action; and 4) attempts to forge alliances with the more moderate sectors of the opposition outside the PCP.[21]

This impasse was resolved when a crisis within the regime, which lasted from 1958 to 1962, and was caused by the fraudulent electoral campaign of General Humberto Delgado, resulted in a growing number of voices demanding radicalisation of the political struggle and a move towards armed violence.[22] In late 1964, the PCP began creating a structure dedicated to preparing and executing non-lethal armed actions directed against the regime's colonial and repressive apparatus. This clandestine structure became the ARA, whose emergence in 1970 as an armed organisation was exceptional in the European context. No other communist party decided to engage in armed struggle, not even the Spanish Communist Party, which experienced similar historical conditions.

In terms of the ARA's armed actions, they were primarily aimed at disrupting the Colonial War, which symbolised imperialism, colonialism, repression, and loss of lives.[23] As a former ARA militant put it:

> ARA's goals were, basically, to create problems for the regime, especially for the Colonial War. Because we used to say that we had been in the war, the war was a terrible thing. […] The aim [of the war] was to kill as much as possible. And I came to hate the war, so we used to say: 'We went to war in the service of the state and now we dedicate our lives to making war on war'. And so we did.[24]

This was done, for instance, through the sabotage of the ocean liners *Cunene* and *Muxima,* which transported troops and war material, respectively, to support the Colonial War. The Tancos air base was also sabotaged, destroying 16 helicopters and 11 aircrafts. None of these armed actions provoked deaths, however. The ARA also carried out armed actions against the state apparatus and against imperialism, such as detonating an explosive device outside the political police's training college and outside the American Cultural Centre, respectively. However, the ARA refused to engage in lethal actions, always attempting to create circumstances in which the risk of loss of lives would be reduced:

> We were careful to detonate explosives only at times when we knew that no one would be on the premises or that it was unlikely that anyone would pass by. Of course, there could be an accident, but we were always very careful to avoid such accidents [deaths].[25]

The ARA decided to suspend its actions in May 1973. At this point, quite a few of its militants were in custody and the political police had identified the members of the central command. The ARA justified this decision, arguing that it sought to decrease the strong repression directed against the general anti-dictatorship movement (e.g. progressive Catholics organising peaceful actions against the Colonial War), and in the context of supporting the recently created Socialist Party in the upcoming 1973 elections. The April Revolution and the establishment of democracy allowed the ARA to lay down its arms, and allowed its militants to integrate into the new political life of the country, as they believed that:

> After the 25th of April, the ARA was no longer necessary, it no longer had legitimacy. Even if the ARA's operations were just, they did not have legitimacy in the democracy that was developing.[26]

The main restraint narratives to the commission of lethal violence by the ARA was the view that it was counterproductive: a view shaped by their need to balance between their choice for armed insurrection and the dominant narrative defended by the Soviet Union, the international communist movement, and the Portuguese opposition opposing the armed struggle. Former ARA militants also reflected on the possible effects of the use of lethal force on their efforts to gather popular support under repressive conditions:

> Our actions would not create victims and would not enable the regime to call us terrorists. They never managed to be able to say that. And the population could also make the distinction, and as they themselves were not bombed, they themselves were not confused.[27]

ARAs efforts were focused on showing people that they were fighting the regime, not the general population. Thus, the ARA's restraint in engaging in lethal violence was firmly rooted in their negative assessment of what this kind of strategy would do for them. One former ARA militant's reflections on the killings carried out by the FP-25 in the 1980s (see below for detail) help to illustrate this point:

> The FP-25 killed a man in Sacavém. That man was a scoundrel, deserved to die five hundred times, but that operation should have never happened because it challenged... for the collective consciousness it called into question the nature of a left which wanted to be necessary, which wanted to be fair and to be ethical.[28]

According to this former militant, lethal violence as a political strategy was counterproductive to the cause of the general struggle, even if the targets were seen as legitimate.

The BR (*Brigadas Revolucionárias [Revolutionary Brigades]*).

The launch of the BR in 1970 marked the second major political rupture within the PCP regarding to the armed insurrection issue.[29] This rupture represented the resistance of PCP members like Isabel do Carmo and Carlos Antunes (BR's co-founders) to the dominant pacifist narrative of the PCP.[30] This position was strengthened by the continuation of the Colonial War and by the disillusionment following the *Primavera Marcelista*. The use of revolutionary violence was seen as a political weapon and as a form of solidarity towards the struggle of the liberation movements in the colonies.

The BR represented a new way of confronting the regime, turning away from PCP's Stalinism and proposing armed action to achieve a socialist revolution, where power would be taken by the proletariat.[31] The BR always pointed to the need for a revolutionary structuring of the proletariat, in which the armed struggle and the mass struggle could converge.[32] The former was not considered more important than the latter, but it was seen as the trigger to a revolutionary organisation based on class.[33] Thus, the BR inverted the usual logic of the creation of armed organisations since the armed organisation surfaced first and only later, in 1973, the PRP (*Partido Revolucionário do Proletariado* [Proletariat Revolutionary Party]) was founded.[34]

In terms of armed actions, similar to the ARA, the BR mostly attacked the structures that served the Colonial War and the authoritarian regime.[35] According to a former BR militant this was defensible because:

> The state was extremely violent, so the violence was justified. Violence paid with violence. Arms, bombs, whatever. The more noise we made, the better, because we were saying 'It's not just you, be careful because we can also reach you!' So it was already justified.[36]

However, within the organisation, the debate regarding what type of actions to engage in was very intense. The militants coming from the PCP, including its founders, were still influenced by PCP's dominant no-kill narrative and preferred spectacular and mediatic actions to draw national and international attention to the Portuguese political and colonial issues.[37] They opposed the use of lethal violence, defended "an ideological and philosophical conception of not killing anyone",[38] and saw violence as more than just killing people:

> You ask: 'but then what is violence?' Violence is not just killing people; violence can be destroying structures. We had reasons for killing, especially before the 25th of April, and we did not kill. We did not kill for philosophical reasons because nobody has the right to take anyone's life.[39]

Other militants were more open to the possibility of actions such as abductions and murders of people linked to the regime, at least in theory. They did not proceed with such actions, however, as they saw these as being too difficult and dangerous. As a former BR militant explained:

> To kill someone, we would have killed Salazar or Marcelo Caetano or others, right? As this was very complicated, we did not kill anyone. […] I had no big problems, for example, if someone proposed an action to kill, imagine, the PIDE [political police] director or Spínola, at the time the commander of Guinea, who was inventing new processes of colonialism. I thought he was a very dangerous man, because of that. He was not as dumb as the others.[40]

The overthrow of the regime by the April Revolution brought new debates to the now official political party PRP/BR, namely the choice of dissolving the armed structure or not. Some militants argued that the fall of the regime meant that the armed struggle was no longer legitimate. Others believed that the armed structure should be kept underground, ready to respond to a negative outcome of the revolutionary process.[41] PRP's first political publication after the April Revolution emphasised the revolutionary violence issue: it stated that it remained a necessity to defend workers from the interests of the bourgeoisie, but underlined that the April Revolution had changed the nature of the violence, which was now in the hands of everyone. Therefore, actions such as strikes and workplace occupations, led by the workers themselves, should be given priority.[42] The PRP defended the distribution of weapons to workers' commissions, so that they could resist in the event of a counter-revolutionary coup and defend the conquests of the Revolution.[43]

In October 1975, the growing prospects of a coup led by moderate and conservative right-wing groups forced the PRP to move the BR back into the underground, while preserving its military structure and weapons. At this point, the more moderate faction of the BR had disengaged right after the April Revolution while the remaining militants had been further radicalised by the revolutionary process and then, by the military coup on the 25th November 1975.

In hiding, the BR focused mainly on bank robberies to fund the organisation.[44] However, the PRP remained a legal political party and was directly involved in the 1976 electoral campaign of Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho for president, which united a large part of the radical left. Otelo was one of the April captains who had a prominent role in triggering the revolution and the revolutionary process. He obtained almost 800.000 votes (17% of the total), which led to the rise of the MUP (*Movimento de Unidade Popular* [Popular Unity Movement]), a new political party bringing together the various radical left parties that had united around his candidacy.

Internal disputes meant that the MUP was short-lived, however. Nonetheless the PRP kept trying to find a way to unite the independent sectors that supported Otelo. This gave rise to the formation of the OUT (*Organização Unitária dos Trabalhadores* [Unitary Workers Organisation]) at a congress on the 8th and 9th of April 1978. It brought together delegations from: Sinn Fein (Ireland); ETA (Basque Country); Workers' Autonomy (Italy); the Arab Socialist Party (Iraq); the CNR Socialist Party (Chile); Venezuelan Revolutionary Party Rupture (Venezuela); Dominican Resistance Group (Dominican Republic); Socialist International (USA); Polisario Front (Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic); and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (Oman). In this congress the return to armed struggle was strongly defended by several OUT leaders, most of them from the PRP.[45]

During 1978, heightened internal differences within the PRP/BR were further intensified by the bombing of a freight train in Mauritania, which caused the death of eight soldiers. The attack was claimed by the Polisario Front, which had been carrying out a series of attacks in Mauritania as a way of fighting for the independence of the Sahrawi people. It was, however, organised by the Algerian Secret Services and carried out by BR militants. The Algerian Secret Services had pledged to finance the PRP and later continued to finance the FUP (*Frente de Unidade Popular* [Popular Unity Force]), to which we will return in the next section.[46] This was the first BR action intentionally meant to cause deaths. Most of the PRP leadership, who were in prison for bank robberies, deny knowledge of this action, sustaining that it was carried out by a splinter group that went on to start the FP-25, and that they would have never approved it as it contravened BR's position against lethal and indiscriminate violence.[47] Nonetheless, one of the former militants involved in the action affirmed that the PRP leadership knew about it and did not oppose it.[48] We are unable to say with certainty which version of events is closest to the truth. What this does indicate, however, is that within the PRP/BR the question of the type of actions to engage in was always on the table and over time some militants rebelled against the narratives of restraint on lethal violence.

In sum, as in the case of the ARA, before the April Revolution, BR militants found lethal and indiscriminate violence to be both counterproductive and philosophically and ideologically problematic. The former is not surprising as BR founders derived from the PCP. However, they did not owe allegiance to the Soviet Union or to the international communist movement and they were clearly in disagreement with the pacifist opposition to the regime. What they added to their narrative was a moral stance presented as a philosophical and ideological commitment not to take lives which, in their view, differentiated them from the authoritarian regime that exerted arbitrary power over people's lives. After the April Revolution, some BR militants felt that their duty had been accomplished and that there was no justification to carry on with the armed struggle. However, this was not the case for all BR militants, some of whom not only remained underground, but also engaged in lethal violence and joined a new organisation which pursued lethal violence as part of its strategies. It is to this new organisation that we now turn.

The FP-25 *(Forças Populares do 25 de Abril [Popular Forces of the 25th of April])*

The FP-25 publicly announced its existence on the 20th of April 1980 through the explosion of a hundred petards – small bombs – in different parts of the country. They also shared their *Manifesto ao Povo Trabalhador* [Manifesto to the Working People], which presented them as the embryo of a revolutionary army.[49] This organisation was the armed component of a broader political project, designed by the PRP in 1975, the *Projecto Global* [Global Project].[50] This project also had a political and ideological component, initially headed by the OUT and then by the FUP (constituted as a political party in July 1980); a military component; and a component called ÓSCAR, organised around Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, figurehead of the *Projecto Global*.[51] The aim of this project was to create the conditions to establish popular power through armed insurrection against the right-wing, which was perceived as once again seeking to take state power and violently dividing the left in the country.[52]

The FP-25 was composed of radical left individuals who had been very active during the revolutionary process that followed the April Revolution, and who felt extremely disappointed with the social and political developments that followed the coup of 25th November 1975.[53] Most FP-25 militants had been part of the PRP/BR, both before and after the April Revolution, and their choice to join the FP-25 was based on two considerations. Some, from a political perspective, had not supported the laying down of arms after the 25th April 1974 and their view that armed struggle was still needed to attain a socialist revolution intensified after the 25th November 1975 coup. Others felt that they had to keep fighting because they had never stopped, having opted to remain underground carrying out actions such as bank robberies to support their organisation, even as PRP/BR leaders in jail were distancing themselves from such activities in order to negotiate an amnesty.[54] The non-PRP/BR militants within FP-25 originated from the LUAR, the FUP, as well as Trotskyist and anarchist circles. FP-25 also attracted a few individuals who had no record of previous political activity. Most militants were 15 to 20 years old when the April Revolution occurred, and some performed military service during the revolutionary process.

FP-25 militants were divided into small cells based in various parts of Portugal. They carried out several armed actions in the early 1980s, including bank robberies, detonation of explosive devices targeting both people and property; they also used firearms to injure or kill specific individuals.[55] A series of international solidarity actions were carried out, which included destruction of property, and there were plans to kidnap prominent public figures in order to generate funds for the organisation.[56] FP-25 actions resulted in 12 deaths.[57] Most of these were factory managers, who were considered to have abused their employees. This enabled the FP-25 to claim they supported the working class by setting an example for both the workers – encouraging them to fight against injustices – and for the managers – discouraging them from ignoring their employees' rights.[58] According to a former FP-25 militant, the organisation:

> […] appeared in the context of a major assault from the right, in order to articulate more radical ways of struggle and to show the workers that when certain forms of struggle are exhausted, there are other ways to respond to the arrogance of the capital, there are other ways of acting.[59]

For another former militant, the FP-25 was the armed wing of the workers against the abuses of the employers, which meant that shooting an abusive employer in the knee would be seen as:

> An attempt to convey a practical message for both sides, for the employers and for the victims who had been laid off. If there was a guy who was not paying the salaries, or who had fled to Brazil, that guy needed to realise that he could not do that. And since the state did not act, at least there were some guys that would keep him frightened.[60]

Other targets for lethal attacks by FP-25 militants were police officers, the director of the Prison Services, and former members of the organisation who collaborated with the police.[61] The use of lethal violence was fiercely debated within the FP-25 and not all militants agreed with it. Several former militants mentioned endless discussions and conflicts around what type of violence was acceptable. Some considered that people should not be killed, because such an action could harm the struggle and turn out to be ineffective:

> I was against the killings, not for moral reasons, but for tactical reasons. […] I considered that if we wanted to lead by example, in pedagogical terms it was preferable to put them in a wheelchair, transforming them in living examples. Pedagogically that would work better than killing the guy, who would make the news, but after a while nobody would talk about it anymore, it would be forgotten. While in a wheelchair: the guy did this, but that happened.[62]

Others perceived killing a representative of the class they were fighting against to have the potential to set an examplefor the workers and encourage them in their struggle:

> From a certain point the organisation chose to act against employers who fired people. For example, there was an action against the administrator of Sacavém Tableware Factory, and I thought that this was the type of action that could trigger the workers' reaction. I mean, the fact that that person was reached could trigger a sense of strength and lead the workers to react.[63]

The latter standpoint prevailed, as it was decided that discriminate lethal violence was possible if in line with the organisation's strategic plan of inciting the workers to revolt. Indiscriminate lethal violence was seen as counterproductive, however. According to the accounts of former FP-25 militants, the decision to kill someone had to be justified by the actions of specific victims:

> For example, the Gelmar guy was used by the government to close companies. He would arrive and destroy the company; this was his speciality! […] At Sacavém Tableware Factory there were several suicides caused by the life the employer imposed on the workers [unpaid wages] […] In the case of Castelo Branco [Director of the Prison Services] there were people who fell ill: he was a tyrant […] Doctors would say that people needed to go to hospital and he would say: 'No, I am the boss here', which led doctors to resign […] In addition to his behaviour regarding the prisoners in general, what he was doing with FP-25 prisoners was totally inhuman. […] Another case that I almost forgot is the case of the penitent, these are actions that I personally understand, and I understand them as messages that need to be pushed through.[64]

According to this former militant, FP-25's victims were in fact perpetrators, responsible for the suffering of others, and ending their life not only amounted to a form of justice, but would also act as a deterrent to those who would perpetrate similar injustices. This view also extended to the militants who were arrested and decided to collaborate with the police to bring down the organisation:

> It was assumed that guys who clearly betrayed, who chose to go to the other side and cooperate with the police, including joining them in the searches for militants, these guys if we had the chance, we would kill them, of course.[65]

Thus, the narratives of some former FP-25 militants were characterised by a sense of disgust for their targets' behaviour – "They are not really people to me, I would not care if I saw them fallen on the sidewalk, quite frankly".[66] The narratives were also permeated by a sense that the options of FP-25 for fighting injustices were extremely limited – "How could the organisation deal with this situation at that time? Send him a postcard wishing him happy holidays?"[67] – justifying the use of discriminate lethal violence by the organisation.

It is important to note that, as in other militant groups, individuals' commitment and involvement varied. Some felt very disappointed with the organisation's strategies. They could, however, not simply leave the organisation:

> There was a time when I began to question what everything was, and how we were running the organisation, and I said I could not continue to participate in operations, but at the same time I could not move to a legal structure, or simply go home.[68]

This former militant, for instance, opted to take a more logistical role, distancing herself from the direct commission of acts of violence. This decision was mainly due to the death of comrades in confrontations with the police. These, in her opinion "were a tsunami within the organisation," that caused "an extremely strong sense of guilt," because "a good part of the deaths occurred due to clear operational failure".[69] In other words,

she considered that the way the organisation was being run was responsible for the death of its militants, because "people with little experience were involved in actions too soon, because there wasn't anyone else, and some of them fell along the way".[70] Another former FP-25 militant found himself in a similar situation, but at an earlier stage of engagement with the organisation, which allowed him to disengage without having to face the state authorities:

> Things started hitting hard with the start of the repression, arrests, deaths... who was playing around? I mean, had we left everything behind to get money, to rob some shitty corner banks? These were things that made no sense to anyone, in that context people were not there to rob small banks, they wanted to do other things, even without a great degree of violence, but things that were significant to them.[71]

The FP-25 was dismantled through the *Operação Orion* (Orion Operation) in June 1984, which closed down all FUP headquarters and arrested 60 people. However, the FP-25 remained active until its total dissolution in 1989, even though between 1985 and 1987 the majority of its militants were arrested or sought refuge abroad.[72]

Discussion and Conclusion

Molly Andrews affirmed that personal narratives do not only talk about the individual, "but provide a small window into the engines of history and historical change, as we both shape and are shaped by the events of our day".[73] Therefore, at the heart of personal stories it is possible to find the intersection between historical context, and personal circumstances, which shed light on how and why certain events take place and why individuals behave in certain ways. In this article, we examined how different contemporary Portuguese armed organisations negotiated restraint to lethal violence according to the social and political contexts of their time. We found two main narratives in each phase of radical left violence analysed. In the first phase, lethal violence was seen as counterproductive and as philosophically and ideologically problematic. In the second phase, indiscriminate lethal violence was perceived as counterproductive and resulted in disappointment with the organisation.

The first phase corresponds chronologically to the last years of *Estado Novo*'s regime (1968-1974) and was characterized by the activities of three different armed organisations – the LUAR, the ARA, and the BR – as they were fighting against the dictatorship and the Colonial War. Despite countless internal debates, these organisations established a no-kill rule as this type of action was unanimously seen as counterproductive to the struggle. They did not want to be perceived as terrorists by the general population, whose support they sought, or undermine the collaboration of other sectors opposing the regime like the progressive Catholics for whom the defence of the value of life was fundamental. For the ARA, as the armed wing of the PCP, it was important to maintain a balance between the defence of the armed struggle in the Portuguese case and the peaceful coexistence advocated by the international communist movement and by the Soviet Union. BR militants also raised moral concerns when it came to engage in lethal violence. Shortly after the April Revolution, the reading that these organisations made of the country's political and social situation resulted in renouncing armed struggle, opting for the development of popular power structures. However, due to the radicalisation of the revolutionary process during the summer of 1975, the PRP started to defend the arming of workers to defend the achievements of the April Revolution and then opted to move the BR back into hiding. During the following years, the PRP focused on creating a unitary radical left structure that could contest elections and maintain the political struggle on a strictly legal level.

However, disputes within the PRP and the arrest of its historical leaders, led to the rise of the most radical sector within the organisation which wanted to return to armed struggle, challenging the dominant narrative of democratic consolidation. This gave rise to the second phase of radical left violence in contemporary Portugal, led by the FP-25, an organisation that engaged in lethal violence as a political strategy. For FP-25 militants, these actions were justified by the direction of events after the April Revolution, as implementing a parliamentary democracy implied adhesion to the EEC and the reversal of many revolutionary conquests.

The serious economic crisis experienced by the country in the 1970s also played an important role in these militants' radicalisation towards violence because it implied the entry of the IMF in Portugal and the adoption of austerity measures, which led to increased unemployment and poverty. For FP-25 militants, this context morally justified the adoption of more extreme actions, such as the death of company directors accused of mismanagement and dismissal of workers. However, the FP-25, in line with other leftist organisations,[74] never engaged in indiscriminate violence, which was seen as counterproductive since FP-25 aimed at obtaining the support of the population for their main objectives – to halt the advance of the right-wing forces in Portugal and to prevent a reversal of the conquests made by the revolutionary process. Restraint narratives were also found at the individual level, as over time some militants felt disappointed with the strategic directions taken by the organisation and decided to take logistical roles or leave the organisation.

In this study, we found three of the five barriers to mass casualty violence presented by Simi and Windisch's framework based on life history interviews with former white supremacists – mass casualty violence seen as counterproductive; moral apprehension; and internal organizational conflict.[75] This points to the fact that the experiences of former violent militants, independently of ideological leanings and historical periods, can be quite similar. Our findings also substantiate some of the strategic and moral logics put forward by Busher, Holbrook and Macklin in their internal brakes on violent escalation typology.[76] These authors examined how people within militant groups manage their collective violence parameters and put forward different strategic and moral logics. When applying such logics to the Portuguese radical left organisations acting during the dictatorship, we see a solid historical consciousness prompting both strategic and moral narratives of restraint, but also the influence of the repressive environment which created highly compartmentalised organisations whose militants did not network much and were limited to following leadership directives. This scenario changed after the April Revolution, which raised a particularly politicised generation whose practice was informed by different strategic and moral logics. This generation of militants was no longer connected to political parties or broader international movements ideologically positioned against lethal violence. Furthermore, after the November 1975 coup the organisation leading the armed struggle also had a specific agenda – to incite the workers to act against the injustices committed at the workplace, which were perceived as a consequence of right-wing, capitalist policies. This contributed to weakening prior narratives and practices of restraint.

This article attempted to contribute to a growing body of literature on processes of restraint to violence, but it also answers a call from former militants to offer an analysis of the different types of violent actions carried out by different organisations. We perceived such a call in the context of the need to remember past struggles that has defined the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries [77] and decided to embark on this endeavour to also give something back to individuals who have shared so much with us. In doing so, we applied a narrative approach to understand processes of restraint to lethal violence as recounted by former politically violent militants to show how the accounts of their past experiences are influenced by what historical narratives were most important to them and how such narratives moulded their actions.

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[23] Raquel da Silva, 2019, op. cit.

[24] Interview A with former ARA militant conducted in March 2013 by the first author.

[25] Interview A with former ARA militant conducted in October 2012 by the second author.

[26] Interview B with former ARA militant conducted in March 2013 by the first author.

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Reality Check: The Real IRA's Tactical Adaptation and Restraint in the Aftermath of the Omagh Bombing

by John Morrison

Abstract

The Real IRA (RIRA) has been the most consistently active of all of the violent dissident republican (VDR) groups in a post-Troubles Northern Ireland, including in its contemporary guise as the New IRA. This group's violence has claimed the lives of police officers, soldiers, suspected-drug dealers, its own members, and innocent civilians. Shortly after its formation, the group's members were responsible for the single worst atrocity of the Troubles—the Omagh bombing of August 1998. From that attack to the group's resurgence in 2007, its violent activity changed in focus. This was largely a result of the post-Omagh response from the legislature and security services. These external pressures worked in parallel with internal brakes to violent activity. The present article utilises the internal brakes typology alongside political organisational theory to assess the non-violent decision-making processes during this period. Central to this analysis is the consideration of the primacy of organisational survival. In the article, primary source interviews and organisational statements are assessed.

Keywords: Northern Ireland, Real IRA, terrorism, restraint, dissidents

Introduction

The Troubles in Northern Ireland are over. The conflict that claimed the lives of more than 3,600 people [1] was ostensibly brought to an end with the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in April 1998. Alongside the subsequent St. Andrew's Agreement, this has brought Northern Ireland on a slow transition into a post-conflict society. Huge milestones have been reached. The Provisional IRA have put their arms beyond use and are now on permanent ceasefire. There are no longer British Army Patrols on the streets of Northern Ireland. The often unstable, power-sharing agreement is in place. As a result, the people of Northern Ireland are jointly governed by political representatives from their own communities.

However, there are still those who aim to drag the country back to the dark days of conflict. Most notably, violent dissident republican (VDR) groups have continued to engage in paramilitary activity. The most dominant of these groups have been the Continuity IRA (CIRA), Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH), Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD) and the Real IRA (RIRA). None of these have been able to maintain the consistency, lethality, or the levels of support that their predecessors in the Provisional IRA (PIRA) had during the Troubles. Yet theirs is still a threat to be taken seriously. Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement these groups have been collectively responsible for the murder of police officers, soldiers, drug dealers, their own membership, suspected 'touts' [2] and innocent civilians. The most lethal of these groups has been the RIRA. In the first year of their existence, they were responsible for the single most deadly attack of the Troubles, the August 1998 Omagh bombing. In more recent years, under their new guise as the New IRA, they are more consistently associated with the targeting of police officers, prison officers, and drug-dealers within Republican communities, rather than mass casualty bombings such as Omagh.

In his analysis of VDR activity, Horgan proposed that there are three distinct waves of violent dissident republican activity. The first wave relates to the pre-Omagh bombing period from August 31st, 1994 (the first known armed activity of the CIRA) to August 15th, 1998 (the day of the Omagh bombing). The second wave was from August 16th, 1998 to January 27th, 2007. The final, contemporary wave starts on January 28th, 2007 (the day of Sinn Féin's endorsement of the PSNI as the legitimate police force of Northern Ireland), and continues to the present day. While the first and third waves are defined by the upward trajectory of violent activity, the

middle wave is noteworthy for the sporadic nature of the campaign.[3] By applying the internal brakes typology and political organisational theory, this article seeks to assess the nature and focus of the organisation's violence in the years that immediately followed Omagh. In doing so, the article aims to address the role that internal brakes and external pressures played in the violent and non-violent decision-making processes of the dissident republican organisation. Central to this analysis is an assessment of the role that the primacy of organisational survival can and does play in organisational decision-making processes.

Internal Brakes and Organisational Survival

In their 2019 analysis of why extremist groups choose not to engage in violent activity or specific forms of violent activity, Busher, Holbrook and Macklin propose a typology of 'internal brakes' on violent escalation.[4] These internal brakes are conceived of as the intra-group mechanisms that inform the decision not to engage in, or to limit their use of, violence. Thus, the typology does not focus on the external factors such as counter measures deployed by the police, security services, or other state or non-state actors. Within the descriptive typology, detailed across this Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*, they identify brakes that work on five different logics: strategic logic, moral logic, logic of ego maintenance, logic of out-group definition, and organisational logic.

Upon assessment, one can see the parallels between the proposed typology and political organisational theory. The central premise of political organisational theory is that the primary aim of the political organisation, either violent or non-violent, is organisational survival. This has to be achieved before the group can even begin to consider the achievement of the ultimate strategic goals, their desired *public goods*.[5] In order to ensure the organisation's survival there has to be a consideration of keeping both the membership and external support, both passive and active, on one's side. This resonates with the emphasis in the internal brakes typology on brakes that work on concerns about how the use of certain forms of violence might undermine external support for the group. This can, in turn, have a detrimental effect on the possibilities of organisational survival.

It would be understandable to consider organisational survival purely in terms of numerical assessments of internal membership and external support. However, it has been proposed that we need a more nuanced understanding of survival that goes beyond this quantification. For example, for those 'fundamentalists' within the terrorist organisation it is not enough for the organisation to just survive as an entity, it must survive in a form they both respect and recognise. Therefore, if there is a threat to what they see as the fundamental identity or direction of the group, be that strategic, tactical, ideological or otherwise, this can cause internal conflict and the potential fragmentation of the group.[6] This aspiration for the survival of the organisation in a form that the membership both respects and recognises can be seen at play in the moral logic and ego maintenance brakes.

The moral logic brake relates to where moral norms and evaluations are developed by the extremists to provide a set of principles that must be met before they engage in violent activity. This can include the identification of specific groups, individuals or locations as illegitimate targets of violence in general, or alternatively specific forms of violence. By maintaining these moral stances, it can also assist in maintaining the organisational survival. When this logic is persistently ignored it can threaten the continued unity of the group.

When considering ego maintenance this relates to how the group wishes to self-identify. This covers the groups' narratives surrounding their non-violence and their disassociation from internal factions, or external partners, who engage in more, of different, violent activity. If there is a persistent and negatively construed divergence from the established narrative, whether the divergence is perceived or actual, this can also be a threat to the both the numerical survival of the organisation and the survival of the group in a form that is both respected and recognise.

The divergence referred to above can be seen illustrated in the final brake, that of organisational logic. This includes organisational developments that may influence the decision-making processes of the groups. When considering this through the lens of political organisational theory it is imperative that any significant organisational developments, especially when the development(s) could potentially be considered threatening to the organisational identity, are managed in a gradual and considered manner so as to provide the best opportunity to maintain organisational unity both in terms of membership and support.

There are clear illustrations of both successful and unsuccessful implementation of such organisational developments in paramilitary Irish Republicanism. A clear example of this comes at the very origins of the Troubles. During the mid to late 1960s the demilitarisation of the IRA was being proposed in tangent with significant political change within the movement. When considered in conjunction with the destabilising context of late 1960s Northern Ireland, the proposed organisational logic of full demilitarisation was seen by those who ultimately exited the movement to form the Provisional IRA as threatening to the organisational identity of the movement. In contrast, when one considers the gradual politicisation of the Provisional Republican movement at the end of the Troubles this was more successful due to the gradual implementation of organisational developments, including the adherence to non-violence. This only took place at times when the leadership were in a position to maintain the membership and support of the large majority of the movement.[7] The purpose of the internal brakes typology is to focus on the internal decision-making processes since, as the authors observe, this aspect of what inhibits further escalation of violence has tended to receive less scholarly attention than questions about how violence is inhibited by external developments. However, in order to get a holistic understanding one must, as Busher, Holbrook and Macklin acknowledge, also consider how the brakes relate to external pressures on the group, as well as the broader context in which they find themselves. These external factors can and do have significant impact on the internal decision-making processes.[8]

Irish Republican Brakes

When considering the combined application of the internal brakes typology and political organisational theory across paramilitary Irish republicanism, there are clear examples illustrating their applicability to our understanding of Republican non-violence. One only needs to go to the direct orders of the training and induction manual, the Green Book, to see the directives in place as to what form of violent activity is acceptable and what is not. Contained within this are discussions of how the choice of victims and targets is defined by the conditions in which volunteers find themselves. Here we can see that, upon their initial arrival in Northern Ireland, that the British Army, later the primary target, were not considered justifiable victims.

> In September 1969 the existing conditions dictated that the Brits were not to be shot, but after the Falls curfew all Brits were to the people acceptable targets. The existing conditions had been changed.[9]

Within the same section the manual outlines how the constitutional nationalist party, the SDLP, was not a legitimate target. This was in spite of the perception that they had proven to be 'collaborationist and thus an enemy of the people'.[10] However, as they were political representatives of the broader nationalist community, involved in the campaign for civil rights, they were not deemed to be legitimate targets. For both the internal membership and the external support of the group it is imperative that there is a clear set of boundaries established as to who is a legitimate target, and who is not. If these boundaries are repeatedly crossed without clear strategic justification this can prove to be detrimental to the long-term survival of the organisation.

Evidence of internal brakes is present not just in relation to the targeting of individuals. It also relates to the geographical location of violence, as demonstrated in the Army Council Easter 1950 statement on the clarification of Republican objectives. In this it is stated that:

> ...in order that no excuse may be provided for using coercion, and to define quite clearly the fact that the

> Irish Republican Army has only one enemy, England, no sanction will be given for any type of aggressive military action in the 26-County area.[11]

While this was presented nineteen years prior to the dawn of the Troubles, and became official policy in 1954,[12] it was brought forward into the contemporary conflict as General Army Order no.8. As a result, the direct and purposeful targeting of members of An Garda Síochana (the national police force of the Republic of Ireland) was not deemed to be morally or strategically logical, even though like the RUC they were actively investigating the actions of the paramilitary Republicans. Despite this, there were a number of Gardaí killed by both the PIRA and INLA during the course of the Troubles. Gary Sheehan, Frank Hand, Seamus Quaid, Michael Clerkin, Samuel Donegan, and Jerry McCabe each lost their lives in PIRA armed activities. However, in each instance they were not the direct target of a pre-planned operation. Instead, they were killed in the process of disrupting paramilitary operations, kidnapping, bank or post office robberies.

Throughout the history of the PIRA, and all other Republican groups, there has been a series of ceasefires.[13] These have allowed the leadership of the movement to negotiate with a variety of actors, be they the Northern Irish Office, intermediaries to the British government, or the government itself. Ceasefires allowed members to regroup, while taking a break from intense conflict. During these ceasefires, the targeting of members of the security forces was generally called off – a clear example of 'brakes' being applied. However, this cessation did not stretch to all forms of violent activities. As noted by Silke, in the aftermath of the 1994 ceasefire, while there was a cessation in nationalised 'terrorist' violence, there was a marked increase in localised paramilitary style attacks targeting known criminals, and suspected informers.[14] From the perspective of political organisational theory, the continued utility of divergent forms of violence, and organisational activity, are necessary in order to maintain the chances of organisational survival. They allow the group to maintain a powerful and threatening presence within the areas in which they operate, thus maintaining the support of their membership and the republican communities they claim to represent. It also demonstrates to those who could potentially threaten their power and existence that they are still in control and their cessation should not be mistaken for their exit.

At the heart of all the decision-making by the Provisional IRA during the Troubles, with a permanent eye on what could negatively impact on their organisational survival, was the public reaction. Bloom and Horgan in their analysis of the short-lived utility of the proxy-bombing tactic emphasise that '[t]he sensitivity to public support and reaction to operations circumscribed what the IRA could and could not do.'[15] In their analysis, they point out that the ultimate rejection of human proxies was not a signal of a shift from extreme violence, but more accurately 'a shift in focus on and sensitivity to civilian targets.'

From its writings, it is clear that the paramilitary leadership took this issue of public support into consideration. In order to maintain their support that the group must be able to rationalise their actions externally. This is especially apparent when the violence went outside of their general principles. In certain instances post-rationalisation, they may have to take a localised 'hit' in support. This is only when necessary and not detrimental to organisational survival.

> Many instances have arisen and will arise again when we have had to step outside these general terms of reference to our immediate detriment propaganda-wise and support-wise. However even in such an eventuality, if we rationalise our action, get our defensive before our offensive, try to ensure that we have an alternative, relatively unaffected area of support from which to operate if the support in the area which the detrimental but unavoidable action takes place, we are adhering as best as possible under the circumstances to a proper conduct of the war.[16]

The Present Study

Represented above are just some of the proposed internal brakes manifested in PIRA activity and directions. The remainder of the article will now present the case of the post-Omagh RIRA. The central aim of the research is to assess if and when the internal brakes typology and political organisational theory is applicable to this case. Any assessment of a clandestine organisation's violent or non-violent decision-making is methodologically challenging. For the purposes of this article a variety of data sources have been analysed. This includes organisational statements,[17] media interviews, state legislation, an interview with the leader at the time of the Omagh bombing of the 32 County Sovereignty Movement and a first-hand interview with a founding member of the RIRA with insight into the violent and non-violent decision-making processes. Both of these interviews were carried out for a previous project.[18] These limited data sources will never be able to give a holistic picture of the decision-making processes in the organisation. However, they can provide the foundation of understanding on which further research can be based. When considering the statements and interviews one must always be aware that the individuals and organisation are outlining how they wish to be portrayed. One must therefore be careful not to over-interpret the findings from any one source.

The methodological approaches to the analysis of the organisational statements, and primary source interviews are described in detail in previous publications.[19] The RIRA interviewee was one of a series of leadership and rank-and-file members of paramilitary republicanism interviewed. Snowball sampling was applied as a sampling technique. The author was put in contact with the interviewee by a former member of the Provisional IRA. The interview was carried out in a public place and was not recorded, at the request of the interviewee. Contemporaneous notes of the interview were developed and verified by the interviewee. Prior to the interview, the interviewee was informed of the purpose of the research, and their right to withdraw at any point. For personal security purposes, they did not wish to sign a consent form. However, they gave verbal consent to their participation in the research. At no stage did any discussion relate to information pertinent to live investigations. In the original analysis interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyse all of this interviews. This approach was not repeated for the present research. Instead, select quotes were assessed, based on their relevance to the non-violent decision-making processes of the organisation.

A database of over 200 organisational statements and interviews was compiled to gain an understanding of how the RIRA, and its sister organisations wished to portray themselves. These were sourced from local and national media sources in Ireland and Northern Ireland, as well as from Irish republican specific publications. In previous publications, these have been analysed using grounded theory. However, as with the primary source interview, for the purpose of this article select quotes were assessed, based on their relevance to the non-violent decision-making processes of the organisation.

Real Brakes

On August 15th, 1998, the RIRA was responsible for the single deadliest atrocity of the Troubles. Just after 3pm a 500lb car bomb detonated on Market Street, Omagh. Those responsible called in a series of telephone warnings. However, these contained inaccurate information about the location of the bomb and when it would detonate. This resulted in the police moving the public towards the direction of the explosive, rather than away from it, as was their intention. In total 29 people were killed by the blast, including one mother and her unborn twins. The devastation was compounded further by the hundreds more wounded, many suffering life-altering injuries.

This attack took place 13 weeks after the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, the deal that was internationally lauded as providing the foundations for peace in Northern Ireland. It was also just nine months after the RIRA had formed from a split with the Provisional IRA (PIRA). The group was led by the former Quartermaster General of the PIRA, Michael McKevitt, and leading members of the Provos' [20] Engineering

Department. While the Reals were small in number, they were highly experienced.[21] In the weeks and months preceding the Omagh bomb, they had demonstrated their intention and capability to carry out large-scale bombings to destabilise the nascent peace. Just two weeks previous, the group was responsible for an almost identical attack in Banbridge, County Down. Both bombings took place mid-afternoon on a Saturday. Once again, a 500lb car bomb was placed in the town. Once again, a warning was called in. This time it was only 20 minutes prior to detonation, but with more accurate information than the Omagh warnings. This was not enough time for the police to appropriately evacuate the town centre. The blast injured 33 civilians and two police, causing an estimated £4 million in damage.[22]

Omagh is a predominantly Catholic nationalist town. The bombing was perpetrated at a time of great hope for Northern Ireland, hope that the atrocities of the Troubles were to become a distant memory. The town was targeted in the mid-afternoon on a Saturday, one of the busiest times of the week. The victims were innocent civilians, a number of whom were Spanish tourists. Neither the location nor the victims of the attack could be considered a legitimate target of 'war.' The combination of these factors resulted in an immense local, national and international backlash against those responsible. This backlash allowed both the British and Irish governments to rush through draconian legislation, with the stated aim of bringing those responsible to justice.[23] This included the 1998 Offences Against the State (Amendment) Act in Ireland. This allowed an individual's refusal to answer questions relating to terrorist activity and orchestration while under police interrogation to be held as evidence against them when under trial.

Three days after the Omagh bombing the RIRA announced a suspension to all operations. In doing so they offered their 'apologies to these civilians.' In this statement, they claimed that the attack was 'part of an ongoing war against the Brits.'[24] This suspension, which included internal consultations on the future direction of the group,[25] was quickly followed by a complete cessation of violence on September 8th. This did not prevent the deterioration in the already minimal membership or support of the paramilitaries and their political wing, the 32 County Sovereignty Committee (now known as the 32 County Sovereignty Movement).[27] For many within republicanism the cessation was not sufficient. This is demonstrated in an extract from an interview with a representative of the Provisional IRA on September 3rd, 1998.

> [M]any republicans feel…aggrieved that they have tarnished the name of Óglaigh na hÉireann and many are justifiably angry at their use of the term `Real IRA'. The grouping have done only disservice to the republican cause. They have no coherent political strategy, they are not a credible alternative to the Irish Republican Army. In the immediate aftermath of the Omagh bomb they announced a temporary halt to their actions. This is insufficient. They should disband and they should do so sooner rather than later.[28]

The sentiment expressed above manifested in leading members of the Provisional IRA paying visits to the homes of some 60 members and associates of the RIRA. The ostensible purpose of these visits was to issue threats against any future activity by the group. The visits and threats took place at a time when the leadership of the RIRA was already laying the groundwork for a ceasefire.

Even without these interventions, those who had just recently defected from the Provisionals and Sinn Fein to join the Reals were turning their backs on the newly formed paramilitary group, a point emphasised in an interview with a former member of the group.

> The Omagh bombing stopped the influx of new recruits and support who were loyal before…Omagh was a mistake, not the way things should have been done on a mission.[29]

When the decision was made by the Army Council of the RIRA, and later the Army Convention, to enter into a ceasefire, this was based on the awareness that the Omagh bombing had been a disaster for the newly formed paramilitary movement. As a result of the internal, security, legislative, and public backlash, cessation of violent activity was the only way to have a chance of securing the organisational survival, and thus to

have any chance of extending their paramilitary campaign. This is reflected by a member of the RIRA Army Council, interviewed by Mooney and O'Toole, when discussing the internal leadership deliberations in the direct aftermath of Omagh.

> It was very glum. We were all quiet because we knew how serious things were. There was a debate about what we should do next, after this disaster. We knew we were in a deep hole and some people said we could and should bomb our way out of it. But in reality there was only one thing we could do - call a ceasefire.[30]

However, as with the Provisional predecessors, the leadership of the RIRA were not idle during their ceasefire. They utilised the cessation as a time to regroup and to redirect their violent and non-violent efforts.

> It [ceasefire] was to give us time to regroup. There was no way that we were interested in calling it a day. [31]

They brought in new weaponry from the Balkans, and developed a strategy to attack targets in England. Throughout the ceasefire the word of new arms shipments spread quickly throughout the group. This was purposefully developed to keep the remaining membership and support onside. The news was shared to convince them that the 'armed struggle' was still alive and well. In essence they were 'trying to save their own skin'.[32]

When the group called an end to their ceasefire in 2000, they returned with a very different kind of campaign. Bombings similar to Omagh and Banbridge were not to be seen again. The leadership were not immediately willing to sanction attacks in Northern Ireland. The possibility of civilian casualties, even if not on the scale of Omagh, could be detrimental to their continued existence.[33] They instead turned their concentration to the targeting of strategic and symbolic sites in England. Amongst other attacks this included the bombing of Hammersmith Bridge,[34] Ealing Broadway Station,[35] BBC Television Centre [36] and MI6 Headquarters. [37] There was an understanding in the leadership, and particularly with Michael McKevitt, that another Omagh would be detrimental to any possibility of organisational survival. It would have 'wiped [them] out for good.'[38] However, a bombing campaign in England would demonstrate to their membership and support, both existing and potential, that they were still willing and able to maintain their armed footing. It also told the British and Irish security forces and political leadership that the RIRA still posed a significant threat to the normalisation of peace in Northern Ireland.

It soon became internal policy that an attack in England would be closely followed by one in Northern Ireland. [39] However, unlike during the nascent months of the group, the main focus of their targeting was to be the broader representations of the state. This included police and security services, the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) Offices and even the Northern Ireland Secretary of State. When they did attack civilian targets, it was not on the scale of Omagh or Banbridge. They detonated devices on railway lines [40] and carried out firebomb attacks on shops.[41] In the years immediately after the Omagh bombing, the group was functioning effectively. Their bombs were detonating, and civilians were not being killed.[42] The attacks on the BBC and in particular on MI6 headquarters demonstrated to their 'enemies' that they were able to attack high profile and highly secure targets. The lack of a 'second Omagh' was to deter the elongation of the post-Omagh backlash against the group and to thus ensure their organisational survival.

However, for the rest of the opening decade of the 21st century they were unable to launch the sustained paramilitary campaign that their opening years of activity suggested they might once have been capable of.[43] The security and legislative pressure took hold on the organisation. A series of high profile arrests and prosecutions significantly destabilised the paramilitary group. They were the target of successful sting operations and were famously infiltrated by informers. The most high profile was the American businessman David Rupert. Rupert had infiltrated the organisation at the very highest of levels and was to become the lead

witness in the case against Michael McKevitt and other leading members of the RIRA. The leadership were aware of the threat of informers, as there was a long history of informers infiltrating the Irish Republican Movement. They even ran internal misinformation campaigns in the attempt to dissipate the effect.[44] However, even with this awareness they were unable to prevent the significant impact these informants were to have. The evidence of this infiltration in itself inevitably led to internalised distrust, and the ultimate reorganisation of the movement preceded by a downturn in activity.

With the knowledge of the detrimental organisational effect the attack had on the group, the latter half of the decade after Omagh demonstrated the group's desire to distance itself from the bombing. They attempted to downplay the level of their involvement. In a 2008 interview with the Belfast based journalist Suzanne Breen, a spokesperson for the RIRA stated:

> The IRA had minimal involvement in Omagh. Our codeword was used – nothing more. To have stated this at the time would have been lost in an understandable wave of emotion. That is the only detail on Omagh we're prepared to give at the moment. Omagh was an absolute tragedy. Any loss of civilian life is regrettable. No-one in any army, except perhaps those in the American or Israeli forces, wants to kill civilians. But wars don't end because civilians die in them.[45]

Their supporters and representatives have even tried to suggest and imply that there was a 'dark hand' at work in the security forces, or elsewhere, to allow the Omagh bombing to take place. Thus, attempting to forfeit any responsibility that the paramilitaries had for the killings.

> There was a pattern of things started to emanate that the bombing in Omagh wasn't what it first appeared to be that it was Republicans took the bomb in to Omagh, planted it, gave their warnings and all of that. All of the snippets and bits and pieces that came out in the media in the years that followed right up to the present time where the case is going on. The families are taking a case against individuals. It started to become very clear that the hand of someone outside of Republicanism was involved in the bombing.[46]

Over the years there have been the successful bombing campaign in England, numerous large explosive finds,[47] and well-placed hoaxes in Northern Ireland,[48] all demonstrating the organisational capabilities to carry out similar attacks to both Omagh and Banbridge. However, this tactic has not been revisited. Why is this the case? One could argue that this is the result of a combination of strategic, moral and organisational logic. Most critically, this relates to 'strategic brakes' in the form of concerns that violent escalation, or repetition of violence similar to that in Omagh and Banbridge, would increase the backlash against them by the legislature and security services. It would also serve to undermine public support for the group, and 'moral brakes' in the form of the identification of certain groups of actors – in this case civilians – as being illegitimate targets of violence.[49] The legislative, public, and republican backlash the group endured after the Omagh bombing demonstrated to the organisational leadership that the reaction to another similar attack may be too much to withstand. Their organisational survival would be at risk.

In the aftermath, and partially as a result, of Omagh, the RIRA were engaged in internal struggles for the leadership and direction of the movement. The original leadership of the movement was largely imprisoned in the early years of the new century. This struggle for the direction of the movement became so heated that it led to the split in the group, seeing the emergence of a new splinter group by the oft-used name of Óglaigh na hÉireann. The levels of internal disdain that arose during the internal wrangling is best illustrated in a statement released by a group of RIRA prisoners in October 2002, which included Michael McKevitt as a signatory. In it there was the call for the leadership of the 'Army' to stand down.

> On Friday, September 27, in a written communication to the Army leadership, the (Real) IRA unit in Portlaoise prison took the unprecedented step of calling the Army Council to stand down with ignominy.[50]

Throughout the history of Irish republicanism, the movement has been beset by splits and infighting.[51] The RIRA has been no different, as was noted in a variety of Independent Monitoring Commission reports from the time the RIRA was operating in two factions.[52] The tensions mounted between those leadership figures trying to maintain control from within the prisons, and those members who were externally active. This led one member, external from the prison, to declare in an interview with the author:

> I didn't consider people who are in jail to being [sic] part of the army. When you are in jail you don't know what is going on on the outside. Once you get out of jail you should start back at the bottom.[53]

This internal feuding is likely to have had an effect on operational capabilities.[54] It may also, to a degree, have moved the focus away from the shared external enemy and onto the targeting of internal movement rivals – a dynamic also discussed in the internal brakes typology as one of the brakes that work on organisational logic. This internal feuding and factionalism would continue into the second decade of the 21st century with the murder of high-profile figures such as Alan Ryan, and the corresponding acts of retribution.[55]

In the previously mentioned 2008 Suzanne Breen interview, the representatives of the RIRA stated that the reasoning for their sporadic activity levels from 2002 to 2007, and lack of tactical 'success,' was the result of them emerging from extensive restructuring whereby members were dismissed, and individual units disbanded.[56] This restructuring was likely in response to the security services infiltration of the group, which posed a significant threat to their continued survival. It was around this time (2007/2008) that the *Independent Monitoring Commission* started reporting on 'heightened' RIRA activities.[57] It was upon their re-emergence from this restructuring that the group engaged in a period of more sustained paramilitary activity.[58] They truly 'relaunched' themselves in the aftermath of Sinn Féin's acceptance of the legitimacy of the PSNI, and subsequently with the murder of two British soldiers at Massereene Barracks in March 2009.[59] This was followed by the subsequent targeting of police officers and stations. In recent years, this has been carried out under the post-2012 moniker of the 'New' IRA, a group which emerged after a merger between the RIRA, Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD) and other disparate dissident republicans. In their new guise, the group has been responsible for a series of parcel bombs targeting high profile individuals and targets in Northern Ireland, England and Scotland; a sustained campaign of paramilitary style attacks targeting members of their own communities deemed to be disruptive influences, and/or involved in criminality; the murder of the journalist Lyra McKee, and the murder and targeting of PSNI and prison officers.[60] If one is to believe their first organisational statement [61] the 'New IRA' was developed to create a more united violent dissident republican front. However, in the years since their emergence the splintered nature of dissident republicanism remains.

From the analysis of the group's statements, during the current wave of RIRA activity, it is clear that one of their defining characteristics is their opposition to the peace process, and the politicisation of Sinn Féin. In their eyes, the Provisional leadership had sold-out on their Republican ideals and were now 'active servants of the British state.'[62] While members of Sinn Féin were traditionally not deemed to be strategically logical targets of lethal violence, attacks on their homes and offices in recent years indicate that for some of the membership this may be changing.[63] When asked whether Sinn Féin politicians were considered legitimate targets, the RIRA representative rationalised that they were not, because of the potential loss of support as a result.

> Those running the Stormont administration are as much British ministers as those sitting in Downing Street. However, targets aren't chosen always on legitimacy but on whether hitting them would be politically expedient or counter-productive and on the likely effect on public support. The IRA never attacked the British Army in Scotland [64] because of its support base there and what was seen as solidarity with a fellow Celtic nation. But the decision on whether to actually hit a legitimate target is one that is kept under review.[65]

This re-emphasises the centrality of support in the organisational survival of a terrorist organisation.[66] This is summed up succinctly in a 2003 interview with representatives of the RIRA. "No guerilla can exist without a support base." [67] Potential targets may be deemed legitimate, but their lethal targeting may not be deemed strategically logical if it is perceived to be likely that it would provoke a significant drop in support from their organisational base. The lethal targeting of political representatives of the very communities the organisation is reliant on for their small semblance of support would be strategically counter-productive.

Conclusion

From the above it is clear that internal brakes have been applied throughout the history of the RIRA, and Irish Republicanism in general. In a post-Omagh environment, strategic logic, moral logic and organisational developments have each been at play, collectively influencing the violent decision-making processes of the group. Certain victims and forms of violence have been deemed to be either strategically or morally illogical. The rationality of violent and non-violent decision-making processes are demonstrable throughout the groups' actions and statements. At the heart of this has been the primacy of maintaining organisational survival. This therefore led the group to purposefully avoid the possibility of 'another Omagh,' namely, a high civilian casualty attack in Northern Ireland.

As noted by Horgan, during this second wave of VDR activity the legislative and security backlash against the RIRA, and other VDR groups, played a significant role in the violent and non-violent decision-making post-Omagh.[68] These external pressures continued to include high profile arrests, arms finds and (by the group's own admission) [69], the continued utility of informers. Therefore, the rationalisation for the sporadic, and clustered, nature of activity is partially the result of external pressure, making it more difficult to carry out sustained level of violence, including high profile mass casualty attacks.

It is important to remember the Omagh bombing took place only nine-months after the emergence of the RIRA from the 1997 split with the PIRA. It was therefore still developing its independent support base, organisational structure, and strategic outlook. When one considers the primacy of organisational survival, this could potentially have left the group more vulnerable to external backlash than a more established group such as the PIRA. The Reals emerged high in operational expertise, but relatively low in physical numbers. The Omagh bombing ultimately resulted in the incarceration of a sizeable proportion of the senior leadership, and the organisational desertion of a significant section of the membership and support. This therefore severely weakened the movement's ability to engage in their sustained activities. While the organisational timing is important to note, so too is the situational timing. Coming at a time of hope for the peaceful future of Northern Ireland, the national and international impetus for stricter legislative and security reactions was greater. Accentuating this was the fact that this was the highest casualty attack of the Troubles.

What has been presented in this article therefore suggests that, in order to maintain organisational survival, internal brakes were actively applied to reduce specific forms and targets of violence. However, researchers looking to apply the findings from this case to different groups, conflicts, and/or attacks must do so with caution. As with all case studies, there are unique contributing factors to the events and outcomes, as described above. It is only with future comparative research alongside the more detailed data-driven analysis of this specific case that one can assess its wider applicability.

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Notes

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[18] John F. Morrison, *The Origins and Rise of Dissident Irish Republicanism*, op.cit.

[19] John F. Morrison, *The Origins and Rise of Dissident Irish Republicanism*, op.cit.; John F. Morrison, "Fighting Talk," op.cit.

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The Dynamics of Restraint in the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty Campaign

by Rune Ellefsen and Joel Busher

Abstract

This article examines the functioning and failure of restraint throughout the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign, from its start in 1999 to its end in 2014. SHAC provides an intriguing case for those interested in restraint within militant or radical social movements. The campaign comprised a range of lawful and unlawful activities. These often extended well beyond standard repertoires of nonviolent civil disobedience - surprising perhaps in a campaign that claimed to be rooted in a nonviolent tradition; but rarely resulted in interpersonal violence and never in the use of lethal force, even as the escalation of state-led repression and policing limited opportunities for peaceful protest. In this article we first identify three aspects of the campaign where a satisfactory explanation for the observable patterns of violence across the SHAC campaign appears to require an understanding of restraint: innovations away from more militant tactics at the outset and during the final stages of the campaign, and the maintenance of the outer limits of violence during the campaign peak. We then explain this restraint, and how it functions or fails. In doing so, we observe a difference between the processes of restraint described: while the innovations away from more militant tactics are to a large extent contingent on developments within the activists' operating environment, the restraint processes associated with maintaining the outer limits of the action repertoire are more deeply inscribed within the basic logics of the campaign. We reflect on the implications of these findings for future research and analysis of restraint within radical movements, and on methodological challenges encountered during this analysis. The article is based on documentary evidence and qualitative data, including interviews and the observation of trials involving SHAC activists.

Keywords: Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty; SHAC; animal liberation; restraint; internal brakes; political violence; limits of violence.

Introduction

The Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign is often held up as a high-water mark for militant animal rights activism.[1] SHAC was launched in Britain in 1999 with the aim of closing down Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), at the time the world's largest animal testing and experiment contractor. Throughout its lifespan, from 1999 to 2014, SHAC diffused to become a transnational grassroots campaign of above- and underground groups deploying lawful tactics, such as demonstrations, online protests and letter writing, and unlawful tactics, such as threats, property damage and arson attacks. During this time over 250 companies severed their links with HLS after being pressured by the campaign, and in 2001 SHAC almost succeeded in pushing HLS into bankruptcy.[2] The campaign prompted a major escalation of repression by assorted state actors, which eventually curtailed and then led to the demise of SHAC.[3]

SHAC provides an intriguing case for those interested in restraint within militant or radical movements and how these evolve, work and fail. On the one hand, it presents what could be seen as a spectacular failure of restraint. Despite claims to be embedded within a nonviolent tradition, throughout much of the campaign, conventional and transgressive protest tactics were combined with violent tactics and personalized intimidation against anyone involved with, or with business-links to HLS, such as shareholders, customers or service providers.[4] This included some activists who largely associated with the underground faction of the campaign setting fire to cars in people's driveways, throwing bricks through the windows of their houses, disseminating malicious rumors and threatening to harm people's children.[5]

Yet SHAC also provides an example of a persistent holding back, or retreating, from more serious forms of violence, even as new legislation and policing tactics limited opportunities to undertake conventional protest and direct action without incurring major legal sanction. Even during the periods of greatest confrontational intensity, activists never deployed lethal force and their use of interpersonal violence was very rare. When activists did commit violence against persons, it almost always resulted from an individual attempting to stop activists in the course of damaging property.[6]

In this article, we examine how restraint contributed to shape three aspects of the SHAC campaign: 1) innovation away from violence at the onset of the campaign; 2) a reorientation away from violence during the final stages of the campaign; and 3) the absence of further escalation of violence at the peak of the campaign. In doing so we make three contributions. First, with regards to the SHAC campaign itself, we provide a fuller explanation for the patterns of, and limits on, violence across the lifecycle of the British campaign than has been offered by the existing literature that has, to date, focused largely on how repression and policing shaped the nature and outcomes of the campaign.[7] Second, we contribute to efforts to better understand processes of restraint, or the 'internal brakes on violent escalation',[8] within radical milieus more broadly by developing the idea that, even within the same campaign, processes of restraint can be understood as being on a continuum between being more contingent upon changes within the activists' operating environment to being more deeply inscribed within the underlying logics of the campaign or wider movement. Third, we discuss methodological challenges raised by our analysis.

The article is based on a combination of documentary evidence, including movement publications, memoirs, government reports, court documents and news reports, and qualitative data gathered primarily by semi-structured interviews in England throughout 2013 and 2014. These comprise twenty interviews with activists involved in organizing the campaign, most of whom had spent time in prison for their activism, and additional interviews with one HLS director, two representatives from the police, one representative from SHAC's counter-movement (the 'Pro-test' organization), and one of SHAC's defense solicitors. Our data also includes notes from seven weeks of observation in two criminal trials against SHAC defendants in the same period.[9]

Documents and news reports were used to make a timeline of SHAC's lifecycle and trace how tactics of protest and repression evolved, with movement publications also used to explore intra-movement discussions about strategy and the use of violence. Interviews were oriented towards the interaction between the activists, their targets and agents of repression, and thematically focused on the campaign's modus operandi, the counter-responses of the British government and law enforcement, and how their interaction impacted the campaign's development. A potential limitation of the data is that we did not explicitly ask about restraint during our interviews. However, the thematic scope of the interviews, with their focus on strategic and tactical decision-making, provided data suitable for examining this issue. Observation notes from the trials are not quoted in the article, but provided insights about the evolution of the campaign not offered by the other data, and contributed to the triangulation of different sources of data about the same events, thereby assisting validation. The article also builds on existing published research that lays out in detail the evolving relationship between the campaign and key adversaries.[10]

SHAC: An Overview of a Multi-dimensional Animal Liberation Campaign

Since at least the 1970s, Britain has had an internationally high-profile animal rights movement sector.[11] A small faction of this movement sector supports and employs illegal and sometimes violent tactics: what we refer to as the Animal Liberation Movement (ALM). The ALM encompasses an aboveground faction comprising groups that mobilize openly and carry out both lawful and unlawful actions, and an underground faction comprising groups that exclusively deploy unlawful strategies of action. Among the groups that comprise the underground faction are the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), internationally the best-known militant animal liberation group,[12] and smaller, more violent groups such as the Animal Rights Militia. There has consistently

been important tactical heterogeneity within the ALM.[13] During the 1980s and 1990s, however, the most militant activists sent letter bombs, deployed incendiary and explosive devices, sent letters with razor blades, and conducted both hoax and real product contamination campaigns.[14]

The roots of the SHAC campaign lie in one of the major tactical innovations that emerged out of the ALM during the 1990s. This consisted of a shift towards targeted campaigns focused on closing down specific companies, usually those involved in animal experimentation. These campaigns combined above- and underground groups and lawful and unlawful actions. They generated a number of significant victories for the movement, with activists succeeding in closing down establishments such as Sky Commercial Rabbit Farm (1990), Hylyne Rabbits (1994), Consort Beagle Kennels (1997), Oxford University Park Farm (1999) and Hillgrove Cat Farm (1999).[15] Success bred repetition and tactical diffusion,[16] and after the closure of Hillgrove Cat Farm in 1999, a small group of prominent activists set their sights on HLS: by far the largest target to date by several degrees of magnitude. They founded the SHAC UK organization and launched the SHAC campaign.

As with the previous targeted campaigns, the SHAC campaign attracted a plethora of groups that deployed a mixture of conventional protest, civil disobedience and unlawful tactics. This combination brought early successes[17] but also triggered the multi-level government responses that led to its eventual collapse.[18] The 'SHAC campaign' is therefore an umbrella term we use to cover all protest activity against HLS. Even though for analytical purposes we distinguish between its above- and underground factions, it should be noted that many activists involved in the aboveground groups were openly supportive of underground groups involved in the campaign, such as the ALF.

The aboveground faction centred on the SHAC UK organization, led by established animal rights protesters Greg and Natasha Avery (née Taylor), and Heather Nicholson. It also encompassed various grassroots organizations and local groups across the country, many of which existed prior to SHAC and had previously engaged in other campaigns against animal experimentation and fur farming. While many of the tactics deployed by activists involved in this faction were legal, some of their actions, such as targeted and intimidatory protests outside the houses of individuals associated with HLS, still stood out as distinctly radical when compared with the tactics typically used by activists across the wider animal rights movement sector.[19]

The underground faction was organized through loose-knit cell structures, many of which identified with the ALF. Within this faction, activists used clandestine and unlawful tactics, such as property damage or destruction, with the intention of inflicting economic damage, exerting psychological pressure and issuing threats. They claimed, however, to adhere to the ALF guidelines that require that activists take 'all necessary precautions against harming any animal, human or nonhuman.'[20]

The two factions played distinct but interdependent roles in the campaign. The specific nature of the relationship between the two factions is, however, difficult to specify. What is clear is that SHAC UK was central to the overall campaign, undertaking most of the research about HLS and the selection of targets. They also disseminated the information required for individuals or groups, associated either with the above- or underground faction, to undertake their activities, thereby ensuring at least partial coordination of the campaign. From there, however, above- and underground groups pursued their own actions. In the criminal trials against persons involved in SHAC UK, it became evident that some had taken part in actions associated both with above- and underground factions.

In order to give some sense of the extent of activity by each faction, we know that between 2000 and 2002, there were about 850 lawful overt demonstrations outside the two main HLS-owned sites in Britain, ranging from 4 to 1000 protestors.[21] For 2006, police statistics reported around 1200 animal research incidents (lawful and unlawful actions) in the UK, of which a majority was related to SHAC, and a quarter of which were criminal actions conducted primarily by underground groups.[22] In 2009, SHAC UK claimed to administer a mailing list of 10,000 members to which they regularly disseminated details on new targets and campaign news.[23]

For the purpose of this article, we conceive of the SHAC campaign as consisting of three phases. ***Phase 1, 1999 - 2001***, comprises the ***launch and initial expansion of the campaign***. This phase is characterized by quite astonishing success. As described above, from the outset the campaign combined conventional protest with civil disobedience and unlawful tactics, and during the first three years, SHAC had a significant impact on HLS. By pressuring its shareholders to sell their shares and HLS' core business partners to cut ties with the company, activists were effective in disrupting HLS's ability to operate and caused them major financial difficulties. By early 2001, HLS was on the brink of collapse.[24] It was, however, saved, first in January, when it was backed by a US investment firm, and subsequently in July when, reportedly just hours away from bankruptcy, a series of regulatory initiatives by the UK government enabled the Bank of England to step in and rescue the company.[25]

This provides an important point of inflection in the campaign. While the campaign continued to expand, never again would activists get close to achieving their goal of closing down HLS. Furthermore, from 2001 there was a shift towards the escalation of violence, particularly from the underground faction. In February 2001, Brian Cass, the CEO of HLS, was attacked outside his home and hit over the head with a pick-axe handle,[26] and Andrew Gay, HLS Marketing Director, was also assaulted on his doorstep.[27] These attacks were condemned by SHAC UK spokesperson, Natasha Taylor, and would eventually turn out to be significant outliers. At the time, however, they appeared to indicate an increased appetite for violence, particularly when some prominent ALM figures, including Ronnie Lee, founder of the ALF, either did not condemn[28] or seemingly condoned the assaults.[29] The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) reported seven attacks that resulted in 'slight injury' in 2001,[30] including 60 incidents of property damage and 135 so-called 'home visits': actions at the private homes of persons linked to HLS.[31] Around this time reports emerged of incidents in which hundreds of letters were sent to the neighbours of people with links to HLS spreading malicious rumours, including allegations that they were paedophiles.[32] It was also at this point that SHAC UK broadened its targeting strategy. Rather than focusing mainly on HLS, its premises and employees, SHAC UK now increased its emphasis on secondary and tertiary targets, meaning that activists shifted attention towards HLS's business partners, customers, service providers, and even the service providers and customers of HLS-partners.

Phase 2, 2002 - 2007, comprises the ***peak of the campaign*** in terms of scope and participation, including significant internationalization as activists sought to recover the initiative. Within this period we can observe the development of an 'interactive' process of escalation involving activists and the state.[33] On the one hand, there was a significant extension of the powers of law enforcement agencies and prosecutors,[34] and a major expansion of law enforcement and intelligence capabilities as government and law enforcement actors, under significant industry pressure, sought to respond to what they identified as a 'crisis'[35] situation that posed an 'enormous' threat to the UK economy.[36]

On the other hand, some elements of the SHAC campaign and wider ALM deployed increasingly militant tactics. While not part of the SHAC campaign, 2004 saw an underground ALM group use grave-desecration as a pressure tactic: activists removed the buried remains of the mother-in-law of one of the owners of a farm that bred guinea pigs for experiments, and stated they would not return the remains until the farm ended that practice. In a sense the tactic was successful: the farm owners eventually conceded to these demands. It also attracted widespread media attention and condemnation from the general public, however, which spilled over onto the wider ALM and the SHAC campaign. The tactic was not repeated.

Some activists also adopted more violent tactics. ABPI reported that in the first three months of 2004, 32 company directors received 'threatening home visits', compared with 10 in the whole of 2003, and that instances of property damage doubled from one year to the next.[37] In 2006, Matthew Worrall, an ABPI spokesperson, stated, 'We've seen a few examples of car bombs and crude incendiary devices recently. There seems to be a move towards outright terrorism'.[38] Between 2005 to 2007, ABPI figures indicate there were 9 incidents in which activists deployed incendiary devices in the UK.[39]

This phase ended on 1 May 2007 when international police cooperation culminated in an operation in which 700 police officers raided thirty-two addresses in the UK, Netherlands and Belgium, resulting in the arrests of the SHAC UK founders along with 27 others.[40] Fifteen of those arrested were charged with conspiracy to blackmail, an offence carrying a maximum custodial sentence of 14 years.

The ***third phase, 2008 - 2014***, marks the ***decline of the campaign***. After the 2007 arrests, the SHAC campaign continued to operate in Britain and internationally.[41] As Lisa, a former SHAC organizer and prisoner, recalls, 'after the first trial there were still enough people left to carry it on. In 2008 I think there was something like 800 demos worldwide, which is pretty good. It seemed to be going really well.'

Nonetheless, the effects of repression were beginning to show. Police statistics indicate a steady decline in the number of unlawful and lawful protests by ALM activists in Britain between 2006 and 2010,[42] and further convictions and heavy sentences in 2010 placed additional strain on the campaign. It became increasingly evident to some activists that at least within the UK the SHAC campaign was, as Lisa puts it, beginning to 'wither away.'

In response to this apparent decline, some activists 'felt like the campaign should go totally underground' (Joan, former SHAC organizer and prisoner). Such a strategic re-orientation did not materialize, however. There were also indications of tactical escalation internationally. In late 2007 and early 2008, the Animal Rights Militia claimed responsibility for several product contaminations against SHAC targets in the UK and other European countries, marking the first contaminations by ALM activists since before the launch of the SHAC campaign.[43] Then, in 2009, there was a substantial increase in serious criminal actions against SHAC targets in mainland Europe, including the use of improvised explosive and incendiary devices.[44] After an arson attack in Germany, the Militant Forces Against Huntingdon Life Sciences released a communiqué, claiming responsibility and stating: 'It has come to a point where we must take any necessary action to make the murderers stop. And if necessary we are prepared to do physical harm.'[45] Further expansion or escalation of violence did not take place, however.

In 2012, raids on a number of British activists by armed SO15 anti-terrorism teams, and subsequent prosecutions for minor incidents and accusations of petty crime (e.g. spray painting slogans) signalled the police's determination to dismantle the last remnants of the SHAC campaign in Britain.[46] SHAC publicly announced its end in September 2014 saying:

> With the onslaught of government repression against animal rights activists in the UK, it's time to reassess our methods, obstacles and opponent's weaknesses, to build up our solidarity network for activists and to start healing the affects [sic] of repression.[47]

Beyond Repression: Recognizing the Role of Restraint within the SHAC Campaign

The first and very basic argument that we make is that if we want to provide a full and satisfactory explanation for the observable patterns of violence across the SHAC campaign, then restraint is an important part of the story.

As identified in the introduction, what makes the SHAC campaign an interesting case to study is that while it arguably comprises a high-water mark for militant animal rights activism, there were important limits to the escalation that took place. Much of the existing research on the SHAC campaign has emphasized the role of repression and policing in shaping the evolution of the SHAC campaign. In particular, it has highlighted that such escalated repression and policing, that began to appear in 2001 and accelerated after 2004, contributed to bring about the eventual decline in both unlawful and lawful activism from 2006 onwards.[48] There are,

however, a number of aspects of the campaign that are not well explained by the effects of repression, and certainly not by the effects of repression alone.

First, at the outset of the campaign, far from representing an escalation towards more militant strategies of action, the launch of SHAC represented an innovation away from more violent tactics. Interviewed just before SHAC's collapse in 2014, Rebecka, a former SHAC organizer and prisoner, reflected back on the early days of the campaign and how the tactics they used at that time differed from what later emerged:

> What I think just looking back, in the early days there was a lot more sort of civil disobedience-type of actions, a lot more. You know, a lot more lock-ons and run-ins and things like that. […] For example, in the early days there were a lot of protest camps outside the homes of directors, you know, customers or individuals with shares in Huntingdon. And you know, really like peaceful camps, with like campaigns in their gardens or [mild laughter], with banners and, you know. A lot of peaceful, non-violent direct action.

While these 'camps' were undoubtedly intimidating for those who were targeted, this nonetheless marked a de-escalation from the 1980s and 1990s when, as described above, some ALM activists had sent letter bombs, planted explosive and incendiary devices and carried out hoax and actual contamination campaigns. Furthermore, while this innovation was mainly initiated by the aboveground faction of the campaign, and particularly SHAC UK, it also led to a temporary tactical de-radicalization of the underground faction of the ALM as those activists sought to contribute to the broader campaign.

Second, based on the existing literature on patterns of escalation across protest cycles, we might have expected to see tactical escalation taking place in Phase 3 of the campaign, particularly within splinter groups that might have become disillusioned with the apparent failings of the core of the movement.[49] In the case of SHAC, however, while there was some escalation towards violence during Phase 3, particularly on mainland Europe, the decline of the movement did not give rise to the emergence of significant new tactical radicalization, particularly in Britain. Even within the most radical parts of the aboveground faction, activists resisted the temptation to go 'totally underground'. What emerged instead was a shift towards an alternate 'strategy of action',[50] centred on engaging in public debate, seeking public support and mobilizing a broader constituency. Activists have, for example, focused greater attention on industrial breeding of livestock for meat and dairy production, and the promotion of veganism. Where activists have engaged in direct action, they have adopted less militant tactics, such as undertaking 'open rescues' in which activists from new international ALM groups such as Direct Action Everywhere or Anonymous for the Voiceless employ confrontational tactics and breaches of the law, but with a stronger emphasis on being 'open' (not hiding their identity) and strictly observing the principles of non-violence.[51] While it is true that effective repression and even simply fatigue are likely to have contributed to some or even many activists choosing to step back from more militant aspects of the campaign, this alone would not explain why we do not see tactical escalation at the margins of the movement.

Third, even as interactive escalation between activists and the state fueled tactical radicalization during Phase 2 of the campaign, instances of physical interpersonal violence remained few and far between and activists never deployed lethal force. Indeed, even other provocative tactics that did not entail physical violence but were considered beyond the pale, such as grave desecration, were not repeated, despite the fact they enabled activists to achieve their immediate goals. Again, while state-led repression and policing might have inhibited or raised the costs of the use of violence, it does not on its own provide us with a satisfactory explanation as to why some activists at least did not escalate further. In fact, and as we might expect based on the literature on protest and repression,[52] while the escalation of repression and policing undoubtedly discouraged aboveground activism and gradually undermined support for the campaign, it also actually encouraged tactical escalation among some activists within the underground faction.[53] As Rebecka describes: 'I do really think that the more it [the aboveground faction] was clamped down on the more direct actions [from the underground faction] happened – and also they became more serious.'

Explaining Restraint within the SHAC Campaign

So how then did this restraint emerge, on what logics did it operate, and how and why did it have the effects that it did on SHAC activists?

The Initial Innovation away from Violence during Phase 1 of the Campaign

As described above, while the initial innovation away from more violent tactics came largely from the aboveground faction of the SHAC campaign, it also produced a temporary tactical de-radicalization of the underground faction. The interview data indicate that this was closely related to the sense of possibility and momentum that characterized the first years of the SHAC campaign, and the way in which the SHAC campaign drew in and integrated groups from the underground faction within a wider movement with clear strategic objectives.

The ALM's strategy of targeted campaigns, which evolved and expanded with the SHAC campaign, galvanized most of the ALM, including actors in the underground faction, towards a joint effort to coerce HLS into closure. Among underground actors in particular, their integration into a campaign that combined lawful and unlawful actions foregrounded strategic logics in a way that had often not been the case previously. Mark, a long-term ALM activist and former ALF prisoner, reflected for example:

> I think prior to that [the SHAC campaign], there hadn't really been that type of focus against targets within the movement. I know for instance, when I was involved with the A.L.F., we didn't really do anything like that, we just used to go all over the place, taking actions against targets that were associated with animal abuse. And we didn't really think in terms of let's concentrate on a particular place, and so that we knocked that place out. […] So the idea of having this concerted type of concentration on one place at a time was a new one, and it really was clever tactics, because of course, that resulted in places actually closing down. And that type of activity was very successful.

The initial successes described above fueled a sense of optimism, which in turn encouraged a view among activists across the campaign that further escalation was unnecessary. Social movement scholars observe that while tactical innovation might ostensibly be about attempting to out-manoeuvre one's opponents, what successful innovations also provide is a way of offsetting activists' sense of 'powerlessness' and providing them with hope.[54] At the outset of the SHAC campaign activists believed that they had found 'a successful way forward'.[55] As Joan recalls: 'Things were really on a roll. […] The movement at that time was really empowered and motivated to the point of thinking; yeah, we're gonna get them.' Similarly, Emily remembers 'a real feeling of people thinking for the first time that the movement can win'. The 'successful way forward' that SHAC activists identified did entail significant disruption, some activists undertook campaigns of intimidation, and the fear generated by unlawful actions targeting HLS was understood to comprise an important part of the campaign. The more severe violence that had previously been deployed by some at the most militant underground fringes of the ALM seemed, however, neither necessary nor productive, in part, perhaps somewhat ironically, due to the way the news media reported, and arguably amplified,[56] the threats posed by the SHAC campaign. Dave, a former SHAC activist and ALF prisoner, recalls for example how even small incidents of unlawful disruptive action could trigger surprising results:

> I remember we went to a company in London, and there were about 10 of us there. They had some champagne reception for investors. And he [one of the activists] managed to get in the building, and he kicked over this table with champagne on it. And then the police kicked him out. He didn't even get arrested. And I remember the next day, reading about the demo, in the *Financial Times*, and there was all these statements from witnesses, how terrified they were, how we'd run through the lobby, attacking people, hitting them, screaming. And this company then pulled out, you know, they pulled out of Huntingdon. And I was like: Oh my god! There were 10 of us. So you could go outside of some of the most powerful companies in the world, shout for 2 hours, and then the next day, in the *Financial Times*, you could read, yeah, there's another company that's gone. So it all appeared to

> be going brilliantly.

This innovation away from more militant tactics began to give way in 2001 to a renewed militancy. The initial optimism gradually eroded, and as a response to the growing repression that gathered momentum in 2001 with, for example, the imprisonment for six months of the three founders and core organizers of the SHAC campaign in November 2001.[57] As Dave observes, 'Obviously, there's the point of view that look, if we can't go and shout "Evil!" outside the laboratory, we get arrested for that, then we may as well resort to more militant actions.'

The Reorientation Away from Violence at the End of the Campaign

As with the innovation away from violence at the beginning of the SHAC campaign, our interview data indicate that the reorientation away from violence at the end of the campaign is also intimately related to the context in which activists found themselves at the time, albeit the mood of activists at this point could hardly have been more different. The ALM had been active in Britain since at least the mid-1970s, and within recent memory activists had been on the brink of closing down the world's largest contract animal testing company. By the end of the SHAC campaign, however, it was clear to most activists not only that they had failed in their attempt to close HLS, but that the ALM itself was collapsing, or at the very least was at something of a crossroads. As Dave described at the time:

> Maybe that purpose that we've held in the past, the loud shouting, screaming, someone take notice of us, maybe that won't return, I don't know. But it doesn't look anywhere near like returning at the minute. So the peaks and troughs have always come, the high turnover has always been there. But it's scary now, the amount of people that is gone. To me, it's like we're on a life support machine, maybe we've even gone into a coma. It's that bad.

As described above, the question for us here is why activists at this crossroads chose to reorient away from violence rather than turning towards clandestinity and greater militancy. Certainly, effective and persistent repression is likely to be part of the answer, as is fatigue. Repression had resulted in all parts of the movement being permeated by apprehension about the costs of activism. Joan, like several other interviewees, argues that, whatever some ALM activists might claim, for many activists the shift to a more 'liberal direction' of activism was largely stimulated by a 'massive blatant fear' combined with a desire 'to do something that feels good [but] that does not put them at risk, that doesn't lose their privilege'.

The interview and documentary data indicate, however, that what also contributed to this reorientation away from more militant tactics was the way activists' acknowledgment of failure prompted broader critical self-reflection. A growing consensus began to emerge across the campaign that in order to obtain meaningful social change, it was necessary to place more emphasis on building public support. As Vicky sums up in an interview undertaken just after the SHAC campaign ended:

> People do feel like they reached a wall with campaigning and they're trying to go around it. And they are kind of thinking; oh, we have to be nicer and quieter.

Paul makes a similar observation:

> Because the wind has changed, repression changed, companies are changed, police are changed, public opinion changed, you now need the public opinion behind you if you want to achieve something.

Most of our activist interviewees were involved in the aboveground faction. As such, it is difficult for us to assess the extent to which activists within the underground shared this assessment. Nonetheless, the reorientation away from more militant tactics that flowed from this process of critical self-reflection affected activists across the above- and underground factions as a result of the interdependency of the factions: without the clear direction provided by the aboveground groups, the underground groups had no realistic chance of achieving the goal of closing down HLS.

Other movement-wide developments also influenced this period of critical self-reflection and subsequent tactical reorientation. By the latter stages of the campaign SHAC had become isolated and was facing heavy criticism from the wider (non-violent) animal rights movement.[58] This coincided with the growing movement-wide influence of a new generation of activists, without a prior history of engagement in the ALM, more oriented towards public awareness raising on issues such as commercial livestock farming and the promotion of veganism, and whose broader cultural reference points were located more within other non-violent campaigns than within the previously influential underground ALM militant scene.

This reorientation towards the use of less militant tactics therefore provides a potentially illuminating example of how external constraints and intra-group processes of restraint can intersect. Just as radical or militant social movements might rapidly escalate their use of violence and then adjust their aims and justifications,[59] the reverse might also happen: a move away from violence, triggered in this case to a significant extent by processes of repression, can be carried forward and consolidated as this also fosters a re-evaluation of activists' aims and objectives and a critical reflection on their choice of tactics.

The Absence of Further Escalation at the Peak of the Campaign

Explaining what held activists back from further escalation of tactics at the peak of the campaign is in a sense the most challenging of these three explanatory tasks, since there is less discussion of this within our interview data. This, we argue, is because this restraint is sufficiently deeply rooted within the underlying logics of the campaign that it is largely taken for granted by activists, a point we return to in the conclusion.

We propose, however, that an explanation can be developed, and that this can be done by a combination of tracing how such restraint proceeds from the underlying strategy of action,[60] and observing the reactions of activists at points where other activists either exceeded, or gave the impression that they might exceed, the broadly accepted outer limits of their action repertoire. In doing so, we identify 'brakes' that work both on 'strategic' and 'moral' logics.[61]

The target and aims of the campaign, and the fact that the campaign was always conceived of as combining above- and underground factions, appear to be of particular importance. The strategies and tactics of movements or campaigns are always developed in relation to their specific aims and objectives, and as a function of who activists identify as their main targets and how they believe they can influence those targets. The aim of the SHAC campaign was to close down HLS by undermining its financial viability and that of other related commercial enterprises.[62] Early in the campaign interpersonal violence was not perceived as necessary to achieve that aim, in part because other forms of low-level violence, such as property damage, threats and intimidation had already proved to be sufficient to achieve notable campaign successes. As described above, this confidence in their campaign strategy began to ebb away. Nonetheless, the activists in both the above- and underground factions continued to conceive of the campaign as combining both factions. Overall campaign success was understood to depend on an effective aboveground campaign just as much as it depended on an effective underground campaign, and it was broadly recognized by the activists that further escalation of violence would undermine the aboveground campaign by damaging public sympathy and support, and by encouraging further repression. It is notable that when escalation of violence did occur, as for example in the attack on Brian Cass, these actions were denounced by the SHAC UK leadership and others within the aboveground faction.

This logic extended beyond interpersonal violence to other tactics that were seen to alienate public support for SHAC and the wider movement: and probably helps to explain why tactics such as grave desecration were not repeated even though these had helped activists to achieve their immediate objectives.[63] As Paul reflected:

> The grave digging was bad. I don't think the British media complained too much about aggressive campaigns. But, once you start to dig out a grave and send stupid letters about your neighbours having sex with children or sending the tampons with blood. You know you lost, you completely lost

> … I think that is the day when the big change came.

Similarly, Dave, an ALM pioneer and former ALF prisoner, observes:

> When I found out about the grave digging, and that they'd done it to a mother-in-law, not even a direct member of the family. I wasn't happy at all about it. Still to this day, people will come up to you, and they'll say: 'that grave digging was disgusting'. On one level, it was a master stroke. If you're looking at the short term, it's like a mafia style technique. It's like we're the mafia, if they want to attack you, they attack the family, yeah? As far as tactics go, it's a master stroke. It's like a chess game, you know. And it's like fucking checkmate, have this you bastards. But in the wider term, in the long-term ... I mean, things like that did public relations disaster.

And in contrast to other militant movements, such as parts of the extreme right or the international jihadi movement, no faction either of SHAC or the ALM ever sought to advance their cause by intentionally provoking repression or sparking violent conflict.

We also find evidence, particularly within the documentary material, of 'moral brakes'[64] on the deployment of interpersonal violence; perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the tactical tastes and choices made by social movement activists always to some extent reflect their political identities and moral visions.[65] In the case of the SHAC campaign, this centred on the value placed on non-violence, and the commitment expressed by activists across both above- and underground factions to reducing harm to animals, be they human or non-human.[66] The effects that this had on activists' tactical choices varied across the above- and underground factions, partly as a function of how broadly or narrowly they interpreted concepts such as harm and violence. For some of the underground groups, for example, their definition of non-violence is limited to condemning damage to the bodies of living beings, meaning that intimidation, property destruction and even arson might still be deemed non-violent and therefore acceptable.[67] Other activists even developed arguments in support of, or at least justifications for, the deployment of interpersonal violence.[68] However, it is difficult to assess the extent to which such arguments represent actual intent or a form of posturing or strategic bluff and bluster, intended to increase the effectiveness of threats and harassment, or simply to achieve personal fame and notoriety. For our purposes, however, what matters is that such pronouncements have repeatedly been met with criticism from much of the rest of the movement, both on strategic and moral grounds,[69] or treated at most as a provocation, rather than as a call to action.

By contrast to the innovations away from violence discussed above, the processes of restraint we have described here then are not so much a product of particular junctures of the campaign and their attendant conditions, but rather are deeply inscribed within the basic strategic and moral logics of the campaign and the broader ALM. Of course, it is possible to imagine situations in which these processes of restraint might have failed, and far greater interpersonal violence might have ensued, but had this happened, it seems that it would have entailed a substantial re-focusing or re-imagining of the whole campaign.

Conclusion and Reflections

The SHAC campaign involved arson attacks, property damage, threats and intimidation. Interpersonal violence was, however, 'very rare'[70], despite the fact that activists often had opportunities for such violence, and lethal force was never deployed. In this article, we have argued that while repression and policing strategies played an important role in shaping the evolution of the SHAC campaign, including its demise, we can generate a fuller, more nuanced and compelling account of the observable patterns of violence across the campaign if we also explore how activists themselves contributed to manage the parameters of their tactical repertoire. We have demonstrated this by tracing how processes of restraint shaped three aspects of the campaign that are difficult to satisfactorily explain with reference to the effects of repression alone: an initial innovation away from more violent tactics at the onset of the campaign; a reorientation away from clandestinity and the use of more violent

tactics at the end of the campaign; and the absence of greater escalation at the peak of the campaign.

The analysis we have presented draws attention to two slightly different types of restraint. The first consists of pivots away from more militant tactics, such as the innovations away from the use of violence observed at the onset and the end of the campaign. The second consists of how activists constructed and maintained the absolute outer limits of their action repertoire, by which we do not mean that it is inconceivable that individuals involved with the campaign would go beyond these limits, but that if they did, it is extremely difficult to conceive that the campaign would not have become something quite radically different as a result.

What stands out when we compare the dynamics of these different types of restraint is how they vary in terms of the extent to which they are rooted within the core logics of the campaign. While the innovations away from violence at the outset and end of the campaign were both informed by the campaign's basic strategy of action, they were also clearly products of activists' adaptation to changes within their operating environment and of specific junctures within their campaign or movement cycles. As a result, the extent to which such restraint worked or failed, persisted or weakened, was contingent to a significant degree on the actions of external parties. By contrast, the construction and maintenance of the absolute outer limits of their action repertoire appears to have been less contingent on external developments and more deeply inscribed into the fundamental logics of the campaign and the wider movement.

In practice of course we would expect these types of restraint to intersect and overlap. Nonetheless, being attentive to the fact that there might be two slightly different types of restraint in play appears to be useful in two ways. First, it helps to highlight and emphasize that the 'internality' and 'externality' of restraint is not binary, but rather a matter of degrees,[71] with some processes of restraint emerging more out of a hybrid process of internal decision-making and adaptation to the changing operating environment, and other processes more deeply rooted within the core strategic and moral logics of the campaign or movement.

Second, it helps to draw our attention to the important point that if some forms of restraint weaken or fail, this does not necessarily mean that all forms of restraint will fail. In our case study, for example, even as the more contingent processes of restraint began to weaken or fail during the latter part of Phase 1 of the campaign, as they were effectively short-circuited by a mixture of frustrated ambition and escalated repression, the processes of restraint pertaining to the outer limits of escalation that were more deeply inscribed within the basic logics of the campaign continued to function. We believe that drawing out distinctions between processes of restraint that are more or less deeply rooted within the internal logics of a campaign or movement might substantially advance our theoretical and practical understanding of the dynamics of restraint by, for example, helping to locate key escalation thresholds, and to distinguish between escalation processes – or 'brake failure' – that are more or less likely to result in such thresholds being breached.

We believe it is useful and appropriate, however, to conclude by drawing attention to, and reflecting on, challenges that we encountered as we undertook this analysis, and that other scholars, analysts or policy practitioners are also likely to encounter. One of the most significant of these relates to the relative (in) visibility of some of these 'brakes' on escalation, and how to interpret their apparent presence or absence. This is particularly the case for some of the brakes that are most deeply embedded within the strategic and moral logics of the campaign or groups in question, precisely because being deeply embedded means they are largely taken for granted by activists and therefore not necessarily made explicit. SHAC activists did not remind or explain to one another with great frequency why they should not assault, let alone kill, those associated with HLS, because this was taken as a given. One pertinent methodological question might therefore be how such embedded understandings become established and are transmitted within milieus, and therefore how they might be observed.

Another challenge relates to how we conceptualized escalation and de-escalation. Within one temporal phase of the case study, we identified a reduction in the frequency of the most severe violence (e.g. the sending of

mail bombs), but a simultaneous increase in the frequency and spread of low-level violence (e.g. property destruction at private homes). We conceived of this as a de-escalation of violence. There is a certain ambiguity here, however, because the increased number of incidents of low-level violence seemingly had a greater cumulative effect on the activists' targets. This raises what seems to us to be an important conceptual question: should we exclusively look at whether the level of severity of violent incidents increases or decreases (and what about foiled attacks?), or should we focus on whether the impact of an interrelated series of violent events grows or declines, or a combination of the two? And what would be the implications of this? How one responds to this question is likely to depend on the objectives of the study, but we believe it is important to spell out and discuss these decisions in order to make as clear as possible what is and is not, and what can or cannot be, claimed based on the evidence available. This is particularly relevant for an area of research – restraint – that is in its relative infancy and has the potential to feed quite directly into various forms of policy planning.

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[9] For a fuller description of this data and processes of data generation and analysis, see Rune Ellefsen, 'Deepening the Explanation of Radical Flank Effects: Tracing Contingent Outcomes of Destructive Capacity', *Qualitative Sociology* 41 (2018), pp. 111–133.

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[11] See Keith Mann, *From Dusk 'til Dawn: An Insider's View of the Growth of the Animal Liberation Movement* (London: Puppy Pincher Press, 2007), pp. 43–54.

[12] Likar, op. cit., p. 95.

[13] Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella, 'Behind the Mask: Uncovering the Animal Liberation Front', in: Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella (Eds.) *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters: Reflections on the Liberation of Animals*, (New York: Lantern Books, 2004), pp. 9-63.

[14] Rachel Monaghan, 'Terrorism in the Name of Animal Rights', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no.4 (1999): pp. 159–169; see also Nicole A. Tishler, 'Fake Terrorism: Examining Terrorist Groups' Resort to Hoaxing as a Mode of Attack,' *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 4 (2018), pp. 3–13.

[15] Donald R. Liddick, *Eco-terrorism: Radical Environmental and Animal Liberation Movements* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), 40; Monaghan, 'Not Quite Terrorism', op. cit., p. 937.

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[34] Donovan and Coupe, op. cit; Rune Ellefsen, 'Relational Dynamics of Protest and Protest Policing,' op. cit.

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[43] Mills, *Assessing the Challenge*, op. cit., pp. 81–82.

[44] Europol, *TE-SAT 2010: EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report* (DOI: 10.2813/12525), p. 41.URL: https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/tesat2010_1.pdf

[45] Communique 7 in Militant Forces Against HLS, *Blackmail 3 & The SHAC Model* (Person(s) Unknown/Dark Matter Publications, 2014), p.12.URL: https://personsunknown.noblogs.org/files/2014/11/MFAH-Blackmail3-SHAC.pdf .

[46] Ellefsen, 'Relational Dynamics of Protest and Protest Policing,' op. cit., p. 762.

[47] SHAC statement (August 11, 2014), 'SHAC ends: We made history... The future is ours'. Republished online URL: https://www.sproutdistro.com/2014/08/13/shac-ends-future/.

[48] Ellefsen, 'Judicial Opportunities,' op. cit.

[49] Donatella della Porta, 'On Violence and Repression: A Relational Approach'. *Government and Opposition* 49, no. 2 (2014), pp. 159–187; Lorenzo Bosi, Chares Demetriou and Stefan Malthaner (Eds.), *Dynamics of Political Violence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

[50] A 'strategy of action' refers to the campaign's (or group's) short- and long term aims and the roadmap navigated by in order to reach those aims (e.g. ideas on what tactics to use, constituencies they rely on etc.).

[51] See Tanner Vea, 'The Ethical Sensations of Immediacy: Embodiment and Multiple Literacies in Animal Rights Activists' Learning with Media Technologies,' *British Journal of Educational Technology* 50, no. 4 (2019), pp. 1589–1602.

[52] Jennifer Earl, 'Political Repression: Iron Fists, Velvet Gloves, and Diffuse Control'. *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (2011), pp. 261–84; Eitan Y Alimi, Chares Demetriou and Lorenzo Bosi, *The Dynamics of Radicalization: A Relational and Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[53] Rune Ellefsen, 'The Unintended Consequences of Escalated Repression', *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, accepted for

publication (2021).

[54] Doug McAdam, 'Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency'. *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 6 (1983): p. 752.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ellefsen, 'Deepening the Explanation of Radical Flank Effects,' op. cit., pp. 123–124.

[57] See della Porta, 'On Violence and Repression,' op. cit., or for a discussion of how the escalation of repression is frequently identified as a mechanism at the onset of escalation of political violence.

[58] Elisa Aaltola, 'Differing Philosophies: Criminalization and the Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty Debate', in: Rune Ellefsen, Ragnild Sollund and Guri Larsen, *Eco-global Crimes: Contemporary Problems and Future Challenges*, edited (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 157–181.

[59] As Sidney Tarrow notes in *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 207, during processes of movement-internal competition between groups or factions 'a common outcome of competition is radicalization: a shift of ideological commitments toward the extremes'.

[60] As the literature on the tactical repertoires of social movements argues, since activists are broadly rational actors pursuing more or less well-defined goals, in most cases the parameters of their action repertoires largely reflect their underlying strategy of action. See Verta Taylor and Nella Van Dyke, '"Get up, Stand up": Tactical Repertoires of Social Movements', in: David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 2007), pp. 62–93.

[61] See Busher et al., op. cit.

[62] Mattias Wahlström and Abby Peterson, 'Between the State and the Market: Expanding the Concept of "Political Opportunity Structure"', *Acta Sociologica* 49, no. 4 (2006), pp. 363–377.

[63] This ambiguity resembles the 'naughty or nice' dilemma that activists may face, as described by James M. Jasper, *Getting It Your Way: Strategic Dilemmas in the Real World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 106–107.

[64] See Busher et al., op. cit.

[65] James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 229–250.

[66] See for example activist publications from and about the ALF, which were widely disseminated in the 1990s and into the 2000s, such as: https://issuu.com/conflictgypsy/docs/animallibthroughdirectaction?mode=window&viewMode=doublePage%22; or https://issuu.com/conflictgypsy/docs/animallibprimer?mode=window&viewMode=doublePage%22.

[67] See for example Kevin Jonas, 'Bricks and Bullhorns', in Best and Nocella, *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters,* op. cit., pp. 263–271. Several other chapters in the same volume address this topic.

[68] Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation. 2nd ed.* (London: Thorsons, 1991); Tom Regan, 'How to Justify Violence', in: Best and Nocella, *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters,* op. cit., pp. 231–236; Don Liddick, 'Techniques of Neutralization and Animal Rights Activists,' *Deviant Behavior* 34, no. 8 (2013), pp. 618-634.

[69] Hall, op. cit.

[70] Mills, *Assessing the Challenge*, op. cit., 78–79.

[71] Joel Busher and Tore Bjørgo, 'Restraint in Terrorist Groups and Radical Milieus: Towards a Research Agenda', in this Special Issue.

Understanding Peace and Restraint Amidst Ethnic Violence: Evidence from Kenya and Kyrgyzstan

by Sarah Jenkins

Abstract

The recent local turn in peace and conflict research has revealed significant sub-national variations in the onset, intensity, and duration of violence in conflict settings, and uncovered complex patterns of participation and non-participation at the individual level. Situated within this research agenda, this article seeks to understand the emergence of small pockets of peace and individual acts of restraint during episodes of ethnic violence. Based on qualitative research undertaken in two diverse contexts – Kenya and Kyrgyzstan – the author argues that strong, crosscutting social ties mediate and contain boundary hardening processes, creating opportunities for peace and restraint on the ground. The article makes three key arguments: that pre-existing ties of friendship, trust and reciprocity render interpersonal violence more difficult and encourage acts of restraint; that extensive and intensive interethnic interaction disrupts and breaks down us-them distinctions that are the foundations of polarisation; and that cross-cutting ties facilitate coordination and cooperation amongst community leaders, and ensure that appeals for peace resonate on the ground.

Keywords: ethnic violence, peace, non-violence, restraint, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan

Introduction

Historically, the overarching concern of conflict research has been to uncover the causes of violence and to explain why organisations, leaders, and ordinary people instigate, perpetrate and participate in it.[1] Within this scholarship, there remains a strong tendency towards top-down, macro-level perspectives that 'focus on a polarized view of society', and that fail to capture the complexity of violence dynamics on the ground.[2] However, the recent 'micro-theoretic' turn in the field has seen a welcome shift to theories that prioritise the disaggregation of conflict, and that have revealed significant subnational variations in the onset, intensity, nature, and duration of violence.[3] Research into riots in India, for example, has sought to understand why some cities were affected, whilst others were not, arguing that 'institutionalised riot systems,'[4] electoral incentives,[5] and interethnic civic associations [6] help to explain the uneven distribution of violence. Peace research scholars have similarly identified 'zones of peace' and 'non-war communities' in the context of protracted civil wars.[7] These studies have pointed to the importance of social cohesion,[8] and local leaders and governance institutions,[9] in facilitating peace. Studies of civil war have examined the uneven, selective use of violence by rebel groups during conflict, exploring the ways in which civilian-rebel relations can shape decisions over where violence is employed, against whom, and to what level of intensity.[10] And genocide scholars have begun to examine the complexities of individual participation in violence, identifying the role of social networks in driving recruitment and participation,[11] and exploring how group dynamics can influence individual choices to participate.[12] This article contributes to this growing field of research in its focus upon the micro-level dynamics of ethnic violence. It seeks to make two key contributions: firstly, it examines the relatively underexplored role of social ties in influencing individual choices to restrain or selectively employ violence. Secondly, it aims to help bridge the macro-micro disjunction that persists in the field,[13] by exploring how macro-level factors – in this case ethnic polarisation – are affected by micro-level social relations, and how this shapes the socio-spatial patterns of violence and peace.[14]

Drawing upon episodes of ethnic violence in Kenya and Kyrgyzstan, the article addresses the following question: How can we understand localised peace and individual restraint amidst ethnic violence? As such, it speaks to two of the key problematics central to this Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*: namely, understanding the uneven distribution of violence across space, and understanding individual restraint. The article's departure point is that ethnic violence must be understood as a socially embedded phenomenon, and it argues that

strong, crosscutting social ties create both the conditions for, and the processes of, peace and restraint. The author, then, is particularly interested in exploring Busher et al.'s fourth 'internal brake' on violent escalation within their typology: boundary softening. That is, the breaking down of clear us-versus-them distinctions, resistance to generalisations about opposing groups, and the maintenance of social contacts across the conflict divide.[15] In this respect, the author reflects upon how cross-ethnic social ties can serve to shape patterns of restraint at the individual, group, and elite levels.

The Cases

Kenya has been plagued by a divisive ethnic politics since the colonial era, as communities have benefitted disproportionately from having one of their own in, or close to, the seat of power. In this context of ethnicised neo-patrimonial politics, of potential marginalisation and exclusion, and of substantial horizontal inequalities, elections have become high-stakes, winner-takes-all games that have repeatedly been a catalyst for violence. The December 2007 polls sparked some of the worst ethnic violence the country has ever witnessed. These elections pitted the incumbent Kikuyu president, Mwai Kibaki, and his Party of National Unity (PNU), against an alliance of leading politicians from Kenya's other major ethnic groups, including the Luo, Kalenjin, Luhya, Kamba, and Coastal communities, under the leadership of Raila Odinga and the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Given these party fault lines, the elections came to be understood as 'all against the Kikuyu', and with Kibaki trailing in the opinion polls, many believed that it was impossible for him to win if the elections were free and fair. The campaigns were heated and anti-Kikuyu sentiment high leading into the election day. Significant delays and serious irregularities in the counting process, followed by a hasty announcement of Kibaki as the winner, sparked immediate violence and protest that quickly spread across the country. The next two months saw members of the Kikuyu community targeted by ODM-affiliated groups, and the former engage in revenge attacks, as the country spiralled into violence that left approximately 1300 people dead and over 700,000 displaced.

Just over two years later, an ongoing political crisis in the Central Asian country of Kyrgyzstan provided the backdrop for tensions between the titular Kyrgyz and the minority Uzbek communities in the south of the country. In April 2010, in the context of rising utility prices, increasing authoritarianism, and rampant corruption and criminality under President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's rule, opposition protests and riots broke out in parts of the country. These culminated in the overthrow of the regime on April 7, and the establishment of an interim provisional government. Seeking a base of support in a region where many Kyrgyz remained loyal to Bakiyev, and with remnants of the former regime attempting to recapture power from the south, the interim government reached out to prominent Uzbek leaders. Their support of the new regime, and their active resistance against Bakiyev and his supporters, led to a series of isolated communal clashes across the south of the country between April and May of that year. The vacuum of power and political jostling had tapped into existing tensions over unequal access to land, economic opportunities, and political power that had underscored Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations in the region since the end of the Soviet era. Tensions steadily rose and rumours abounded that the Uzbek community – who were already seen as dominating economic activity in the urban centres across the region – were now seeking political power and autonomy. On the night of 10 June 2010, a confrontation between Kyrgyz and Uzbek men outside a casino in Osh city escalated rapidly, with large crowds gathering and engaging in violence. Fuelled by this incident, and by subsequent unfounded rumours that Uzbek men had raped Kyrgyz girls in a nearby university dormitory, the violence quickly spiralled. Groups of Kyrgyz from nearby villages descended upon Osh and other major towns and cities in the south, whilst Uzbek communities mobilized in response. The ethnic violence was short-lived, lasting little more than a week, but it saw the destruction of large sections of the affected towns and cities, several hundred people killed, thousands injured, and tens of thousands displaced.

In both of these cases, despite the spread of intense ethnic violence, some neighbourhoods, villages, and towns managed to maintain peace, with members of otherwise conflicting communities uniting to protect one another. Moreover, amidst the violence there is evidence of more ambiguous patterns of participation and individual practices of restraint, as people made efforts to resist violence and protect friends and neighbours.

These spaces of peace and forms of restraint demand further attention and understanding.

Methodology

This research adopts a multiple case study approach and employs an exploratory most different systems strategy in order to build theory. Kenya and Kyrgyzstan differ in a number of significant ways that could feasibly factor into shaping the nature and landscape of ethnic violence, including political history, regional dynamics, socio-economic structures, geographical features, and ethnic demographics. Despite these differences, both cases exhibited similarities in the patterns of violence and participation on the ground. The research was conducted in two distinct phases. The field research in Kenya was carried out over 10 months in 2009-2010, with over 500 semi-structured interviews conducted as part of the researcher's PhD fieldwork. It employed a subnational comparative approach, selecting field sites in Nairobi, Eldoret, and Nakuru that had experienced high levels of violence alongside areas that did not. The research in Kyrgyzstan was carried out over the course of five weeks in June and July 2016, with fifty-nine semi-structured interviews conducted in that time. The intention was to utilise a similar within-case comparison methodology. However, the sensitivity of the research, and the high levels of fear and suspicion that were encountered, made this approach more challenging. Whilst an extended period of research could have facilitated the building of trust in key field sites – as it had done in Kenya – constraints upon time and resources made this impossible. Upon advice from key informants, the project design was altered to include only areas that had remained relatively calm during the 2010 crisis. These included three small towns or villages near to Osh (Aravan, Kenesh, and Kara-suu), Kochkor Ata, a small town neighbouring conflict-ridden Bazar-Korgon, and Uzgen town. Secondary sources and literature have been used to compensate for the absence of primary data gathered in more violent contexts in this case.

In both cases, a mixture of purposive sampling (based on place of residence), and snowball sampling was used to mobilise respondents. Interviewees were asked to narrate their personal experiences of the respective episodes of violence in their villages or neighbourhoods, before a series of more specific questions were explored to capture everyday lived experience and relationships across the ethnic divide. The interview material was further supplemented by observation and secondary source material, including human rights documents and government reports. In both cases, a research assistant was employed to assist with mobilising respondents and with translation where necessary. Whilst central to the success of sensitive research, the presence of assistants nevertheless impacts upon the research process, particularly in relation to who is mobilised and how they might respond to particular questions or issues.[16] In Kenya, my main research assistant was a male, Nubian youth from Nairobi. His ethnic identity was fortuitous in that he was regarded by almost all interviewees as 'ethnically neutral' in relation to the violence. However, his gender identity undoubtedly impacted upon the recruitment of female respondents, inhibiting their participation, as well as shaping their responses. In Kyrgyzstan, a young, female Kyrgyz student was employed. As a result, it is important to acknowledge that while interviews with many Uzbeks appeared open and honest, the presence of my Kyrgyz assistant may have restricted or influenced the information that these respondents provided, or the views they expressed. In addition, while my assistant's gender may have helped mobilise Uzbek participants more easily than a male Kyrgyz assistant, it did render interviews with young men who had potentially been involved in violence more challenging. Snowball sampling methods did mitigate this issue to an extent, but these groups remain underrepresented. Despite these challenges and limitations, however, rewarding interviews were carried out across the ethnic divides in both cases, and the field research has elicited some important and significant findings that demonstrate meaningful similarities.

Social Embeddedness and Ethnic Violence

Understandings of all human behaviour, including violence, must be attentive to the immediate social context in which it is embedded:[17] that is, in the complex array of social identities, ties, and relationships that make up our everyday lives. Processes of boundary hardening – that is, the process through which exclusivist us-versus-them identities emerge and are reproduced – do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, they map onto existing social

landscapes that can, in some circumstances, serve to undermine them and facilitate restraint. The subsequent sections explore three components of this process in the cases of Kenya and Kyrgyzstan, illustrating marked similarities across these two different cases. The first focuses on the significance of strong ties of friendship in maintaining peace and shaping individual acts of restraint. The second explores how interethnic interaction can challenge ethnicised perspectives, rendering such spaces more resistant to damaging generalisations about ethnic others. And the final section explores how both vertical and horizontal ties amongst local leaders and their communities facilitated peace and solidarity across the ethnic divide.

Social Ties, Peace, and Restraint

There is a widening consensus within the literature on social movements and political violence that pre-existing social ties play an important role in recruitment, radicalisation, and participation.[18] Recent micro-level studies of violent ethnic conflict, and particularly of the Rwandan genocide, have also drawn attention to this 'dark side of social capital', whereby involvement has been 'linked to the interpersonal ties that bring and bind participants together.'[19] However, far less attention has been paid to *how* such ties might act as a restraint on violence escalation and participation. Indeed, people are embedded in multiple, complex, and often competing webs of social relationships that can pull in different directions, especially during periods of conflict and tension. Whilst some social ties can encourage violent action, others may mediate participation and build resilience. Stryker has suggested that the intensity of relationships becomes an important factor when such competing identities call for incompatible behaviour.[20] Following these lines, then, this section argues that strong inter-ethnic social ties remain important during violent conflict, and can act as mediators in processes of boundary hardening and as restraints upon violence.

In both the Kenyan and the Kyrgyz crises, residents of ethnically mixed areas noted that their villages remained cool and calm despite being 'surrounded by war.'[21] In these areas, residents united across the ethnic divide to protect each other and their properties, establishing interethnic patrols and erecting and defending barricades together. When asked why they felt their areas had been more resilient to the violence, the majority of interviewees pointed to the intensity and strength of interethnic relationships, stating that, 'when you live together and you know each other well and you interact all the time it is very hard to hurt them.'[22] Ethnic heterogeneity in and of itself is not sufficient to foster and promote strong crosscutting social ties; indeed, high levels of segregation can persist in heterogeneous contexts. But, as Rydgren et al. note, when multi-ethnic settings encourage close, everyday interactions, interethnic friendships and ties of reciprocity are more likely to emerge.[23] Interviews with those living in villages that remained relatively peaceful in both Kenya and Kyrgyzstan support this notion; they describe strong interethnic ties of trust, mutual support, and aid that have developed through prolonged daily interaction, and they attribute the maintenance of peace, in part, to the presence of these relationships. Thus, in ethnically mixed spaces, ties of loyalty and reciprocity can build social capital across the ethnic divide, discouraging residents from engaging in violence against one another. As Malthaner notes, 'loyalty based on personal relations…can be very resilient.'[24]

Whilst high levels of interaction and integration can promote the development of strong interethnic relationships, that is not to say that those living in more homogeneous settings do not also have ties that cross ethnic boundaries. They certainly do; and these relationships continue to matter during episodes of violence. In fact, pre-existing social ties appear to play an important role in shaping individual decisions to avoid, resist, mediate, limit, or selectively employ violence: not all ethnic others are considered to be equally legitimate targets. In both Kenya and Kyrgyzstan, friends, 'good neighbours', and individuals whose 'otherness' was more ambiguous, were often protected from attack. Friendships and close neighbourly relationships were the most oft-cited sources of restraint. Interview material from Kenya reveals countless examples of individuals secretly hiding friends or neighbours in their homes in order to protect them, and research in Kyrgyzstan illustrates a similar dynamic.[25] As one Luo youth surmises, 'We were only fighting against those we didn't know. If we had a friend who was Kikuyu we would protect him.'[26] Similarly, individuals considered to be 'good neighbours' – those who helped others in the community – were also often protected from harm, whilst 'bad neighbours' were targeted. For example, a number of residents of Luo-dominated 4B, Mathare, spoke of a

Kikuyu man who was not attacked and remained in the area throughout the crisis. They cited the fact that the man had a *posho* mill [for grinding maize] and a water tap, and in everyday life he 'helped people a lot with these assets, so with that good relationship in the slums, he was safe.'[27] Similarly, a group of Luo and Luhya youth in Kibera explain, 'it really depends on how you stayed with someone' prior to the violence:

> *L1:* You know there was a man here. He had a very bad heart with people here. He was a Kikuyu and he had a water tap. He refused to give water to others here....
>
> *LY1:* He was not a role model in the community…If you took water from his tap he'll beat you up. So people remembered what he was like, and when the violence came it was 'Let's go and attack him.'
>
> *L1:* But the lady of that man was a good woman. She would help people with *unga* [flour] and things. So when the people from Gatuikera came to burn the houses here, we, under risk, we helped her. We did not help him, but we helped her.[28]

In addition, local residents whose 'otherness' was blurred by virtue of their social connections or depth of integration into the majority community were also more ambiguous targets, and in some cases inspired acts of restraint. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, an elderly Uzbek man is reported to have been beaten by Kyrgyz youth in the Cheremushki microdistrict of Osh, but he escaped being killed, because 'he speaks Kyrgyz well, he grew up in Otuz-Adyr village;'[29] and in the Uzbek neighbourhood of Padavan, 'all the houses were burned except one, where the wife of the owner was an ethnic Kyrgyz.'[30] Similarly, in Kenya, a Luo interviewee in Mathare explained that his Kikuyu wife was not attacked by other residents because of 'the way she is deeply in our system and she is talking fluently in Luo.'[31] Moreover, against the electoral backdrop of violence in Kenya, political allegiances across the ethnic divide similarly blurred the boundaries of 'otherness.' Those who had supported the majority community's favoured candidate during the electoral campaigns – openly rejecting the party associated with their own ethnic community – were more likely to inspire restraint. For example, one Kikuyu interviewee recalls,

> The group came to me, eager to kill me, but when they saw me they said, 'No, no, no, don't hurt him, he's a strong ODM supporter, he campaigned with us as a driver.' So I managed to escape death that time. They asked me, 'Are you able to make it to your place? Can we take you there, we can give you a guard? I told them, 'I'm ok, I'll reach.' They left me and continued chasing the others. They killed many of them.' [32]

Thus, in some cases, the 'us-them' binary was softened by an individual's social integration in, or political support of, the majority community, calling the legitimacy of violence against them into question, and encouraging forms of restraint.

The way in which restraint could be employed, however, differed across actors and contexts, and while some individuals were able to engage in open acts of resistance, others were far more constrained in their options. At the more visible end of the spectrum, some individuals were able to openly oppose, resist, and prevent imminent attacks against people they knew, appealing to other participants not to harm friends and neighbours. For example, upon encountering two Kikuyu friends being chased by a group of armed youth in his village, one Kalenjin interviewee recalls:

> I told the crowd, 'Please don't kill them. I schooled with them before.' Just because I'm well-known in the area, they stopped and they weren't hurt. They told those two boys, 'If it were not for this man, you would be dead by now, and just because we know this man, if we didn't know him then both you and him would be dead, so just run and go.'[33]

What is notable here is the significance of the resister's social ties with, and status amongst, the group: he is a well-known and respected figure. Indeed, in almost all related instances of successful outright resistance like this, the resisting figure was either an established and well-liked member of the attackers' social group, or a well-respected authority figure within the community. Attempts by individuals to prevent attacks by *external* armed actors – or attempts by those with limited social standing amongst, or authority over, members of the attacking group – were extremely rare. Most interviewees noted that to openly resist in such circumstances

would not only be ineffective, but could also lead to brutal, if not fatal, punishment. Thus, this form of restraint only occurred in very limited circumstances with quite specific group dynamics.

Another visible form of restraint involved the choice to moderate violence against acquaintances when encountered on the battlefield. For example, in the midst of one of the most horrific acts of the Kenyan violence, where thirty-five people were burned alive in a church in Kiambaa, one interviewee explained that his mother had managed to escape the fire, and as she was running away, the Kalenjin mob attacked and robbed her. One of his former classmates from school was part of the attacking group. As she fled, 'she heard someone call her and when she looked back he was calling her to come….he told her that they would take her phone and money, but that he would give her the title deeds and her ID "because we know you."'[34] The circumstances under which individuals could exercise such restraint, however, was again significantly limited by the immediate group dynamics; when individuals were confident of their social standing and respect within the group, they might choose to exercise restraint such as this. But in contexts of greater uncertainty, such acts could invite reprisal or accusations of treachery, and individuals often felt they had little opportunity to exercise restraint. Indeed, one Luo resident of Mathare illustrates this clear tension. In his everyday life before the violence, he spent much of his time playing football with Kikuyu friends from the neighbouring village, and as such was not as well-integrated with residents of his own community. He was also married to a Kikuyu. When the violence broke out, he initially held back from participating in attacks against and looting of his Kikuyu neighbours. However, his lack of participation in the violence soon drew attention and accusations of being traitor:

> There came a time when they asked me, 'Why aren't you joining us? Have you been sent with *Mungiki* [a gang associated with the Kikuyu] so that they can know our plans?' I said 'No', but they know that this place [that I come to] is a Kikuyu place and they see me here every day, and so they thought, 'This guy is planning something for us.' So I decided to join them, I had a *panga* [a machete] and I was with them, we were going door to door, looting and breaking.[35]

Thus, unless an individual was well-known and well-respected by members of the attacking group, open resistance, restraint, or non-participation in violence was very risky.

Consequently, individuals most commonly utilised more subtle and covert forms of restraint, finding ways of protecting the lives and livelihoods of their friends and neighbours out of sight of other participants. As noted, above, many individuals in both the Kenyan and Kyrgyz cases hid people within their homes; others protected their properties, preventing their destruction or looting by outsiders by pretending that they owned or had appropriated them.[36] Others passed information on to friends in nearby villages, warning them of the time and place of upcoming attacks, or giving them code words to pass roadblocks safely. As one Kalenjin interviewee stated, 'You are told to cut communication because this isn't friendship now, this is about community. But you can't sit there knowing your friend is there, you have to call him.'[37] These patterns support Lee Ann Fujii's research on the Rwandan genocide, where she found that out of sight of leaders and other participants, individual Hutu often acted upon pre-existing social ties, helping and protecting Tutsi friends and neighbours. However, when surrounded by other participants, their options were more limited. She concludes that 'it was social ties, not ethnic membership, that patterned processes of recruitment and targeting'.[38] This author's own research demonstrates similar dynamics.

Thus, as Asal et al. note, 'who you know and how well you know them impacts what you do.' [39] In ethnically mixed neighbourhoods and villages, where everyday interactions are high, close interethnic relationships can form and render violence against one another much more difficult. In more homogenous contexts, friendships and other close social ties of reciprocity continued to shape forms of participation, encouraging resistance, restraint, and assistance across ethnic lines. However, people's options were often significantly constrained by the immediate social context, and open resistance was usually only possible when social ties amongst perpetrators themselves were strong, either through friendship or a relationship of authority. In the absence of these, individuals exercised restraint in more subtle and covert ways, protecting and assisting friends and neighbours secretly.

Everyday Ethnicity and Continuums of Violence

This section moves beyond the level of the individual and of interpersonal relationships to examine the ways in which social relationships shape the everyday construction of ethnicity and perceptions of self and other. It argues that ethnicised perspectives, prejudices and resentments – the very 'stuff' of polarisation and boundary hardening – are produced, circulated, and reinforced more intensively in largely homogeneous contexts, whilst extensive interethnic interaction can reduce 'negative ethnicity' in daily life.[40] Attention to these everyday expressions of ethnicity are important, as episodes of ethnic violence do not emerge in isolation from them, but rather are part of a continuum of ethnically conflictual behaviours. Indeed, violence is more likely in contexts where pre-existing polarisation is high.[41] Thus, this section seeks to strengthen the bridge between the macro- and micro-levels of analysis by exploring how everyday social relations on the ground interact with a key macro-level driver of the conflict: ethnic polarisation.

In both Kenya and Kyrgyzstan, expressions of negative ethnicity, prejudice and resentment permeate everyday life, pervading TV, radio, print and other media, and influencing discourse between people on the ground. These expressions contribute to the construction and maintenance of us-them distinctions and form the foundations of polarisation and boundary hardening in times of political tension. Indeed, the very act of 'speaking prejudice' perpetuates it, reinforces it, and further embeds it within mentalities and consciousness. As one Kenyan news article surmises:

> We have…left unchallenged our ethnic stereotypes to the point of allowing hate speech to thrive in our conversations. We have accused our political leaders (and rightly so) of making hate speeches in public gatherings, but we are all engaging daily in the same sin.[42]

However, the occurrence of negative ethnicity is shaped by socio-spatial dynamics. Whilst relatively common and frequently unchallenged in in-group communication – or at least when a particular group constitutes a clear majority – in more ethnically mixed contexts it is far less acceptable; and when it does occur, it is often subject to local disciplining and contestation. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, interviewees indicated that whilst prejudice and discrimination is commonplace in segregated cities, such as Osh, in their own neighbourhoods and villages – where interethnic friendships and marriages are pervasive – it is not as apparent, and is challenged when it does occur. In Uzgen, for example, several interviewees noted that visible interethnic tensions are quickly addressed:

> If there are rumours about misunderstandings or that someone is saying that one ethnic group is better than others, the city people stand together to stop it or to quell the rumours.[43]

Wa-Mungai's analysis of the use of ethnic stereotypes in Kenya illustrates a similar point, highlighting the ways in which the articulation of prejudice and derogatory language is more constrained in ethnically mixed social settings.[44] This policing of negative ethnicity and prejudice plays an important role in building and maintaining trust and tolerance between members of different ethnic groups. As Kutmanaliev notes, 'the absence of any bridging communication and contacts between residents of the Kyrgyz and Uzbek neighborhoods [in Osh] increased their perceptions and feelings of hostility, uncertainty [and] mistrust'.[45] Thus, following the findings of intergroup contact theory, it is suggested here that increased, positive, intergroup interactions can reduce prejudice and intolerance between different communities. Consequently, in ethnically mixed contexts, appeals to ethnicised prejudices and resentments at times of political tension find far less resonance than in ethnicised spaces, where the circulation of prejudice, intolerance and resentment infuses everyday life.

However, processes of boundary hardening are not limited to the pre-violence period. Indeed, violence itself often plays a constitutive role. Yet, the immediate social context again can work either to facilitate and encourage participation in violence, or to slow and restrain it. In more ethnically homogeneous spaces, for example, interactions with and observations of, co-ethnics and their responses to the crisis can tap into feelings of pride, duty and solidarity to the ethnic group. As one interviewee recalls:

> As we talked, a group of Kikuyu passed our place…singing songs…and every Kikuyu in the area was

> told to rise up and defend their country, their rights, their land, their farms and their family, what our forefathers left, because there is no way that it can be taken from us, it is for us to defend it…I was going to defend my people. I couldn't stay in the house because I'm the child of heroes.[46]

Moreover, as events are discussed and stories of atrocities committed by opposing ethnic groups are circulated, or as rumours of impending attacks spread, feelings of anger, hatred or fear can intensify and reify ethnic boundaries even further. Indeed, the movement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and the stories that they relate can compel others to action. One Kenyan IDP, for example, recalls fleeing to an area where violence had not yet spread:

> They asked how things were there in Eldoret. I told them how the Kalenjin and Luo were killing Kikuyu there and I didn't know they were getting angry at my story…When it reached night, I saw them coming with a box of knives and I wondered what they were for. I heard them say that 'This knife, we must use it to circumcise the Luo here.'[47]

Thus, intra-ethnic interaction and the visibility of suffering can heighten the salience of ethnicity and strengthen the inclination to react to violence against the community. As a result, boundary hardening, and the impetus to participate in violence against ethnic others, spreads more rapidly in ethnicised areas. In ethnically mixed settings, however, whilst individuals may experience feelings of ethnic duty, solidarity, anger, fear, or resentment as violence unfolds, they are not exclusively reinforced through interactions with those in close proximity; rather they are tempered by ethnic others and subject to contestation and debate. Consequently, these spaces are more amenable to local appeals for peace and restraint, either by other residents or by local leaders.

The local structure of social ties, then, can serve to facilitate or mediate boundary hardening processes in periods of political tension and transition. In segregated contexts, relatively clear us-them distinctions and ethnic polarisation mark everyday life, rendering them more vulnerable to escalation along these lines at moments of uncertainty. Ethnically mixed spaces, on the other hand, facilitate the development of softer, more blurred boundaries between ethnic others, and as such, the boundary hardening processes upon which violence depends find less resonance. As McDoom points out, 'Where you live matters because what your neighbours think, say and do also matters'.[48]

Leadership and Pockets of Peace

While the social structures and relationships of everyday life can make peace and restraint possible, these conditions in and of themselves cannot wholly prevent or constrain violence: some form of organisation is required to sustain peace. Community leadership is crucial in the prevention of conflict escalation.[49] In both Kenya and Kyrgyzstan, prominent local figures from across the ethnic divides played a key role in fostering and maintaining calm within their communities. They engaged in a wide range of activities to maintain peace, including going house to house to preach peace; communicating amongst each other and with leaders in neighbouring villages to quell rumours; coordinating the building of barricades; establishing patrols within villages and neighbourhoods; negotiating with external armed groups; and strictly controlling and disciplining movement within their community. While the specific actors involved, and the tactics they favoured, differed across contexts, their respective successes in facilitating peace and resilience was dependent upon strong vertical and horizontal social ties between themselves and their communities.

In the Kyrgyz context, a wide range of formal, semi-formal, and informal governance actors adopted leadership roles in mobilising for peace, including district administration officials, police chiefs, NGO activists, neighbourhood committee heads, and other prominent members of the local community.[50] My interviewees emphasised the importance of village *aksakals* [elders] in particular, noting that 'the fact that the *aksakals* got together and said they would not fight anyone, that kept the peace here'.[51] The success of these actors depended heavily upon strong vertical ties with local residents. It was important that they both knew and were well known by their communities. Indeed, Khamidov et al. note that community leaders and officials in Aravan were able to prevent violence due to their personal relations with many residents, but the lack of comparable vertical ties in Osh made peace efforts ineffective.[52] Moreover, these actors play a central role in managing

community issues in everyday life, and are particularly prominent in dispute resolution activities. As such, they are already recognised as leaders in the maintenance of social harmony. This traditional authority and legitimacy ensures that their appeals for peace are more likely to be heeded at times of tension.[53] As one interviewee noted, 'the elders' court here is very powerful and everyone listens to them.'[54] Contrastingly, Kutmanaliev points out that in certain areas of Osh, there is an absence of this sense of traditional authority and of 'community leaders who are recognized as such by the majority of residents': he notes that this contributed to their lack of resilience to violence.[55] Thus, where elders and other community leaders know, and are well-known by, local residents, and where they already have established positions of authority in governing everyday life, there exists a greater capacity for encouraging restraint.

In rural villages in Kenya, similar dynamics were noted as residents asserted that, 'the elders told us that we must unite in this village.'[56] Just as in Kyrgyzstan, elders in these contexts enjoy significant levels of authority and respect, and are central figures in managing local conflicts and community activities in everyday life. This facilitated the resonance of their appeals for peace when violence erupted. However, in urban slums, while elders, religious leaders and other traditional authority figures are present and active to an extent, their role and authority has been diluted by the presence of other informal governance actors. Indeed, in these highly insecure settings, gangs and vigilante groups often play a greater role in protection, security and dispute resolution within their communities.[57] When the violence erupted, it was these 'boys of the area,'[58] who often took the lead in imposing peace within their territories. Indeed, it should be noted that such groups relied much more heavily on repression, violence and threat than governance actors who enjoy more traditional authority.[59] As one vigilante leader notes:

> In the post-election, this place was not affected because it is mixed up [ethnically], and we have a vigilante group. I was spearheading the vigilante group. We didn't sleep and we didn't allow anyone to come in…We decided if you start war here then we will put you out of this community and we were strong….There were some who wanted to do that, they formed a group wanting to start that but we were many and we were strong.[60]

Members of these vigilante groups were not necessarily bystanders during the violence and a number admitted to engaging in violence and looting activities outside of their own neighbourhoods. However, they strictly disciplined any agitators within their own territories, and prevented external groups from entering the area in order to protect their properties and livelihoods.

The capacity for leaders to establish, impose, and maintain peace, then, relies on a foundation of authority, alongside strong vertical ties to local residents. They must know and be well-known within their communities. Yet, horizontal ties that cut across the ethnic divide are also crucial amongst leaders, and in both the Kenyan and Kyrgyz violence they served three key purposes. Firstly, they provided opportunities for communication, building confidence and reassurance that no attacks were being planned.[61] Indeed, open communication and the flow of information at the leadership level helps prevent the emergence of a 'security dilemma' between ethnic communities.[62] Secondly, the visibility of interethnic cooperation amongst leaders establishes a norm of tolerance, sets an example for ordinary citizens to follow, and gives appeals for peace and friendship greater credence. As one interviewee in Aravan notes, 'the leaders did a big job at preserving peace…[they] showed tolerance.'[63] Thirdly, the multi-ethnic nature of leadership within these spaces facilitated negotiations with external armed groups from either side of the conflict divide, allowing leaders from the same ethnic group to confront them and dissuade them from entry. One interviewee in Nigeria, Mathare, for example, explains, 'we were protecting both tribes, whoever would come here. So when the Luos came we put Martin [a Luo] there and he talked to them, and then they just know that we were together. So we had no problems with anyone.'[64]

Thus, informal governance actors utilised their pre-existing ties and connections to build trust across the ethnic divide, to inspire norms of tolerance and cooperation, and to protect the area from external attack. However, their capacity to mobilise residents for peace, and to silence any local agitators was dependent upon the presence of cross-cutting ties amongst residents themselves. Indeed, one of the key ways in which leaders brought communities together was through appeals to a common identity that transcended the ethnic divide.

In her research in Nigeria and Indonesia, Krause similarly argues that leaders 'supported proactive "we-thinking" and alternative framings to the dominant conflict identities of Muslim versus Christian'.[65] This bears striking similarities to leadership appeals in Kenya and Kyrgyzstan, where leaders worked to construct more territorially-based identities. As one Kenyan interviewee recalls, 'Here our elders in this community called everyone and told us, "You are not a Luo or a Nandi or a Kikuyu anymore. We are Kenyans. We must come together to take care of our community".[66] Such appeals have greater resonance in ethnically mixed areas. Finally, but importantly, in low-segregated areas, whilst there may be some local agitators, it is much harder for large, armed, mono-ethnic groups to form and to overwhelm advocates for peace than in more homogeneous spaces.

Conclusion

While there has been a welcome shift to micro-level perspectives of conflict and peace in recent scholarship, the factors shaping individual acts of restraint amidst violence remain underexplored, and the connection between macro-level conflict drivers, such as ethnic polarisation, and micro-level dynamics are not well understood. This article has sought to address this gap, and to better understand the emergence of pockets of peace and individual choices to restrain, limit or selectively employ violence during episodes of ethnic conflict. The multiple case study approach and the most-different-systems strategy helps to build confidence in the applicability and transferability of the findings to other contexts. Indeed, this article has shown that there are striking similarities in the role of social ties across the two very diverse cases of Kenya and Kyrgyzstan. In both contexts, strong, cross-cutting social ties facilitated forms of peace and restraint in three key ways. Firstly, they rendered interpersonal violence more difficult, encouraging individuals to avoid, limit or prevent acts against friends and neighbours. The ways in which they could exercise restraint, however, were constrained by group dynamics and the immediate social context. In the absence of a strong social standing amongst members of the attacking group, individuals tended to seek more subtle and covert forms of restraint. Secondly, cross-ethnic social ties can disrupt and challenge negative us-them distinctions in everyday life, rendering ethnically-mixed neighbourhoods more resilient to the polarising narratives upon which violence depends. And thirdly, horizontal ties amongst local leaders, and strong vertical to their communities, facilitate leadership coordination and appeals for peace. Thus, episodes of ethnic violence 'are not fought in social vacuums. They are fought in social landscapes'.[67] Social ties can strengthen boundary-softening processes and act as an internal brake on violence escalation.

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Notes

[1] Scott Straus (2012) 'Retreating from the Brink: Theorizing Mass Violence and the Dynamics of Restraint', *Perspectives on Politics*, 10:2, p. 344.

[2] Jeremy Allouche and Patrick Anderson Zadi Zadi (2013) 'The Dynamics of Restraint in Côte D'Ivoire' *IDS Bulletin* 44:1, pp. 72-86, p. 77; cf. Lee Ann Fujii (2009) *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 9.

[3] Stathis N. Kalyvas (2008) 'Promises and Pitfalls of an Emerging Research Program: The Microdynamics of Civil War', in Stathis N. Kalyvas, Ian Shapiro, and Tarek Masoud (Eds.), *Order, Conflict and Violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 397-421, p. 399.

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[5] Steven Wilkinson (2004) *Votes and violence: Electoral competition and ethnic riots in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[6] Ashutosh Varshney (2002) *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, New Haven CT: Yale University Press.

[7] See for example, Landon E. Hancock and Christopher Roger Mitchell (Eds.), *Zones of Peace*, Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press; Mary B Anderson and Marshall Wallace (2013) *Opting out of War: Strategies to Prevent Violent Conflict*, Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers; Ed Garcia (1997) 'Filipino zones of peace', *Peace Review*, 9:2, pp. 221-224; Philipp Naucke (2017) 'Peacebuilding upside down? How a peace community in Colombia builds peace despite the state', *Social Anthropology/Anthropolgie sociale*, 25: 4, pp. 454-469; Landon E. Hancock (2017) 'Agency and peacebuilding: the promise of local zones of peace', *Peacebuilding*, 5:3, pp. 255-269; Victoria Sanford (2003) 'Peacebuilding in a War Zone: The case of Colombian peace communities', *International Peacekeeping*, 10:2, pp. 107-118; Allouche and Zadi, op.cit.

[8] Oliver Kaplan (2017) *Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[9] Jana Krause (2018) *Resilient Communities: Non-violence and Civilian Agency in Communal War,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Ana Arjona (2016) *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Colombian Civil War,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[10] Stathis N. Kalyvas (2006) *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Jeremy Weinstein (2006) *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, New York: Cambridge University Press; Nils Hägerdal (2019) 'Ethnic cleansing and the politics of restraint: Violence and coexistence in the Lebanese civil war', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 63:1, pp. 59-74; Reed M. Wood (2014) 'Opportunities to kill or incentives for restraint? Rebel capabilities, the origins of support, and civilian victimization in civil war', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 31: 5, pp. 461-480.

[11] Omar Shahabudin McDoom (2013) 'Who killed in Rwanda's Genocide? Micro-space, social influence and individual participation in intergroup violence', *Journal of Peace Research*, 50:4, pp. 453-467.

[12] Lee Ann Fujii (2008) 'The Power of Local Ties: Popular participation in the Rwandan genocide', *Security Studies*, 17:3, pp. 568-597; Lee Ann Fujii, *Killing Neighbors*, op.cit.

[13] Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*, op.cit., p. 4.

[14] McDoom draws attention to this gap, noting that it remains unclear precisely how 'macrovariables' like ethnicity affect micro-level outcomes. Omar Shahabudin McDoom (2014) 'Antisocial Capital: A profile of Rwandan genocide perpetrators' social networks', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 58:5, p. 890.

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[16] See Sarah Jenkins (2018) 'Assistants, guides, collaborators, friends: The concealed figures of conflict research' *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 47(2), pp. 143-170, for further discussion of the role of research assistants in conflict research.

[17] Mark Granovetter (1985) 'Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness', *American Journal of Sociology*, 91:3, pp. 481-510.

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[21] Interview with coastal province youth, Nigeria, Mathare, Kenya, 19 May 2010.

[22] Interview with elderly Kyrgyz woman, Kochkor-Ata, Kyrgyzstan, 18 June 2016.

[23] Jens Rydgren, Dana Sofi, and Martin Hällsten (2013) 'Interethnic Friendship, Trust, and Tolerance: Findings from two North Iraqi cities', *American Journal of Sociology*, 118:6, p. 1659.

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[26] Interview with Luo youth, Kianda, Kibera, Kenya, 15 November 2009.

[27] Interview with Luo youth, 4B, Mathare, Kenya, 9 May 2010.

[28] Group interview with three Luo and two Luhya male youths, Kianda, Kibera, 14 November 2009.

[29] Cited in Norwegian Helsinki Committee et al., *A Chronicle of Violence*, p. 103.

[30] Cited in Norwegian Helsinki Committee et al., *A Chronicle of Violence*, p. 140.

[31] Interview with Luo youth, 4B, Mathare, Kenya, 2 May 2010.

[32] Interview with Kamba youth, Ronda, Nakuru, Kenya, 7 June 2010.

[33] Interview with Kalenjin youth, Kaptembwa, Nakuru, Kenya, 20 June 2010.

[34] Interview with Kikuyu youth, Kiambaa, Eldoret, Kenya, 20 January 2010.

[35] Interview with Luo youth, Nigeria, Mathare, Kenya, 20 May 2010.

[36] Numerous examples related throughout Norwegian Helsinki Committee et al., *A Chronicle of Violence.*

[37] Interview with male Kalenjin youth, Shabab, Nakuru, Kenya, 2 June 2010.

[38] Fujii, *Killing Neighbors*, op.cit., p. 128-129.

[39] Victor H. Asal, Na'ama Nagar and R. Karl Rethemeyer (2015), 'Building Terrorism from Social Ties: The dark side of social capital', *Civil Wars*, 16:4, p. 420.

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[43] Interview with elderly Kyrgyz woman, Uzgen, Kyrgyzstan, 22 June 2016.

[44] Mbugua Wa-Mungai (2007) 'Tusker Project Fame: Ethnic states, popular flows', *Journal of Eastern African Studies,* 1:3, pp. 338-358.

[45] Joldon Kutmanaliev (2015) 'Public and communal spaces and their relation to the spatial dynamics of ethnic riots: Violence and non-violence in the city of Osh', *International Journal of Social Policy*, 35:7/8, p. 466.

[46] Interview with middle-aged Kikuyu man, Langalanga, Nakuru 2 June 2010.

[47] Interview with Kikuyu youth, Kapsoya, Eldoret, 12 February 2010.

[48] McDoom, 'Who killed', op.cit., p. 465.

[49] Krause, *Resilient communities,* op.cit., p. 68.

[50] See for example, Fryer et al.'s description of events in Kara-Suu, and Khamidov et al.'s detailed analysis of peace efforts in Aravan. Paul Fryer, Elmira Satybaldieva, Jeremy Smith and Joni Virkkunen (2011) 'Indirect fall-out from the June 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan: the case of Kara-Suu', *EUCAM Commentary* No. 14, June 2011, available at URL: https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/indirect-fall-out-june-2010-events-kyrgyzstan-case-kara-suu/ [Accessed 16 June 2020]; Alisher Khamidov, Nick Megoran, and John Heathershaw (2017), 'Bottom-up peacekeeping in southern Kyrgyzstan: How local actors managed to prevent the spread of violence from Osh/Jalal-Abad to Aravan, June 2010', *Nationalities Papers*, 45:6, pp. 1118-1134.

[51] Interview with young Kyrgyz man, Uzgen, Kyrgyzstan, 27 June 2016.

[52] Khamidov et al. 'Bottom up peacekeeping', op.cit., p. 1124.

[53] Arjona similarly argues that communities that enjoy legitimate and effective dispute resolution institutions are more likely to be willing to oppose violence, and also to be able to unite in order to do so. See Arjona, *Rebelocracy,* p. 71.

[54] Interview with young Kyrgyz man, Uzgen, Kyrgyzstan, 22nd June 2016.

[55] Kutmanaliev 'Public and communal spaces', op.cit., p. 488. Here, Kutmanaliev is discussing the Kyrgyz dominated apartment bloc neighbourhoods of Osh here. In the Uzbek *mahallas*, community leadership figures are significant.

[56] Interview with young Kikuyu man, Kenya Service, Eldoret, 12 February 2010.

[57] Adrienne LeBas (2013) 'Violence and Urban Order in Nairobi, Kenya and Lagos, Nigeria', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 48, pp. 240-262, p. 244.

[58] Interview with coastal province youth, Nigeria, Mathare, 19 May 2010.

[59] That is not to say that elders and other leaders did not exert discipline and control. Indeed, in Uzgen a vast majority of my interviewees expressed that the aksakals strictly controlled their communities, preventing people from coming in, but also from leaving to go and fight in Osh or elsewhere.

[60] Interview with young Kikuyu man, Kabiro, Kawangware, 1 March 2010.

[61] This was more prominent in contexts where large groups of youths from specific ethnic communities were present; in the ethnically mixed slums of Kenyan cities, for example, this was less of an issue, as groups in these areas were not comprised of any single community that could overwhelm.

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[63] Interview with young Kyrgyz woman, Aravan, Kyrgyzstan, 15 June 2016.

[64] Interview with young Kikuyu man, Nigeria, Mathare, 18 May 2010.

[65] Krause, *Resilient Communities*, op. cit., p. 72.

[66] Interview with Borana youth, Kenya Service, Eldoret, 12 February 2010.

[67] Kaplan, *Resisting War*, op. cit., p. 34.

Counterterrorism Bookshelf: 20 Books on Terrorism & Counter-Terrorism-Related Subjects

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai

So many books are published on terrorism- and counterterrorism-related subjects that it is difficult to catch up on a large backlog of monographs and edited volumes received for review. In order to deal with this backlog, this column consists of capsule reviews, including Tables of Contents of 20 books, including also several books published less recently but still meriting attention. Some of the new books will be reviewed in future issues of 'Perspectives on Terrorism' as stand-alone reviews. The books are listed topically.

General

Robert J. Bunker, *Terrorism Futures: Evolving Technology and TTPS Use* (Indianapolis, IN: Xlibris/A C/O Futures Pocketbook, 2020), 160 pp., US $ 16.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-6641-3781-3.

This is a fascinating and innovative series of essays about future technological trends in terrorist warfare and the counterterrorism measures that will be required in response. The author is the director of research and analysis of C/O Futures, LLC, of which he is also a managing partner.

Table of Contents: Foreword: Terrorist Imagineering; Preface: Terrorism Futures; Essay 1: Virtual Martyrs – Jihadists, Oculus Rift, and IED Drones; Essay 2: Terrorism as Disruptive Targeting; Essay 3: Fifth Dimensional Battlespace – Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Implications; Essay 4: Close to the Body and Body Cavity Suicide Bombs; Essay 5: Use and Potentials of Counter-Optical Lasers in Riots and Terrorism; Essay 6: Home Made, Printed, and Remote Controlled Firearms – Terrorism and Insurgency Implications; Essay 7: The Use of Social Media Bots and Automated (AI Based) Text Generators – Key Technologies in Winning the Propaganda War Against Islamic State/Daesh?; Essay 8: Daesh/IS Armored Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (AVBIEDs) – Insurgent Use and Terrorism Potentials; Essay 9: Laptop Bombs and Civil Aviation – Terrorism Potentials and Carry-On Travel Bans; Conclusion: Evolving Technology and TTPs Use.

Textbooks on Terrorism and Homeland Security

Jane A. Bullock, George D. Haddow, and Damon P. Coppola, *Introduction to Homeland Security: Principles of All-Hazards Risk Management* [Sixth Edition] (Boston, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann/Elsevier, 2021), 880 pp., US $ 84.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-1281-7137-0.

This is a comprehensive, authoritative and practitioner-oriented textbook about how homeland security is organized and managed in the United States. The chapters also cover homeland security topics such as risk management, cybersecurity, border and transportation security, immigration and customs enforcement, among others. As a textbook, each chapter begins with a section on "What you will learn," followed by an introduction, a conclusion with key terms, review questions, and references. Numerous figures and tables add to the chapters' discussions. The authors are veteran practitioners in homeland security, with extensive work experience in agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Table of Contents: Homeland Security: The Concept, the Organization; Historic Overview of the Terrorist Threat; Hazards; Governmental Homeland Security Structures; Intelligence Counterterrorism; Border Security, Immigration, and Customs Enforcement; Transportation Safety and Security; Cybersecurity and Critical Infrastructure Protection; All-Hazards Emergency Response and Recovery; Mitigation, Prevention,

and Preparedness; Communications; Science and Technology; The Future of Homeland Security.

Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues* [7th Edition] (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2021), 592 pp., US $ 100.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-5443-7586-1.

This is the updated and revised 7th edition of one of the finest and most comprehensive introductory textbooks on terrorism and counterterrorism. Pedagogically, each chapter begins with learning objectives, opening viewpoints, and a chapter introduction, which are then accompanied by chapter perspectives and discussion boxes, figures and tables, which are followed by a chapter summary, key terms and concepts, and recommended readings. The textbook is accompanied by a website for instructors that contains multimedia content, PowerPoint slides, and web exercises. The author is a Professor of Criminal Justice Administration in the Department of Public Administration and Public Policy at California State University, Dominguez Hills.

Table of Contents: Introduction and Rationale; Part I. Terrorism: A Conceptual Review; Terrorism: First Impressions; The Nature of the Beast: Defining Terrorism; Beginnings: The Causes of Terrorism; Part II: Terrorist Environment and Typologies; Terror From Above: Terrorism by the State; Terror From Below: Terrorism by Dissidents; Violence in the Name of the Faith: Religious Terrorism; Violent Ideologies: Terrorism From the Left and Right; Terrorist Spillovers: International Terrorism; Emerging Terrorist Environments: Gender-Selective Political Violence and Criminal Dissident Terrorism; Part III. The Terrorist Trade and Counterterrorism; Tools of the Trade: Tactics and Targets of Terrorists; The Information Battleground: Terrorist Violence and the Role of the Media; The American Case: Terrorism in the United States; Counterterrorism: The Options; Part IV. Securing the Homeland; A New Era: Homeland Security; What's Next? The Future of Terrorism; Appendix A: Map References; Appendix B: Prominent Persons and Organizations; Glossary of Terms.

Counterterrorism

Shanthie D'Souza (Ed.), *Countering Insurgencies and Violent Extremism in South and South East Asia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 388 pp., US $ 160.00 [Hardcover], US $ 49.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-1386-1555-7.

The contributors to this comprehensive volume examine the nature of the multi-faceted ideological extremism and terrorism in South and South East Asia, and the effectiveness of the targeted governments' counter-terrorism response measures. The volume's editor is the Founder and President of Mantraya and a Member of the Research and Advisory Committee, Naval War College, Goa, India.

Table of Contents: Introduction; **Part I: Emerging Challenges**; Countering the Islamic State in Asia; Philippines' Counter-Terror Conundrum: Marawi and Duterte's Battle Against the Islamic State; The Evolution of Violent Extremism and State Response in Indonesia; The Rohingya and Myanmar's Counter Terrorism Approach; Emerging Violent Radical Islamism in the Maldives; **Part II: Cautious Optimism – or False Dawn?**; Back To The Future: Nepali People's War As "New War"; India's two-track response to the Naxalite movement: security and development, but no political process; India's fleeting Attachment to the Counterinsurgency Grand Strategy; Countering Violent Extremism: The Singapore Experience; Challenges in Counter Terrorism and Counter Violent Extremism in Malaysia; **Part III: Quagmires**; The counter-insurgency quandary in post-2001 Afghanistan; Insurgency and Violent Extremism in Pakistan; Counter-Insurgency in Pakistan: The Role of Legitimacy; Thailand's South: Roots of Conflict; **Part IV: Victory?**; Size Still Matters: Explaining Sri Lanka's Counterinsurgency Victory over the Tamil Tigers; Sri Lanka: State Response to Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; Conclusion.

Robert Gates, ***Exercise of Power: American Failures, Successes, and a New Path Forward in the Post-Cold War World*** (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020), 464 pp., US $ 29.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-5247-3188-5.

Since the end of the Cold War, the global perception of the United States has progressively morphed from dominant international leader to disorganized entity, seemingly unwilling to accept the mantle of leadership or unable to govern itself effectively. Robert Gates argues that this transformation is the result of the failure of political leaders to understand the complexity of American power, its expansiveness, and its limitations. He makes clear that the successful exercise of power is not limited to the use of military might or the ability to coerce or demand submission, but must encompass as well diplomacy, economics, strategic communications, development assistance, intelligence, technology, ideology, and cyber. By analyzing specific challenges faced by the American government in the post-Cold War period–Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, North Korea, Syria, Libya, Russia, China, and others–Gates deconstructs the ways in which leaders have used the instruments of power available to them. With forthright judgments of the performance of past presidents and their senior-most advisers, firsthand knowledge, and insider stories, Gates argues that U.S. national security in the future will require learning, and abiding by, the lessons of the past, and re-creating those capabilities that the misuse of power has cost the nation.

This is a fascinating insider's account of failures by U.S. political leaders to understand the complexity and limitations of attempting to intervene militarily and politically to "fix" internal problems in foreign countries, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq, where internal problems are intractable and incapable of quick and easy solutions. Mr. Gates, a former Director of the CIA and Secretary of Defense, argues that in the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan, "effective exercise of power requires a thorough understanding of both the physical and the human terrain," and that not understanding the latter "proved costly" (p. 189). This is especially costly, the author adds, when there is no "strong local partner," with "strong local government institutions or at least foundations on which to build them. Can and will the locals lead the fight, with us in a supporting role?" (p. 399). It is such practitioner insights that make this book an indispensable resource for understanding the components necessary to formulate counterterrorism campaigns that will actually succeed when deciding to intervene in foreign countries facing protracted insurgencies. The author is currently Chancellor of the College of William & Mary, in Virginia.

Table of Contents: Prologue; The Symphony of Power; Exercising Power; Iran: Great Satan's Bane; Somalia, Haiti, and the Yugoslav Wars: Good Intentions and the Road to Hell; Colombia: The Plan That Worked (Mostly); Afghanistan: War Without End; Iraq: A Curse; Africa: A Success Story; Russia: Opportunity Missed?; Georgia, Libya, Syria, and Ukraine: To Intervene or Not to Intervene; North Korea: Crazy Like a Fox; China: Competition, Conflict, or Something New?; Lessons Learned.

Amos N. Guiora, ***Legitimate Target: A Criteria-Based Approach to Targeted Killing*** (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 107 pp., US $ 115.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-1999-6973-9.

With the recent targeted assassinations in Iran of one of al Qaida's top operatives and the country's top nuclear weapons scientist (by "officially unknown" assailants), the issue of targeted killings is again at the top of the counterterrorism policy agenda. Dr. Guiora, who had a 20-year career as a legal expert in the Israeli legal corps of the Israel Defense Forces, and is currently a professor at S.J. Quinney College of Law, University of Utah, is well positioned to examine these issues. Targeted killings are justified, he writes, when a five criteria-based decision-making model is applied to ensure that an identified target represents a "legitimate target" for assassination. These criteria consist of: "(1) The threat must be imminent; (2) The identified individual must pose an imminent threat; (3) The force used must be proportionate to the threat posed; (4) Collateral damage must be minimal; and (5) Viable alternatives to the use of deadly force are not available" (p. xii). What is also noteworthy about this discussion is that the author applies his criteria to several examples of targeted killings,

with his framework illustrated by a series of diagrams and tables. In the conclusion, Amos Guiora observes that the "legitimacy of targeted killing is dependent on narrow classification rather than broad indiscriminate classification. In other words, specific targeting of individuals whose actions significantly endanger national security" (p. 101). Such expert practitioner insights make this book one of the finest and most indispensable discussions of the legal, moral and operational issues involved in assessing the utility of governments' carrying out such targeted killings against terrorist and other national security adversaries.

Table of Contents: Preface; An Introduction; Dilemmas, Concerns and Contemporary Conflict; International Law; The Source, the Intelligence Community and the Commander; The Target; The Practicalities of Targeted Killing; Morality; Looking Forward.

Douglas Pratt, *Religion and Extremism: Rejecting Diversity* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic/An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2018), 208 pp., US $ 66.50 [Hardcover], US $ 21.66 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-4742-9224-5.

This is an excellent account of why and how extremists in the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam engage in terrorism, which is also the reason why no extremist adherents in one religion should be singled out over the others in their engagement in extremism and terrorism. To examine these issues, the author highlights the ideological rejection of diversity and an adherence to theological absolutism as some of the primary underlying causes of religious extremism in all such religions. In responding to religious extremism, the author criticizes government approaches that might lead to Islamophobia and mutual extremism, which he terms as 'reactive co-radicalization'. In the conclusion, the author recommends effective ways to counter religious extremism, with "diversity affirmation" utilized to counter "exclusivist rejection," because "in so doing, [it] neutralizes religious extremism" (p. 160). The author is Professor of Studies in Religion at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and Adjunct Professor of Theology and Interreligious Studies at the University of Bern, Switzerland.

Table of Contents: Preface; Introduction; Accommodating Diversity: paradigms and patterns; Diversity Resisted: exclusion and fundamentalism; Texts of Terror: scriptural motifs for extremism; The Jewish experience of extremism; Forms of Christian extremism; Trajectories of Islamic extremism; Mutual extremism: reactive co-radicalization; Extremism and Islamophobia; Conclusion.

Military Warfare

DK/Smithsonian, *Warfare: The Definitive Visual History* [Revised & Updated Edition] (New York, NY: DK/Random House Penguin, 2020), 512 pp, US $ 40.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-4654-8876-3.

This is a beautifully illustrated, detailed, authoritative, and fascinating account of the history of military warfare worldwide, from 3000 BCE to the present. It explores the significant military campaigns and their underlying causes, the military formations and their commanders, and the evolution of the tactics, technologies, and weapons employed in warfare over the centuries. The volume also includes a comprehensive almost 150-pages long directory of wars, battles, and military statistics from ancient to modern times. This volume is highly recommended as a supplementary text for undergraduate courses on the history of military warfare because it visualizes the subject in a way that will interest student readers. It is also a lavishly illustrated volume for enjoyment by the general reader.

Table of Contents: Part 1: War in the Ancient World, 3000 BCE – 500 CE; Part 2: War in the Medieval World, 500 – 1500; Early Modern Warfare, 1500 – 1750; Part 4: The Age of Revolution, 1750 – 1830; Part 5: The Dawn of Mechanized Warfare, 1830 – 1914; Part 6: Era of the World Wars, 1914 – 1945; Part 7: Conflicts After World

War II, 1945 – Present; Directory.

Stephen Morillo with Michael F. Pavkovic, *What is Military History?* [Third Edition, Revised and Updated] (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018), 188 pp., US $ 67.50 [Hardcover], US $ 20.75 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-5095-1761-9.

Terrorism is a type of irregular asymmetric warfare that is distinguished from 'conventional' warfare involving regular militaries. Militaries are employed in counterterrorism, with their military formations reconfigured to counter their asymmetric terrorist adversaries. Since the tactic of terrorism has been employed by insurgents through much of history, with the principles of military effectiveness also used in counter-terrorism, it is crucially important for counterterrorism analysts to understand military history, the similarities and differences between terrorists, paramilitary guerrilla armies, and 'regular' military formations.

Already considered a classic in the field of military history, this updated third edition includes new case studies on naval warfare, the origins of war, as well expanded sections on historiography, environmental history, world history, and bibliography. Regarding terrorism and counter-terrorism, the authors observe that despite the Revolution in Military Affairs' (RMA) focus on high technology and its impact on the "battlefield of the future," at least in the case of the U.S. military, it has had to shift "attention to the problems associated with irregular warfare against unconventional, non- or quasi-military enemies, including strategies for counter-insurgency operations, problems not obviously liable to high-tech solutions…." (p. 8) This is also affecting the study of military history, with the authors asking whether "the gradual disappearance of 'traditional' wars (to take an optimistic view that may prove unfounded) make the traditional core of military history obsolete?" (p. 131). Such insights make this book an indispensable resource for those studying military history, as well as terrorism and counterterrorism. Stephen Morillo is Professor of History at Wabash College while Michael F. Pavkovic is teaching Strategy and Policy at the United States Naval War College.

Table of Contents: Preface to the Third Edition; **An Introduction to Military History**; Military History: Definitions, Topics, Scope; Who Studies Military History and Why?; Overview of this Book; **Military Historiography**; Classical Roots: Military History in Ancient Times; Military History in the Traditional World: Histories, Manuals, and War Tales; Science, Nationalism, and General Staffs: Military History in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries; New Military Histories: The Transformations of the Last 50 Years; **Conceptual Frameworks**; Military History and Philosophy of History; Military Art and Practice; War and Society: Interdisciplinary Influences; Global History and Comparative Methodology; Conclusions; **Current Controversies**; Military Revolutions; Counter-Insurgency: History and Policy; "The West": Exceptionalism and Dominance?; Is Naval History Military History?; War, Society, and Culture: Other Controversies; Conclusion: Revisionism and Reading the Process of History; **Doing Military History**; Forms; Sources; Programs, Journals, Presses, and Associations; **The Future of Military History**; Trends in the Field; The Politics of Military History.

Cathal J. Nolan, *The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 728 pp., US $ 34.95 [Hardcover], US $21.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-1909-3151-3.

This is a highly comprehensive and original account of how the outcomes of many significant military wars throughout history have not resulted in decisive strategic outcomes in terms of "winners and losers," but have been characterized as prolonged stalemates. In the conclusion, the author offers several important insights for political and military leaders about deciding to embark on wars: beware of engaging in vanity and hubris but be skeptical about short-war plans and promises of easy military victory (p. 579). Also, in Western military interventions such as in Afghanistan and Iraq against religious extremist insurgents, expect such wars to evolve as even "raw military power" by a "physically stronger party" can be resisted by a determined insurgent adversary (p. 581). It's a lengthy book, but this highly insightful account is indispensable in understanding

the complexity of military engagements in a wide variety of wars, some of which are capable of achieving strategic successes, but others are not. The author is Associate Professor of History and Executive Director of the International History Institute at Boston University.

Table of Contents: Introduction; Battle in History; Battle Retarded; Battle Remembered; Battle Reformed; Battle with Reason; Battle Restored; Battle Decisive; Battle Defeated; Battle Exalted; Battle of Annihilation; Annihilation of Battle; Annihilation of Strategy; Annihilation of Nations; Annihilation of Mercy; Annihilation at Sea; Annihilation of Illusions; Conclusion.

Geoffrey Parker (Ed.), ***The Cambridge History of Warfare*** [Second Edition] (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 608 pp., US $ 99.99 [Hardcover], US $29.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-3166-3276-5.

The contributors to this updated edition examine how war was waged by Western powers throughout history, beginning with classical Greece and Rome, moving through the Middle Ages and the early modern period, up to the twenty-first century wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Five significant aspects of the Western approach to war throughout history are highlighted: technology (especially maintaining a technological edge), discipline (including disciplined training), "an aggressive military tradition, eclecticism (such as the ability to adopt new techniques and tactics), and finance (especially a sophisticated financial structure to support military buildups) (pp. 1-10). Although the volume's focus is primarily on the West and war, the book's chapters also examine the military effectiveness of adversaries in other regions. In the volume's epilogue, Geoffrey Park and Leif A. Torkelsen, observe that despite America's traumatic experience in the long Vietnam War, "hubris, like hope, springs eternal. Accordingly, after its decisive 1991 victory in the Gulf War, the victors again imagined that they were invincible. The long-running wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East suggest that Nemesis remains dedicated to her task" (p. 488). Geoffrey Parker is Andreas Dorpalen Professor of European History and an Associate of the Mershon Center at The Ohio State University.

Table of Contents: Preface; **Introduction: The Western Way of War**; **Part I. The Age of Massed Infantry**; Genesis of the Infantry 600-350 BC; From Phalanx to Legion 350-250 BC; The Roman Way of War 250 BC-AD 300; **Part II: The Age of Stone Fortifications**; On Roman Ramparts 300-1300; New Weapons New Tactics 1300-1500; The Gunpowder Revolution 1300-1500; **Part III. The Age of Guns and Sails**; Ships of the Line 1500-1650; The Conquest of the Americas 1500-1650; Dynastic War 1494-1660; States in Conflict 1661-1763; Nations in Arms 1763-1815; **Part IV. The Age of Mechanized Warfare**; The Industrialization of War 1815-1871; Towards World War 1871-1914; The West at War 1914-1918; The World in Conflict 1919-1941; The World at War 1941-1945; The Post-War World 1945-1991; The New World Disorder 1991-2019; **Epilogue: The Future of Western Warfare**; Reference Guide: Chronology, Glossary; Bibliography.

Suicide Terrorism

Tanya Narozhna and W. Andy Knight, ***Female Suicide Bombings: A Critical Gender Approach*** (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 280 pp., US $79.00 [Hardcover], US $ 32.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-4875-2004-5.

Generally, as the authors note in the volume's introduction, females who engage in terrorist suicide bombings are examined in terms of "who they were, how they lived, and what drove them to commit their final acts" (p. 3). In this volume, however, the authors' focus is on "how female suicide bombings are studied, made sense of, and represented within Western academia" (p. 4). What follows is a "deconstructive" discussion that questions "dominant discourses and common understandings of female suicide bombings [that asks – JS] about the modes of representation excluded from mainstream practices of knowledge production and explore[s – JS] the ways in which conventional knowledge is intertwined with existing power relations and social hierarchies" (p. 4). In the conclusion, the authors argue that "the only effective response to the violence of female suicide

bombings entails finding the ways to emancipate individuals from overlapping gendered social structures and oppressive relationships" (p. 222). Despite the authors' heavy use of such academic jargon in their analysis, one of the book's benefits are its numerous tables that extensively list the attacks by female suicide bombers in terms of their dates, features of the attack, victims, and locations in Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Chechnya and Russia, Israel/West Bank/Palestine, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Cameroon. Tanya Narozhna is an Associate Professor of Global Politics at the University of Winnipeg. W. Andy Knight is a Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta.

Table of Contents: Introduction; Mapping the Framework: Key Terms and Concepts; The History of Modern Female Suicide Bombings: Contextualizing Acts of Violence; Female Suicide Bombings: Between Agential Choice and Structural Determinism; Gender, Power, and Violence: Exploring the Organizations behind Female Suicide Bombings; Global Power, Knowledge, and the Politics of Difference in the Representations of Female Suicide Bombings; Counter-Terrorism, Gender, and Human Security; Conclusion.

Global Jihad

Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin, *The Jihadi Dictionary: The Essential Intel Tool for Military, Law Enforcement, Government and the Concerned Public* (Mamaroneck, NY: Multieducator Press, 2016), 286 pp., US $ 19.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-8858-8199-1.

This is a clever, well-informed and well-organized dictionary on jihadism. Its premise, the author writes, is that "By understanding their unconscious behavior, decoding their covert messages, and examining how they misuse objects, we can devise better and earlier interventions to help prevent the spread of terror" (p. 7). A four-pronged entry is provided for each concept which includes the basic definition, the etymology, the psychological definition, and information on how the entry relates to jihadi thought and behavior. Examples of the entries include concepts such as aggression, annihilation anxiety, clan, culture of shame-honor, death fusion, domestic violence, group identity, hijab and burka, honor killing, Islam, jihad, maternal attachment, narcissism, polygamy, radicalization, sex and sexuality, shame, Shia Islam, suicide bombing, Sunny Islam, terrorism, victim-victimizer-victimization, weapons of mass destruction, and withdrawal versus detachment. The author is a psychoanalyst, Arabist, and counter-terrorism expert who has worked extensively with military, law enforcement, and mental health professionals.

Table of Contents: Introduction; Format of Dictionary Entries; List of Entries; Alphabetical Entries; Coda.

Alexander Melleagrou-Hitchens, Seamus Hughes, and Bennett Clifford, *Homegrown: ISIS in America* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 248 pp., US $ 18.90 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-7883-1485-5.

This is a detailed account of the presence and activities of Islamic State (also known as ISIS) operatives and adherents in the United States since 2014, when the organization became the primary jihadi movement globally. To discuss these issues, the authors divide ISIS's activities in America into four categories: "terrorist attacks and plots, foreign fighter recruitment, online engagement and activism, and promoting the group's message through ideologues" (pp. 6-7). The volume's account is excellently organized. Chapter 2, "The Terrorists," provides detailed profiles of several ISIS-related terrorists who had plotted or carried out attacks in America. Chapter 3, "The Travelers," presents in-depth accounts of Americans who had travelled to countries such as Syria to join ISIS as foreign fighters. These "travelers" are usefully categorized as pioneers, networked travelers, loners, women travelers, and returning travelers. The fourth chapter, "The E-Activists," explains how the ISIS extremists communicate online, identifies the ISIS cyber activists, their technologies and operations, financing, as well as the nature of their propaganda. The fifth chapter, "The Ideologues," explains the "Americanization" of Salafi-Jihadism, and discusses the activities of several prominent American-based ISIS ideologues. The final

chapter, "Countering Violent Extremism in America," provides an overview of the American government's CVE objectives and programs, with the authors recommending a local community-based "bottom-up" approach, which they observe provides "a more stable foundation than the top-down strategy of the past ten years" (p. 168). In the conclusion, the authors find that ISIS has been more " successful at radicalizing and recruiting American jihadists to their cause" than "at guiding successful and deadly attacks" (p. 169). In one of the account's shortfalls, since the United States military, especially its Special Forces, have been involved in countering ISIS in Iraq and Syria, it would have been useful for the authors to discuss how intelligence gained during these operations might have aided in countering the organization's American adherents. Overall, this is an important and authoritative account of ISIS in America. The authors are senior research officials at the Program on Extremism at The George Washington University, in Washington, DC.

Table of Contents: Introduction; The Islamic State in America, The Terrorists; The Travelers; The E-Activists; The Ideologues; Countering Violent Extremism in America; Conclusion.

Glenn E. Robinson, Global Jihad: ***A Brief History*** (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 264 pp., US $83.55 [Hardcover], US $25.00 [Paperback], ISBN:978-0-8047-6047-8.

This is an excellent account of the origins and evolution of global jihad from 1979 to 2020. The author divides this period into four distinct jihadi historical waves: Jihadi International (1979-1990); America First (1996-2011); Caliphate Now (2003-2017), and Personal Jihad (2001-2020). In the conclusion, the author refers to global jihad as a movement of rage, and makes comparisons with movements such as the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the Red Guards in China, the Nazi Brownshirts in Germany, and White Nationalists in Western countries. He concludes that the level of threat posed by global jihad is "a modest danger of seriously brutal intentions but limited capabilities" (p. 187). Not everyone will agree with such a "modest" threat assessment, but the author's overall account is worth reading. The author is a faculty member at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, and is affiliated with the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

Table of Contents: Preface; Introduction: The Birth of Islamism and Jihadism; The Jihadi International, 1979-1990; America First! 1996-2011; Caliphate Now! 2003-2017; Personal Jihad, 2001-2020…and Beyond; Conclusion: Movements of Rage; Epilogue: Who Won?

Leslie J. Shaw and Alexandre Del Valle, ***Allah on the Job: Political Islam in the Workplace*** (Paris, France: Firm Editions, 2020), 268 pp., US $19.75 [Paperback], ISBN: 979-8-6751-2492-3.

This is a very interesting and important account of a non-violent tactic by Islamists to push an Islamist agenda to transform the workplace in Western societies. While pluralism in Western societies attempts to accommodate the religious needs of all religions, the authors claim that Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, are being especially aggressive in pushing their agenda, such as accusing companies and organizations of discrimination and Islamophobia if their demands are not granted, with such coercive pressures resulting in workplace conflict that undermines productivity and workplace cohesion. In countries such as France, the authors note, this has led to threats of violence against employees who do not comply to such demands. Leslie J. Shaw is a Paris-based economist, professor at ESCP Business School and President of the Forum on Islamic Radicalism and Management (FIRM). Alexandre Del Valle is a geopolitical analyst, Managing Director of Geopol Consulting, and author of several books on Islamism.

Table of Contents: Preface; Introduction; **Part I: Accommodating Political Islam**; Corporate Sector in the Crosshairs of Islamic Subversion; Economic Cost of Religious Accommodation; Islamic Radicalism in the Workplace Survey; **Part II: The Battle for France**; Business and the Phenomenon of Radicalization; Political Islam

in the French Workplace; The Gearwheel Strategy: Sectarian Infiltration and Denunciation of Islamophobia; **Political Islam's New Frontier**; Corporate America: Jihadis in the Core and the Failing Paradigm; Challenges Political Islam Poses to Insider Threat Strategies; Countering Political Islam's Economic Warfare; Political Islam's Agenda for the USA; **Part IV: Case Studies**; Case Studies of Religious Accommodation 2001-2018; Airline & Airport Vulnerability to Infiltration: Contractors, Catering, Cargo; The Rise of Salafism at the Paris Transit Authority; Political Islam in the Private Security Sector; French Labour Unions and the Rise of Political Islam; Political Islam in the Pakistani Subsidiary of a US Multinational; Soccer and Jihad; Political Islam and MNCs; **Part V: Understanding the Mindset of Political Islam**; Muslims in the Western Workplace: Opposites Meet; The Inside Out Shame Honor World of the Workplace Jihadi; An Economic Approach to Sunni Islam Hostility to Outgroups; Conclusion.

Lorenzo Vidino, *The Closed Circle: Joining and Leaving the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2020), 296 pp., US $ 90.00 [Hardcover], US $ 30.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-2311-9367-2.

This is a well-informed account of some of the latest developments affecting the Muslim Brotherhood in the West. The Muslim Brotherhood, the author explains, consists of three organizational formations: pure Brotherhood, Brotherhood spawns, and organizations influenced by the Brotherhood. The account, which is based on the author's interviews with current and former Brotherhood members, primarily focuses on the factors for joining and leaving the extremist Islamist organization. The author explains the process of induction of new members into the organization by its senior members, with the new members joining it out of a desire "to help spread Islam and their feeling of pride at having joined such an exclusive and renowned organization" (p. 175). Those who decide to leave the organization, the author writes, are disenchanted with its "Lack of internal democracy, nepotism, and ethnic biases…." (p. 187). The final chapter, "The Western Brotherhood's Future: From the Arab Spring and Beyond," covers developments affecting the Brotherhood in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, as well as geopolitical implications affecting it throughout the Middle East. Also discussed is the attitude of Western governments toward the Brotherhood. The author concludes that "the Brotherhood will remain a crucial actor in the future of Islam in the West" (p. 226). The author is director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University, in Washington, DC.

Table of Contents: Preface and Acknowledgments; List of Abbreviations; What is the Muslim Brotherhood in the West?; Joining and Leaving the Brotherhood; Kamal Helbawy; Ahmed Akkari; Pierre Durrani; Mohamed Louizi; Omero Marongiu; Pernilla Ouis; The American Brothers; Joining and Leaving: What the Evidence Suggests; The Western Brotherhood's Future: From the Arab Spring and Beyond.

Canada

Paul Bramadat and Lorne Dawson, *Religious Radicalization and Securitization in Canada and Beyond* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2014/2016), 344 pp., US $87.80 [Hardcover], US $ 37.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-4426-1436-9.

The contributors to this volume examine the religious aspects of radicalization challenges by various minority communities facing Canada and the responses by the government and the media. To upgrade the effectiveness of the responses to such threats, the editors recommend broadening the focus of response to include threats by extremists in all religions, enhancing understanding of the impact of government security measures on radicalization in immigrant communities, and understanding the international dimension of radicalization within the affected communities in Canada. Paul Bramadat is an Associate Professor in the Department of History and the Religious Studies Program at the University of Victoria. Lorne Dawson is a Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo.

Table of Contents: List of Figures and Tables; The Public, the Political, and the Possible: Religion and Radicalization in Canada and Beyond; **Part I: Religion and Radicalization**; Beating a Path to Salvation: Themes in the Reality of Religious Violence; Trying to Make Sense of Homegrown Terrorist Radicalization: The Case of the Toronto 18; Pluralism and Radicalization: Mind the Gap!; Securitization and Young Muslim Males: Is None Too Many?; **Part II: Securitization and Canadian Ethno-Religious Minorities**; The Impact of Securitization on South Asian Muslims in Montreal; The Sikhs in Canada: Culture, Religion, and Radicalization; Religion, Politics, and Nationalism in Tamil Militancy in Sri Lankan and the Diaspora; **Part III: Public Discourse and Religious Radicalization**; Religion, Reporting, and Radicalization: The Role of News Media in Securitized Discourses; The Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security as a Response to Radicalization: Personal Experiences and Academic Reflections; Narratives, Identity, and Terrorism; Conclusion.

Edward M. Iacobucci and Stephen J. Toope, *After the Paris Attacks: Responses in Canada, Europe, and around the World* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 256 pp., US $ 83.60 [Hardcover], US $ 37.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-4426-3001-7.

The contributors to this volume discuss the responses by Canadian, European, and other governments to the terrorist attacks in Paris, France, on January 7-9, 2015, which were carried out by Islamic State cells. Some of the issues covered include the cost of free expression following major terrorist attacks, how can multiculturalism be promoted in Western democracies, and what are effective security measures - such as Canada's C-51 Anti-Terrorism Act to counter violent extremism without infringing on civil liberties. Edward M. Iacobucci is the Dean and James M. Tory Professor of Law at the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto. Stephen J. Toope is the Director of the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto.

Table of Contents: Preface; **Part I: Religion, Culture and Pluralism**; After Paris: Liberalism, Free Speech, Religion, and Immigration in Europe; Free Speech and Civility in Pluralist Societies; The Status of Muslim Minorities Following the Paris Attacks; A Tale of Two Massacres: *Charlie Hebdo* and Utoya Island; The (In) Secure Citizen: Islamophobia and the Natives of the Republic after Paris; Evil as a Noun: Dichotomous Avoidance of Political Analysis; The Search for Equal Membership in the Age of Terror; *Charlie Hebdo* and the Politics of Fear: Questions without Answers; **Part II: Geopolitical Effects**; What Does It Mean to Be at War?; After the Paris Attacks: Long Views Backwards and Forwards; International Law and Transnational Terrorism; Looking Back and Looking Forward: Authenticity through Purification; **Part III: From Headlines to Analysis: The Media**; After The Paris Attacks: Reflections on the Media; Journalism and Political Decision-Making in an Age of Crises; **Part IV: Canada: Security and Society**; Legislating in Fearful and Politicized Times: The Limits of Bill C-51's Disruption Powers in Making Us Safer; What Lessons Have We Learned about Speech in the Aftermath of the Paris Attacks?; C-51 and the Canadian Security and Intelligence Community: Finding the Balance for Security and Rights Protections; Freedom and Security: The Gordian Knot for Democracies; Anti-Terrorism's Privacy Sleight-of-Hand: Bill C-51 and the Erosion of Privacy; Who Knows What Evils Lurk in the Shadows?; The Complex Ecology of Policing, Trust, and Community Partnerships in Counterterrorism; Postscript: The Paris Attacks as a Turning Point?

Jez Littlewood, Lorne L. Dawson, and Sara K. Thompson (Eds.), *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Canada* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 352 pp., US $ 67.50 [Hardcover], US $ 18.48 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-4875-2170-7.

The contributors to this volume examine the nature of the terrorist threats against Canada and the government's counter-terrorism response measures. This volume's importance is that it is one of the few books to discuss these issues in such a comprehensive way. Also important, as the editors note, is the volume's presentation of latest scholarship on these issues, with the contributors applying empirical data, research methodologies, and policy relevant recommendations to upgrade Canada's responses to the terrorist threat at all levels of society.

Jez Littlewood is an Assistant Professor in the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University. Lorne Dawson is a Professor in the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo. Sara K. Thompson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Criminology at Ryerson University.

Table of Contents: List of Figures and Tables; 1. Introduction; **Part One: Terrorism**; A Survey of Terrorism in Canada: 1960–2015; Canadian Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq, 2012–2016; Breaking Free: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Canadian Freemen-on-the-Land Movement; Jihadism in the Digital Era: The Canadian Context and Responses; **Part Two: Security and Counterterrorism**; Counterterrorism Security Planning in Canada: From Imperialism to International Terrorism; Deterrence or Blowback? The Consequences of Canadian Counterterrorism in Afghanistan; Social Structure of Extremist Websites; Terrorist Resourcing: Money and Much, Much More; **Part Three: Society, Terrorism, and Counterterrorism**; Intelligence Accountability in Canada; Who's a Terrorist? What's Terrorism? Comparative Media Representations of Lone-Actor Violence in Canada; National Security: Exclusion and Isolation among Muslims in Canada; When "Soft Security" is Smart: On the Importance of Building Strong Community-Police Relationships in the Context of National Security; Conclusion.

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Bibliography: Defining and Conceptualizing Terrorism

Compiled and selected by Judith Tinnes

[Bibliographic Series of Perspectives on Terrorism – BSPT-JT-2020-9]

Abstract

This bibliography contains journal articles, book chapters, books, edited volumes, theses, grey literature, bibliographies and other resources on the much debated, controversial question of how terrorism should be defined and conceptualized. It focuses on recent publications (up to November 2020) and should not be considered as exhaustive. The literature has been retrieved by manually browsing more than 200 core and periphery sources in the field of Terrorism Studies. Additionally, full-text and reference retrieval systems have been employed to broaden the search.

Keywords: bibliography, resources, literature, terrorism, definition, conceptualization

NB: All websites were last visited on 22.11.2020. - See also Note for the Reader at the end of this literature list.

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Note

Whenever retrievable, URLs for freely available versions of subscription-based publications have been provided. Thanks to the Open Access movement, self-archiving of publications in institutional repositories, on professional networking sites, or author homepages for free public use (so-called Green Open Access) has become more common. Please note, that the content of Green Open Access documents is not necessarily identical to the officially published versions (e.g., in case of preprints); it might therefore not have passed through all editorial stages which publishers employ to ensure quality control (peer review, copy and layout editing etc.). In some cases, articles may only be cited after obtaining permission by the author(s).

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Recent Online Resources for the Analysis of Terrorism and Related Subjects

Compiled and Seleced by Berto Jongman

Most of the clickable items included became available online between October and December 2020. They are categorized under thirteen headings (as well as sub-headings, not listed below):

1. Non-Religious Terrorism
2. Religious Terrorism
3. Terrorist Strategies and Tactics
4. Conflict, Crime and Political Violence other than Terrorism
5. Extremism, Radicalization
6. Counterterrorism - General
7. Counterterrorism: Specific Operations and/or Specific Policy Measures
8. Prevention, Preparedness and Resilience and Rehabilitation Studies
9. State Repression, Civil War and Clandestine Warfare
10. Intelligence Operations
11. Cyber Operations
12. Risk and Threat Assessments, Forecasts and Analytical Studies
13. Also Worth the Time to Read/Listen/Watch

N.B. *Recent Online Resources for the Analysis of Terrorism and Related Subjects* is a regular feature in 'Perspectives on Terrorism'. For past listings, search under 'Archive' at https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/PoT

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2. Religious Terrorism

2.1. Al Qaeda and its Affiliates

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***About the Compiler*: Berto Jongman** *is Associate Editor of 'Perspectives on Terrorism'. He is a former senior Military Intelligence Analyst and currently serves as an International Consultant on CBRN issues. A sociologist by training, he previously worked for Swedish and Dutch civilian research institutes. Drs. Jongman was the recipient of the Golden Candle Award for his World Conflict & Human Rights Maps, published by PIOOM. He is editor of the volume 'Contemporary Genocides' (1996) and has also contributed to various editions of 'Political Terrorism', the award-winning handbook of terrorism research, edited by Alex P. Schmid.*

Conference Monitor/Calendar of Events (December 2020)

Compiled by Reinier Bergema

The Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), in its mission to provide a platform for academics and practitioners in the field of terrorism and counter-terrorism, compiles an online calendar, listing recent and upcoming academic and professional conferences, symposia and similar events that are directly or indirectly relevant to the readers of *Perspectives on Terrorism*. The calendar includes academic and (inter-) governmental conferences, professional expert meetings, civil society events and educational programs. The listed events are organised by a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental institutions, including several key (counter) terrorism research centres and institutes.

We encourage readers to contact the journal's Assistant Editor for Conference Monitoring, Reinier Bergema, or Olivia Kearney, Editorial Assistant, and provide them with relevant information, preferably in the same format as the items listed below. Reinier Bergema can be reached at <r.bergema@icct.nl> and Olivia Kearney can be reached at <oliviaj.kearney@gmail.com> or via Twitter: @oliviajkearney.

December 2020

89th Interpol General Assembly
Interpol
7-8 December, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
Website: visit | Twitter: @Interpol_HQ

Border Security, Refugees and CT
Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism
7-11 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: n/a

14th Annual Terrorism Conference
Jamestown Foundation
7-11 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @JamestownTweets

Police and Dealing with Online Incitement, Mobilisation, Recruitment and Radicalization
Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)
8 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @RANEurope

Homeland Security Emerging Threats: Domestic Terrorism and White Supremacy
Council on Foreign Relations
8 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @CFR_org

Historical Appropriation Among Far-Right Extremists
National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)
10 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @START_umd

Beyond 9/11 Homeland Security for the Twenty-First Century
Wilson Center
14 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @thewilsoncenter

Profiles of Individual Radicalisation in Australia (PIRA) Dataset: An Introduction to PIRA and an Exploration of Risk and Contextual Factors Linked to Radicalisation in Australia
National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)
14 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @START_UMD

New Technologies in Counter-Terrorism
CEPOL
15 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @eu_cepol

RAN Webinar following the Joint RAN FC&S, LOCAL, C&N and Y&E Meeting on "Preventing Polarisation and building Resilience by Creating a Shared Identity"
Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)
15 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @RANEurope

Engaging with Non-Violent/Not Yet Violent Activists and Extremists to Prevent Them From Turning to Violence
Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)
15 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @RANEurope

Gender, Security and Right-Wing Extremism
Danish Institute for International Studies
15 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @diisdk

The War in Afghanistan: Perspectives from US Veterans
Wilson Center
15 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @thewilsoncenter

Content Moderation & Alternatives to Content Removal
Tech Against Terrorism
16 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @techvsterrorism

U.S. Policy in the Middle East
Foreign Policy Research Institute
16 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @fpri

Africa's Thorny Horn
Italian Institute for International Political Studies (IPSI)
17 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @ispionline

Belgium in the UN Security Council 2019-2020 Webinar 3: Children in Armed Conflict
Egmont Institute
18 December, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @Egmontinstitute

January 2021

Advanced Winter Programme: Preventing, Detecting and Responding to Violent Extremism
Leiden University Centre for Professional Learning & International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague
25-29 January 2021, The Hague, The Netherlands
Website: visit | Twitter: @UniLeidenCPL; @ICCT_TheHague

Terrorism – Old Threats Returning, New Threats Emerging: What are the Key Longer Term Trends Business Needs to Worry About?
Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)
27 January 2020, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @RUSI_org

February 2021

Edlis Neeson Great Decisions: Persian Gulf Security Issues
Aspen Institute
2 February, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @aspeninstitute

How Did 9/11 Affect Terrorism Research? A Look at Disciplines and Gender
National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)
3 February, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @START_UMD

March 2021 & Beyond

Is Ebola the "The ISIS of Disease"?: When Counter-Terrorism Meets Humanitarian Medicine
Center for International Security and Cooperation
10 March, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @FSIStanford

Online Seminar: Cyber Terrorism
The Institute of World Politics
28 April, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @theIWP

2021 Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development
Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)
4-6 May, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @sipriorg

26th German Prevention Congress/ 14th Annual International Forum
German Prevention Congress
10-11 May 2021, Cologne, Germany
Website: visit | Twitter: @praeventionstag

Online Seminar: Counterintelligence and Cyber Technology
The Institute of World Politics
9 June, *online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @theIWP

The 20th Jan Tinbergen European Peace Science Conference
European Peace Scientists
29 June – 1 July 2021, London, United Kingdom
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About the Compiler: **Reinier Bergema** *is a Research Fellow and Project Manager at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) and an Associate Editor at Perspectives on Terrorism.*

About *Perspectives on Terrorism*

Perspectives on Terrorism (PoT) is a joint publication of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), headquartered in Vienna, Austria, and the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) of Leiden University, Campus The Hague. PoT is published six times per year as a free, independent, scholarly peer-reviewed online journal available at the following URL: **https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/perspectives-on-terrorism.**

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