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THE ISLAMIC STATE: THE LASTEST INCARNATION IN A GLOBALIZED INSURGENCY

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SYNOPSIS

Terrorism is no longer an issue for any single sovereign state. Globalisation has forged a shift in tactics and strategy for terrorist organisations, which are increasingly expanding their goals to transnational, globalised campaigns. These organisations are, in the pursuit of their territorial ambitions, waging an insurgency against globalisation and western society. However, classical counterinsurgency (COIN) is out-dated in the face of the evident modern transnational threat of the Islamic State (ISIS) and whatever incarnation may follow. Some insurgencies today such as ISIS, aim to conquer the globe, to disrupt the political landscape within the Muslim world and fracture the relationship between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities for exploitation and recruitment.

ISIS' take on the global insurgency differs largely from Al Qaeda (AQ) and is perceived to be more successful not because of the amount of strikes abroad that ISIS executes, but from the amount of strikes abroad they can claim responsibility for. ISIS is enabling a franchise phenomenon of copycat terrorism, similar to the frequency of the American Skyline hijackings in the 1960's and 1970's. Individuals with little to no ties to ISIS can conduct their act of violence and pledge allegiance just before, during or after their attack and have their cause accepted by ISIS's brand; notable examples are Man Haron Monis and the San Bernadino Shooters. Examples such as these give credence to the perception of a succeeding and large global network, when really ISIS are just opportunists that embrace anything to repurpose for propaganda. They have transformed their military successes inside Iraq and Syria into an insurgency campaign, calling for foreign fighters to travel to them, and

launching strikes of their own abroad to cause fear, division, and suspicion. By exploiting the social chaos they cause with each cumulative strike in a coalition country, they manipulate youths to travel to Iraq and Syria, or to conduct strikes of their own within their home countries. ISIS is successfully recruiting from those who are disenfranchised with their society, the unemployed, the rejected, and those who lack religious identity or conviction. They are effectively recognising the flaws of our society, and baiting those who are at loss to redeem them through jihad in Iraq, Syria or at home.

This article will argue that it is essential that we view this challenge for what it is, a continuation of a global insurgency campaign that aims to manipulate the hearts and minds of youths, to cause fear and division within societies and create an "us and them" narrative for further manipulation. We fight this global war on terrorism through spats of conflict that are almost entirely asymmetrical in nature; they combat our interventions as guerrillas and insurgents. Where we are, they are there also, forming militias and cells. If we are fighting a global war on terrorism, we have to acknowledge it's also a global insurgency that we have to overcome. It's madness to assume that this theatre is limited to a particular region when they constantly demonstrate the ability to usurp our security, borders and populations with the ability to conduct attacks in our homelands. It's time we shifted our strategy at home and abroad to match their rhetoric and stop treating the opponent only as terrorists in our backyard, but insurgents in theirs. We must also innovate new ways to combat them through social media and take back the at-risk youths who are exposed to radicalisation online.

GLOBALISATION BACKLASH: THE CONTINUATION OF AN INSURGENCY

 In order to understand the primary motivations of the Islamic State, we must first remind ourselves of the rationale behind their predecessor organisation, AQ, and their strike on 9/11. Although some limit the symbolism of the attack as just a strike against America, AQ and their senior brass have consistently made it clear it was a strike against the global capitalist system and those they hold responsible for pushing it. Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri preached anti-globalisation sentiments as their grand motivations, rejecting the creep of what they perceive as a new form of colonialism under the guise of globalisation, involving itself into the politics, traditions, and cultures of the Middle East. After successfully baiting the United States into the "forever war" into the region, AQ engaged the Western coalition through an insurgent campaign that manifested in Iraq and Afghanistan. Curiously, the devolution of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) into what is now ISIS heralded a change of strategy. While AQ and the Taliban fought insurgency with the intention to bleed the West dry with their strategy of exhaustion, ISIS altered tactics to resemble a Maoist displacement strategy, shifting their force structure from asymmetrical, guerrilla fighters into a conventional (albeit with asymmetrical support components) functioning military, even commencing state-like governance in

seized territories. Although ISIS operates with converged hybridity within Iraq and Syria, they have enacted the stepping-stones for what their predecessor AQ dreamed for, a global caliphate. Whilst they don't yet have the capability to export the "Central State" through conventional means to the globe beyond Iraq and Syria, they have laid the seeds for the cultivation of further insurgent fronts around the world to challenge governance through wilayat. ISIS has been targeting regions with history of ethnic and ideological based conflict such as in South East Asia, for the construction of wilayat to establish consistent operational sanctuaries. Whilst the Islamic State is setting up carefully selected franchises across the world, it is through their Internationale that they are waging their terrorist campaign against the west in their homelands, aiming to cause societal dissent and commence their fight for the hearts and minds of at-risk population.

HOW THE ISLAMIC STATE IS INFECTING AND EXPLOITING THE WEST WITH THEIR POPULATION-FOCUSED STRATEGY.

ISIS is implementing several measures to pave the road to success and steer the theatre into grounds that are favourable towards them. These manoeuvres manifested through attacks launched from both the wilayat and Internationale against the West. As ISIS began to lose ground under the coalition air campaign in Syria and Iraq, they began to lash out and shift their prevalence of suicide bombings away from the central state and abroad to the homelands of coalition countries, aiming to goad an emotional overreaction in the form of a commitment of ground forces they can then exploit for recruitment and propaganda purposes. Whilst Australia endured the Lindt Café Siege in Sydney 2014, it has not yet seen an act of terror on the scale of 9/11, the 2015 November Paris attacks or the Brussels bombings. Of course, while ISIS inspired acts of terror are intended to use violence to achieve a political goal, they also have a secondary purpose, which is to cause societal division within multicultural societies in order to create an "us and them" narrative between the Muslim and non-Muslim population of the target countries. TV Presenter Waleed Aly exposed these desires publicly on Australian television in an effort to curb the rising fear after the fallout of the Paris attacks. In essence, ISISs hopes to exploit the environment of fear they create abroad, in order target the marginalised populations for remote recruitment to leave to fight for the central state, or if not possible, to commence attacks in their home country.

ISIS' strategy of causing societal division is nothing relatively new. In fact, it is a standard practice that they have been implementing since their origin as AQI. Aiming to draw in Sunni recruits, AQI would strike at a site of Shi'a symbolic importance in order to cause emotional overreaction and sectarian backlash from the Shi'a community in the form of intense societal conflict. This backlash forced the Sunni community to choose between what they perceived to be life in the form of joining takfirist

extremist groups or death at the hand of Shi'a motivated revenge. ISIS is in the sectarian conflict business, and they have been trying to export the same practice abroad with every strike they land in a western country, and arguably are succeeding in some regard. The best demonstration of ISIS attempting to manipulate this fear is through the planted Syrian passports found on the Paris attackers bodies, showing an obvious intent to weaponise the refugee crisis and compound ethnic tensions in Europe and beyond. Whilst we have not seen a reaction on par with the Shi'a communities in Iraq, we are witnessing an increase of anti-Muslim and anti-immigration groups that are, in essence, assisting the grand strategy of ISIS, creating an environment ripe to boil over given a successful terror attack occurs. A visible symptom of their success is the creation of several extreme anti-immigration groups across Europe and here in Australia. While organisations such as the United Patriots Front (UPF) preach racist sentiments through rallies, it is important to acknowledge that this is part of the ISIS strategy, and that in order to entirely defeat the impact of ISIS, we must also defeat these organisations' harmful ideology, otherwise the cycle will not fully dissipate.

EXAMINING THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND RADICALISATION AND THE APPEAL OF THE ISLAMIC STATE.

While ISIS has successfully managed to lure in foreign fighters from around the world, we have seen the spread of their global insurgency campaign to our very doorsteps. Whilst the infection rate of foreign fighters is actually a drop in the ocean compared to the wider Muslim population, there are important factors we need to consider.

Firstly, whilst ISIS is trying to manipulate our society to generate recruitment, it is important to take a look at the environment as it is. The truth is, ISIS has been exploiting our Western society before they bombed airliners or struck Paris and Brussels, drawing in thousands of recruits from Europe in particular to join the insurgency and state-building effort in Iraq and Syria. Therefore the question is begged, how is ISIS exploiting our society? The answer being an amalgamation of societal issues that is affecting an at-risk population at an individual level. A large part of the incentive for ISIS and their ideology comes from an absence of individual identity, self-worth and disconnect with mainstream Australian society and way of life. Contrary to popular belief, religion is often not the main driver of ISIS and modern jihadi movement recruitment, and rather quite the opposite. Aspiring jihadists Yusuf Sarwar and Mohammed Ahmed purchased *Islam for Dummies* before setting off to join jihadist groups in Syria. The factor that appears to be a trend in ISIS recruitment is not so much religion, but using this lack of identity and self-fulfilment to turn at-risk individuals towards Takrifist Salafism as a fall-back identity and solution for the societal issues they are facing. In fact, those who end up supporting terrorist organisations or insurgency movements wholeheartedly believe they have found

something important, and are contributing to a cause that enables them to feel a sense of duty. Particularly where an identity crisis is the foundation for recruitment for jihad, the takfirist religious fall-back identity enables them to identify with an ethnic struggle of sorts, allowing them to feel a sense of nationalist pride and honour. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made a special call for judges, doctors, engineers and other professions to emigrate and help build a new state, to be part of something larger than themselves. A message that was expertly followed up with a series of propaganda stunts that portrayed life under the Islamic State as a professional haven where people can go to help build the caliphate, and offer their skills and services. Perhaps the lack of identity in ISIS' targeted demographic may have something to do with the Australian unemployment rate of 12.65%, correlating with the average age of foreign fighters being 18-24 and a matching, suggesting a worrying relationship that has been recognised abroad and combatted through various counter-terrorism initiatives.

Secondly, ISIS has manifested in an arena that has until now been unconquered or dominated by any group – Social Media. Propaganda is a critical element of any insurgency, and having a maintained direct method of recruitment and communication with an at-risk population is detrimental to any counterinsurgency. COIN expert David Kilcullen said that if "the population is the prize, and protecting and controlling it is the key activity, the war, therefore, is where the people are", in which case our fight for preventing the radicalisation of youths needs to also be waged online where ISIS is trying to recruit foreign fighters. The appeal of ISIS's presence online is generated through their impressive tech savvy capability, producing magazines such as Dabiq, and producing on average 38 items per day through multimedia platforms such as documentaries, essays, audio and pamphlets, all available in a range of languages enabling a wider audience to target possible recruits. ISIS, acting as the latest incarnation of globalised insurgency, is taking advantage of the modern operational environment. The Internet has created another dimension, or "sanctuary" for insurgents and terror organisations to operate within to muster financial and popular support, often at the fringe of or out of reach of COIN or counterterrorist (CT) capabilities to neutralise and control. Until we manage to find a way to properly contain the ability for ISIS to manipulate the media that millions access, we have to acknowledge that this will be the primary source of recruitment through remote radicalisation.

 It should be noted that whilst this article argues that we should combat ISIS and similar organisations as insurgencies, it is not suggesting that we abandon CT practices in favour of COIN. Rather, we should use the two to contest an enemy that employs both techniques in the battlefield in Iraq and Syria and abroad. The reason for this is that CT practices alone against an enemy like ISIS are reactive and secondary, rather than the long-term planning approach of COIN. Given that wilayat and Internationale are inspired fighters of a population abroad, it makes sense that the COIN approach is an alternative to implement in order to prevent the recruitment and spreading of cells and the

formation of new ISIS footholds outside of Iraq and Syria. Through an intensive, hearts and mind approach towards community engagement, we can work on engaging with susceptible at-risk population at a ground level to combat the influence of ISIS allure in disenfranchised individuals. Already we have programs that are targeting de-radicalisation and the communities, but we need to expand their publicity and effectiveness in order to challenge ISIS rhetoric of a societal divide. Conversely, it is important we do not focus only upon the Muslim community as THE at-risk population. Such rhetoric only procures stereotypes and generalisations that feed the ISIS narrative. Instead, Britain's MI5 concluded in a report in 2008 that a well-established religious identity actually protects against radicalisation. We have to recognise that while ISIS twists religion as a fall-back identity for recruitment from a wider population base, they are also manipulating division to influence those who preach far-right extremist ideology, and it is they whom we must combat simultaneously and publicly. Quelling societal tensions at home is as important as balancing peace between Shi'a and Sunni communities in Iraq. We need to establish initiatives to challenge the UPF-allied propaganda, just as much as we need to challenge radicalisation of those who are disenfranchised with society. Favouring one over the other will not create a multifaceted solution that reduces tensions overall.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO TACKLE ISIS' ELEMENTS OF A GLOBAL INSURGENCY WITHIN AUSTRALIA?

Furthermore, it is time the mainstream media took a greater responsibility in their role over influencing at-risk populations. The ASIO 2014-2015 report to Parliament explicitly stated that the coverage of the conflict in Iraq and Syria by mainstream and social media provided a utilised stream of propaganda by organisations like UPF to preach anti-Islamic messages. Public education and portrayal of the conflict is the best approach to nullifying the recruitment potential of both ISIS and extreme right organisations, and can assist the communities to reconnect. Public education through the Media is the most available and televised opportunity to challenge negative rhetoric, and while we have seen excellent Australian examples like The Project's Waleed Aly, or the well-intentioned but poorly executed 'The Verdict', the Media just isn't taking on a large enough role considering their influence on society. The Media is an excellent forum to shift the interpretation of ISIS's attacks abroad as a losing enemy, as opposed to a strengthening body, as fear-mongering reporting is more likely to generate public demands for a ground-based operation if the attack is significant enough to the populace.

ISIS is simply the most recent incarnation of what is a never-ending fight against terrorism. Their shift of tactics towards a globalised insurgency has the ideological underpinnings of their predecessor AQ,

but their execution through functioning wilayat, Internationale, and competency of online resources is new. If we are to fully eradicate this threat, we have to address it in the theatre in which it operates. We need to challenge the narrative that ISIS is creating within our societies of exclusion, division and frustration on local, regional and global levels. Until we fully engage with those who are at risk, they are ripe for recruitment at the hands of ISIS's exploitation. At the current time, ISIS' greatest weapon against us is their ability to turn members of our society into lone wolf attackers or foreign fighters, encouraging copycat terrorism at home. Whilst we are not seeing the societal reaction that ISIS is hoping for, the seeds for discontent are being sown with the emergence of organisations like UPF. It's time we took a population-centric approach, online and in person amongst our communities to combat all levels of extremism.