

Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis

Volume 5, Issue 11
November 2013

The “Marketplace of Ideas” and Countering
Violent Extremism

MUHAMMAD HANIFF HASSAN

Muslim Converts and Terrorism

SCOTT FLOWER

Combating Terrorism on the Free Highway

RAPHAEL COHEN-ALMAGOR

Peace Negotiations in Colombia and the
DDR Challenge

STEVEN JONES-CHALJUB

Colombia: An *In Aeternum* Conflict?

FRANCK EMMANUEL MARRE

Caucasian and Central Asian Fighters in Syria:
A Security Concern for the SCO

NODIRBEK SOLIYEV



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM RESEARCH
S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

November 2013: Year-End Open Issue

This issue of CTTA deals with three broad areas. The first is radicalization and the motivations for terrorism. [Hassan](#) explores the notion of creating a “marketplace of ideas” to combat violent extremism, arguing that it could encourage disengagement from violence and the consideration of alternative ideas. He argues that it is essential to move away from an over-reliance on censorship and legal measures because they neglect the need to disprove ideas that support violent extremism to reduce the public’s susceptibility to them.

[Flower](#) examines the relationship between Muslim converts and Islamist terrorism, pointing out that although converts play a statistically disproportionate role, we know very little about them. In light of the spate of attacks involving Muslim converts in 2013, his analysis offers insight into a topic that academic research has yet to delve deeper into. Exploring the motivations for conversion that create conditions susceptible to radicalization, Flower argues that it is necessary to conduct further research to determine what factors might turn ordinarily peaceful Muslim converts into extremists who use violence in the name of their religion.

[Cohen-Almagor](#) looks at the World Wide Web, focusing on how terrorists use the Internet to find essential information as well as communicate and coordinate among each other. He concludes that Internet Service Providers must be actively involved in countermeasures and that concerted international cooperation is needed to effectively combat the misuse of the Internet by terrorist and the extremist groups.

The second broad area of this issue is the conflict in Colombia. Two perspectives are presented, the first one by [Jones-Chaljub](#), who looks at how Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs will come into play as the

country once again negotiates with one of the oldest insurgent groups in Latin America, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC. In the second perspective, [Marre](#) examines the history of the conflict for clues about the present situation, and cautions that a peaceful resolution is unlikely to come anytime soon.

The final area addressed in this issue examines an aspect of the ongoing Syrian conflict that has received little attention thus far. Foreign fighters have played a prominent role in the conflict, and [Soliyev](#) looks at the specific role played by militants of Caucasian and Central Asian origin. He argues that a multilateral approach is needed and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is well-placed to provide it.

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor

Dr. Arabinda Acharya

Associate Editor

Manoj Harjani

For inclusion in the CTTA mailing list, please email your full name and the name of your organization with the subject “CTTA Subscription” to the following address: ctta@ntu.edu.sg

The CTTA Editorial Team welcomes feedback and comments from its readers - please share your thoughts with us via email to ctta@ntu.edu.sg

The views presented in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect or represent the views of the editors or the organizations to which the editors and authors are affiliated.

The “Marketplace of Ideas” and Countering Violent Extremism

Muhammad Haniff Hassan

An approach moving away from censorship and legal measures and towards a “marketplace of ideas” has significant potential in countering ideas that support violent extremism.

Scholars who study violent extremism remain in disagreement over the actual process leading a person to it. However, many recognize the importance of ideas in contributing towards violent extremism. They thus acknowledge that ideas are also an important part of the solution, and it is on this basis that there has been increased emphasis at the policy-making level on countering ideas that lead to and support violent extremism. However, the relationship between ideas and violent extremism may not be causal and there are other non-ideational variables involved which need to be considered.

Countering ideas that support violent extremism has become an important part of the multifaceted approach to counterterrorism in countries such as the UK, USA and Indonesia, among others. As countries engaged in countering violent extremism have experimented with a range of strategies, some lessons have emerged over time. Most important is the realization that an over-reliance on censorship and legal measures, while convenient, neglects the need to disprove ideas that support violent extremism to reduce the public’s susceptibility to them. Ideas reside in the mind and, once embraced, cannot simply be eliminated by hard countermeasures. Ideas are also resilient and can persist under extreme and hostile conditions, going underground and resurging once those conditions change.

In this context, the promotion of debate challenging ideas related to the worldview of violent extremists has the potential to generate significant benefits in countering violent extremism. Such a debate would operate at two levels – first, between the proponents of ideas supporting violent extremism themselves, and

second, between proponents and those who do not share their views. The potentially constructive results of the debate operating at multiple levels include the creation of a “marketplace of ideas” within violent extremist circles that could encourage disengagement from violence and consideration of alternative ideas. Engaging in debate to challenge the ideas of violent extremists can also create a culture of critical thinking to catalyze the re-evaluation of old ideas and reduce the glamour of violence. At the tactical level, stirring up such a debate could force violent extremist groups to devote resources to counter the debate and cause division among their members.

“AN OVER-RELIANCE ON CENSORSHIP AND LEGAL MEASURES, WHILE CONVENIENT, NEGLECTS THE NEED TO DISPROVE IDEAS THAT SUPPORT VIOLENT EXTREMISM TO REDUCE THE PUBLIC’S SUSCEPTIBILITY TO THEM”

The notion that there are potential benefits from promoting debate to challenge the ideas supporting violent extremism is validated by Omar Ashour’s study of de-radicalization among Muslim militant groups in *The De-radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* (2009). His study involved the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, al-Jihad, al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya and the Algerian Armed Islamic Group, Islamic Salvation Army and Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat. Ashour posited that social interaction is one of four important variables in disengaging Muslim militant groups from violence and moving them

towards participating in previously denounced civil activities. The other three variables are state repression, selective inducement and charismatic militant leadership.

Ashour describes two dimensions of interaction. One is external and occurs between violent militants and “any social actor or entity who/which does not belong to the same ideological camp.” The other is internal and takes place “between the leadership, the mid-ranking commanders and the grassroots” of a particular group. Ashour asserts that social interactions which facilitate exchanges of ideas with non-militants in combination with the other variables (state repression, selective inducement and charismatic militant leadership) will affect the transformation of violent militants’ ideology, albeit to different degrees.

Furthermore, such interaction would affect both the followers and leaders within the group. For the former, the effect is limited because it may not necessarily bring about the de-radicalization of the group. However, it may still contribute towards reducing the number of the group’s members and creating factions among them. For the latter, Ashour states that “de-radicalization efforts are much likely to become successful when they originate from within the organization. Thus, internal interaction between a leadership supportive of de-radicalization and its followers is crucial, especially for containing opposition to the process. For example in the [Egyptian al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya]... many of the followers did not support the process except after meeting with their ‘historical leadership’ and intensely debating the ‘theological legitimacy’ as well as the costs and benefits of de-radicalization.”

The subsequent interactions between the leadership of a de-radicalized al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya with other groups’ leaders, according to Ashour, resulted in the de-radicalization of al-Jihad and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

It is possible to argue that in the cases investigated by Ashour, the debate took place within a controlled environment while the militants were imprisoned. Thus, it does not really support the allowance for an open debate in public space which may be potentially used by the militants to propagate their ideas to the public and complicate the security problem they already pose.

This, however, can be answered. First, the study does highlight that the debate at two different levels did occur and had a positive effect towards changing the militants’ ideas. Second, although the change occurred under a controlled environment of imprisonment, it is incorrect to conclude that the change cannot occur outside such an environment or that the debate would have no positive effect in a more open environment. The conversion of thousands from one religion to another which occurs regularly all over the world through open propagation and debate of contending religious beliefs supports the value of open debate and contestation for the case at hand.

Another similar finding was made by Heather S. Gregg in her 2010 article “Fighting the Jihad of Pen: Countering Revolutionary Islam’s Ideology.” Gregg reported that in the al-Sakinah program in Saudi Arabia, the very act of drawing extremists into dialogue and debating their ideas with religious scholars and former jihadists created an opportunity for alternative viewpoints to emerge and promoted a “middle way” between extremism and secularism. The al-Sakinah program was supported by the government to engage violent militants online at the ideological level with the objective of persuading them to abandon their violent ideas and behavior.

Although the above cases relate to debate with those who have already subscribed to ideas supporting violence and terrorism, it must be noted that they are not the only target of such initiatives. By witnessing debate over ideas

supporting violent extremism on various open platforms, the public too would benefit. There is also the possibility that a norm may develop where the refutation of ideas can be approached in a more engaging manner that would enhance the public’s understanding with multiple perspectives. The public’s views, while not presented in a scholarly manner, could be important for sending strong signals against violence and terrorism. In fact, one of the reasons that caused al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya to review their ideological disposition towards violence was the realization that the public was not with them and strongly opposed their ideas and actions.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that a liberal attitude to dissent, disagreement and contestation is of greater value in countering ideas that support violence and extremism than a policy of censorship and legal measures. As one 2010 study on radicalization titled *The Edge of Violence: A Radical Approach to Extremism* argued, such an approach “can de-mystify and de-glamourize terrorism without alienating large numbers of people. However – a liberal approach depends on independent voices setting out forceful counter-arguments against extremist ideas... silencing radical views must be considered as a last option because banning radical voices will neither prove effective nor lessen their appeal in the long term. Instead, government and non-government agencies – including Muslims – must set out counter arguments as to why particular radical or extremist ideas are wrong.”

While the suppression of ideas supporting violent extremism helps to limit their dissemination, it cannot be relied upon to diminish the persuasion and appeal of those ideas or eliminate them from the mind of militants. Such ideas must be discredited and this can only be achieved by promoting open debate and contestation to expose their flaws. A nuanced approach would avoid silencing proponents of such ideas and instead develop credible means to challenge

them in the open where their own followers and the public at large can also be exposed to the debate. If the common assertion that extremists are on the fringes and do not enjoy wide support of the community is indeed true, then those seeking to combat them should be willing to face them in an open debate. In such a context, relying on censorship and legal measures only shows lack of confidence and belief.

“A LIBERAL ATTITUDE TO DISSENT, DISAGREEMENT AND CONTESTATION IS OF GREATER VALUE IN COUNTERING IDEAS THAT SUPPORT VIOLENCE AND EXTREMISM THAN A POLICY OF CENSORSHIP AND LEGAL MEASURES.”

From a theological viewpoint, the approach involving open debate and contestation with less reliance on censorship is in line with the Quranic verse which states: “Let there be no compulsion in religion” (2:256). Although the verse is popularly understood to refer to compulsion in the context of conversion to Islam, it is equally valid in the context of persuading violent extremists who have gone astray. This is because the verse establishes one important principle which is relevant in both contexts, namely that Islam cannot be practiced or embraced except through free will. Thus it is imperative from rational policy and theological viewpoints that a marketplace of ideas with some form of supervision for the purpose of preserving public order be created where a broad spectrum of opinions can contribute to debate where the worldview of violent extremists could be contested and challenged.

Muhammad Haniff Hassan is a Research Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, and Head, Moderation Studies Program at ICPVTR.

Muslim Converts and Terrorism

Scott Flower

Many terrorist attacks in the last six months have one thing in common – the involvement of Muslim converts. Converts play a disproportionate role in Islamist terrorism internationally, yet we know very little about them.

The vast majority of terrorist attacks in the last six months have one thing in common – the involvement of Muslim converts. Recently, the spotlight was on Samantha Lewthwaite (the so-called “White Widow”) for her links to the Westgate shopping mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya during 21-24 September 2013. Months earlier, Michael Adebolajo, a Muslim convert who allegedly beheaded a British soldier in Woolwich (a district in London, UK) on 22 May 2013, captured the world’s headlines. The Nairobi and Woolwich attacks are shocking and tragic, yet they raise a much bigger issue regarding the involvement of converts in religiously motivated violence. Converts play a disproportionate role in Islamist terrorism internationally, yet we know very little about them.

Conversion and Extremism

Far from being a marginal phenomenon, the number of converts involved in fundamentalist and radical Islamist networks has been growing since the early 1990s. There are short and long-term considerations regarding this phenomenon. The recent spate of attacks involving converts provides a greater incentive to objectively consider why converts, especially those in Western countries, have increasingly become involved in terrorism in the last decade.

Globally, anecdotal evidence suggests that Islamic conversion rates have increased in a number of countries since 2001, despite there

being no exact or official statistics on conversion to Islam in most countries. However, early research in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia and Canada suggests that the rate of conversion growth is high by pre-9/11 historical standards. Nevertheless, when compared to the wider Muslim minorities living in Western countries, converts remain a small minority within the religious minority.

Over-Representation in Extremism and Violence

There is a clear trend for converts internationally to be statistically over-represented relative to those who are “born Muslim.” This pattern has been visible in a number of countries:

United Kingdom

Best estimates suggest that there are currently between 60,000 and 100,000 Muslim converts in the UK. On this count, converts represent between 2-3% of Britain’s 2.8 million Muslims. Available data suggests that prior to 9/11, there were few, if any, Islamist terrorist attacks involving Muslim converts. However, converts have been involved in 27% of jihadist-related incidents in the United Kingdom from 2001 to 2013. A total of 14 British converts have been convicted for involvement in terrorist plots. Two converts were involved in the 2006 plot to smuggle liquid explosives onto up to 10 aircraft departing the United Kingdom bound for the United States – the largest attempted plot in the United Kingdom to date.

United States

According to data collected by the author, the total number of Islamist terror plots in the country by US and foreign Muslim perpetrators since 9/11 is 61. A total of 75 Muslim converts and 90 born Muslims have been involved in these 61 cases.

Australia

Three of the six home-grown terrorism plots disrupted in Australia since 9/11 have involved converts. Other Australian converts such as David Hicks, Joseph Thomas, and Shiloh Jayne Giddens have been arrested, charged or detained for involvement with Islamist terrorism or extremism overseas.

Canada

To date, two terror plots involving converts have been disrupted in Canada (2006 and 2013). In 2006, convert Steven Vikash Chand was part of a plot referred to as the "Toronto 18." On 1 July 2013, John Stewart Nuttall and Amanda Marie Korody were arrested for allegedly plotting to explode pressure-cooker bombs at the British Columbia Legislature in Victoria. Canadian converts are also active overseas. For example, Xristos Katsiroubas was involved in the attack on the Tiguentourine gas plant in Algeria on 16 January 2013. According to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), approximately 60 Canadians are being monitored for alleged terrorist activities abroad and CSIS has identified convert Aaron Yoon in Morocco and a convert fighting in Syria as part of this cohort.

France

Almost half of the terror plots foiled in France have involved converts with 8 converts convicted of terrorism. The most recent attack in France on 29 May 2013 was a copycat attack of the Woolwich beheading and allegedly involved the stabbing of a uniformed French soldier by a 22-year-old convert named Alexandre.

Germany

More than 10 converts in Germany have been engaged in various terrorist-related activities ranging from incitement, overseas training with Al Qaeda and the planning of attacks in Germany and the United Kingdom.

Philippines

In February 2004, a group of Christian converts to Islam known as the Rajah Sulaiman Movement conducted the Philippines' most destructive terror attack by bombing a Manila ferry which killed 116 people. The group had links to two Al Qaeda-related organizations – the Southeast Asian militant network Jemaah Islamiyah and the Abu Sayyaf Group.

Strategic and Security Concerns

Increasing rates of conversions to Islam lead us to the following short and long-term considerations:

Short-Term

The conversion of non-Muslims to Islam is an explicit strategy employed by Islamist extremists currently engaged in Islamic radicalism and militant jihad across the globe. Al Qaeda's current leader Ayman al-Zawahiri made a video statement in September 2006 encouraging the recruitment of converts in Western countries on the basis that they provide tactical and strategic advantages. The increasing and disproportionate number of converts involved in Islamist terrorism suggests this trend is likely to continue.

Long-Term

For some Western security analysts, the growth of Muslim convert populations may be of greater strategic concern. This is due to the possibility that some Muslim converts in Western countries may potentially seek to use Islam for a range of agendas, some of which may pre-date their religious conversion or even breach the tenets of

Islam. The converts' new religious identity may also become a source of radicalization, mobilization or motivation.

Islamic Conversion as Social Protest

Evidence suggests that the roots of Islam's religious and political appeal in many Western countries stem from a range of social processes that weaken prior forms of social and familial solidarity, identity and order. This leads many to search for new or stronger forms of meaning or identity to replace or protect previous beliefs and values and find stronger social relationships. For some, this could mean joining a fundamentalist Pentecostal Christian group (Pentecostal Christians adhere to a literal reading of scripture). However for many who become Muslim converts, Islam is seen as the only alternative to challenge the existing religious, social, cultural, political and economic order. Becoming a Muslim provides a range of new means (i.e. theological, social, and psychological) with which to challenge the existing forms of power that are seen as sources of grievance.

Osama bin Laden stated numerous times that non-Muslim people needed to convert to Islam to resolve the problems caused by Western/Christian beliefs. In his "Letter to America" in 2002, he exhorted people to embrace Islam if they realize they have "lost their confidence in the democratic system and capitalism that has caused problems and wars" and "begun to look for an alternative."

Radicalization

There is certainly a sense among converts who have gone on to conduct religious violence that, prior to their conversion, they felt personally vacuous and suffered a degree of social alienation. They also resented the forces of modernity, globalization and secular society, which they perceive as having negatively affecting their previous social solidarities and values.

Another common strand among radicalized converts is that they tend to lack formal education and training in Islamic doctrine and theology. This makes them vulnerable to an ideology that claims to define the actions and beliefs of "good Muslims," but is actually contrary to the values and scripture of Islam.

Act of Rebellion

Most converts' motivations to embrace Islam appear similar to other cases in which people join new social or counter-culture movements. In societies where Islam is viewed negatively, as is often the case in the West, conversion can sometimes be an act of rebellion against wider society which can pre-dispose converts to joining more radical/extreme groups that engage in violence. There is an increasing global trend among Muslim converts to radicalize when their conversion is influenced by Islamic ideology that represents a form of protest. This is especially true when conversion is linked to a sense of moral outrage, a conspiratorial interpretation of the world, and when the ideology resonates with personal experience.

Process

Islamic conversions are a type of transitional religious experience that involves the intensification of religiosity through a process that can lead some converts to become radicalized to the point of engaging in violence, despite this situation rarely or naturally following most conversions.

Radicalization of converts is most frequently a two-step process:

1. The first step involves conversion to a new faith.
2. The second stage, involving a very small minority of converts overall, usually sees converts radicalizing as a result of social interaction; it is less common for converts to self-radicalize in isolation. The radicalization process which involves the convert

developing a more extreme interpretation of their faith to legitimize or justify violence generally takes months or, more usually, years.

In this scenario, the first step involves converting to Islam, which is similar to joining a protest counter-culture (i.e., non-violent extremism). The second step involves rejecting this protest counter-culture on the basis that it is ineffective, and resorting to violent means to attain political change by using more extreme interpretations of faith to legitimize or justify the violence directed at political ends.

A complicating factor is that for those Islamic converts that go on to become violent, there is generally a lag phase between the time of religious conversion, a rise in religiosity, the manifestation of radical Islamist inclinations, extremism and finally terrorism. It is a continuum along which only a few converts progress as a result of some further psycho-social catalyst.

Implications

Social scientists know very little about why Muslim converts appear more likely to radicalize than those who are born Muslims. There are only five peer reviewed academic articles touching on the topic, yet there are hundreds of media articles on the topic of "Muslim convert terrorism," the majority of which are speculative and only reinforce an inaccurate negative stereotype of converts. This lack of knowledge regarding convert radicalization leaves policymakers and security agencies poorly prepared to understand converts and prevent their radicalization.

How the mechanisms of conversion correlate and intersect with the process of radicalization is not yet well understood. What we do know is that both religious conversion and radicalization are similar in that they both involve significant changes in beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. However, radicalization differs as a process in

that the new beliefs, attitudes and behaviors occurring as a result of conversion are heightened and polarized in preparation for engaging in some form of violence.

Counterterrorism officials often place more scrutiny on individuals from Muslim countries. The evidence on Muslim converts' involvement in terrorism suggests that governments need to reassess and attempt to better understand the nature of the evolving jihadist threat. However, to broadly brand the majority of Muslim converts as a terrorist threat is inaccurate and misleading as there are far more Muslim converts who do not become terrorists than those who do.

“SOCIAL SCIENTISTS KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT WHY MUSLIM CONVERTS APPEAR MORE LIKELY TO RADICALIZE THAN THOSE WHO ARE BORN MUSLIMS...THIS LACK OF KNOWLEDGE REGARDING CONVERT RADICALIZATION LEAVES POLICYMAKERS AND SECURITY AGENCIES POORLY PREPARED TO UNDERSTAND CONVERTS AND PREVENT THEIR RADICALIZATION”

Psychological research on radicalization indicates that a "transmission belt" from religious belief to terrorism does not exist. Therefore converting to Islam is not an indication that a person will radicalize. Isolating the range of factors and processes that flow from conversion through to radicalization is essential before claiming that converts are the new face of terrorism. To prevent future tragedies, we must scientifically determine what factors might turn ordinarily peaceful Muslim converts into extremists who use violence in the name of their religion.

Scott Flower is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.

Combating Terrorism on the Free Highway

Raphael Cohen-Almagor

Cooperation is vital in combating the abuse of the Internet by terrorist groups.

The Internet has enabled transnational jihad based on a decentralized network that overcomes the limitations of face-to-face interaction. Terrorists are making the most of the Internet to: 1) find essential information, 2) communicate, and 3) coordinate among each other in order to wage violent anti-social operations.

Finding Essential Information

Jihadi websites have several sections. The most important is usually the religious section, which features Quranic references to jihad, the different ways jihad can be expressed, aspects of martyrdom, *fatwa* (opinions on matters pertaining to Islamic law) explaining who can be targeted legitimately, and online doctrinal consultations with religious leaders. In the jihad section, would-be recruits are encouraged to join the battle. Some general advice is given, such as the best routes into warzones as well as the names and locations of sympathetic mosques. Galleries of martyr portraits are accompanied by their last testaments, often in a video clip. Many sites also have an IT section where contributors are urged to share their knowledge and develop new ways of using cyberspace to further jihad. Furthermore, some jihadi sites have a women's section where wives and mothers are urged to support their men in jihad and help them in the psychological battle against what one site described as "that disease, the weakness which loves life and hates death."

There is also an immense amount of "how-to" material together with the staple violent propaganda. Multiple password-protected forums contain extensive literature on explosives.

There are tutorials on viruses, hacking stratagems, the use of secret codes, encryption methods, Tor and other anonymity tools. Bomb-making knowledge is available on jihadi websites in the form of very detailed step-by-step video instructions showing how to build improvised explosive devices (IEDs). There is strong evidence that such online instructions played a critical role in the March 2004 Madrid bombings, the April 2005 Khan el-Khalili bombings in Cairo, the July 2006 failed attempt to bomb trains in Germany, and the June 2007 plot to bomb London's West End and Glasgow.

Communicating

Networking

Jihadi websites allow isolated young Muslims to engage with a worldwide network of like-minded people striving against what they perceive as a common enemy and with a singular unity of purpose. They offer these individuals a space to develop friendships and support, and prove the existence of the *ummah*, or imagined Muslim nation. In this way, the Internet bridges the gap between isolated potential jihadists and those already active within transnational jihad circles. Connections may develop on popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter and then continue on more specific jihadi forums and websites.

Propaganda and Indoctrination

Most radical and terrorist organizations use the Internet as a vehicle for ideological indoctrination. Al Qaeda has been particularly successful in its use of multimedia propaganda, producing pre-recorded video and audio, photographs, and written documents. Islamist zealots are also

developing computer games and promoting hip-hop artists in order to spread radical ideology to reach individuals within traditionally adversarial populations. Nearly every insurgency operation in Iraq was filmed and posted on a number of sites and bulletin boards accompanied by jihadi songs. The bloodshed was presented as heroic and glorious, and the accompanying text promoted jihad. The attempt to target traditionally adversarial populations is also seen in the publication of an English language jihadist magazine called *Inspire* by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Known for its high production standards, the magazine targets English-speaking Muslims, encouraging them to engage in militant activity where they live.

Recruitment

There are numerous cases of average, even non-religious citizens becoming radicalized by jihadist websites, leaving them vulnerable to terrorist recruitment. The content of such websites usually consists of enemy demonization, justification of violence, and a general background of the jihadi group, its platform and objectives. The websites try to be effective as they compete with each other on the attention of potential followers. Interactive technology is used to connect with those who seem receptive to the jihadi messages and ideology.

Coordinating

Information technology has enabled terrorist organizations to receive and share knowledge globally. The Internet has proven to be an excellent vehicle by which information about travel, training, targets, tactics and a host of other useful organizational details is displayed. Instructions, maps, diagrams, photographs, tactical and technical details are often sent over the Internet in encrypted formats, using onion routers such as Tor that hide the Internet Protocol (IP) address.

Al Qaeda used the Internet extensively in planning and coordinating the attacks of 11 September 2001. Mary E. Galligan, who supervised the FBI's investigation of the attacks, said that the Internet was a vital channel for coordination. Galligan asserted that Al Qaeda terrorists learned the methods used by the US to combat terrorism and studied soft spots and targets. They refrained from using cell phones, as they knew cell phones could be traced. Instead, they used the Internet, prepaid phone cards, and face-to-face meetings in Spain. Email was used to transmit messages between the terrorists. They looked for American flight schools on the Internet while they were in Germany, and used public library terminals for communications and data. At many public libraries, people can simply walk up to a terminal and access the Internet without presenting any form of identification. Within two weeks of the 9/11 attacks, the US had located hundreds of e-mails linked to the hijackers, in English and Arabic, sent before 11 September 2001, some of which included operational details of the planned terrorist assault.

“INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY HAS ENABLED TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS TO RECEIVE AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE GLOBALLY”

Fundraising

Crucial to the coordination of terrorist attacks is the provision of necessary funds. The Internet has been a crucial enabler in this regard too, with terrorist groups raising funds via some or all of the following five main methods:

- 1) Appeals via e-mail or directly through websites
 Hamas has in the past circulated appeal letters to various newsgroups. Hezbollah supplied bank account information to those who solicit the group by e-mail and posted its bank account information directly on several of its websites.

2) Selling goods

Many sites offer online “gift shops,” where visitors can purchase or download free posters, books, videos, pictures, audiocassettes and discs, stickers, badges, symbols, and calendars.

3) Side businesses that are not identified as group-owned but are nevertheless associated

There are links between terrorism and organized crime, especially in spheres concerning illegal migration, corruption, economic crime, illicit drugs, arms trafficking and money laundering. Hezbollah has coordinated the transportation, distribution, and sale of multi-ton bulk shipments of cocaine from South America. Large amounts of cash were smuggled to Lebanon, and several Lebanese exchange houses utilized accounts at the Beirut-based Lebanese Canadian Bank (LCB). The proceeds were laundered through various methods which included the sale of used cars in the United States to African nations, mixing legitimate business with drug money which eventually found its way to Hezbollah.

4) Online organizations that resemble humanitarian charity groups

Some charity organizations in the USA were in the service of Hamas and the Hezbollah until they were closed down. Charities acted as legitimate front organizations which raised money from across the globe

5) Fraud, gambling, or online brokering

According to the United Kingdom’s Financial Services Authority (FSA), terrorist groups launder their money through online firms. Online brokerage and spread-betting firms are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by terrorist groups because they are under-regulated and do not perform thorough checks on their investors. Younes Tsouli, Waseem Mughal and Tariq Al-Daour, based in London, working for Al Qaeda in Iraq, stole money through online gambling

sites. With different Trojan viruses, the three terrorists managed to raise more than US\$3.5 million to buy web hosting services in order to show more influential videos of al-Qaeda.

Combating Terrorist Activities Online

Combating terrorist activities online demands resources and capabilities that most of us – normal citizens – do not have. The prime responsibility lies with ISPs (Internet Service Providers), governments, and the international community at large. As terrorism is a global phenomenon, it is necessary to fight against it globally via diligent cross-country cooperation.

“COMBATING TERRORIST ACTIVITIES ONLINE DEMANDS RESOURCES AND CAPABILITIES THAT MOST OF US – NORMAL CITIZENS – DO NOT HAVE.”

ISP Responsibility

Like any other industry, there is a need to assure a certain security level on the Internet. Many ISPs hosted terrorist sites and helped the cause of transnational jihad. Some did it knowingly while others did it inadvertently. InfoCom Corporation in Texas, for instance, hosted websites for numerous clients in the Middle East. Founded by Mousa Abu Marzook, a senior official in Hamas, it served more than 500 Saudi Internet sites and notable Palestinian Hamas organizations, including the Islamic Association for Palestine and the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development. InfoCom also served to launder money from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states to sponsor Hamas activities. While the InfoCom Corporation knowingly participated in terrorist activities, Fortress ITX unwittingly hosted a jihadi website that urged attacks against American and Israeli

targets. This website was shut down when Fortress learned about the content from a reporter. To avoid playing into the hands of terrorists requires oversight and proactive steps. ISPs are, however, reluctant to monitor their servers for economic reasons.

International Cooperation

Halting the flow of funds via the Internet to terrorist organizations is a difficult and time-consuming task. Sites and accounts are closed and re-opened under different names very swiftly. As many terrorist organizations have set up charities in the real as well the virtual worlds, multilateral bodies such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which was established to combat money laundering and terrorist financing, are instrumental in sharing information about the global charitable sector, improving oversight of national and international charities, devising methodologies for detecting terrorists masquerading as charities, and establishing international standards to combat such abuse.

On 8 September 2006, the United Nations adopted a Global Counterterrorism Strategy. The strategy, in the form of a resolution and an annexed Plan of Action (A/RES/60/288), is a global instrument designed to enhance national, regional and international efforts to counter terrorism. It marked the first time that all Member States had agreed on a common strategic approach to combat terrorism and resolved to take practical steps to fight it. These practical steps ranged from strengthening state capacity to better coordinating UN counterterrorism activities.

The European Union police agency, Europol, built an information portal to allow for the exchange of information on militant website monitoring. The portal includes a list of monitored websites as well as statements by terrorists. Keeping track of jihadi websites requires vigilance as statements and videos by individuals and groups may appear only for a short period of

time. Law enforcement agencies throughout the world can learn from each other and cooperate in the fight against illicit and anti-social activities online. Indeed, there are many similarities between counterterrorism activities online and activities to counter child pornography and racism on the Internet.

Conclusion

The Internet is the single most important factor in transforming largely local concerns and activities into the broader transnational jihad. It is ubiquitous, interactive, fast and decentralized. The Internet's ease of access, low cost, high speed, chaotic structure (or lack of structure), anonymity and international character furnish all kinds of individuals and organizations with an easy and effective arena for their partisan

“THE INTERNET IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN TRANSFORMING LARGELY LOCAL CONCERNS AND ACTIVITIES INTO THE BROADER TRANSNATIONAL JIHAD.”

interests. As the years pass, there is growing awareness of the terrorist threat online, and of the need to combat it. With concerted cooperation, capabilities to address the formidable challenges and provide appropriate answers can be developed and maintained. Indeed, to have effective results in combating terrorism, cooperation is vital.

—
Raphael Cohen-Almagor is Professor and Chair in Politics and Director of the Middle East Study Group, University of Hull.

This article is adapted by the author from “In Internet’s way: Terrorism on the Free Highway,” published by the Jerusalem Post on 23 October 2012.

Peace Negotiations in Colombia and the DDR Challenge

Steven Jones-Chaljub

As Colombia once again heads towards peace, the role its Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programs will play is likely to be crucial.

Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia; FARC) is one of the major and oldest insurgent groups in Latin America, being officially constituted in May 1964 as a peasant-based Marxist-Leninist guerrilla movement. Today it is present in different municipalities, and is active both militarily and politically. Partly due to its longevity, FARC has participated since 1982 in different peace talks with the Colombian government, the El Caguán series (1998-2002) being the last official talks conducted. The El Caguán talks proved to be a complete failure, resulting in a demilitarized zone the size of Switzerland that served FARC both as safe haven and training camp. However, 11 years after the El Caguán attempt, the bells of peace are ringing once again in Colombia.

The government of President Juan Manuel Santos has bet in favor of negotiating a peaceful settlement to the armed struggle with FARC. But after months of discussions in Cuba which started on 23 February 2013, few advances have been made. From the broad agenda, which includes issues such as rural development, political participation, the end of the conflict, illegal drugs, and victims, the parties have only reached agreement upon the first issue. In addition, these talks have been openly criticized by President Santos' political opponents, especially former President Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010).

Colombian public opinion is already reflecting signs of anxiety and distrust toward the administration. In September 2013, President Santos' popularity decreased to a historically low 21%. This fall was partly due to the peace talks and partly the result of poor management of

internal issues such as strikes by agricultural workers. The burden on President Santos has been exacerbated by a lack of time, as Colombia is due for presidential elections on 25 May 2014.

In an effort to restore its image and dissociate the Havana talks from El Caguán, the government claimed that the success of its security policies has forced FARC into a disadvantageous position at the table. Timochenko, the current leader of FARC, contested such statements and behavior in a public letter to the President. In it, Timochenko stated: "Santos, alucinando, confía en doblegarnos con gruñidos. Estamos muy viejos para eso... tanta retórica hace daño, Santos [Santos, hallucinating, trusts to subdue us with barks. We are too old for that... too much rhetoric makes harm, Santos] (translation mine)."

Nevertheless, it is true that Colombia has improved its security situation since 2000. Financial aid from the United States to enhance Colombia's operational, military and intelligence capabilities has proven to be effective. The US aid package – named "Plan Colombia" – amounted to \$6.13 billion for 2000-2008 and \$722.3 million for 2008-2013. From the aid received between 2000 and 2008, \$4.86 billion was given to the Colombian police and military. The assistance doubled the size of the military forces between 1998 (113,081 units) and 2013 (285,292 units), and allowed for the purchase of newer and more efficient military hardware. Together with Plan Colombia, the consistent counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy adopted (known as Seguridad Democrática [Democratic Security/Safety]) has catalyzed several advances in security. First, the state has achieved offensive momentum, control of, or a presence in most of the country's territory.

Second, the paramilitary group Las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) was officially dismantled by 2006. Third, FARC's strength has been diminished from 13,000-14,000 to 7,000-8,000, and its top leaders are either dead, captured, or have abandoned the group.

Colombia's DDR programs: Strengths and Weaknesses

The apparent success of the government cannot only be attributed to the military. COIN operations were complemented with an improvement in DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) programs. When DDR was first introduced as policy in 1982 by former President Belisario Betancur, it was intended only to target the causes of the conflict. It consisted of a general amnesty (Ley 35 de 1982), socio-economic programs (land grants, microcredit, training, and housing), and development initiatives (Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación, National Rehabilitation Plan). Today the mechanism has evolved to include psychological support, social reconciliation, and transitional justice (Ley de Justicia y Paz [Justice and Peace Law] and later, Marco Jurídico para la Paz [Legal Framework for Peace]). The most significant improvements to the DDR regime resulted from the necessity of facing the demobilization of almost 35,000 AUC members between 2003 and 2006. Due to the need to make the advances in security sustainable in the long run, the administration of former President Uribe was forced to create necessary juridical preconditions (Ley 782 de 2002 and Ley de Justicia y Paz) and better institutions.

The six-step process in Colombia's DDR regime consists of: 1) disarmament before an authority; 2) receipt of an aid package for reinsertion; 3) accommodation in Ministry of Defense peace households and acquisition of demobilization certificate; 4) transfer to ACR; 5) definition of reintegration route; 6) start of the reintegration plan. The eligibility criteria are set in a way which

eases the process for individual demobilization, as the only requirements are to demonstrate objective membership and be of Colombian nationality.

Between 2003 and 2006, el Programa para la Reinserción de la Vida Civil (Program for Reintegration into Civilian Life, PRVC) of the Ministries of Interior and Justice was in charge of ex-combatants. The program focused mainly on the individual. It sought to rehabilitate and prepare the demobilized for civilian life by granting psychosocial attention, academic training, access to the National Health Service, and economic stipends. Nevertheless, this initiative could not cope once the demobilization of the AUC began. By 2006, PRVC was replaced with la Alta Consejería para la Reintegración (High Council for Reintegration, ACR), which was later renamed Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración (Colombian Agency for Reintegration), the cornerstone of Colombia's DDR program.

The DDR program's budget between 1990 and 2007 reveals the influence of Plan Colombia in strengthening the DDR regime in Colombia. The overall budget for 1990-2002 was 200,000 million Colombian pesos (approximately US\$100 million). Between 2003 and 2007, the budget increased by 460%, expanding to a total of 925,000 million Colombian pesos (approximately US\$462 million). For 2012, the amount available for DDR was 144,000 million Colombian pesos (approximately US\$72 million). According to the ACR, the total number of people that have joined its programs between 2003 and 2012 is 54,839 (35,314 AUC, 15,852 FARC, 3,195 ELN, 478 other). Based on this data, until 31 December 2012, out of 54,839 demobilized, 10,212 abandoned the reintegration stage, 8,030 never joined the program, 1,786 are under judicial investigation for *a posteriori* crimes, and 1,102 have been prosecuted. This leaves the DDR initiatives with an ineffectiveness of 38.53%.

Most of the unsuccessful cases described are associated with the *Bandas Criminales* (Criminal groups, BACRIM) that operate today within Colombia. According to the *Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz de la Organización de los Estados Americanos* (Mission to Support the Peace Process in the Organization of American States, MAPP-OEA), the BACRIM had recruited at least 12% (approximately 4,200) of AUC's demobilized personnel. *Las Águilas Negras* (The Black Eagles), *Los Rastrojos* (The Stubble), *Los Paisas*, *ERPAC* (*Ejército Revolucionario Popular Antiterrorista Colombiano*, Popular Revolutionary Anti-Terrorist Army of Colombia), and *Los Urabeños* (*Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces*) are openly recognized as having recruited demobilized AUC personnel. If the state desires a peace agreement, it cannot afford to have a loose DDR program, as its failure may result in a return to hostilities or the strengthening of BACRIM. The fact that FARC's leaders are looking forward to achieving political space exacerbates difficulties. Nonetheless, it must be said that Colombia is far from being an easy place for conducting DDR.

The nature and number of actors which are a source of insecurity (for instance, splinter AUC groups, BACRIM, and left-wing guerrillas) have made it impossible for the state to carry out a completely inclusive and collective DDR program. As a result, military action and the DDR programs have been developed simultaneously as different sides of the same coin. This has caused a disruption in the expected cycle (from disarmament to demobilization and then reintegration), and has trapped the country in a dichotomy that exists between the conflict and post-conflict stages. *El Observatorio de Procesos de Desarme, Desmovilización y Reintegración* (Observatory of the DDR Process, ODDR) of the *Universidad Nacional de Colombia* (National University of Colombia) has identified at least two different trends within the local DDR cycle: 1) disarmament → demobilization →

reintegration → rearmament → return to war and 2) Disarmament → demobilization → reintegration → positive feedback → demobilization → disarmament.

Collective demobilizations are rare in Colombia because they are mainly a political phenomenon. The Upper Chamber (*Senado*) and Lower Chamber (*Cámara de Representantes*) must agree with the Supreme Court (*Corte Constitucional*) on the juridical underpinnings that would legitimize DDR processes. This is not necessarily easy as most judicial initiatives have faced debates that have taken months to conclude. Such has been the case of *La Ley de Justicia y Paz* (*Ley 975 de 2005*), *Ley de Víctimas* (Victims Act, *Ley 1448 de 2011*), and *el Marco Jurídico para la Paz* (*Acto Legislativo 014/11S-094/11C*). Likewise, the Colombian experience shows that collective demobilizations which have occurred at the national level as part of agreements celebrated between the government and armed groups are not necessarily due to the exhaustion of the latter (e.g. *Movimiento 19 de Abril* [Movement of 19 April, M-19] during the presidency of Virgilio Barco). Furthermore, as in any other conflict, the willingness to negotiate is not always present.

Despite the various difficulties faced, the Colombian government has managed to constantly run a DDR program that can be applied on an individual basis. To date, of the 54,839 demobilized between 2003 and 2012, 22,990 cases were individual demobilizations. If the percentage of ineffectiveness is accurate (38.53%), around 14,131 have been successfully reintegrated to society. This is a number that should not be disregarded. However, at the same time, the rise of BACRIM remains a source of concern for the state, acting as a reminder of the need to evaluate the real robustness and scope of its DDR capabilities.

—
Steven Jones-Chaljub is currently enrolled in the NTU-Warwick Double Master's Program.

Colombia: An *In Aeternum* Conflict?

Franck Emmanuel Marre

Is there an end in sight to the conflict in Colombia?

Colombia is a *sui generis* country as far as insurgency is concerned. It is the last remaining stronghold in the world for Marxist and Guevarist guerrilla movements, which also constitute the world's oldest guerrilla groups. And far from disappearing after the collapse of communism as one might have expected, these groups even had their hour of glory from 1995 to 2001. This is especially true of FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army). However, their military expansion has not been smooth, being punctuated by a series of upheavals since 1980.

The FARC Culmination (1996-2001)

Several factors explain the rise of FARC during the mid-1990s, beginning with a well-conceived strategic plan elaborately developed during the 1980s. In addition to this, multiple illegal sources of funding such as drug cultivation and manufacture (cocaine and heroin), kidnapping and extortion through revolutionary tax boosted FARC's revenue. As a result, FARC's territory expanded significantly both in qualitative and quantitative terms, with its guerrilla fronts multiplying all over the entire country.

At the time, FARC had a sharp strategic insight of Colombia's geography which the Colombian army lacked and used this to take control of strategic corridors, key positions and zones of influence for greater mobility. Moreover, it reinforced its hold over high value-added areas containing gold mines, oil and coca and poppy cultivation to reap the benefits of these resources. Increased income facilitated the creation of more guerrilla fronts that could better

amplify and consolidate the group's territorial coverage for increased control over the population and of resources.

The result is obvious; while FARC accumulated remarkable military successes and were at the height of their power in 1998, an unprepared army and police were on the ropes, overwhelmed and distressed by FARC offensives. Guerrilla warfare had gradually turned into mobile warfare with FARC being able to deploy hundreds of fighters to carry out large-scale attacks on security forces. The group appeared formidable enough that some national and international newspapers asked whether the rebels could take control of major cities and even seize power.

Concerns over this situation among ordinary Colombians contributed to the election of President Pastrana in 1998 on an agenda of peace with FARC. He granted FARC a 42,000 km² safe haven, which was the rebels' prerequisite before entering into any negotiations. Peace talks would eventually lead to FARC's demobilization. Nevertheless, in this enclave that was the size of Switzerland, the rebels continued to carry out a number of criminal activities that contradicted their intention to demobilize. Peace talks were only an alibi for the rebel movement to keep accumulating force and power.

However, at the same time as the peace talks, Pastrana also implemented "Plan Colombia," an ambitious counter-narcotics policy with the financial and logistical support of the USA. Indeed, the government's underlying strategy

was to starve FARC of its illegal narco-dollars so as to be in a stronger negotiating position. However, after the 9/11 attacks and the collapse of peace talks in 2002, Plan Colombia became a much more aggressive counter-insurgency plan. The changing perception of terrorist threats in the wake of 9/11 led to a major change in the army's strategy and became a turning point in the Colombian conflict, but this time to the army's advantage.

Strategic Withdrawal and Downfall (2002-2010)

The perception of the Colombian conflict and the underlying strategy to settle it changed dramatically with President Uribe's election in 2002. He implemented a policy known as Democratic Security, which revolved around four main areas: making the FARC give in by using military force, reaffirming the commitment of the Colombian state to its authority over the country's entire territory, involving local populations in the peace effort and destroying the illegal drug trade so as to dry up revenues which finance terrorism and generate crime. By April 2004, a permanent police or military presence was established in every Colombian municipality and the army was able to dismantle a growing number of guerrilla fronts.

Faced with multiple army offensives, FARC gradually draw back. This marked the beginning of its strategic withdrawal to remote and sparsely populated forest and mountain areas. Uribe's policy made homicides, kidnappings, and terrorist attacks decrease by as much as 50%. For the first time in decades, Colombians witnessed a comeback of state sovereignty in areas where FARC had always reigned supreme. The army's strategy, a reverse application of Mao Tse-Tung's guerrilla warfare principle, seemed to have born fruit: the "fish" (guerrilla force) being out of the "water" (isolated from the population and its support), would not survive for long.

The restructuring of security forces and the use of modern military helicopters and aircraft since 1998 undeniably played a decisive role. They improved mobility and firepower, which changed the military equation of the conflict. As a result, FARC attacks on major roads and electric power lines strongly decreased, and the economy picked up as foreign investments increased. Colombia eventually emerged from the darkness. However, it should be noted that FARC's weakening was also caused by right-wing paramilitary groups. By attacking key strongholds where FARC had maintained their grip over the years, they contributed to a significant loss of the rebels' influence.

The FARC decline accelerated as a result of special military operations targeting guerrilla cadres. The most emblematic FARC leaders fell: Raúl Reyes in March 2008, military commander Mono Jojoy in September 2010 and Alfonso Cano in November 2011. These operations aimed at breaking FARC's chain of command, creating confusion and demoralizing rebels so as to force them to surrender.

Faced with concerted military action, an increasing number of guerrilla fronts could no longer keep a rein on their fighters. Consequently, massive desertions provoked a haemorrhage within the FARC to the extent that fronts disappeared or had no other option but to merge with others. Moreover, Colombian military intelligence made a significant contribution with interceptions of communications. This was reflected in the spectacular Operation Jaque carried out in July 2008, where the Army was able to infiltrate FARC and trick its members into releasing its most valuable political and military hostages without spilling a drop of blood. More than a mere setback, Operation Jaque humiliated FARC, revealing the extent of its strength. Relentless army operations all over the country had forced it to limit internal communications and this isolated the various

fronts further. FARC struggled while the army was at the height of its strength.

A Major Turnaround?

The current situation with respect to FARC is a set of changing and conflicting realities, rendering any attempt at a forward-looking assessment of the rebel group problematic.

FARC's strategic withdrawal came to an end in early 2010 and targeted attacks on Colombian troops increased significantly in 2011. President Santos' more diplomatic approach may explain FARC's revival. However, this new cycle of violence is not a strategic renewal. The rebels simply adjusted their tactics and returned to classic guerrilla warfare with small mobile units carrying out limited attacks against the military. Their remarkable ability in mobilizing combatants and their major military successes became features of the past.

Furthermore, FARC has lost much credibility among Colombians and the international community for a number of reasons. First, it has always developed military strategies to the detriment of a real and comprehensive political strategy that could have brought it greater legitimacy. Despite peace talks announced by President Santos in August 2012, FARC has remained firmly entrenched in an old-fashioned logic of continued warfare. This has cast doubts on the prospects of achieving a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and the significant degree of mistrust prevailing on both sides makes a negotiated solution even more difficult.

Moreover, many have questioned FARC's commitment and sincerity with regards to peace talks. Its leaders are well aware that they have potentially more to lose than to gain should they decide to demobilize and return to civilian life. The gravity of criminal charges against them may

lead to serious sentences. In addition, the use of kidnapping as a political and economic instrument, involvement in drug production, reckless attacks against hundreds of villages and the use of terrorist tactics have only confirmed the decay of the group.

Nonetheless, despite the aversion of most Colombians towards FARC, there is no evidence to suggest that they will be wiped out anytime soon. They are currently estimated to have 9,200 heavily armed and trained combatants primarily entrenched in mountain and forest areas. FARC's stranglehold on the supply of illegal drugs is also expected to continue due to the drug trade's profitability. Indeed, a perfect match can be observed between coca and poppy production areas and the geographical location of FARC's fronts. They currently control an estimated 70% of cocaine production.

Colombia's Uncertain Future

The Democratic Security policy has not been the beginning of the end for FARC, but it has significantly weakened it. In this way, the policy has saved Colombia from becoming a failed state. However, despite the increased presence of security forces across the country, many grey areas with weak or non-existent state presence remain due to rugged terrain that makes access difficult. Ironically, the FARC grip on territory is inversely proportional to their degree of accessibility. Public roads are sorely lacking in many rural areas or often in poor condition. State presence and sovereignty is deficient in these areas, reducing the likelihood that security forces will be able to completely dislodge the rebels from strongholds they have controlled for decades and bring law and order.

The ideological flame that fuelled communist revolutions in Latin America from the 60s to the 80s has died. Being a FARC fighter is no longer

reflective of certain ideals, but a way of life and very often the only one for most rebels. Without viable and lasting economic opportunities and infrastructure development in those areas abandoned by the state, peasants will continue joining FARC and growing illegal drugs.

Moreover, the conflict has become a cross-border issue since 2000 as FARC's presence has been felt outside of Colombia in bordering states such as Venezuela and Ecuador. The deadly attack against top FARC commander Raúl Reyes by the Colombian army in March 2008 on Ecuadorian soil and current FARC leader Timochenko's repeated presence in Venezuela between November 2011 and May 2012 show that FARC have used these areas as rear operating bases to withdraw to or to carry out military attacks on Colombian soil. The availability of such rear bases has not only invigorated the rebels, but has poisoned diplomatic relations among countries in the region.

Colombia's wealth in natural resources contributes to its prosperity, but has also caused it misfortune by fuelling the conflict. Illegal drug cultivation and manufacture has become one of the driving forces of the conflict and the resulting monetary gains will continue stirring up the greed of irregular armed groups without exception.

The Colombian conflict is a forgotten war that the international community cares little about. And yet, Colombia remains by far the main source of instability within the whole American continent. The current peace talks are creating a sense of déjà vu and many Colombians remain skeptical. There is no sign that a peaceful resolution will come anytime soon, and peace appears to remain a hostage.

Franck Emmanuel Marre currently teaches at Alliance Française de Singapour and is a Visiting Professor at Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia.

CTTA IN 2014

CTTA is re-organizing its annual schedule into smaller series and special topics for 2014. This is to enable readers and contributors have a better understanding of the overall direction of CTTA for the whole year.

The series planned for 2014 are *Strategic Counterterrorism* (2 parts) and *Regional Focus* (4 parts). Special topics are intended to become annualized reviews covering key issues and areas of concern among counterterrorism researchers and practitioners, and will include: 1) The State of Al Qaeda, 2) Cooperation in Terrorism and Counterterrorism, and 3) Key Personalities.

CTTA will supplement this schedule with articles on its website – www.cttajournal.org – covering topics other than those featured in the monthly issues. Web-only content also offers the flexibility of timely coverage for topics of immediate importance ahead of where they might normally have been featured in the monthly issues. Regular columns and short series of articles are part of the overall development intended for the CTTA website in future.

January: Annual Threat Assessment

February: Radicalization, De-Radicalization/ Rehabilitation, and Community Engagement

March: Southeast Asia in Focus

April: The State of Al Qaeda

May: South Asia in Focus

June: Cooperation in Terrorism and Counterterrorism

July: Africa in Focus

August: Key Personalities

September: The Middle East in Focus

October: Counter Ideology and Promoting Moderation

November: Year-End Open Issue

Caucasian and Central Asian Fighters in Syria: A Security Concern for the SCO

Nodirbek Soliyev

As the conflict in Syria continues, it has become increasingly apparent that Caucasian and Central Asian fighters are playing an important role. Their return home poses a significant threat which the SCO is well-placed to address.

On 13 September 2013, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) – a regional grouping made up of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan – convened its 13th summit in Kyrgyzstan's capital city of Bishkek. The crisis in Syria featured prominently in the discussions, with SCO member states agreeing unanimously to support Moscow and Beijing's position of a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

On the surface, the united stance of the SCO member states on Syria appears to be easily explained. Since Russia and China dominate the SCO and are firmly opposed to any foreign military intervention against the Bashar al-Assad regime, the remaining member states could be seen as merely adhering to the existing dynamics of the organization. However, there is evidence to suggest that concern over a growing number of Caucasian (from the Caucasus region that includes the Russian republics, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and parts of Turkey and Iran) and Central Asian fighters in Syria was a more important factor in the unanimity of the SCO's stance.

Over the past several months, many Caucasians and Central Asians are believed to have fought under the command of Chechen militants alongside Syrian opposition forces. With a growing trend of experienced militants returning to their home countries from Syria to plot terrorist attacks, SCO member states are now not only

concerned about the impact of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, but the consequences of the civil war in Syria as well.

Caucasian and Central Asian Fighters in Syria

On 26 March 2013, the Kataeb al-Khattab (Brigade of Khattab), Katibat Jaish al-Muhammad (Army of Muhammad Brigades) and Kataeb al-Muhajirin (Brigade of Emigrants) declared their unification into a new group named Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (Army of Emigrants and Helpers, JMA). The *emir* (leader) of the group was identified as Abu Omar al-Chechen (also known as Abu Omar al-Shishani), an ethnic Chechen from the Pankisi valley of northeast Georgia, where Chechens settled during the various periods of conflict in the North Caucasus. The formation of JMA with al-Chechen as its leader marked a turning point in the role played by Chechen fighters in the Syrian conflict. In fact, the participation of Chechen militants was only confirmed as late as February 2013, when Abu Omar al-Chechen appeared in a video with other Syrian rebels. Until then, speculation was rife about the participation of Chechen militants in the conflict.

JMA is now one of the most prominent armed units in the Syrian conflict, with an estimated 800 to 1,700 fighters from different parts of the world, half of whom are reportedly Chechens. However, it is difficult to confirm the exact composition of Russian Chechens versus

Chechens from the large diaspora communities in the Middle East. In June 2013, the Head of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSS) Aleksandr Bortnikov said that approximately 200 militants from the Russian Federation were fighting for the opposition in Syria. JMA has been actively fighting alongside with the Al Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front and Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham. However, it has thus far not declared allegiance to Al Qaeda.

With confirmation of the participation of Chechen militants in the Syrian conflict, one question that has emerged is why they are fighting in Syria and not in their own country. One reason is that Chechens, being predominantly Sunni Muslims, believe that they are fighting against an "anti-Sunni" Alawite regime. Furthermore, the Syrian conflict is viewed by Chechen militants as an opportunity to wage an indirect war against Russia. This is because the Assad regime has long enjoyed the support of Moscow. Finally, there is a dearth of opportunities for Chechen militants outside Chechnya to fight at home against Russia due to high security measures at borders preventing their entry from overseas.

The first reports that experienced Central Asian militants were beginning to return to their home countries emerged in May 2013 when Kyrgyz security agencies detained a Kyrgyz national who, while in Turkey to study, had travelled to Syria. In the same month, the Tajik media reported that citizens of Tajikistan had travelled to receive training in Syria.

In July 2013, Chinese counterterrorism authorities arrested 23-year-old Memeti Aili, a suspected member of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), who was allegedly on his way back from Syria to carry out attacks in China's restive Xinjiang province. Furthermore, in a video uploaded on the internet in July 2013, a militant

named Abu Mu'adh al-Muhajir from Kazakhstan appealed in his native tongue to fellow Kazakhs and others to participate in the conflict in Syria against the al-Assad regime.

“JMA IS NOW ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT ARMED UNITS IN THE SYRIAN CONFLICT, WITH AN ESTIMATED 800 TO 1,700 FIGHTERS FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD, HALF OF WHOM ARE REPORTEDLY CHECHENS”

In August 2013, Kyrgyzstan's State Committee for National Security (GKNB) detained three members of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) in the southern Kyrgyz province of Osh. Two of the detainees were citizens of Kyrgyzstan while the other was identified as a Kazakh national. According to the GKNB, they had travelled from Kyrgyzstan to Syria to join the Syrian opposition and were sent back to Kyrgyzstan to plot a series of terrorist attacks in the Kyrgyz cities of Bishkek and Osh on the eve of the 13th summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). There were also reports that the some Uzbek fighters under the command of Abu Talha from Uzbekistan had fought alongside the members of JMA and the al-Nusra Front involved in the battle for Sheikh Suleiman Base (also known as Base 111) in western Aleppo during December 2012.

Some Russian analysts claim that Qatar and Saudi Arabia have financed the recruitment of jihadists from the former Soviet republics. Furthermore, given Turkey's well-disposed political stance towards anti-Assad opposition forces, Caucasians and Central Asians studying in Turkey have also become a source of recruits. Newly-recruited jihadists from the former Soviet republics are reported to have entered Syrian

refugee camps in Turkey before slipping across the border into Syria's northern Aleppo and northwestern Latakia provinces. In fact, citizens of many countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia can travel to Turkey without engendering suspicion due to a visa-free regime.

The Road Ahead

As the conflict in Syria continues, Caucasian and Central Asian fighters in Syria are likely to return to their home countries or move to other conflict zones. Central Asians are likely to venture to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area to join their fellow countrymen there for further combat experience, especially given the expected security vacuum following the withdrawal of Coalition forces from Afghanistan in 2014.

In light of this, SCO countries will need to strengthen counterterrorism cooperation and take preventive measures at both the national and regional level to build a collective security network in order to meet the threat of transnational terrorism more effectively.

First, in order to prevent the movement of Central Asian fighters into Syria, it is important to improve border management and control. Intelligence collaboration – including intelligence gathering, screening and sharing – is crucial in this regard. Second, the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) needs to collaborate with Syrian intelligence agencies. Furthermore, since Turkey is transit country for fighters to slip into Syria, it is also very important for RATS to establish ties with security agencies in this country. Lastly, a mechanism must be put in place to address the use of the Internet in recruiting Caucasians and Central Asians to fight in Syria, as there is currently no strategic counterterrorism measures aimed at the online sphere.

Nodirbek Soliyev is an Analyst with ICPVTR.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

CTTA welcomes contributions from researchers and practitioners in the field of terrorism research, security, and other related fields.

Before pitching an article or sending in a submission, please consult the schedule for 2014 below:

- January:** Annual Threat Assessment
- February:** Radicalization, De-Radicalization/ Rehabilitation, and Community Engagement
- March:** Southeast Asia in Focus
- April:** The State of Al Qaeda
- May:** South Asia in Focus
- June:** Cooperation in Terrorism and Counterterrorism
- July:** Africa in Focus
- August:** Key Personalities
- September:** The Middle East in Focus
- October:** Counter Ideology and Promoting Moderation
- November:** Year-End Open Issue

Articles outside the topics for the month are also welcome and may be submitted on a rolling basis for the CTTA website.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- All article submissions must be sent electronically to ctta@ntu.edu.sg as a Microsoft Word document
- Articles are generally 1,200 to 1,500 words in length and follow the style of a commentary
- The deadline for submissions is the 10th of every month. For example, if you are submitting an article for the March issue, please send it to us by 10 February
- For more information, please visit www.cttajournal.org/submissions

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM RESEARCH



S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

Block S4, Level B4, Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

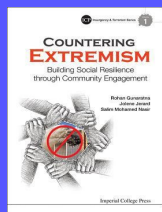
Phone: +65 6316 8925 Fax: +65 6791 1941

Website: www.pvtr.org

The International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) is a specialist center within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

ICPVTR conducts research, training, and outreach programs aimed at reducing the threat of politically motivated violence and at mitigating its effects on the international system.

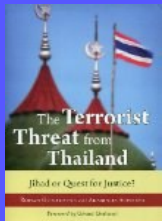
STAFF PUBLICATIONS



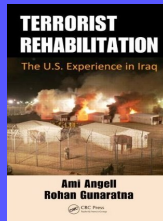
Countering Extremism
Rohan Gunaratna,
Salim Mohamed Nasir
and Jolene Jerard
(Imperial College Press,
2013)



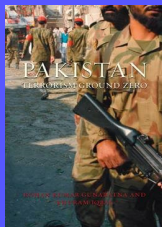
Ten Years After 9/11:
Rethinking the Jihadist
Threat
Arabinda Acharya
(Routledge, 2013)



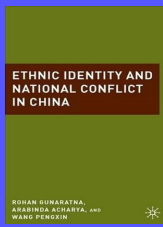
The Terrorist Threat from
Thailand: Jihad or Quest
for Justice?
Rohan Gunaratna and
Arabinda Acharya
(Potomac Books, 2013)



Terrorist Rehabilitation:
The US Experience in Iraq
Ami Angell and
Rohan Gunaratna
(CRC Press, 2011)



Pakistan: Terrorism
Ground Zero
Rohan Gunaratna and
Khurram Iqbal
(Reaktion Books, 2011)



Ethnic Identity and
National Conflict in China
Rohan Gunaratna,
Arabinda Acharya and
Wang Pengxin
(Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)



Targeting Terrorist
Financing: International
Cooperation and New
Regimes
Arabinda Acharya
(Routledge, 2009)