

# Transnational Terrorism Regenerated

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## Abstract

Now that Da'ish's territorial construct has been dismantled, a new version of violent Islamic extremism is confidently predicted. Its form and ideological content is, as yet, undefined but the fact that it will emerge is considered inevitable as extremism follows what is assumed to be a linear progression into becoming the basic challenge facing the hegemonic secular political order, whether liberal or autocratic in nature. This comment is intended to question this conclusion by suggesting that extremism of this kind may be ideologically static or even in regression as it fragments and begins to confront mirror-images of itself that also operate outside the confines of the formal state. It is a fragmentation that has also been accelerated by the sustained anti-terrorist containment tactics of the West which have cut into its efficacy in terms of ideological regeneration and territorial control. Western tactical and strategic mistakes, however, have given it the means to postpone its ultimate defeat and, even, to recuperate from much of its past losses.

## Resumo

### *Terrorismo Transnacional Regenerado*

*Agora que a construção territorial do Da'ish foi desmantelada, pode prever-se uma nova versão do extremismo islâmico violento. O autor coloca em causa as táticas sustentadas de contenção antiterrorista do Ocidente. Os erros táticos e estratégicos ocidentais têm adiado a derrota final do Da'ish.*

By the end of 2017, the territorial reification of the *Islamic State* (ISIS, *Da'ish*) – its ‘caliphate’ in Syria and Iraq, with outliers in Sinai, Libya and latterly Afghanistan – seemed to have become little more than a palimpsest of ungoverned space awaiting the reappearance of a state to be etched out upon its surface. Most commentators appeared to believe that *Da'ish* itself would transmute into a new type of structure and emerge yet again, phoenix-like, from its ashes as it had seven years before after American and Iraqi forces had dismembered it inside Iraq (Joffé, 2016a, p. 7). The ‘virtual caliphate’ that they anticipated would replace it was also expected to develop new ideological forms by which to justify its actions. Just as *al-Qa'ida* had sidelined its objective of confronting the ‘far enemy’<sup>1</sup> and replaced it by the new aim of ‘good governance’ as it entrenched itself in Yemen and Libya, so *Da'ish v.2*, as it came to be known, was expected to adopt new strategies and tactics as it adjusted to the loss of its embryonic universal state.

A year later, however, this did not appear to have happened. Instead the movement had regressed back to the pattern of sporadic attacks within the confines of the states in which it remained and where it now fragmented into isolated but still-active groups. Its targets remained the same – the institutions of the state, whether security forces or administrations, if they existed; antagonistic militias and violent competitors if they did not; individuals who actively opposed it and religious competitors (the Shi'a in particular) even if they did not challenge it. Nor had its essential ideology changed, beyond the fact of its territorial loss with the resulting irrelevance of the administrative and extractive infrastructure it had created. It still irrationally believed in a rigid application in the most brutal way of its salafi-jihadi vision and in the need to destroy the ‘gray zone’, that arena of social interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim populations which was to be replaced by antagonistic and agonistic separation.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, this may yet change but there is no evidence that this will be the case. Beyond this, too, despite the fragmentation of *Da'ish*, the core of its leadership still remained. Its putative caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, still seemed to hold on to its nominal leadership, albeit concealed in the ungoverned spaces along the Syrian-Iraqi border.<sup>3</sup> Its rank-and-file, too, particularly its foreign fighters, seemed largely undiminished in their enthusiasm for the movement wherever they had not been dispersed, killed or detained. In Europe, as well, its acolytes turned back to the practice of ‘leaderless jihad’ – self-motivated extremism against the wider popula-

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- 1 The non-Muslim Western states that were perceived to support and tolerate the repressive autocracies of the Middle East and North Africa in order to preserve regional stability, regardless of the consequences for the populations concerned or for their cultural and religious values.
  - 2 In terms of Adorno’s ‘theodicity of conflict’ in the critical sense that it is irreconcilable with majority sentiment and society which it must, therefore, seek to destroy (Adorno, 1951, p. 52).
  - 3 There have recently been reports that he, together with most of the remaining core of *Da'ish*, has fled to the tribal areas of Pakistan along the Afghan-Pakistan border (Anon., 2018a).
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tion, as encouraged by as-Suri in his study, *The global Islamic resistance call* (Lia, 2008). Their ostensible purpose was to cause antagonism and hatred between its Muslim and non-Muslim communities or simply to estrange host communities from engagement with the wider Muslim world preparatory to aggressively confronting them with its aim of ultimate victory.<sup>4</sup> Da'ish had become, in short, the archetypal chiliastic movement it always ultimately sought to be, despite its loss of control over the physical reality of Dabiq and the territorial caliphate.<sup>5</sup>

### Alternative Agendas

Quite apart from any regression or reversion to type within Da'ish's strategy as a result of the destruction of its territorial caliphate, there have been other directions in which the extremist salafi-jihadi agenda has evolved. Ironically enough, the non-Muslim world has become habituated to extremist violence and therefore tends to ignore the day-to-day reality of its existence unless its gratuitous brutality becomes impossible to overlook – one of the main reasons, apart from its success at recruiting foreigners to fight in its ranks and its staggering initial success in confronting the Iraqi and Syrian states, that Da'ish had attracted so much attention in the West. Another irony appears to be that part of its membership relocated to Afghanistan and Pakistan, allegedly having enjoyed safe passage through Iran to do so; a trajectory originally followed by its founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, in 1999 and a further irony because of his detestation of Shi'a Islam, a sentiment subsequently adopted by the organisation he created, *al-Qa'ida fi'l-Iraq* (Joffé, 2016a, p. 6). It is a sentiment typical of the wider salafi movement, too, but adopted with particular vehemence by Da'ish.

The third irony, however, is that as Da'ish appears to have regressed in terms of media prominence and ideological innovation in recent years, it has been al-Qa'ida and the other organisations claiming affiliation to it that have progressed. The irony here is that, shortly after the emergence of Da'ish, the movement tried to assert its leadership of the global jihadi movement against al-Qaida on the grounds that leadership should be the prerogative of those directly engaged in the struggle, not of those isolated in the mountain fastnesses of Afghanistan or tribal Pakistan and

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4 See Lia (2008, pp. 102, 313-316 and 347-484) and Naji (2006). Naji's major vision, as expressed in *The Administration of Savagery*, is discussed in Brachman (2009, pp. 94-95) and in Ryan (2013, pp. 148 and 168-178). It should be noted that the original book is also sometimes entitled *The Management of Savagery*. See also Kaplan (2008) for a description of what Da'ish has become: "Chiliastic in nature, deeply religious with eclectic or syncretic religious tropes assembled and interpreted by the leaders in support of a millenarian dream to be realized through a campaign of apocalyptic violence". Cited in George Joffé (2017, p. 12).

5 Dabiq is the town in Northern Syria where the final millennial battle between Islam triumphant and its non-Muslim opponents would be fought out that would mark the advent of 'the end of time' – al-Qaymah, the Day of Judgement.

thus removed from the field of action (Joffé, 2016b, pp. 807-808). It has continued to maintain this position, particularly through its project for the caliphate in Syria and Iraq until it was forced out of Mosul and Raqqa (Maher, 2018, pp. 10-12). Yet, in reality, it has been al-Qa'ida which had adapted its agenda to changed circumstances in ways that Da'ish apparently could not.

There have been several reasons for Al-Qa'ida's new-found flexibility and Da'ish's doctrinal and organisational rigidity. Firstly, al-Qa'ida had become a brand, rather than a unitary organisation, to which other autonomous groups sought affiliation, being prepared to accept shared ideology, strategy and tactics, and it also expanded its ideological horizon as well, moving away from its original concern solely with confronting the 'far enemy' – non-Muslim states supporting corrupt regimes in the Muslim world which it considered degenerate – 'jahili' (Gerges, 2005, pp. 44-49). Thus the remnants of the extremist groups which had participated in the Algerian civil war between 1992 and 1999, which had moved from Kabylia and the surrounding regions along Algeria's Mediterranean coast into the Sahara and the Sahel after 2003, rebranded themselves as *Tanzim al-Qa'ida fi'l-Bilad al-Maghribi al-Islami* (al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghrib – AQIM) with al-Qa'ida's explicit agreement in 2006. Secondly, networks have now begun to emerge, tying such affiliated groups together. Thus AQIM has proliferated into at least three, if not four related groups; AQIM itself continues but now as a predominantly Algerian group still linked its origins in Kabylia. Alongside it, *Mujao (Jamā'at at-tawhīd wa'l-jihād fi'l-gharb al-'afrīqīyā; Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest)* emerged in 2011 as a predominantly Sahelian group primarily led by Mauritians seeking its ideological inspiration from African, rather than Arab, religious leaders such as Usman Dan Fodio, an eighteenth century jihadi leader from Northern Nigeria. In 2013, one of its factions merged with a dissident AQIM group, led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar called *Al-Mulathamīn* to create *Al-Mourabitoun*, a group avowedly loyal to al-Qa'ida (Counter Extremism Project, 2018). It has even been prepared to embrace other similar groups elsewhere in Africa as its loose links with *Boko Haram* in Northern Nigeria, in the Lake Chad region and in Cameroon attest.

In addition, al-Qa'ida was prepared to accommodate, even collaborate, with other similar groups; something which Da'ish would not consider under any circumstances, unless the group concerned espoused its doctrines and leadership in all respects, as was to be the case in November 2014 with *Ansar al-Bayt Maqdis* in Sinai, now renamed as *Ad-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi'l-Iraq wa'sh-Sham: Wilayat Sinai* (Kirkpatrick, 2014). AQIM, on the other hand is a very good example of this alternative approach adopted by al-Qa'ida-affiliated groups, for it sought affiliation with al-Qa'ida as early as 2003, an affiliation which was accepted by the parent organisation three years later. Al-Qa'ida's relationship with the *Nusra Front* in Syria, now renamed *Jabhat Fatah ash-Sham*, is another, for the Nusra Front was originally derived from the Iraqi-based movement that was to become Da'ish after the Syrian

civil war broke out. However, it rejected Da'ish's demand that Al-Qa'ida recognise its leadership, remaining faithful to Usama bin Ladin's original movement instead, even at the cost of a rupture with its own parent organisation (Maher, 2018, pp. 10-12). The original al-Qa'ida movement has also re-forged links with extremist groups in South East Asia, such as *Jemaah Islamiyyah* in Indonesia and similar groups in Mindanao in the Philippines (Singh, 1917, pp. 5-8). It has also reached out to similar groups in Africa and Central Asia (Cummings, 2017).

Furthermore, Al-Qa'ida's flexibility is also demonstrated by the way it has allowed its ideology and objectives to change. Its old agendas of confronting the 'far enemy' either through pre-emption, as was the case in Washington and New York in September 2001, or by the kind of direct engagement it practiced in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union between 1980 and the Soviet departure in 1989 or even through 'nomadic jihad', as occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Chechniya in the late 1980s – have evolved in the last decade (Joffé, 2016b, pp. 803-804). *Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (Tanẓīm al-Qā'ida fī'l-Jazīrat al-'Arab)* was able, during the last decade, to develop a new approach, aiming at 'good governance' instead and thereby at ensuring popular support. It has, as a result, been able to spread its influence throughout the Yemeni Hadramaut since 2015 and its success there has been replicated in Western Libya and Tunisia within a new movement adopting similar ideological patterns in the form of *Ansar al-Shar'ia*. Other movements have developed their own agendas – Boko Haram, for example, ostensibly attacking the influence of Western culture to justify its own bestiality towards local populations. Da'ish, on the other hand, has shown no such flexibility in the face of Western attacks upon it. It has, instead, merely undergone a tactical evolution, forced upon it by its loss of territorial control and its organisational fragmentation.

### Western Responses

Yet Da'ish remains the primary target and concern of the Western response.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, that response to the terrorism of recent decades is also an aspect of the problem, for it has not only been a response but also a progenitor of extremist violence itself. Its primary response, certainly since September 11, 2001, has been the so-called 'war on terror', an American-inspired initiative bringing together a loose alliance of Western states against the manifestation of extremist violence arising primarily in the Middle East. The alliance has been committed to using a spectrum of responses against such violence, dominated by military force as its dominant principle in five major geographic arenas – Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Somalia together with Mali and the Sahel since 2011 – supplemented by initiatives designed to undermine the financial viability and social cohesion of the movements involved.

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6 Viz. United Nations Security Council (2018).

It has been an extremely costly undertaking which, by 2020 is expected to have cost its major members – predominantly the United States – between \$1.8 trillion and \$5.5 trillion (Trotta, 2011).<sup>7</sup> It has also involved significant loss of life: an estimated 65,800-to-88,600 extremists worldwide up to the end of 2015 as the result of military action, together with 7,008 American military deaths and a further more than 3,000 civilian deaths (Anon., 2015). Overall civilian deaths in Western states and in the five principle arenas of military activity have been variously estimated to have been between 480,000 and 507,000 (Anon., 2018b) and 1.3 million-to-2 million.<sup>8</sup>

The problem is that, quite apart from the massive costs involved in terms of wealth and loss-of-life, there have been other losses that raise serious questions about the efficacy of the initiative introduced by the George W. Bush administration after the horrific attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001. Accompanying legal measures, such as the Patriot Act in the United States and terrorist legislation in most Western countries have resulted in abuse of human rights and a reduction of civil liberties, thus undermining the very principles for which the ‘war on terror’ was supposed to be the defensive bulwark. Perhaps the most egregious examples of this have been the CIA’s ‘special rendition’ programme and the extra-legal detention of terrorist suspects in the prison created at Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere – outside the reach of the American legal system.

More sinister, perhaps, has been the gradual shredding of civil rights of assembly and expression for the populations concerned within Europe and the United States, despite the arguments of the governments concerned that they are endeavouring to achieve the reverse outcome. And even worse has been the intellectual acceptance and unconscious incorporation of these developments on the grounds of necessity and intellectual co-option within the West. Popular protest at their curtailment has been gradually replaced by a tacit acceptance, even on occasion active endorsement, of the necessity to restrict them by elites and populace alike. This has been reflected in the conventional media-induced hysteria over the threat of extremism to the Western ideal which is increasingly reflected in social media as well. It has been partnered by the growing neglect of responses to extremism based on the rule-of-law and the definition of extremism in terms of its criminal dimensions, rather than as a hard security threat, equivalent to war.<sup>9</sup>

7 The estimates are derived from two sources, as shown below:

	<b>Congress</b>	<b>Brown</b>
<b>Financial year 2001-2011</b>	1,283.2	2,662.1-3,057.3
<b>Financial year 2012-2020</b>	454.1	2,043.1-2,388.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,737.3</b>	<b>4,705.2-5,445.4</b>

**Congress:** United States Congressional Research Service.

**Brown:** Watson Institute, Brown University, United States.

8 This is an estimate made by three humanitarian groups: *International Physicians for the prevention of Nuclear War*, *Physicians for Social Responsibility* and *Physicians for Global Survival* (Wilkins, 2015).

9 See Chouet (2008).

The greatest irony, though, is the fact that the development of such attitudes perfectly mirrors the objective of destroying the 'Grey Zone' sought by Da'ish and its intellectual progenitors (see footnote [2] above)! This is manifest in the growing clamour against immigration in both Europe and the United States, albeit for different reasons in each case. Parallel to this has been the generalisation of Islamophobia within Western societies and the demand for the revival of the supposedly social and ethnic homogeneity of an idealised – and, thus, defunct – society of an imagined past. These sentiments are exacerbated by the economic victimisation of large sections of Western societies caused by neo-liberal economic globalisation. It also lies behind the growing populist objection in Europe to the inclusion of Turkey within the Union – a project that was seen as central to its growth a decade ago. This complex array of factors is, ironically enough, manifest in such apparently unrelated phenomena as Britain's crisis over membership of the European Union and its growing popular endorsement of Islamophobia and thus, by implication, of Da'ish's agenda as well.

Da'ish's objective in this respect, after all, has been disaggregate Muslim and non-Muslim populations by intensifying their mutual hatreds through exemplary violence, whether this was achieved through 'lone-wolf' attacks or by planned extremism against Western states or populations. In this respect, of course, it mirrored the original objectives of al-Qa'ida and its associates as well but differed from them in both believing that it should direct such a struggle, not al-Qa'ida, and in refusing to alter its techniques and objectives in the face of the Western onslaught against it. Nor, apparently, does it intend to do so now, despite the loss of its territorial desideratum, the caliphate. The irony, then, resides in the fact that such an unchanged strategy which should have led to its oblivion has, through the 'war in terror'<sup>10</sup>, led to its revitalisation because of the unconscious cultural consequences which the alleged war has induced, both in re-legitimising Da'ish's strategy and tactics and in reinforcing the antiphonal antagonism that both sides in this 'war' now manifest.

In the popular and media imaginary, the 'war on terror' has, in effect, appropriated Samuel Huntington's vision of future war as cultural and civilisational in nature, rather than, as in the past, being based in state security and national interest (Huntington, 1993). The consequence is that Islam itself is now popularly seen as intrinsically responsible for contemporary extremist violence – whether those

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10 Although the label was abandoned by the Obama Administration in 2009, being replaced by the more anodyne term 'Overseas Contingency Operation', the objectives and techniques did not significantly change except insofar as the use of targeted drone warfare and aerial warfare replaced the use of main, land-based force. The British government had abandoned the use of the term two years earlier since, as Eliza Manningham-Buller, the former head of MI5, pointed out in 2011, it under-valued the criminal nature of the extremism it was supposed to counter by dignifying it as a 'war' (Norton-Taylor, 2011). Other critics have pointed out that extremism is a tactic of struggle, not a conventional hard security entity equivalent to a state which could therefore engage in a formal war.

involved are Muslim or not! This, of course, naturally feeds into the dominant Western popular narrative of identity politics and populism as Europe and America come to rely on the vision of the West as the domain of a Judeo-Christian cultural tradition and thus reify a traditional Christian-Muslim confrontation (Malik, 2011). It is, however, a far cry from the European (and American) self-image as the repository of Enlightenment values of liberalism and democracy, a discrepancy which, if not evident to the West, is certainly clear to the wider non-Western world. However, in a further irony, that experience is also reflected in Da'ish's paradigm of the contemporary caliphate rooted, as it is in practice, in violence towards non-Muslim minorities, rather than in an inclusive rule-of-law.

The reality of such values in practice, in the experience of the Muslim world, has been quite different and has been profoundly and adversely affected by the 'war on terror'. It is a distinction that reflects the difference between timeless synchronic and historically-evolving diachronic appreciations of social reality in the context of contemporary political extremism and of the history of its evolution. For the developing world, the thick substratum of the colonial experience persists as a basis of its understanding of Enlightenment values imposed upon it during and at the end of the colonial period and as constantly renewed in the rhetorical dialogue about development that has persisted thereafter (Bellaigue, 2017; Robinson, 2009). For the Muslim world, in particular, these values, whether welcomed or seen as an oppressive imposition, are nevertheless contrasted with its own cultural and social ideal of a social and political order derived from Islamic principles (Joffé, 2007).

The 'war on terror', then, has had as its primary consequence, a deepening of the distrust and dislike of the principles it is supposed to protect within the cultural domain – the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle East, and Muslim minority communities in Europe – to which it has been predominantly applied. It has also underlined Muslim perceptions of the 'double standards' and hypocrisy that many in the developing world believe to characterise Western policy, in terms, for example, of Western attitudes towards sensitive issues such as Israel and the Palestinian problem, as well as Western rhetoric over governance through popular participation compared with the reality of Western preferences for the illusory stability associated with autocratic governance in the Middle East and North Africa.

In addition, this sense of growing anger in the Muslim world engendered by the seemingly endless struggle encompassed by the 'war on terror' has been reflected in the growth of popular intolerance of Islam inside Europe and the United States. This, of course, has been coupled with the growth of right-wing populism in the Western world, itself in part a consequence of the political failure of neo-liberalism and economic globalisation stimulated by the economic and financial collapse after 2007. But it has also been driven by factors promoted by the 'war on terror', not least by its social and economic costs, and by the cynicism that it has involved. Thus indigenous resentment has been inflamed by the evidence of Western partnership

with obscurantist and corrupt elite elements of the regimes held responsible for indigenous repression. Perhaps the statistics that most starkly reveal this emerged at the end of 2018 in a report published by the Center for Security and International Studies in Washington. Its summary revealed two key points that are germane to the argument being developed here:

- The number of Salafi-jihadists in 2018 declined somewhat from a high in 2016, but is still at near peak levels since 1980. To put this into historical perspective, the high estimate of fighters in 2018 is 270 percent greater than in 2001 when the 9/11 attacks occurred.
- The regions with the largest number of fighters are the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Other regions, such as Southeast Asia, have fewer fighters (Jones *et al.*, 2018).

In other words, the ‘war on terror’ appears to have dramatically worsened global security. There are now estimated to be between 114,500 and 249,500 militant extremists in the five major arenas of activity now, compared with between 30,000 and 70,000 in 2001, distributed amongst 67 discrete groups of which 44 groups (67 per cent) are not affiliated with either Al-Qa’ida or Da’ish. In 2001, there were 25 such groups; now extremist groups worldwide have been augmented 180 per cent.<sup>11</sup> These figures need to be set against the other reality; that of an unrelenting Western attempt to fragment and eliminate extremism through military action, and underlines the fact that, despite military success, widespread resentment of Western interference has, nonetheless fed the pool of committed opponents to the Western project. By any standard, this represents a monumental failure in achieving security at immense cost, with the added irony – as suggested above – that it has also served the purpose of those opposed to Western objectives by radically disaggregating the ‘gray zone’ in which Western populism has become a tacit accomplice. As Senator Elizabeth Warren made clear in a speech at the American University in Washington on November 29, 2018:

“Despite America’s huge investment, these wars have not succeeded even on their own terms. Seventeen years later [since 2001], the Middle East remains in shambles. US counterterrorism efforts have often undermined other efforts to reinforce civilian governance, the rule of law, and human rights abroad. We have partnered with countries that share neither our goals nor our values. In some cases, as with our support for Saudi Arabia’s proxy war in Yemen, US policies risk generating even more extremism. Widespread migration of millions of people seeking safety from war-torn regions has allowed right-wing demagogues to unfairly blame the newcomers for the economic pain of working people at home”.

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11 See Jones *et al.* (2018, pp. 23-26). These groups, except for *Ahrar ash-Sham* in Syria, are located primarily in Afghanistan or South Asia and take their inspiration from the Deobandi movement, rather than Wahhabi Islam.

This strategic failure is accompanied by a failure of interpretation as well. As I have suggested in a companion article (Joffé, 2017), the widespread assumption that the cause of Islamic extremism is buried within the Islamic theological and ideological corpus is misplaced. Rather than just having religious roots, the drivers for extremism are manifold and also arise from geopolitical, political, psychological and sociological factors as well. Indeed, in many, if not most cases, ideology plays a subordinate role, becoming simply a means of legitimising or camouflaging quite different causes instead. And, in a final irony, right-wing non-Muslim violent extremists have begun to ape the tactics of their supposed antagonists, particularly in 'lone wolf' attacks in Europe and the United States!

### **New Transnational Terrorism?**

If indeed the campaign against violent extremism is failing despite its apparent military successes and despite the intellectual, organisational and ideological rigidity of one of its major opponents – Da'ish – this would suggest a new form of transnational terrorism has, in fact, emerged which we need to understand. Our understanding of the new extremist environment that we now confront would also have to take into account that the new form has emerged despite the lack of intellectual, strategic or tactical innovation that part of the new movement may manifest and that, instead, its success may be as much a consequence of the errors of its antagonists rather than of its own innate principles. In other words, the 'war on terror' may have been a significant contributor to the successful mutation of the opponent it was meant to destroy! And that, in turn, may be crucial to the future design of strategies that could achieve that original goal.

And that, also in turn, may require a review of what that original goal might have been and an understanding of what violent extremism really represents. Violent extremism – usually categorised as 'terrorism', although there is no generally-accepted definition of the term<sup>12</sup> – is a tactic through which a dominant narrative, usually that of a state, is challenged. Despite the difficulty of defining precisely what it is, such extremism does have certain unique characteristics which allow us to distinguish it from other tactical categories of violence through which dominant narratives are contested. Firstly, it tends to be a tactic adopted by groups that perceive themselves as being far weaker than their antagonists, although states may also make use of the tactic as a convenient form of unconventional or hybrid warfare.<sup>13</sup>

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12 The definition that is used here is that proposed by Paul Wilkinson who argues that 'terrorism is the systematic use of coercive intimidation, usually to service political ends' (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 15).

13 The term 'hybrid warfare' is a term used to describe a range of tactics "widely understood to blend conventional/unconventional, regular/irregular, and information and cyber warfare". It first appeared around 2006 in reference to Hizbullah's tactics in its war in that year against Israel. See Puyvelde (2016).

Secondly, the term is permeated by moral ambiguity, in that the antagonists – usually states – consider such activities to be criminal since terrorism usually involves civilian deaths and, conventionally, only states can legitimise murder by its citizens (or others in its employ) or of them in pursuit of the wider goals of the state through warfare. However, to the perpetrators of violent extremism, it is their own actions that are inherently moral, for the state has delegitimized itself by its own violence towards its opponents. This is a feature that can also provide a certain specificity towards a phenomenon which is otherwise apparently ideologically neutral. In this respect, salafi-jihadism has an immediate relevance for it provides both a moral framework and the guidelines for a structure through which it can be articulated.

In addition, it is generally considered that extremist violence is indiscriminate in nature and unbounded, for its targets are often apparently innocent civilians and bystanders who have no direct connection with the events in question. The classic response to this is to be found in the “testament” of Emile Henry, an anarchist who in February 1894 bombed a café in Paris – the Café Terminus in Gare St Lazare – which was frequented by the French bourgeoisie. His actions were predicated against the bourgeoisie precisely because of their class-identity and their role, in Emile Henry’s eyes, in exploiting the French working-class. His testament, in the form of a statement to the jury whose verdict enabled his sentence of death – he was executed in May 1894 – is a detailed and reasoned exposition of this argument.<sup>14</sup>

Thus the apparently indiscriminate nature of terrorist violence in fact has a certain specificity about it, for there are groups of people who are considered legitimate targets precisely because they are members of the group, not because of their individual actions or responsibilities. The principle, of course can have much wider ramifications but, in the case of terrorism, it is an integral part of the process itself and, almost by definition, means that innocent individuals will be the intended targets and not simply unfortunate incidental victims. It also emphasises, of course, that only certain groups of people can be considered as legitimate targets, thus showing that extremist violence is not necessarily unbounded.

There are many other features that characterise terrorist violence as well,<sup>15</sup> but for our purposes, it is the fact that extremist violence is a tactic, a mode of action to achieve a specified political purpose, not an organisation as such, with a specific

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14 See Henry (1894). The specific reason for his choice of the Café Terminus was the execution of Auguste Vaillant, another anarchist who had bombed the French national assembly, injuring twenty-two deputies the previous December in protest over the corruption rife in France for which Emile Henry held the bourgeoisie responsible. Tradition has it that, after his capture in the immediate aftermath of the bombing, Henry was asked why he had tried to kill so many innocent people (only one person actually died, although twenty others were injured) and he replied, “Nobody is innocent!” In reality, he had said, “There are no innocent bourgeois!” thus emphasising the importance of group-identity in determining appropriate targets.

15 Fuller reviews are provided in Joffé (2004 and 2010).

and well-defined ideology to legitimise its actions that is important although the actual nature of the legitimising ideology is not. The one exception to this is epiphenomenal terrorism or extremism in which violence, in itself, is the objective, not the political outcome sought as a consequence of the violence. There is, perhaps a further condition for, as a tactic alone, violent extremism of this kind is also antiphonal in nature; it depends on a defined antagonist with which it can engage on parallel terms and which can and does engage (albeit unwittingly) with it. The 'war on terror' has fulfilled this role to perfection and has thus become a driver for the expansion of extremism, rather than its nemesis, as it had been supposed to be.

### Responses

In this respect, therefore, the rigidity that Da'ish now demonstrates is of little consequence for its power of attraction resides in the moral ambiguity it exploits and in its ability to engage with codified and structured Western hostility. In that respect, it differs little from Al-Qa'ida despite the latter's flexibility and innovative ideological evolution, as described above. The new wave of transnational terrorism, in short, is in reality reactive, not innovative, as was its predecessor, and reflects long-standing agonistic tensions between two separate cultural domains. An aspect of its renewed vitality and viability is its relevance as a means of authenticating a cultural reality, however distorted and brutal it may appear to a disinterested observer; that of an innately authentic Muslim social order. Yet its weakness in those terms is the distortion and violence it has created in its interpretation of that ideal. In the long term, therefore, it will be doomed to failure.<sup>16</sup>

Yet the longevity of its survival is partly predicated on the nature of the response to it, as the failure of the 'war on terror' has demonstrated. The final question, therefore, must be what the new strategy and tactics to hasten the demise of this 'new transnational terrorism' should be. In terms of tactics, there seems little doubt that, since the military approach has failed, it would be wise to return to the alternative of treating violent extremism as an inherently criminal enterprise. Quite apart from the movement's inherent violence, whatever the justification, nearly all the groups involved use techniques of financing their activities which are illicit or illegal, whether through *hawala*,<sup>17</sup> smuggling, theft, fraud or violence.

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16 As Rapoport has pointed out, violent extremism has been a constant concomitant of the established international order and of the state as an expression of those individuals and groups who have felt excluded from the international community and the state ever since the French revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. The consequent and repeated waves of violence, each dominated by an hegemonic ideological vision to legitimise it, have tended to last for up to forty-to-forty-five years (Rapoport, 2002).

17 As Charles Tripp points out, *hawala* "[relies] on interpersonal transnational networks of trust, which avoid the formal banking institutions associated with the dominant global capitalist economy..." (Tripp, 2006, p. 6). See also Ballard (2003) and Jost and Sandhu (n/d).

However, this approach alone will be insufficient to eliminate the threat because of the moral ambiguity in which violent extremism is located and the historical justifications for its sense of resentment and victimhood. In many respects, this is a far greater challenge for it will involve challenging and countering the populism and Islamophobia that have been entrenched in the Western image of Islam during the past two decades. It will also involve the incorporation of Muslim minority communities within Europe into the mainstream communities already there, despite their growing resentments at what is increasingly perceived as an alien intrusion into a European cultural space shaped by quite different influences. It remains to be seen whether the West still has the imagination and empathy to be able to do this and whether it has the political and cultural leadership to achieve such an outcome despite the increasingly agonist nature of its confrontation with the Muslim world.

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