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ARTICLE



## Building foundations for the comparative study of state and non-state terrorism

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we argue that a comparative study of state and non-state terrorism that uses the minimal foundationalist definition of terrorism as its central analytical framework offers a unique and instructive approach for answering the question: “what is terrorism?” To date, most recent comparative case study analyses of terrorism focus on ideologies, political/governance models, structural/contextual enablers, practices, organisational structures, and/or the basis of issues such as trust, belonging, and membership. We uniquely contribute to the growing literature on comparative terrorism studies by comparing and contrasting state and non-state terrorism on the basis of strategic communication vis-à-vis the preparation, execution, and outcomes of political violence (the “terrorism attack cycle”), the instrumentalisation of victims, and fear management. We argue that state and non-state terrorism are co-constituting and co-enabling phenomena, possibly best conceptualised as two bounded and coiled strands of the political violence DNA.

### KEYWORDS

State terrorism; non-state terrorism; comparative terrorism studies; strategic communication; definition of terrorism; terrorism attack cycle; drones; Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS); Boko Haram; al-Shabab

### Introduction

In this article, we argue that a comparative study of state and non-state terrorism that uses the minimal foundationalist definition of terrorism as its central analytical framework (Jackson 2011) offers a unique and instructive approach for answering the question: “what is terrorism?” The comparative study of terrorism has an innate capacity to problematise researcher and practitioner assumptions, put practices into perspective, as well as pinpoint the strengths and limits of the terrorism field more broadly, including its imbalanced fixation on jihadi violence at the expense of right-wing, nationalist, neo-liberal, and/or state violence. Scholarship on terrorism is never neutral because the purpose and praxis of its design(s) emerge from particular social worlds. Nonetheless, comparative terrorism studies increases dispassionate objectivity among researchers confident that their work potentially involves more holistic, comprehensive, and just angles. Comparative terrorism studies thus helps researchers historicise events, supports the scholarly examination of structures vis-à-vis violent actors/agenc(ies), and showcases

case study comparisons that foreground the importance of field-based research (Booth 2007; Toros and Gunning 2009).

Political scientists, sociologists, and historians are developing and contributing, in their collective output, to a robust set of comparative terrorism methodologies and frameworks. Researchers such as Stohl and Lopez (1984) were among the first, in the post-1979 Jerusalem conference context, where terrorism was demarcated as a supra-crime or worse than crime (Stampnitzky 2013), to critically interrogate government violence as state terrorism. Since the publication of the Stohl and Lopez volume, researchers have systematised the study of state terrorism, arguing that civil, military, and intelligence agency policy decisions can be acts of state terrorism (Blakeley 2007; Bilandzić 2013; Jackson, Murphy, and Scott 2009; Primoratz 2004). It is our view that the meaning of “terrorism” is evacuated and the pretense of objectivity in terrorism research is unveiled when the actions of states are excluded from analyses, glossed over as the exception (rather than the rule), or deemed inherently legitimate (Stohl and Lopez 1984).

Through sociological analysis, Donatella Della Porta (2013) and Steve Vertigan (2008) offer important starting points, consolidating measures, and conceptual operationalisations for the comparative investigation of terrorisms. Their sociological treatments of political violence complement Alex Schmid’s work (2004a, 2004b) in the field of criminology that has helped consolidate different definitions of terrorism. Della Porta (2013) and Vertigan (2008) probe how and why terrorism should be differentiated from other forms of political violence. They problematise broad-brush stroke categorisations of people as “terrorists” by questioning whether non-violent members of groups, people who might have once been active, but are currently dormant, or people who threaten violence, can be considered terrorists. Such questioning is also emerging from scholarship critically evaluating targeted killings in the current moment when the category “terrorist” has never been more fluid (Hines 2015). Comparative analyses help researchers identify measures to adjudicate what terrorism attacks are supposed to achieve before and after the event itself, the grounds for the possible legitimacy and justifiability of political violence, and the moral boundaries separating terrorising and non-terrorising action (Della Porta 2013; Vertigan 2008). Hanhimäki and Blumenau’s (2013) volume examines different periods of political violence through a comparative lens, and David Rapoport’s (2004) theory on the waves of modern terror also provides a provocative framework for understanding the history of terrorism, and helps situate comparative methodologies for this field. Recent comparative case study analyses include studies on the FARC and PKK (Eccarius-Kelly 2013), ethnic and nationalist violence (Murer 2012; Sánchez-Cuenca 2007), Mexican drug cartels and Middle Eastern terrorist organisations (Flanigan 2012), lone wolf terrorisms (Berntzen and Sandberg 2014; Feldman 2013), and jihadi and Islamist groups (Abuza 2009; Rich and Conduit 2015). To date, these studies make comparisons on the basis of ideologies, political/governance models, structural/contextual enablers, practices, organisational structures, or on the basis of issues such as trust, belonging, and membership.

Systematic comparative analysis of state and non-state terrorism helps shift terrorism studies from actor-based analysis to action-based analysis – from seeing terrorism as the action of one kind of actor (for example, a non-state entity) to seeing it as a method, strategy, or tool that can be deployed by any actor (Della Porta 2013; Jackson, Murphy,

and Scott 2009). Although Jackson's minimal foundationalist definition of terrorism is contested (Blakeley 2008; Horgan and Boyle 2008; Lutz 2011), we use it as our framework for the comparative study of non-state and state terrorism because it focuses on action rather than specific actors. In this article, we uniquely contribute to the growing comparative terrorism studies literature by comparing and contrasting state and non-state terrorism on the basis of strategic communication vis-à-vis the preparation, execution, and outcomes of political violence (the "terrorism attack cycle"), the instrumentalisation of victims, and fear management.

## Analytical and conceptual approach

In terms of state actions, our focus is on the US' drone targeted killings program. Due to length restrictions, we do not systematically problematise the term "state" or differentiate the strategic communication practices of different segments of the state; such differentiations must be left for a future publication. As far as the US military is concerned, a chain of command does exist and the President does maintain a measure of oversight over the actions of the armed forces. The "US state," however, is a site of competing interests (including agencies, departments, and powerful personalities) whose failure to implement checks and balances against each other has led to the expansion of targeted killings as a method for unending warfare against an amorphous enemy. So, while the Pentagon and the CIA (official non-combatants vis-à-vis laws of war) pursue their own drone assassination campaigns (Hines 2015), and manage Title 10 (the legal code governing military force) and Title 50 (the legal code governing intelligence and covert operations) in their use of remotely piloted vehicles (RPVs), the inertia of bureaucratic decision-making, the prioritisation of secret criteria for and evidence of supra-criminality warranting death without recourse to trial, and the multiple interests, including corporate lobbying by the arms and drone manufacturing industries, complicate what one means when one refers to the "state." Government officials are also supported by a wide plethora of legal advocates from the White House, State Department, Department of Defense, Department of Justice, and the Department of Homeland Security, among others (Koh 2010).

There is a greatly divided global debate about whether the United States officially abides by the laws of war, including the principles of distinction and proportionality (ACLU/CCR 2015; Johnsen 2015; Koh 2010). Our objective is not to take these principles and the US government's commitment to them at face value, but rather to assert that there is distinction between: (1) official intentions and intentions claimed *ex post facto* regarding the reasons for using drone strikes in a given situation (which often reify political expediency, as such); and (2) intentions and strategic communication that are evident, at a minimum, philosophically speaking, in political posturing and military decision-making on strike targeting, execution and exploitation.

Theories on intentionality make distinctions between postured intention and intentionality in reasoned explanations for action after the fact (Malle et al. 2001). In the case of drones, state officials including those in government, military, and intelligence claim to adhere to a policy of restraint in their deployment of RPVs. However, state actors' repeated violations of civilian human rights in non-official zones of conflict, and humanitarian legal rights in official zones of conflict (conducted under a shroud of secrecy and

with near complete impunity), reveal intention, and strategic communication becomes assessable in the reiteration of these violations. The US Government officially pursues a policy of targeting only “high-value targets” (HVTs), but in fact, only 2.3% of thousands of casualties have been found to be “high-value targets” (that is, leaders), the rest have been “mid-to-low level commanders and fighters or civilians” (Gettinger 2015).

These outcomes communicate. In purely economic terms, these are expensive decisions: each individual Hellfire missile, paid for by US taxpayers, costs 95,000 USD (Power 2015). The arms industry secures tens of thousands of dollars in profit when the US armed forces or the CIA choose to kill rather than capture a high-value target, even though the stated preference of the Government is to capture (the true rate of killing to capture is actually 30:1) (Hines 2015). The intention motivating a specific action can be inferred from the behaviour, and from external information, which includes cues in the immediate context, prior knowledge about an actor or set of actors, and the script or framing/framework within which actions are embedded. Inferences help to distinguish intentional or strategic from unintentional or incidental behaviour (Malle et al. 2001).

Our approach to terrorism studies is an inclusive one: we focus on “terrorisms” rather than “terrorists,” and we extend the concept of “radicalisation” to any actor. Debates over the various definitions of terrorism have revealed that violence, force, political goals, fear, terror, threats, psychological effects, victim/target differentiation, systematisation or preparation in action, methods of combat, the breaching of accepted rules with or without humanitarian constraints, coercion, extortion, induction of compliance all figure heavily in many definitions of terrorism, but that the term “terrorist” is highly contestable because it is often mobilised to stigmatise an adversary and ensure continued state disavowal of the terrorism of government strategic and tactical war planning (Jackson 2011). Although “radicalisation” is a politicised and contested concept, comparative terrorism studies juxtaposing state and non-state action helps clarify how police and military personnel can also be radicalised, or adopt extremely negative practices in purported attempts to resolve conflict or mitigate real and perceived criminality (Forcese and Roach 2015). State and non-state terrorism are co-constituting and co-enabling phenomena possibly best conceptualised as two bounded and coiled strands of the political violence DNA.

There are a number of studies to date that examine terrorism as a form of strategic communication (Bockstette 2008, 2009; Richards 2004), and literature that challenges the idea that terrorism actors pursue strategic communication through their violence (Davis 2013). A few studies to date examine the terrorism attack cycle (Feldman 2013; Stratfor 2009, 2012a, 2012b). To our knowledge, no study has married the minimal foundationalist definition of terrorism and the “terrorism attack cycle” as a framework to compare and contrast different forms of terrorism. We analyse the strategic communications of Islamist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Boko Haram, and al-Shabab in their use of civilian-targeted violence, and, state actors in their deployment of armed drones for extra-judicial assassination of militants, called “targeted killings,” and more indiscriminate “signature strikes,” both justified on pre-emption grounds. Part of our analysis involves attributing intentionality to actors deploying political violence based on the statements and policy guidebooks signed off by prominent leaders among state and non-state entities.

### ***Moving beyond orthodox operationalisations of “terrorism”***

Terrorism is widely regarded as the use of political violence by non-state actors seeking symbolic rather than physical power. Terrorism is also carefully distinguished from guerrilla warfare, insurgency, and paramilitary warfare because, it is argued, if actors were more powerful they would be using the latter methods instead of the former methods. The theory is that terrorism is a weapon used by weak non-state actors (or when non-state actors are weakened by strategic roadblocks) to target civilians and combatants as a method to leverage symbolic power over a more powerful government/state body. This theory is supported by “actor-focused” analyses in studies on war and terrorism that continue to discursively paint non-state political violence as “terrorism” and state political violence by other more euphemistically palatable concepts and arguments.

Actor-focused research is used by beneficiaries of the state, including political elites, government employees, and state supported research centres and academics to describe and frame, for example, the CIA and Pentagon’s extra-judicial drone assassination programs inside and *outside* conventional war zones as legitimate and legal campaigns of “targeted killings” and “signature strikes” by “unmanned aerial vehicles” (UAVs) or “RPVs”. Many military analysts see drones as a strategic asset, because they protect service personnel (since armed forces are not physically deployed on the ground or “take” enemy fire), and eliminate militants who threaten national security (with little collateral damage while offering greater precision than is possible with conventional warfare) (Beckhusen and Gault 2015; Brennan 2015; Garamone 2002; Johnston and Sarbahi 2016). Objective and scientifically verified critiques of the methods and effects of the assassination programs on the targets and operators are often ignored or left with little sustained airtime by mainstream media (Sullivan 2015). Analysts critically examining the US’ drone assassination program point out that there are many aspects of militarised drone use that render it a form of state terrorism.

### ***The minimal foundationalist conceptualisation of terrorism***

Given the variability in the respective resources wielded by states and non-state actors, and the notable discrepancies in the scales of their attacks, one of the few productive ways to compare state and non-state terrorism is along minimalist criteria foundational to action. The *central* purpose of this action is to manipulate through fear and terror. Widely indiscriminate and precedent setting use of political violence, often in apparently mundane places such as fields of okra and tea houses beyond zones of war and “hot” battlefields, results in widespread terror among civilian populations fearing congregation in large or small groups, or fearing rescue of victims of attacks due to state “double-tap” (or triple-tap) practices designed to target rescuers at sites of initial attacks (Hines 2015; Mayer 2015).

Jackson’s definition of terrorism specifically focuses on the shared characteristics of most definitions of terrorism: the *intentional* and *symbolically communicative* nature of political violence in which the targets are *instrumentalised* as a means to impose a *psychological state of fear or intimidation* on a target audience for a *political objective* (emphasis added). From this perspective, terrorism is a form of political action that, while

subverting an intrinsic engagement with the political realm, can be deployed by any actor. The nature of the actor itself, whether state or non-state, is not distinguished in this definition because state and non-state actors both intentionally deploy political violence as a strategy or tool to communicate and intimidate (Jackson 2011). Targeted killings are partly intended to terrorise. The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial summary, or arbitrary executions defines targeted killing as “the intentional, premeditated, or deliberate use of lethal force, by states or their agents acting under *color of law*, or by an organised armed group in armed conflict, against a specific individual who is not in the physical custody of the perpetrator” (Hines 2015: 2; emphasis added). By focusing on action over the identity of actors, this minimal foundationalist definition recognises the fact that attackers’ identities are not necessarily critical to capturing or forestalling their violence, and thus, that focusing on the planned action instead of the identity of the actor helps members of government, policy practitioners and law enforcement to better determine the capabilities of actors (Stratfor 2012a, 2012b), and obstruct those violent plans.

Although state and non-state actors actively instrumentalise victims, the victims’ status as combatants or non-combatants is not always determinable and the process of determining target legitimacy or illegitimacy on this basis in any given scenario is highly normative and value-laden. The apparent “random” nature of terrorism is also not part of this definition because terrorism is rarely random and instead often “strategically indiscriminate,” which is not randomness per se, but something more like intentionally wanton violence. Some terrorism may be publicity seeking, but not all terrorism is. All forms of terrorism are, however, seeking to communicate a set of goals, of which publicity might be one (Jackson 2011). Strategic community engagement, intelligence, and law can mitigate the perceived benefits of terrorism because security and/or militarised responses to terrorism often create the conditions for terrorism inspiration and facilitation, and copy-cat criminality.

## Exploring strategic communication in terrorism

At a moment when western governments claim to have the Islamic State of Iraq and Shams (ISIS) forces on the run, ISIS’ claimed downing of the Russian airliner over the Sinai desert in October 2015, the twin martyrdom operations in Beirut, an attack on a hotel in Mali, the attacks in Baghdad, and numerous others across Nigeria and Turkey, and the multiple coordinated attacks in Brussels, Belgium in March 2016 and Paris, France in November 2015, in addition to ISIS’ adaptive insurgency in Syria and Iraq, its expansion in Libya, its increasing ideological marrying with segments of al-Shabab and Boko Haram, and its dogged, although by no means assured hold on Mosul and Raqqa, suggest that the group, its franchises, and ad hoc sympathisers are communicating resilience, retaliation, and resolve through political violence. In fact, Islamic State-inspired sympathisers are strategically communicating different things to different audiences, including short-term, long-term, and end goals. Western adversaries of ISIS, in fact, communicate uncertainty about how to handle ISIS when they flip-flop about the tactical benefits of an aerial bombing campaign against ISIS personnel, first pursuing aerial bombardment, then scaling back, and now currently, at the time of writing, expanding the offensive again. When Russian or western allied forces expand aerial

bombardment operations with ill-regard for civilian life (Vanden Brook 2016), they are communicating, at once: (1) a failure to adopt the accepted wisdom of historical air wars against guerrillas; (2) their continued support for their arms industry counterparts whose mandate is to gain profit from war and military approaches to global problems; and (3) a disregard for the extent to which civilian loss of life, or indiscriminate bombing work in ISIS' favour.

Non-state terrorism actors communicate different messages in their target selection, locale of attack, and resources deployed. Sometimes ISIS or al-Qaeda-inspired attacks upon populations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), South-East Asia, and in East and West Africa, serve different communication purposes than attacks on populations in the western world (for example, sectarian versus retributive; or retributive versus instigating). Sometimes in one attack, terrorism actors are sending messages to both MENA/African governments and western governments. In the Mali hotel attack in November 2015, the attackers said nothing as they walked into a western hotel and fired off rounds indiscriminately, killing mostly foreign humanitarian, bureaucrat, and diplomatic personnel. Later, Al Mourabitoun, working with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, claimed responsibility for the attacks, arguing that they were retributive in response to government aggression in Northern Mali. Given al-Qaeda's discourse about the nexus between western interventionism in Muslim lands and neo-colonialism, the attack served as a retributive message for the local Mali government, and also an offensive message against French and allied resistance against Islamist expansion in Northern Mali (Karimi and Burnett 2015).

ISIS adherents are communicating their continued ability to innovate, act unpredictably, and destabilise taken-for-granted comforts of security and quality of life through the perpetration of notable civilian deaths in public places. With their actions, ISIS supporters are communicating their continued global intentions to repel the "far enemy" (pithily dubbed the "crusader alliance") both within and beyond the "caliphate" lands, their dogged resilience and continuation despite multiple coalitions' airstrikes, the freedom they still command and wield when planning and executing their attacks, and provocation for which they hope governments will respond with force (thus furthering evidence in support of ISIS narration that it needs protection from Muslims worldwide). Aerial bombardment gives ISIS the green light to ramp up its ideological campaign among sympathisers and to sell itself further among locals who often prefer its brutal rule over being pulverised by US and Russian missiles, or liberated by the armed forces of the Abadi regime and Shi'ite militias, and then subject to arbitrary and historically authoritarian Iraqi central control (al-Dagher and Kalthenthaler 2016). Violence against different sects of Muslims and non-Muslims are intended to purify the caliphates of undesirables, to communicate the resolve of the movement for territorial acquisition and conquest (as invaders with a divine mission to re-unite the Muslim world under one homogenised banner), and to instrumentalise victims for political, economic, social, sexual, and religious purposes. Every stage of an attack communicates something different to sympathisers and potential recruits, as well as target audiences around the world.

Since terrorism is a method, terrorism can also be deployed by state actors when the objective of communicating a message is more important than attempting to destroy the opponent through direct military confrontation (or when that opponent is resilient

in the face of conventional strikes), or when communicating a message to adversaries is only one among a host of methods of military confrontation. States also communicate different messages to different target audiences. Acts of torture in secret detention communicate messages to other detainees about compliance and fear, and to the torture practitioners themselves about how far the system will let them go until they are told to stop. States communicate through methods of warfare and their aftermath. Personality drone strikes that have unequivocally identified a targeted individual on a state “kill list” are intended to communicate to other militants the drawbacks of identification and publicity. Signature strikes instil fear in anyone who might associate with a militant that they too can be targeted or killed with impunity for their mere association. Both types of strikes are terrorising because militants often keep their affiliations secret, and thus the people who congregate with them are unaware of the danger their association poses (Al-Muslimi 2015; Jaber 2015). Kenneth R. Hines sums up the issues well: “Drones, because they strike with impunity, suddenly, and almost anywhere, appear to have a singular ability to terrorise not only legitimate targets but people in general within a region under surveillance” (Hines 2015, 18).

Additionally, the impacts of drone strikes are felt not just by the direct targets, but also by the survivors of attacks. The use of cluster munitions affect not only the armies or militant groups being targeted, but also intensify fear among populations who cannot play, walk, or farm without fear of hitting an unexploded ordnance. State-sponsored paramilitary and counter-insurgency abusers who act with impunity are able to murder and spread fear at the same time (Blakeley 2009). Even when state officials who deploy such practices do not publicly communicate a message that justifies their political violence, a meaningful silence is still communicated; an oversight, the turning of a blind eye to the violence of allies, and active cover-ups also point to a disingenuous policy or state motivation. Whereas non-state actors strike soft civilian targets because they lack the resources for a large-scale military attack of the kind states can deploy, state actors utilise comparatively minimal state resources (compared to resource deployment in conventional war) to attack, induce fear and compliance, and symbolically communicate in the process. Terrorism, for states, can be a politically advantageous alternative when [total conventional] war against an elusive or diffusely spread adversary is not feasible, or when the message of non-engagement and no-negotiation with the enemy is privileged and valorised. Sometimes, in the case of the US’ JSoc (Joint Special Operations Command) program, private military contractors, secret paramilitary teams, or death squads engage in capture and kill missions against perceived militant enemies, but in the process also communicate and market the “war on terrorism” as a brand worth investing in (Scahill 2013; Wolf 2013). Obama’s widespread and expanding adoption of Special Forces operations raises the profile of covert, non-transparent avenues as war on terrorism brand *du jour* (Turse 2015). Terrorism therefore, is a form of branding and communication through the imposition of fear, and deaths of people who are, in many cases, not the main targets of the message.

The primary objective of state and non-state terrorism is to psychologically intimidate an audience rather than to *necessarily* harm, fight, injure, or destroy the opponent (which can be a secondary objective or non-objective). Instead, the primary objective is to strategically communicate a message that pressures a military adversary to back down or change course. Most terrorism is perpetrated without regard to conventions of

war because terrorism by states or non-state actors involves the perpetration of extra-judicial and extra-legal murder (Bockstette 2008, 8). Indeed, like many terrorism-inspired organisations and individuals, most state secret armed or intelligence services, and paramilitary groups operate clandestinely and without accountability.

Debates in the social sciences literature persist about whether non-state terrorism is an effective method of producing or creating the conditions for the achievement of political goals (Abrahms 2012; Krause 2013). There are many proponents for the effectiveness of state militarism and targeted killings (Anderson 2015a, 2015b), but detractors include many scholars who carry out work that spans the disciplines of the social sciences (Davenport 2007; Holden 1996; Kalmoe 2013; Pape 2014). In a few cases, an act of non-state terrorism directly resulted in a change in a government's foreign and domestic policy that favoured the perpetrators of the violence or the group with whom the perpetrators were affiliated. Symbolically, approximately 911 days after the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, an al-Qaeda-inspired group bombed several commuter trains in Madrid within minutes of each other. The attack caused the deaths of 191 people and wounded many hundreds of people. Three days after the attacks, a close-race Spanish general election was won by a leftist socialist party campaigning on a promise to withdraw Spanish troops from the war in Iraq.

Carsten Bockstette cites an al-Qaeda planning document ("Media Committee for the Victory of the Iraqi People") uploaded 3 months before the attacks that discusses using multiple attacks against Spain to influence Spanish voters. The apparent objective was to isolate the US from one of its coalition allies and induce Spain to withdraw its troops from Iraq (Bockstette 2008). Analysts debate whether the attacks spurred millions of undecided voters to vote for a new government and thus by extension a military withdrawal policy. Max Abrahms argues, instead, that the

Madrid attacks suggest, in theory, [that] terrorism attacks on civilians may potentially lead to policy concessions if the target country has extremely firm preexisting beliefs that the enemy is motivated by limited policy objectives [rather than ideological objectives]. When that is the case, attacks – regardless of target selection – will communicate the escalating costs of defying the actors' limited policy goals, making coercion possible. (Rose, Murphy, and Abrahms 2007, 191)

The same cannot necessarily be said of states in their relationship with non-state actors. It is not guaranteed, for example in the context of the "War on Terror," that non-state militant groups will make concessions to state governments if their members think that government foreign policy interventions abroad are motivated by policy objectives that are limited in scope rather than based on an ideological framework. According to Audrey Cronin, negotiations and concessions by often reluctant non-state actors are precipitated by the group's comparatively longer life span (the longer a group is around, the more concern it will have that it will die, splinter, or mutate from other causes), by its (in)ability to use control of territory as a bargaining chip, by the resolve and scale of its constituency base, and by the extent to which members feel that political violence is (not) advancing the cause (Cronin 2009, 39–42).

Leveraging or managing asymmetry is one basis to compare and contrast state and non-state terrorism and helps explain the pragmatism of the terrorism attack cycle stages. If asymmetry and the power imbalance benefit the state, it euphemistically

frames its political violence as necessary in war; if the asymmetry does not benefit the state, it relies upon more insidious and hidden forms of terrorism to try to regain perceived lost ground. Non-state actors leverage their lack of power in their asymmetrical relationship with the state. Many lone-wolf actors specifically paint their acts of violence not as justified crimes, but rather acts of asymmetrical warfare (Feldman 2013, 272).

In many cases, state actors will leverage their expansive power against dissidents and adversaries; this is undeniable and is evidenced in the recent wars of attrition in Afghanistan and Iraq and shadow wars in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Syria. The powerful can beget acts of terrorism. But, the irony is that states routinely lack real power and real, sustained territorial control (evidenced, for example, in the overall failed projects that have been the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the assault against ISIS in Syria and Iraq that will scatter militants, while reinforcing the ideologies and structures that undergird them). Sometimes by the very ineffectiveness and counterproductive nature of these wars of attrition, and to mitigate these losses (or in anticipation of them), states turn to alternative practices of terrorism precisely on the premise that they have no other option (or use conventional and non-conventional practices in tandem, simultaneously). Thus, unlawful detention in Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and black sites across the world are used by states to leverage their real lack of power and control over an ever-mutating adversary whose ideological and political motivations are constantly reinforced and re-inscribed by state action. In this context, states rely upon and justify torture and other degrading treatment for political gain and expediency.

### Analysing strategic communication in the terrorism attack cycle

The strategic communication in state and non-state terrorism bears a number of similarities to public relations campaigns, insofar as terrorism makes strategic communication and public relations possible:

Both [terrorism and public relations] share the objectives of commanding attention, delivering a message, and influencing opinion [...], what ultimately separates the two is the social responsibility of the practitioner and the social utility of the end. Terrorism seeks legitimacy through self-definition, and not through the mandate of society. (Rada 1985; quoted in Rothenberger 2012)

Barry Richards (2004) argues that if terrorism is to be seen as public relations at all, it is power-based public relations rather than the value-based public relations upon which corporations lean. In fact, state and non-state actors leverage the fear produced by political violence not just for power ends, but also to proffer the ends of their own purported values, and to impress a public of their moral worth as marketing firms are wont to do. State and non-state terrorism public relations might strategically communicate the power and values of a public's disclosed and hidden desires for the same things, but that does not make political violence-as-communication, its messages, or outcomes ethical.

The Obama Administration has shrouded its RPVs program in secrecy, seeking not a public mandate, but the pretense of one. When John O. Brennan justified the US drone program in 2012 as necessary and framed it as pre-emptive lethal action to save lives

("anticipatory" self-defence was the wording of the Bush Administration), rather than vengeance seeking punishment for past wrongs, he was pursuing fraught public approval given that the Government continued to keep its program, target selection criteria, and civilian death counts in abeyance (Brennan 2015; Mayer 2015). The silence, elisions, abstractions, reifications, or the cover-ups are strategic communication and public relations navigation. Thus, the strategic communication of terrorism is not necessarily to gain a public mandate per se, as public relations campaigns seek to do, but rather to communicate what happens to those who fail to be compliant to the policies or goals of the state or non-state actor doing the threatening.

A strategic communication plan is an asset to actors because it compensates for their lack of military power or control (for example, in the context of non-state actors lacking a constituency or substantial resources, and in the context of state attacks on a diffuse or elusive enemy), especially when it is effectively managed or branded (Bockstette 2008). The violence acts as agitation propaganda and is thought to shift the asymmetrical communication battle in the favour of perpetrators (Bockstette 2008). Carsten Bockstette argues that strategic communicative management techniques involve the "systematic planning and realisation of information flow, communication, media development and image care" over a long period of time. "Communication management is process creation," he writes, bringing "three factors into balance: the message(s), media channel(s), and the audience(s)" (Bockstette 2008, (9)). Strategic communication management is made most possible by the Internet, what Feldman refers to as "broadband terrorism," widely regarded as a windfall for actors to exchange tactics, give lessons (what Raffaello Pantucci calls "autodidactic extremism"), identify targets, procure weapons and weapons conversion kits, exchange manuals, expand online communities of support, incite hatred, and proliferate ideological messaging, including motivations for violence and *ex post facto* justifications for violence (Feldman 2013, 275; Pantucci 2011, 25). State actors engage in systematic forms of terror, intimidation, and coercive leveraging over victims, and manage their communication through their foreign and domestic policy branding and by gate-keeping information transfers to media outlets. In many cases, the only thing that is broadcasted about a terrorising state mission is what the state itself imparts to the news media in scrums and interviews, while the state's strategic communication is assessable through inferences about context, history, relationships and framing.

Terrorism is centrally a practice of symbolically communicating a message *before*, *through* and *after* the violence. The symbolic messaging in "propaganda of the deed" involves marketing principles or a cause through violence, or, in the case of Anders Breivik or the Libyan ISIS affiliates' videos showing the beheadings and slaughter of Egyptian and Ethiopian migrants, for example, "deed for propaganda" wherein violent action itself is marketed as terrorism public relations (Feldman 2013). In the terrorism attack cycle, groups seek justification for attacks *ex post facto*, but many also draw up justifications for violence before attacks are made, or use the attacks themselves as methods for drawing attention, readership, and viewership of their brand image (Feldman 2013). The War on Terror is a form of state branding that seeks to build specific (meta)narrative and justificatory frameworks for political violence, consolidate government reputation and legitimacy, and initiate action plans. Strategic communication techniques are invoked and applied during several phases of the terrorism attack

cycle, widely regarded as six phases (sometimes presented in a slightly different order): target selection, operational planning, deployment, attack, escape, and exploitation (Feldman 2013).

### **Stage 1: target selection**

In the target selection stage of the attack cycle, actors planning an attack engage in pre-operation surveillance to get a sense of the scale of the operation needed, and the time commitment needed to see the mission through to its conclusion. Militants are typically looking in this stage at the target's pattern(s) of behaviour, such as routes taken, levels of security present, and identifying patterns of behaviour that might make the target weak (Stratfor 2009). State actors use sustained surveillance in similar ways. There was symbolic messaging in the US' intelligence community's careful monitoring and surveillance of ISIS militant, Mohammed Emwazi, aka Jihadi John, who was ultimately killed by a Reaper drone strike in Raqqa, and in the 3 weeks invested surveilling Anwar al-Awlaqi in Yemen before his assassination on 30 September 2011. Enormous resources were devoted to following and ultimately executing Emwazi and al-Awlaqi through extra-judicial means. In the case of the latter, defenders argue that 3 weeks was sufficient time to determine capture possibilities and to avoid civilian casualties (ACLU/CCR 2015).

When states devote large-scale resources to (pre-operation) surveillance of a target, they are ascribing symbolic importance the targeted killing of that individual or group over other military and non-military interventions that could be pursued. Emwazi publicly executed numerous western hostages and countless other prisoners in Syria. His staged executions of western journalists and aid workers were one of the main reasons the United States started its bombing campaign against ISIS in September 2014. Pre-operation surveillance is a such a prominent feature of the US' drone wars that operators are suffering from post-traumatic syndrome disorder (PTSD) because they surveil people and land for so long that they are affected in negative ways when, after the operation, they have to return and scan the target site and witness the damage wrought; in many cases, drone operators recognise civilians who are obliterated by their strikes against militant targets. Some operators have likened the act of killing a militant after long periods of surveillance to killing their neighbour (Hines 2015; Power 2015).

Pursuing a policy of target killings continuously without sufficient transparency and accountability, not just for weeks or months, but for years and decades, strategically communicates a willingness to instrumentalise the targets and victims, to treat the imposition of fear flagrantly, and to pursue expediency of political objectives at all costs. Target selection in CIA drone bombings, the specific methodology, taxonomy of targets, and computer algorithms used to determine target identification, acceptability of strike locale (for example, the question about whether a strike should be conducted near or in a mosque/school), and criteria for the threshold of acceptable civilian casualties, are not systematised. The definition of what constitutes "success," "imminent threat" posed by the target, "ability to capture," and the target's purported "active and direct participation in hostilities" are extremely fraught. Determinations on these questions are conducted in secret without Congressional oversight, except in cursory reviews after the fact. In many cases, targets are low-level militants, or are misidentified because of incomplete or faulty intelligence, or because

local informants mislead US operatives for their own political reasons (Mayer 2015). In research for this article, we encountered numerous instances where civilians targeted in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Yemen had, only days before their deaths, been vocal in their opposition to al-Qaeda or the Taliban; targeting and erasing them ensures that their opposition to this militancy is silenced and justifications for war can continue unabated (Jaber 2015).

In this article, we argue that state, military, and intelligence elites, and individual drone operators are communicating their acceptance and pursuit of wanton violence when they target militants in personality strikes (or against MAMs, military-aged males, in signature strikes who bear guilt by association or proximity) with disregard for civilian life (Kaag and Kreps 2015). The Pentagon has a sliding scale for its tolerance for civilian deaths, and the US' pre-9/11 reservations about targeted killings have been replaced in the intervening 15 years by targeting with much less stringent oversight that has been described as "indiscriminate"; like the US' program for torture, once infrastructure and regimens are in place, indiscrimination becomes standard operating procedure (Mayer 2015). Higher civilian deaths are accepted in the pursuit of a "high-value target" (HVT). The decision-making about who would constitute a HVT, when a domestic building should be targeted, and how many civilians meets the threshold of "collateral damage" is shrouded in secrecy. The Bureau for Investigative Journalism (2014) reports that:

at least 417 civilians – and possibly as many as 957 – have been killed in drone strikes in Pakistan [...] Over half of the minimum reported civilian casualties have been in attacks on domestic buildings. The civilian casualty rate (the number of civilians killed in each strike on average) is 0.93. [...] the deadliest strikes for civilians are in attacks on mosques and madrassas (religious schools). At least 12 civilians died in each attack on a mosque or madrassa hit by drones, on average. By contrast, attacks on vehicles were far less likely to kill civilians, with a civilian casualty rate of 0.3.

In April 2016, the Pentagon said that it was raising its threshold for civilian casualties in its effort to expand the fight against ISIS (Hall 2016). Military governance structures require armed forces personnel to follow a chain of command. Individual drone operators take their cues from superiors about the acceptability of referring to militant targets as "bugs" or "squirters," so as to dehumanise them (zero reprimand for such references or practices infers and confers approval), and in turn, transmit the acceptability, legitimacy, and justifiability of such references to peer operators (Mayer 2015).

State and non-state actors communicate in the target selection phase, for example, by determining their audience (the expected recipient of the symbolic communication of the physical attack), identifying the media that may cover the attacks(s) (for example, mass media outlets, Internet media), and leveraging any communication infrastructure they may have (for example, in-house Internet media stations, social media platforms). Terrorism actors, therefore, communicate a message in the targets they select to be attacked and in the message that is to be disseminated after the attack. When non-state actors attack state symbols, they are communicating a message that is different than when they attack civilians. To understand why actors select the targets that they do, one needs to analyse each case in context.

## ***Stage 2: operational planning***

The operational planning phase involves the plan for the actual attack and identifies the “who, how, where, and when” of the attack. This stage determines who among the compatriots or operators is going to execute the mission. The operational planning phase requires increased surveillance, weapons selection, weapons assembly, money transfers, and, in some cases, the practice of dry runs (Stratfor 2009). Actors planning an act of terrorism are communicating a great deal through these choices. For example, there is a different message being communicated in the choice of using a remote-detonated bomb versus a martyrdom operation, or a shooting spree versus a hostage taking, especially about resolve, planning, logistical sophistication, material resources (and therefore relative power), and the willingness of perpetrators to be in contact with victims or removed. The choice and the act of brandishing a knife and beheading a journalist, migrant worker or aid worker has a purpose and a message that must be distinguished from a martyrdom operation deliberately striking a military check-point. Martyrdom operations uniquely anticipate and require the individual perpetrator’s death and sacrifice, so this carries a different symbolic impact than a mass shooting.

There was a deliberate selection of various means of attack in the Paris assault in November 2015. Bringing guns into the Bataclan might have been intended to ensure that the band, “Eagles of Death Metal” would be directly targeted, whereas bringing bomb belts into the Stade de France might have been intended to create a different kind of carnage to the privileged world of football where only a select demographic have the money and time to attend big stadium events, and the whole atmosphere is picture-perfect. The use of gun violence in the streets, cafés, and restaurants in seemingly sporadic and constantly moving forms where a black car shows up, shoots off hundreds of rounds of ammunition and then moves on, was likely intended to disrupt the sense of security and calmness Parisians feel in their city. The intention is to make even the most common and mundane event such as having dinner out with friends a potentially life-threatening experience.

During this phase, communications in the form of phone calls and Internet traffic increase (Stratfor 2009). Actors expand their communicative activities by developing a brand, sometimes privately to be promoted after the attack, and sometimes publicly before the attack to: increase the prominence of the attack when it does happen; solidify an action plan regarding specific timing and implementation consistent with their personal, technical, and financial capabilities; denote objectives and tactics; establish ways of monitoring the perceived success of the mission(s); and propagate their power through the rigor and effectiveness of their operational research, often conducted via the Internet. The depth of the research (called “electronic scouting”) through this phase varies depending on the group and target selected (Stratfor 2009).

## ***Stages 3–5: deployment, attack, and escape***

The deployment stage is in figurative and literal terms, the “point of no return” for actors employing acts and methods of terrorism. When in motion, deployed actors cannot renege on their obligation to participate, and often go forward regardless of second thoughts, because the likelihood of detection, capture by authorities, or possible harm

from their group if they do turn back is very high at this point. Here, the perpetrators are communicating some of the conditions that leave no other option than to attack. Throughout the history of terrorism, a recurrent theme of grievance-based terrorism is that the activist must act because in a state of perceived deprivation and oppression, they have “nothing left to lose.” For states, they often have “nothing to lose” because they are free to act with impunity. In the deployment, attack, and escape stages, the attackers actively execute their communicative objectives through the violence itself to create a psychological effect in an audience, intending to intimidate and/or provoke a reaction. There is symbolic communication in the attack itself, including, among other things: control over levels of death and destruction; tactical surprise, control over time, place, and method of attack (which denotes power); and the recognition that fear influences states and societies to ready themselves for future attacks which leaves them vulnerable and on their toes (never settled) (Stratfor 2009).

When Mohammed Emwazi executed unarmed civilians in cold blood, he was communicating a number of messages, including an eye for an eye (the executions are in response to the state’s killing of local civilians), the ISIS’ ruthless, determined drive to sow fear in the minds of its enemies’ populations and elites, but also a power that ISIS is usurping from the states whose territory ISIS has conquered. In the expensive and militarily draining extra-judicial assassination of Mohammad Emwazi – in a context where ISIS has numerous executioner replacements – as Patrick Cockburn points out, the US was disrupting.

the appeal of ISIS in the eyes of its followers ... that it does not fail, that it wins divinely-inspired victories against the odds, such as capturing Mosul last year when a few thousand of its fighters defeated 20,000 Iraqi troops. Episodes like the killing of Emwazi show ISIS as vulnerable and that its security can be penetrated by intelligence agencies. (Cockburn 2015)

### Stage 6: exploitation

The rationally calculative purpose of the exploitation is to flaunt the success of the attack and stoke the fear that it invokes. US officials frame individual drone strike operations, when they are acknowledged, as the cleanest and most efficient way to disable the enemy’s capacities to congregate and plan attacks. US officials have been exploiting the 60 words of the hastily constructed post-9/11 “Authorisation for the Use of Military Force” (AUMF) law to widely justify arbitrary, expansive, and some have said, unconstitutional actions (the new normal for war) often *post hoc* (Johnsen 2015; Powell 2016; Turse 2015). The words “all necessary and appropriate force” are used *ex post facto* to justify rendition, torture, indefinite detention, and extrajudicial killings, when the threat to national security is interpreted in arbitrary terms as “imminent” (Johnsen 2015). The imminence argument is exploited, but critics ask: if US forces or the CIA can surveil an individual for weeks or months, exactly how imminent is the threat? Evidence, moreover, used to justify and exploit these state actions are often found, when brought to the courts or aired publicly, to be “exaggerated, wrong, or nonexistent” (Johnsen 2015, 281).

Videos of ISIS’ hostage executions and their worldwide dissemination are the product of a rational and deliberative calculus designed to create maximum political impact and

leverage over target audiences that exploiters of terrorism would not otherwise gain, given their relative lack of power vis-à-vis their state adversaries (Tinnes 2015). Non-state and state actors are looking to expand their support base and sympathy for their cause from the populations most inclined to agree with their goals (Stratfor 2009). In the exploitation phase, the organisers or planners of the event(s) track and evaluate the impact of the attack(s), analyse audience responses, and determine the extent of the positive outcomes vis-à-vis their long-term goals. The benefits of the documentation and media exploitation of terrorism has been, itself, well documented. Activists recognise the fact that spectacular, brazen, highly violent acts, or attacks on prominent people (especially westerners) tend to elicit the most widespread coverage in the western world. After all, the potential media reaction to the attacks has already been comprehensively considered during the target selection stage.

A report by Stratfor on the terrorism attack cycle notes that with built-in sensationalism, the media tacitly assists these criminals [with their goals] by providing timely, sometimes around-the-clock coverage of the attacks and that “[b]rutal and well-publicised attacks also make it easier for terrorists and insurgents to collect ‘revolutionary taxes’, protection money from farmers or businessmen in their areas of operation” (Stratfor 2009, 11). Regarding non-state terrorism, Judith Tinnes pithily describes the symbiotic relationship between the terrorism protagonists and traditional media: the latter are exploited (and allow themselves to be exploited) as a “powerful echo-chamber for enhancing the radius of [the former’s] message” and the perceived newsworthiness of the methods, execution, and delivery of the act(s) of terrorism (Tinnes 2015).

Political agitators who record their violence and disseminate it, like ISIS, are enhancing terror and exploiting the violence through the documentation process itself. The sheer sophistication of the terror videos produced by ISIS causes people to question their realities (for example, is this a scene in a Hollywood studio, or the Syrian desert?), and to question the relative power of the group doing the attacks. ISIS supporters use social media platforms to exploit events, but also to negotiate what impact they have upon targeted audiences. Batsheva Moriarty (2015), for example, found that tweet and retweet frequencies increased when regional events happened that affected potential supporters from Arabic-speaking audiences. There was a noticeable spike in tweets and retweets after the formation of the US-coalition against the group and the beginning of its aerial bombardment in September 2014, and after the release of the video showing the IS burning a Jordanian pilot alive in February 2015. There was comparatively no significant fluctuation in specifically Arabic tweets after the release of the James Foley and Steven Sotloff beheading videos that were sensationally covered by western media. Moriarty argues that the ISIS’ tweeting patterns and therefore its social media strategy in Arabic messages are organically reacting “to events around them,” managing, exploiting, and mitigating the impact of their actions on Arabs, and are most likely disseminated from accounts based in the Middle East (Moriarty 2015). It makes sense that Arabic-language social media messages would appeal to and respond to events in the Arabic-speaking world.

Although Moriarty does not analyse English tweets from ISIS, it is clear from her analysis that the language and content of the messages are tied to events in particular regions of concern. Exploitation of acts of terrorism is, therefore, not *ad hoc*, but deliberately calculated to ensure the greatest impact upon the audience deemed the

most important target for the message. The beheading of westerners is designed to push a response in westerners; the burning of the pilot was designed to push a response in the Arab world that showed the consequences for Arab armies that challenge the Islamic State and shift from an isolationist or non-interventionist position to combat enemy. Terrorism is, at its heart, a method of authoritarianism.

States exploit the outcomes of targeted killings by de-linking politically expedient policy objectives, including their assertions that targeted killings are far less destructive to human life than conventional wars, and the actual outcomes of attacks. States, therefore, foreground their political intentions and objectives, including the proposition that capture is the preferred policy, and obfuscate the instances of actual killing and the deaths of civilian bystanders or rescuers (Brennan 2015).

### **The perceived benefits of the instrumentalisation of victims**

When perpetrators of political violence instrumentalise their victims, they are reducing their human targets to an object or tool. Victims are instrumentalised in the pre-operation surveillance, planning, and execution of an operation because they are depersonalised and dehumanised as mere means to achieve a political end goal. The attack involves interaction where the victims are used to achieve political goals that vastly degrade their security and if they survive, their quality of life. The only reason that the violent interaction between the perpetrator and the victim is occurring at all (it is largely indeterminable if these two actors would ever interact otherwise) is to advance the former's political vision of the world. Dehumanising and instrumentalising human beings for political ends renders the victims unable to consent to any of the chosen processes via an explicit request (which is never given) to the operation, its goals, or its effects. In a hypothetically impossible situation where a violent perpetrator made an explicit request to involve the victims and consent of the victim(s) was given, this would transform a terrorism event from a tool-making process to a cooperative exchange. If an act of political violence involved a cooperative exchange between perpetrator and victim(s), it would cease to be an act of terrorism.

The instrumentalisation of victims also prevents the victims from sharing the real and perceived benefits of the violence with the perpetrators of the violence (Kaufmann 2011). As states pursue militarised strategies in the War on Terror, led prominently by the un-noble pursuit of militant assassination from the air via armed drones, civilian victims that are killed in the vast majority of these operations are instrumentalised and dehumanised as collateral damage never get to share in the political outcomes of the strike. It is a sad irony however, that given their terrorising purpose, function, and presence, drone strikes produce mostly negative outcomes. In addition to murdering civilians trying to go about their daily lives, drone assassinations sow more militancy than is being "stemmed" by the erasure of militant individuals. What is particularly terroristic about flying armed drones for hours and hours on end over large territorial spaces and using drones to fire missiles against targets is that: (1) advocates of targeted killings treat strikes in non-battlefields as instruments for political end goals while simultaneously robbing combatant and non-combatant victims of any recourse to due process and equality of legal protection before the law; and (2) drone missile deployment is designed to send a message to the wider constituency supporting or not

supporting an insurgency or guerrilla group that they too can be targeted with impunity (Blakeley 2010; Scahill, Devereaux, and Currier 2015).

“Terrorism” is often determinable from its terrorising effects upon people, and “terrifying” the enemy is, according to Kenneth Anderson, an objective of the drone program’s unpredictable sudden attacks; state actors, from this view, use terror to disrupt the planning and organisational cohesion of militant groups (Anderson 2015a). Non-state actors have similar motivations for terrorism attacks on combatants. State-led drone bombing campaigns supported by an assassination complex and complete impunity terrorise populations to stand-down and give complicit surrender and compliance to foreign state designs (Scahill, Devereaux, and Currier 2015). First-hand accounts of drone operators also make clear that operators are themselves instrumentalised in ways that frequently have terrorising effects upon them (for example, long work days, cognitive dissonance from causing death from an unreal distance or killing people with whom the operators have developed an ironic and humanised acquaintance from sustained surveillance, being forced to act without full knowledge of the anticipated outcomes, and following a chain of command that expects full trust but does not offer it in return) (Anderson 2015b; Pilkington 2015). The terrorising effects are evident in the post-traumatic stress disorders that many operators experience from “fear conditioning” and “mortal terror/moral injury” for the violence they have inflicted upon others (Power 2015).

State and non-state actors often claim that weightier moral reasons circumvent the prohibition against using people to advance a political goal. With all forms of terror, there is often a claim made that the political opponent or enemy has given the actors no other choice but to respond with terroristic violence. Another frequently cited reason justifying the circumvention of moral principles in this regard is expediency in ISIS’ argument, “there is no time to be merciful” (CNN 2014) or by US rationalisations that targeted killings are efficient and are the best response to fast-pace events or contexts that require expedient action (Hines 2015). In the case of non-state terrorism, the argument is that the policies of the government rob symbols of government (state agents or officials) of their dignity and thus there is no longer a constraint against using them as mere means for an end or against insulting, neglecting, or humiliating them. A similar logic applies to US state actors who argue that their enemies’ actions, including any abstract threats to the state, deprive them of the dignity of humane treatment (Kaufmann 2011; Kerstein 2009), or fair treatment under the law, or that targeted killings are a second-best option when capture is not possible (or when local states refuse to support US efforts) (US 2013).

By humiliating, degrading, and dehumanising their targets, and by conducting targeting and killing people outside the bounds of state, international, and Islamic law, state and non-state actors and terrorism sympathisers are communicating that there are lives that do not deserve to live and that some people, particularly the people directly or broadly associated with the enemy, are expendable. In instrumentalising people, non-state actors often see themselves as destroying and discrediting the destroyer. In this case, the objective is to put state protection of its populations and citizens into irredeemable question. Such actors may also be communicating in-group solidarity at the expense of out-groups, what Kenneth Burke calls “congregation through separation” (Ori 2013). This can be seen in militant Sunni attacks on

Shi'ite Muslim populations (or *vice versa*). Attacks on victims of one demographic therefore can communicate the development of a shared consciousness against them. Thus, in instrumentalising victims, protagonists of terrorism make people a tool for recruitment and solidarity.

### The perceived benefits of the imposition of fear for political goals

Fear is built from the attacks, but also through a rhetoric that tells a compelling story about struggle and vilification. Effective rhetorical discourse by movements must constitute a field of knowledge and a perceived ethics. Actors must argue the truth of a problem, an injustice, or danger in a convincing way, including knowledge about the subject and object of the struggle, vilification of opponents as malevolent powers, heroisation of activists as moral agents and power subjects. The knowledge-ethic model is tactical; it arouses moral outrage at opponents' action and practices. The good are outraged into action. Thus, perpetrators of terrorism attempt to manipulate and coerce people, to make an enemy afraid and cause that enemy to shift course. State and non-state protagonists of terrorism insufficiently attend to the fact that few groups in history have ever succeeded in attaining their long-term strategic goals through terrorism. Extra-judicial murder outside due process in territory inside and outside conventional war zones, along with other forms of state terrorism such as rendition, indefinite detention, and torture (including hooding, stress positions, deprivation, sensory assault, rape, and other forms of bodily harm) are also ineffective in achieving larger government goals of national security in the long-term (Blakeley 2009).

Attacks by ISIS against Shi'ites are designed to drive a wedge between the different sects of Islam and send Iran and its proxy actors such as Hezbollah a message about how little their *kaffir* (disbeliever) followers are valued. Attacks by Boko Haram against Christians are also designed to drive a wedge between Christians and Muslims and provoke sectarian conflict in Nigeria. Boko Haram's attacks on state symbols such as police personnel and soldiers aim to directly challenge and contest the authority of the Nigerian state. Boko Haram seeks several end-goals, including: the withdrawal of the North from the current Nigerian state (in this way, they represent a kind of religio-ethno-separatist group); the diminution of western influence in Nigeria and the application of Shari'a law; to promote the forbidden nature of western culture, Christianity, and democracy; to create a "better" Nigeria than the one currently in place which they regard as corrupt and mismanaged; and to send a message to secular authorities whom Boko Haram regard as corrupt, illegitimate, and Christian-dominated. The strategic communication of Boko Haram cannot be divorced from the context of Nigeria's history, if it is to be properly countered and mitigated (Ori 2013). For Boko Haram, its violence is an attempt to regain control and fight the perceived oppression in the systemic poverty faced by Northern Nigerians, diminished social services and infrastructure, huge gaps in educational service delivery, rising unemployment, and the weak production base of the Northern states. The violence is seen as retributive and a corrective to the established order leading to the true communion, justice and salvation.

### Conclusion

One of the main ways to challenge and mitigate all forms of terrorism is to see them as a series of communication gestures and acts. Protagonists of the method of

terrorism attempt to gain information and military leverage over their adversaries through surprise attacks, innovative practices of violence and brutality, and the dogged manipulation of information, public discourse, and framing of violent events. One characteristic of the fourth generation of warfare is that non-state actors engage in battles of attrition designed to strategically communicate messages that challenge their enemies' worldview (Hammes 2007). This particular characteristic can be extended to state actors.

Bockstette argues that societies can mitigate radicalisation by addressing the asymmetry that acts of terrorism garner in sensationally capturing the world's attention. His focus is on non-state actors in clarifying the scope of the three primary terrorism communication goals – “the propagation and enlargement of their movement, the legitimisation of their movement and the coercion and intimidation of their enemies” – arguing that these three goals can be effectively undermined (Bockstette 2008, 20). Any interlocutor who offers an alternative and sober reading of events must be credible. A successful communication plan that challenges the platforms of terrorism propagation must have effective, consistent, and ethical law enforcement measures, “conciliatory political, diplomatic ... socioeconomic [and community-based] measures which are ‘synchronised’ at all levels of government (political, diplomatic, law enforcement, military, and intelligence)” (Bockstette 2008, 6).

These are worthwhile steps to take to mitigate the push and pull factors that bring individual people into a radicalised worldview in which they are willing to adopt political violence to achieve an improved quality of life for their self-identified kin. But what can be said about stemming similar dynamics in the expansion of state terrorism in the world? How do a lack of ethics in war practices adopted by the state undermine the integrity and moral “high-ground” of the communication governments are supposed to be transmitting to stem radicalisation? How do these practices go beyond one-way communication? They, in fact, project a message, but are not truly interested in hearing a reply. It is not interlocution. It has been widely documented, for example, that states across the world are adopting the method of armed drones in fields of battles in an effort, apparently, to save combat lives and keep “war at a distance.” Recently, Iraq deployed its first unmanned and armed drones made by China in its fight against local militant groups, but the negative short and long-term consequences of drone warfare are rarely acknowledged by state powers; they are communicating through violence, but not listening. This transformation for Iraq in tactic and capacity communicates a transformation in power for the regime, broadcasted to western powers and to militant groups within its territory. But, if history is any indication, it is unlikely to provide the state with the security it seeks, and once institutionalised as the “go-to” mechanism of warfare, the drone will shift inevitably from being a mechanism of warfare to a mechanism of terror.

Mechanisms of state terror described in this article do not represent the forms of “effective, consistent, and ethical law enforcement” or policy (given that they operate extra-judicially), and are neither conciliatory, diplomatic, nor supportive of communities. And, governments are often internally at odds with each other about how to marry the political processes, military practice, and intelligence gathered in the practice of drone deployment. At some point, governments must recognise the DNA tango that tit-for-tat state and non-state terrorisms represent, and that the non-state politically violent actor has little motivation to change the practices deployed because the tactics and strategies of the state actor remain the role model, reference point, and standard to follow.

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