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ISIS AND THE MEDIA: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A FUNCTION AND DETERRENT OF
TERROR

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ABSTRACT

Social media is no longer comprised of college students and websites built in college dorm rooms. Rather, social media has evolved into a sophisticated network of platforms that connect the entire globe. Internet connectivity has dramatically increased in recent years, and while there are many benefits to this increased connectivity, there are also consequences, especially in the realm of terrorism studies and foreign policy. Terrorists are increasingly using social media to propagate their violent agendas, rather than relying on typical “legacy” media sources. This paper will examine the relationship between the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/the Levant (ISIS/ISIL) and the media. This paper will examine whether terror groups continue to need media coverage from legacy sources or if they can achieve their goals through online self-promotion. Finally, this paper will examine the policy implications of the shift in terrorism’s relationship to the media and the implications for the United States’ war on terror.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
Chapter 1 Terrorism and Media	1
Introduction	1
Methodology	4
Conclusion	5
Chapter 2 Literature Review	6
Chapter 3 A Brief Timeline of Modern Terrorism	10
Introduction	10
Munich, 1972	10
Lebanon, 1983	11
France, 1995	11
U.S.S. Cole, 2000	11
New York, 2001 (9/11)	11
Los Angeles, 2002	12
Spain, 2004	12
Netherlands, 2004	13
England, 2005	13
Denmark, 2005-2010	13
Paris 2011	14
Toulouse, 2012	14
London, 2013	14
Belgium, 2014	14
Canada, 2014	15
Australia, 2014	15
Paris, 2015 (January)	15
Paris, 2015 (November)	16
San Bernadino, 2015	16
Brussels, 2016	17
Conclusion	17
Chapter 4 The Evolution of Terrorism Coverage	18
Introduction	18
Munich	18
Iran 19	
Al-Qaeda	20

Conclusion	21
Chapter 5 An Analysis of Legacy Coverage.....	23
Introduction.....	23
Al-Qaeda — The Precursor to ISIS’ Media Strategy.....	24
ISIS’ Media Strategy.....	24
Legacy Media Coverage	26
Conclusion	28
Chapter 6 Policy Implications.....	29
Introduction.....	29
Social Media Outreach.....	31
Conclusion	36
Chapter 7 The Relevance and Future of Mainstream Media	37
Introduction.....	37
Dichotomy of the Media Landscape	38
Conclusion	39
Chapter 8 Findings and Conclusions	41
Introduction.....	41
Findings.....	42
Future Corollary Questions	43
Conclusion	43
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	44

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	31
Figure 2	32
Figure 3	33
Figure 4	34

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Chapter 1

Terrorism and Media

Introduction

The world is shrinking. With the press of a button, a person can communicate with someone across the world. Thirty years ago, the idea of instant communication was still very much on the horizon of technology. More traditional methods of communication were preferred. But in recent years, the landscape of media and communication has changed. In today's digital age, social media and other forms of Internet communication are no longer a novelty, but rather a fact of life. Platforms that began as digital scrapbooks for college students are now considered legitimate forms of communication, newsgathering and reporting. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube are now considered just as much a part of the media landscape as CNN or the New York Times. However, reporters and college students are not the only audience and users of social media. Government bodies, world leaders, and policymakers use social media to connect with constituents. Social media has become just as viable a political platform as any other medium.

With the spread of social media, more and more groups are utilizing Internet communication. Various terror groups are using social media to spread their ideology, recruit new members and broadcast their activities. In the early 2000s, al-Qaeda relied heavily on various forms of online media to broadcast messages from Osama bin Laden. But in recent years, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has garnered international headlines for their gruesome use of social media to broadcast ideologies, incite fear and recruit members. This widespread use of social media is nearly unprecedented among terror groups. ISIS has built a formidable presence on the Internet, and this presence has sparked many discussions in both the political and journalistic communities.

The United States Code by the U.S. Department of State defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents.” This paper will operate under this definition, and under this definition, it can be stated that terrorism is not a new phenomenon. Since the earliest instances of terroristic activity, such events have occurred thousands of times across the world. Although these events differ in time, place and method, each instance of terroristic activity displays similar traits and commonalities. Non-state actors commit atrocities with the goals of inciting terror and fear as well as disseminating their philosophies. Non-state actors will engage in asymmetric warfare in order to exert force against a government that would otherwise outmatch the non-state actors in traditional warfare.

Since the popularization of social media and Internet communication, there has been debate surrounding the place and relevance of “legacy” media sources such as newspapers and television and radio stations. With more and more consumers accessing their news online, traditional media sources have been struggling to compete in the digital age. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have invested thousands of dollars and countless hours into developing their digital platforms and online media. The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* cut back production and only publishes a print product three days a week. This choice was not the exception, but rather an increasingly common trend. Such a trend begs the question of the relevance of print media and television stations. Both media scholars and journalism professionals have been questioning the place that print and broadcast hold in a society so dominated by online communication.

The overarching purpose of this thesis is to explore ISIS’ need of mainstream media. This paper will explore whether ISIS needs “legacy” sources to publicize, disseminate, and justify their draconian world-view, or if ISIS can achieve the goals of a terror organization through the exclusive use of social media. As a corollary, this paper will also explore the relevance and necessity of mainstream media. The views and usage of mainstream media is changing, and this paper will explore the place in the media landscape that traditional media holds.

Additionally, this paper will examine the relationship between terrorism and media from a policy standpoint. Media is inextricably linked with other topics. Politically, media is an important consideration. In recent years, a government's fight against terrorism is fought less with boots on the ground and more over the Internet. The battle for the hearts and minds is now being won through social media. The connection between media and government is one that is simply too important to ignore.

Although social media and Internet communication is now a major part of the media landscape, the body of research on the topic is still being developed. Although social media and online media have been a part of the cultural zeitgeist for over a decade, Internet communication has only been recognized as a legitimate form of news-making in the last several years. It has been accepted that online media is creating a change in the media landscape, but it is a subject that is still being explored and researched. This paper will explore the still unanswered questions of the role of social media in the journalism profession. Additionally, this paper will examine the relationship between non-state terrorist actors and the media. Terrorist groups are turning to online communication and social media to disseminate their worldviews. Before the advent of social media, traditional media sources fulfilled that role for terror groups. This paper will explore the consequences of moving to online social media and the relevance of traditional, legacy sources — a topic that has not yet been discussed at length. In that vein, this paper will also discuss the importance of social media in a government's fight against terrorism. The Islamic State is a relatively new terror group, and governments are still working to find the best strategy to combat ISIS. Unlike previous campaigns against terror groups, the war against ISIS is being fought online. Because of ISIS' relatively recent entrance into world affairs, not as much research has been completed on this topic. It is no longer a viable strategy to simply fight terrorism through "boots on the ground" or traditional military force. States must now consider the online world another battleground in which to fight non-state actors. This paper will discuss the consequences social media will have on the United States' response to ISIS.

This paper will employ a qualitative analysis using, in part, traditional media sources such as newspapers and television stations, as well as online media, to answer the previously stated research questions. Some quantitative data will also be used. This will be discussed in a more in depth way in the methodology section.

In addition to addressing the aforementioned research questions, this paper seeks to close gaps in the knowledge and scholarship regarding ISIS and the media. Because ISIS is a relatively new addition to the international political scene, there is not as much academic scholarship regarding its practices and motivations. This paper seeks to at least close some of those gaps.

Methodology

In order to answer the aforementioned questions, this paper will use a comparative content analysis as the main methodology. This paper will focus only on the landscape and coverage of the United States media only. Primarily, this paper will focus on a content analysis of the *New York Times*, a newspaper with a liberal slant and the *Wall Street Journal*, a newspaper with a conservative slant.

This paper will examine the coverage of ISIS as found in both the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* and compare the way the two papers cover the same issue. This paper will include a base-level quantitative element by comparing how many times ISIS/ISIL or the Islamic State has been mentioned in the headlines or lead paragraph of the aforementioned sources. This quantitative analysis will be completed in order to gauge the extent of the coverage of ISIS by the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*.

In addition to examining traditional media sources, this paper will research the ways in which online communication has impacted coverage of ISIS' terror activities. Online sources such as blogs and social media accounts will be taken into consideration.

Conclusion

While the findings for this paper have not yet been reached, the methodology and existing research on the topic of media and terrorism is satisfactory to produce findings. Through a comparative content analysis, this paper will use the available resources to determine if terrorist groups still need coverage from print publications and television broadcasts to sufficiently further their aims or if non-state actors' use of social media is an adequate way to disseminate information and further asymmetric warfare. Additionally, this paper will discuss and determine the relevance of traditional media and whether or not traditional media has a place in the changing media landscape. Finally, this paper will look at the issue from a policy standpoint and offer suggestions as how the United States should best respond to terror activities committed by the Islamic State and how online media plays into the government's response to terror activities. While this paper initially posited that some level of coverage from a legacy media source is still relevant, this thesis allows for that assumption to be proven incorrect, in that terror groups are no longer reliant solely on coverage from a traditional media source, but are now capable of achieving the goals of terrorism through their own means.

Although ISIS is still a relatively new player on the international scene, there has been some scholarship on the group, as well as significant research on media and terrorism. The works of various scholars will be discussed and reviewed in the next chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

It is a fundamental characteristic of the news that it is always changing, and there is no better example of the constant transformations than social media. Social media has grown from a platform used by college students to a legitimate and necessary function of reporting the news. Similarly, the study of terrorism is another constantly changing field. As terrorist groups discover new ways to commit acts of violence, scholars and policy makers rush to update their knowledge. Just as news and terrorism are constantly changing, so is the literature surrounding those topics. Everyday, there are new revelations about the way terrorists are changing their strategies, especially using media. However, there are some paradigms and characteristics that many terrorism scholars have established that are relevant even in light of the changes.

Part of this thesis will attempt to compare the differences between the traditional coverage of terrorism by legacy news sources to the coverage of terrorism through mobile methods. As such, much of the literature of this paper is drawn from news coverage. This thesis will primarily examine the coverage of the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*. These two papers were chosen because of their status as legacy news organizations. These newspapers have built reputations over time as reliable and trusted news sources.

Additionally, they represent opposite perspectives. The *New York Times* has long been regarded as a bastion of left-of-center perspectives. Historically, the *Times* endorses presidential candidates. Since the 1960 endorsement of Democrat John F. Kennedy, every endorsed candidate up to the 2012 endorsement of Barack Obama has been a Democrat. Since 1860, the *Times* endorsed twelve Republican candidates, twenty-six Democratic candidates and one candidate from the National Democratic Party in 1896. Based on this information, it is a reasonable assumption that the *Times* leans left-of-center, at least politically (Editorial, 2012).

Unlike the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* does not have a history of endorsing candidates. However, the *Wall Street Journal*, a primarily financially driven paper, has a reputation as leaning right-of-center and tends to take a more conservative position on issues. Neil Weinberg, a veteran columnist for *Forbes* wrote a column underlining the differences between both papers. Although his piece is an opinion column, it is important for the sake of this paper to shed light on the perceptions of other media consumers (Weinberg, 2010). The *Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* are influential newspapers in the American media system and often provide insight into the opinions of the American citizenry, making them important resources in this paper.

In addition to understanding the positions of the various newspapers used in this paper, it is imperative to understand the basic functions, definitions and characteristics of terrorism. David Rapoport is one of the leading scholars on terrorism studies, and his work is some of the most-cited literature on terrorism. Much of Rapoport's work deals with the Four Waves of Terrorisms. He divides modern terrorism into four major periods beginning in the 1800s and continuing to present. Twenty-first century terrorism falls into the fourth wave — radical religious terrorism. Rapoport's explanations provide insight into recent terrorism, especially the actions of ISIS (Rapoport, David C.).

One of the first steps in understanding a phenomenon is defining it. The word "terrorism" is broadly applied and often loosely used. However, there are several definitions that most scholars cite when defining acts of terror in a scholarly context. Charles L. Ruby published a paper on the definition of terrorism. In his paper, Ruby acknowledges the loose use of the word terrorism and then attempts to narrow it to a scholarly definition. He examines several factors as they apply to various terror attacks and attempts to create a definition. Ruby's work draws on the research of other scholars and looks at terrorism from several perspectives, including a legal, moral and behavioral standpoint (Ruby 2002). Ruby's work is also a significant resource because of Ruby's credentials. Ruby is a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel who spent sixteen years working in counterintelligence and criminal matters. His military experience provides a unique perspective to this subject.

As this thesis looks at the relationship between the media and terrorist groups, it will draw on the work of journalists who have studied ISIS and the Middle East. Joby Warrick's 2015 book, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*, traces the Islamic State from its origins in Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and his followers to the current iteration of ISIS terrorizing the Middle East. Warrick's book was published in September 2015, making it one of the most current works regarding ISIS. Warrick is a *Washington Post* reporter and Pulitzer Prize recipient. Warrick is an American journalist working for the *Washington Post* since 1996. During his time at the *Post*, he has written extensively about national security, intelligence and the Middle East. In addition to *Black Flags*, Warrick wrote *The Triple Agent: The Al-Qaeda Mole who Infiltrated the CIA*, an extensive look at some of the United States' efforts to combat al-Qaeda. His book on ISIS provides a comprehensive timeline from ISIS' beginnings as an offshoot of al-Qaeda in Iraq to the terror group it has evolved into in 2016 (Warrick 2015).

Max Boot is also cited in this thesis to provide historical context and background for the origins of ISIS and its tactics. Boot wrote his 2013 book, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* under the auspices of the Council on Foreign Relations. During the six years of writing the book, Boot was the Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Senior Fellow in National Security Studies. Boot is a military historian and foreign policy analyst who regularly contributes to both the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*. Additionally, according to his website, Boot has worked as a foreign policy and defense policy adviser to various U.S. commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as an adviser to politicians including the John McCain and Mitt Romney and Marco Rubio campaigns (Boot 2016). *Invisible Armies* examines various guerrilla groups and their impact on warfare. Although guerrilla groups and terrorist groups are technically different, there are many commonalities between the two, and Boot explores the roots of al-Qaeda in Iraq and its leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the man who would eventually create ISIS (Boot 2013). As with Warrick, Boot's book gives history and context to the rise of ISIS. Policy makers have struggled to combat ISIS in part because they are so different from other terror organizations, and Boot outlines the narrative necessary for understanding their origin.

This thesis will also draw upon The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, also known as the 9-11 Commission. The 9-11 Commission was commissioned by congressional legislation and signed off by President George W. Bush. The commission report will be used nominally in this thesis to understand the beginning of a new age of terrorism and counterterrorism in the United States as well as the decisions of U.S. policymakers and politicians. The events of 9/11 and the United States' response set the precedent in many ways for how the government handles terror and counterterrorism. This 9-11 commission will be used when examining current U.S. policy regarding terrorism (U.S. Congress). Additionally, two journal articles by Martin E. Halstuk and Eric B. Easton will be used to supplement the findings of the 9-11 Commission Report and the possibly fallacies of that report.

While more literature will certainly be cited throughout this thesis, the above works are of critical importance to the research and findings of this thesis and will seek to shed the most light on the relationship between ISIS and the media as well as the United States' counterterrorism strategy and policy implications.

Chapter 3

A Brief Timeline of Modern Terrorism

Introduction

Although terrorism has become a fixture in both modern warfare and the media, terrorism as a tactic has a long history that traces its roots back to the early years of the Common Era. Many scholars look to the Zealots of the ancient Judea Province. The Sicarii were a subset of this group that emerged around 50 C.E. According to Richard Horsley, the Sicarii used tactics such as kidnapping and assassination to combat the Roman Empire (Horsley, 1979). Since the Sicarii, terrorism has become one of the more common facets of war and conflict, not the least of which is the recent actions of the Islamic State. Hundreds of thousands of terrorist acts have been committed over the centuries, but there are several incidents in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that figure prominently in the trajectory of ISIS.

Munich, 1972

In 1972, Black September, a Palestinian terror organization, shot and killed two and kidnapped nine members of the Israeli Olympic team at the Munich Games. Although this was not the first incident of terrorism in the twentieth century, it is a significant event because it was the first terrorist attack that was broadcast heavily on television.

Lebanon, 1983

A decade later, Islamic Jihad, a smaller terror group, attacked U.S. military barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. Suicide bombers were responsible for the deaths of 241 American service members, making it one of the highest death tolls in a single day in military history. The use of suicide bombers was significant, as that method of terrorism would become more prevalent in terror attacks during the latter half of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries.

France, 1995

In July of 1995, eight people were killed and more than 150 injured following the bombing of a Paris subway station. One man, Rachid Ramada, planned the attack but he had ties to the Armed Islamic Group, a fundamentalist organization based in Algeria.

U.S.S. Cole, 2000

In October 2000, suicide bombers attacked the U.S.S. Cole, a Navy missile-destroyer, while in port off the coast of Aden, Yemen. Several people were arrested and indicted in conjunction with the bombing, and Yemen charged six men. The attack also had links to al-Qaeda.

New York, 2001 (9/11)

In September 2001, al-Qaeda coordinated three attacks on United States soil. Terrorists commandeered and crashed two planes into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. Another plane was crashed into the Pentagon outside of Washington, D.C. A fourth plane was initially hijacked and routed toward Washington, D.C., but passengers on the plane attempted to overtake

the hijackers and crashed the plane into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. This was the one of the deadliest attacks on U.S. soil, with almost 3,000 people killed in the attacks. Although al-Qaeda was suspected of masterminding the attacks, al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden didn't claim responsibility until 2004.

Los Angeles, 2002

Hesham Mohammed Hadayet, a lone gunman, opened fire in Los Angeles International Airport at the ticket counter of El Al Airlines, an Israeli airline, in July 2002. Hadayet was not a U.S. citizen, but had been in the country legally. Two people were killed and four were wounded. The mayor of Los Angeles and other United States officials classified the shooting as simply a criminal act. However, Israeli officials were convinced the shooting was a terrorist attack.

Spain, 2004

In the early morning of March 11, ten bombs were detonated in a coordinated attack on four commuter trains at three different stations. This was the deadliest terror attack in Spanish history. More than 1,800 people were injured and 191 were killed in the attacks. The government initially suspected ETA, a Basque separatist organization, and al-Qaeda as the groups responsible for the attacks. ETA made several anonymous phone calls to media outlets to deny their involvement. A few days later, al-Qaeda released a video claiming responsibility.

Netherlands, 2004

In 2004, Theo van Gogh was stabbed, shot and slashed across the throat by a Mohammed Bouyeri, a Muslim who was angered van Gogh's criticisms of Islam. Although the attack was limited to one person, there were repercussions. A violent standoff occurred in The Hague between police and a suspected terror cell that lasted fifteen hours.

England, 2005

On July 7, four bombs were detonated — three bombs on trains and one on a double-decker bus. Four different people coordinated the attack. Three men entered King's Cross Station and then detonated their explosives Aldgate, Edgware Road and Russell Square a few minutes before 9 a.m. About an hour later, a fourth accomplice triggered his device on a double-decker bus. Six people were killed at Edgware Road, seven were killed at the Aldgate attack, twenty-six people were killed at Russell Square, and thirteen were killed at the double-decker bus attack in Tavistock Square.

Denmark, 2005-2010

In 2005, a Danish cartoonist created cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, prompting an outraged backlash and the announcement of a jihadist campaign against Denmark. Three years later in 2008, the cartoons were reprinted as a way to support free speech. The reprinting prompted another wave of backlash. Following the reprinting, a murder plot against one of the cartoonists was revealed and a suicide bombing occurred at the Danish embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan. Finally, in 2010, Danish and Swedish authorities revealed they stopped a terrorist attack against Jyllands-Posten, the Danish newspaper that initially published the cartoons.

Paris 2011

A Molotov cocktail started a fire that destroyed the office of *Charlie Hebdo*, a satirical magazine based in Paris. The attack occurred a few hours before a caricature of the Prophet Mohammad in a special issue was set to be released. No one was injured in the attack.

Toulouse, 2012

Mohamed Merah, a criminal who claimed loyalty to al-Qaeda, committed point-blank shootings around Toulouse. Three French soldiers, three Jewish schoolchildren and a rabbi were all killed in the shootings.

London, 2013

Two British-born Muslim converts drove into a British soldier and subsequently stabbed him and attempted to hack his head off. The two attackers declared their actions were retribution for British military actions abroad.

Belgium, 2014

Four people were killed in a shooting at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. Mehdi Nemmouche was arrested and charged for the killings. Nemmouche was identified as a French national with ties to the Islamic State.

Canada, 2014

Michael Zehaf-Bibeau opened fire on Canadian troopers near the Canadian Parliament. Zehaf-Bibeau was an ex-convict and had been stopped a few weeks earlier when he tried to fly to Syria to join ISIS. In the chaos, Zehaf-Bibeau wounded an army reservist and was shot and killed by police.

Australia, 2014

In 2014, there was a sixteen-hour siege in a Sydney café. Three people, including the gunman, Man Haron Monis, were killed. Monis claimed he was a supporter of the Islamic State.

Paris, 2015 (January)

On January 7, 2015, two gunmen attacked the Paris office of *Charlie Hebdo*, a French satirical magazine. The gunmen killed at least ten people at the offices before fleeing and shooting at police officers that had just arrived on scene. Several more police officers were shot in the ensuing chase. The next day, January 8, police continued to search for the gunmen. While the hunt was occurring, a single gunman killed two people in Montrouge, a Parisian suburb. French authorities later confirmed the two incidents were connected. Authorities later released an arrest warrant for two men, one of whom was a convicted Islamist who had been known for his militant activities. The manhunt for the two men ended a day later. While this was occurring a gunman took hostages in a grocery store in a Paris neighborhood. At the end of the attacks, twelve people killed in total.

Paris, 2015 (November)

Less than a year after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, Paris saw some of the deadliest attacks in its history — at least 130 people were killed. Between 9 and 10 p.m., three bombs were detonated near Stade de France in Saint Denis, a suburb north of Paris. Four people were killed — the three suicide bombers and one passerby. At the same time, gunmen with assault rifles killed fifteen people at the intersection Rue Alibert and Rue Bichat in Paris. A few minutes later, nineteen people were killed when gunmen opened fire on a restaurant also in Paris. A suicide bomber detonates at a restaurant in the 11th District. One person was severely injured and a few others were injured less severely. Simultaneously, three gunmen with assault weapons opened fire at the Bataclan concert hall. Eighty-nine people were killed in the initial assault, and the French police killed three terrorists in the subsequent counter assault. The next day, ISIS took responsibility for the attacks.

San Bernadino, 2015

In December, two gunmen, Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik, a married couple, opened fire at a party at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernadino. Fourteen people were killed and another twenty-two were injured. Farook was born in the United States and Malik was a Pakistani national. Although the two began plotting the attack as early as 2013 and had discussed jihad and radical martyrdom, authorities and investigators have yet to determine whether the couple was connected to any established terror organization. When classified as a terror attack, this shooting is the deadliest attack on United States soil since 9/11.

Brussels, 2016

In March, two explosions occurred in the departure area of the Brussels Airport around 8 a.m., one of which was caused by a suicide bomber. Ten people were killed. Approximately an hour later, a third bomb went off at the Maelbeek subway station, which is near many of the core buildings and institutions of the European Union. Twenty people were killed. More than 230 people in total were wounded. Eight hours later, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attacks. This incident occurred two days after one of the suspects of the November attacks in Paris was apprehended and arrested.

Conclusion

This list is not meant to be exhaustive or all-inclusive. There have been hundreds of terrorist attacks and incidents in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries alone. Rather, this list was compiled in the context of modern fourth-wave terrorism and the Islamic State. The above events give larger context to the more recent activities of ISIS. Although not every incident on this list is directly related to ISIS, the attacks all hold commonality in their connection to radical religious terrorism. This further supports Rapoport's claims that the world is currently experiencing the fourth-wave of religious radicalization (Rapoport). After considering this list, it can be inferred that while the actions of the Islamic State (especially the media) are relatively new to world politics, the origin of the tactics and motivation is not. As this paper moves forward, it will recall the context of these events when attempting to find solutions to the way the United States responds to modern terror.

Chapter 4

The Evolution of Terrorism Coverage

Introduction

The previous chapter of this thesis outlined a timeline of significant terrorist attacks in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As previously discussed, the definition can be broadly applied to many different scenarios and events. As such, the timeline in the previous chapter is by no means exhaustive or definitive. Rather, the timeline was constructed with events in regards to events that were examples of fourth wave religious terrorism as well as important to the development of the Islamic State. The previous chapter aims to shed light on the motivations and methods of ISIS — while the group might be a newer player in international security, its tactics are rooted in history. Similarly, this chapter will aim to shed light on the evolution of media coverage and terrorism. The events in the timeline also demonstrate the change in media coverage. The tools and methods used by journalists to report news are constantly changing, and these changes are demonstrated in the ways journalists approach coverage of terrorism. This chapter will explore these changes in media and the changes in coverage of terrorism.

Munich

In discussing the media coverage of ISIS in recent years, it is necessary to look back at media coverage of previous events. Perhaps the seminal moment in modern media coverage of terrorism is the Munich Olympic Games. During the 1972 summer Olympic games, eight Palestinian terrorists from the group Black September seized hostages from the Israeli Olympic team. The terrorists threatened to systematically kill the hostages until more than two hundred political prisoners were released (Large

2009). Coupled with the international stage of the Olympics and the media attention already surrounding the games, this terrorist attack was perhaps the first terrorist attack that was heavily documented on international television and other forms of media. Dubbed the “Munich Massacre,” the attacks at the 1972 Olympics are also known as the “first internationally staged terrorist event” (Bowman 2003). Although one of the main goals of any terrorist attack is the spreading of an ideology or message, until Munich many terrorist attacks hadn’t been covered with the same intensity or international audience as the Olympic games. This coverage would set the trend for future terrorist events and their coverage in the media. Extensive news coverage of terrorist attacks is part of the normal news cycle in 2016, but this type of intense or daily coverage was not seen in the news prior to Munich. The Munich Olympics represented a shift in the media culture surrounding terrorism. Suddenly, terrorism was something that could reach viewers through their television screens.

Iran

Seven years after the Munich games, the world once again turned its attention another international terrorist event. In 1979, after storming the American embassy in Tehran, Iranian revolutionaries seized fifty-two American hostages for 444 days. The severity and longevity of the hostage situation and captured the attention of the United States. While the Munich Games might have been the first internationally staged event, the Iranian hostage crisis was perhaps the first terror attack that truly became a major media event. News reports covered the situation nearly every night for the duration of the crisis, and thousands of Americans tuned in. ABC created a nightly report called “Americans Held Hostage” to provide daily updates on the situation in Iran. American media created constant coverage of the hostage crisis, and the Iranian hostage takers took advantage of the media attention. In order to stay in the news spotlight and further promote their position, the hostage takers often showed the hostages on television or had them relay messages (Pearson). Masoumeh Ebtekar, the current vice president of Iran,

served as the students' spokesperson. Known as "Mary" or dubbed "Tiger Lily" by the international press, Ebtekar appeared on American television broadcasts to share the revolutionaries' goals. This type of media usage is very similar to the more recent broadcasts by ISIS and their use of television and online media to parade hostages in front of cameras. Although it can seem as though ISIS is an entirely new type of terrorist group, in actuality, many of their methods and tactics —especially in media — have roots in earlier acts of terrorism. The ways in which ISIS delivers their media might be a product of the new generation, but the tactics themselves are not.

Al-Qaeda

Munich and the Iranian hostage crisis were some of the first times that mass media covered terrorism. During these two events the terrorist actors themselves also used media to propagate their ideology and motivations. However, perhaps another terrorist group best showcases the use of media as a significant tool of terrorist groups. After the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden, a young Saudi, left his home country to join the Afghan mujahideen. In 1988, bin Laden went on to create one of the most significant and feared terrorist groups of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries — al-Qaeda. Bin Laden and his right-hand, Ayman al-Zawahiri handle most of the media branding and dissemination of message.

In addition to their laundry list of terrorist attacks to their name, al-Qaeda is one of the best examples of the use of media by a terrorist group. At the height of their power, al-Qaeda was operating an entire media company to promote and maintain their ideology. Much like a traditional media marketing strategy, al-Qaeda was the brand and terror was the product. Carl Ciovacco outlines al-Qaeda's media strategy and their transition from a single terrorist cell to a multi-national terrorist group with a highly developed media strategy. Indeed, al-Qaeda developed an entire media wing (al-Sahab) with the express purpose of connecting with people across the world and promoting their brand and message. Al-Qaeda's

media strategy was also incredibly mobile. Al-Qaeda operates in cells and as a result, are scattered throughout the Middle East, Northern Africa, Europe and other parts of the world. Consequently, the media strategy of al-Qaeda was important to unite the group and keep a consistently branded message. Al-Qaeda bases all of its media releases around seven themes, and no matter the subject matter, bin Laden and Additionally, al-Qaeda specifically tailors its message to appeal to local groups in order to appeal to the largest base of audience. Bin Laden has used this technique to build a relationship and trust between the al-Qaeda leadership and local groups (Ciovacco 2009, 856).

Additionally, Ciovacco notes that in recent years, al-Qaeda has been on a decline and the group has been losing its bureaucracy, operations base and funding. Because of these losses, al-Qaeda has increasingly relied on its message and media to stay relevant (Ciovacco 2009, 855). Terrorism is changing. Rather than a group that only commits physical attacks, terrorism is now just as much about words and education as it is about boots on the ground. Ciovacco quotes former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who noted al-Qaeda's success in media. Rumsfeld is quoted as saying, "our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today's media age, but for the most part we—our country, our government—have not adapted" (Ciovacco 2009, 854). Terrorism is no longer a matter of boots on the ground. It is now a matter that is being played out online and through the media. Unlike terror groups of previous decades, al-Qaeda used the Internet to its advantage in order to connect with supporters and disseminate their world views.

Conclusion

Munich and the Iranian hostage situation are two powerful events that demonstrated a change in media in regards to terrorism. Al-Qaeda changed the game in regards to terrorist-produced media, and ISIS has taken that connectivity a step further. Connectivity around the world has increased, and even less developed countries have some kind of Internet access. Terrorism involves more than physical acts of

violence or terror. In order for a terrorist group to achieve its goals, people must know about the group and its activities. Increasingly, terrorist groups are turning to social media and the Internet to disseminate their world-views and promote their agendas. In previous decades, terrorist groups depended solely on traditional media, such as television or newspapers, for coverage of their actions. But in the age of the Internet, terrorist groups are taking media into their own hands and releasing their information on their terms. Terrorism is now more than a single physical threat. Terrorism is now being played out on the Internet. In that same vein, the war on terrorism has moved beyond a “boots on the ground” strategy. Policy makers, politicians and government agencies are turning to social media to monitor and combat terrorism. The increased connectivity around the world has important implications in the war against terror and the changes in the United States’ policy responses to asymmetric warfare. These changes and new policies will be explored in the forthcoming chapters.

Chapter 5

An Analysis of Legacy Coverage

Introduction

As this paper discussed in previous chapters, the role of media coverage in acts of terrorism is crucial to the success of said acts. In addition to inciting fear, terror groups seek to promote their ideologies. Media attention is one of the ways terrorists achieve these goals. Consequently, this media attention need not be favorable. In keeping with the adage, “there is no bad publicity,” terrorist groups generally seek any type of media attention — even derogatory coverage. Traditionally, this news coverage has come from legacy media sources, such as newspapers and television stations.

Before the advent and popularization of social media, terrorist groups had limited opportunities to promote their own aims. Although terrorist groups may have been getting coverage, in most instances, they did not have the opportunity to control the content of the new reports. But, in recent years, that trend is shifting. Social media and online platforms have given terrorist groups more agency to curate its message. Essentially, ISIS and other terrorist groups are creating a brand and terrorism is the product. Terrorists are relying more on their own self-promotion and are in less need of media outlets. In recent months, ISIS has been making headlines as one of the most media-savvy terrorist groups currently in operation. However, their media strategy — while innovative — is not completely new. Social media has become both a function and deterrent of terrorism. The war on terror is no longer a “boots on the ground” event — the fight is moving to cyberspace. Later, this thesis will examine the policy implications and counterterrorism options surrounding social media. But, before policy options can be explored, this thesis will also discuss the use of social media by ISIS and the ways in which terror groups are bypassing traditional media outlets.

Al-Qaeda — The Precursor to ISIS' Media Strategy

Although ISIS has made significant inroads in the use of social media, their strategy is rooted in the history of other terrorist groups. When al-Qaeda formed in the late 1980s, it took a new approach to terrorism in that it also focused on its media strategy. Osama bin Laden, the founder of al-Qaeda was particularly concerned with the message being dispersed to the masses. Subsequently, al-Qaeda was perhaps one of the first terrorist groups to attempt to bypass legacy media. With the creation of al-Sahab — the media arm of al-Qaeda — Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri were able to curate the brand and message of the group through video and audio releases. Although these releases received more publicity and a wider reach from media outlets, al-Qaeda was still able to have some semblance of control of the message that was being presented to the public. In his paper “The Contours of Al Qaeda’s Media Strategy,” Carl Ciovacco outlines the ways in which bin Laden and al-Zawahiri curated the release of information from al-Qaeda. For example, Ciovacco notes that bin Laden and Zawahiri keep a theme of consistency by sticking to seven different themes in each media release. In addition to the message that was being distributed by media outlets, al-Qaeda was able to supplement those narratives with their own — obviously biased — content (Ciovacco 2009). However, al-Qaeda’s peak years of media involvement occurred before the peak of social media usage. Al-Qaeda didn’t make as much use of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. During the peak of media releases, al-Qaeda relied primarily on video and audio releases, online websites and their own television station.

ISIS' Media Strategy

ISIS’ media strategy does share some parallels with that of al-Qaeda in that it has worked to create its own narrative to supplement the coverage from traditional media outlets. No longer is ISIS relying solely on legacy media coverage to garner international attention. Javier Lesaca, a contributor to the Brookings Institution and associate professor at the University of Navarra, wrote several articles

detailing ISIS' media strategy and use of video content. In several articles for the Brookings Institution, Lesaca describes ISIS as "one of the most important phenomena in digital public communication since the beginning of the century" (Lesaca 2015). Much of Lesaca's work focuses on ISIS' audiovisual strategy. Lesaca analyzed ISIS media releases from January 2014 to September 2015 and discovered ISIS created more than 845 audiovisual releases — which, as Lesaca notes, amounts to more than one release per day (Lesaca 2015).

J.M. Berger and Jonathan Morgan of the Brookings Institution also conducted extensive research on ISIS' use of online media. ISIS has used Twitter as one of its main platforms. Through studies, Berger and Morgan discovered that approximately 30,000 out of 50,000 Twitter accounts studied are tied to ISIS and controlled by human users. Additional data was also collected, and the study estimates a maximum "hard ceiling for ISIS supporters in the vicinity of 90,000 accounts." In the study, Berger and Morgan took care to ensure the data was not skewed by accounts used to boost followers, i.e. "automated bots." This data was collected during the period of October 4 through November 27, 2014 (Berger and Morgan 2015, 7). Most of these accounts were created in 2014. The study also notes that the increase in ISIS-related Twitter accounts affects the growth of Twitter. Berger and Morgan explain that, in terms of growth, "the growth in ISIS supporting accounts outstripped that of the overall Twitter user population" (Berger and Morgan 2015, 17). This is an important distinction in that it notes the aggressive nature in which ISIS is utilizing Twitter and social media to spread its message. In previous decades, a terrorist group's message was limited to that of the legacy media as well or any information the group could broadcast on a legacy platform, as was the case with the Iranian Revolution's radio and television broadcasts.

Legacy Media Coverage

In contrast to social media and its use by ISIS followers, legacy media takes a different approach. Although the content might vary by medium or ownership, the coverage of ISIS by legacy sources ultimately seeks to report the news free from the bias of the subject. However, as with any news source, it is important to notice bias or trends in coverage. The Columbia Journalism Review, published by the Columbia University School of Journalism, is one of the premiere voices in press criticism. In 2014, the CJR published a report on media coverage of ISIS and the evolving nature of the media narrative. In recent years, the media narrative surrounding ISIS has increased exponentially in both volume and attention. Just as ISIS is a terrorist group with its roots in the past, so is the media coverage. The CJR critique suggests the media coverage of ISIS is reminiscent of media coverage of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Demaris Colhoun is the Columbia Journalism Review's digital correspondent who covers media business. In her report, Colhoun compares the coverage of ISIS's terror campaign to the 2003 invasion, saying,

“These reports belong to a larger narrative that is changing week to week, sometimes day to day, yet its pattern and tone are familiar. Driven by a national outcry over the gruesome beheadings, the news media has focused on threats at home and abroad, while invoking the comforting myth of America's military prowess. Like the media coverage that led up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, much of it is based on official, often anonymous sources, and a startling lack of evidence” (Colhoun 2014).

Additionally, part of the CJR report addresses the direct impact the activities of ISIS have had on journalists and the journalism community. In summer 2014, viral videos of ISIS beheading journalist James Foley began circulating the internet. William Youmans, a George Washington University media and public affairs professor, is cited in the report speculating if “outrage it sparked has given way to the same sort of solipsistic nationalism that transfixed the media in the buildup to the invasion of Iraq

in 2003” (Colhoun 2014). The language of news is a crucial aspect of reporting. In her report, Colhoun briefly examines the ways in which various news outlets report on the Islamic State and the way the story is framed. For example, Colhoun looks at various legacy media outlets, including the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, CNN, CBS and Fox News. Despite serving different audiences on a variety of platforms, Colhoun notes that all of these legacy outlets rely heavily on the reports from law enforcement and relationships with the upper echelons of politics (Colhoun 2014). This can often limit the scope of the coverage, as well as add an element of bias within the story.

Media visibility is crucial to the success terrorist groups’ attacks. As previously discussed, ISIS utilizes social media to create their own narrative. However, ISIS is also skilled at manipulating legacy coverage to fit their purpose. ISIS has proved itself adept at finding vulnerabilities in legacy media coverage and exploiting those weaknesses. In a recent column for the *Atlantic*, Charlie Winter, a senior research associate at Georgia State University’s Transcultural Conflict and Violence Initiative, discusses this phenomenon in the context of ISIS and the recent bombings in Brussels. Winter notes that, in the aftermath of the bombings, Western media sources speculated about the nature of the attack. However, ISIS began claiming responsibility on Amaq News Agency (its official newswire). That release ultimately went viral, despite the fact it was mostly a collection of already-reported details from Western media. Winter notes that ISIS inserted itself into that media landscape to turn the tide of attention back to itself. Winter writes, “directed, first and foremost, at the Western enemies of ISIS, the statement was a way to capitalize on the international media storm surrounding Brussels that day” (Winter 2015). In this instance, ISIS took control of the media narrative and to exert greater influence to on legacy media. Although legacy media is a necessary control on the institutions around it, it is still open to fallacy. ISIS has proven its ability to latch on to those fallacies to turn the narrative back to them. Winter sums it up by writing, “ISIS terrorism doesn’t end when a bomb detonates. Rather, it continues for hours, days, and weeks after, living on through the media” (Winter 2015).

Conclusion

Despite the vulnerabilities in legacy media coverage, the work of newspapers and traditional media cannot be discounted. In November 2015, Callum Borchers, the *Washington Post* reporter for politics and media, discussed U.S. President Barack Obama's message to American journalists. Borchers noted Obama beseeched reporters to remain objective and unbiased, stating, "but one of the things that has to happen is how we report on this has to maintain perspective and not empower in any way these terrorist organizations or elevate them in ways that make it easier for them to recruit or make them stronger" (Borchers 2015). Borchers outlined the implicit dangers of the president attempting to dictate the mainstream media. At its core, the watchdog element of American journalism is one of the pillars of American democracy. However, clearly, Obama's attempt to dictate the media was met with opposition from all journalists. While legacy media coverage might be vulnerable to manipulation from ISIS and other terror groups, it still serves a larger purpose. Legacy media coverage is essential when covering terrorism and terrorist groups, especially ISIS. The role of the fourth estate as the watchdog of those in power is essential to the continuation of Western democracy, and legacy media coverage of ISIS is essential to that goal.

Chapter 6

Policy Implications

Introduction

The rise of ISIS has had enormous impact on the world of media and journalism. The media world and the way journalists cover terrorism are changing, and this also has significant implications for the ways in which terror is fought. “Boots on the ground” is no longer an adequate strategy — the war on terror is moving online. As previously discussed in this thesis, one of the characteristics of terrorism is the use of asymmetric force. Traditionally, terrorist groups are too small to exert equal power when faced with threats from government forces or the military. Typically, governments are able to employ various strategies to fight terrorism, and in previous years, this was focused heavily on a “boots on the ground” strategy. In most scenarios, a show of military force from a government was enough to defeat terrorist groups. However, in recent years, the war on terror has moved off the streets. Terrorist groups are producing more online content and propaganda as well as moving their recruiting strategies online. Just as terrorist groups adapt their strategies, so must the government adapt its policy.

Recruitment is perhaps one of the most important aspects of online counterterrorism. ISIS has gained notoriety for its use of social media and online platforms to recruit followers. As discussed previously, Berger and Morgan’s study estimated the number of Twitter followers in the tens of thousands, and media outlets from BuzzFeed to the *New York Times* are reporting on new cases of ISIS followers being lured in by Twitter.

The United States Department of State is one organization attempting to counter these recruitments through the use of online platforms. ISIS’ recruitment strategy, in part, includes the use of highly produced videos that feature clips from pop culture, including scenes *The Matrix*, *American Sniper*

or the videogame Call of Duty (Lesaca 2015). In response, the Department of State has begun to use a YouTube channel entirely in Arabic to produce and distribute anti-terrorism videos. The most viewed video, which details ISIS threatening Sunnis in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, on the Department of State channel has been viewed more than 127,000 times (Lesaca 2015). The majority of the other videos on the all-Arabic channel have user views that range from several hundred to 60,000. But, while the videos attempt to dissuade terrorism, their content and aesthetic features might hinder that goal. In December 2015, CNN published an anonymous interview with Abu Hurriya¹, a former al-Qaeda fighter and recruiter who dissected the effectiveness of US counterterrorism videos to recruitment videos produced or distributed by ISIS. The article outlined the shortcomings of the United States' online counterterrorism, beginning with the content of the United States' videos. Compared to the ISIS videos — which feature a high production value — the State Department videos are lacking because they feature mostly static images and text. The effectiveness of the ISIS videos lies in their movie quality and high-paced and action-filled clips. The CNN article cites Abu Hurriya, who explains that the videos “[hit] the sweet spot for angry young men and women who are searching for a purpose in life and a community of like-minded souls” (Cohen and Goldschmidt 2015).

The United States is also tailoring its policy to Twitter. The State Department manages the Global Engagement Center, which seeks to “effectively coordinate, integrate and synchronize messaging to foreign audiences that undermines the disinformation espoused by violent extremist groups” (U.S. Department of State 2016). The Global Engagement Center also controls a Twitter account (@TheGEC), which was formerly known as Think Again, Turn Away (@ThinkAgain_DOS), a name that drew criticism from counterterrorism experts and scholars. According to Nadia Oweidat, non-residential Senior Fellow at New America, who was quoted in the CNN article, ISIS sympathizers are not likely to take instruction from the United States government, making Think Again, Turn Away an ineffective name for a counterterrorism strategy. Additionally, U.S. Central Command operates a Twitter account

¹ Abu Hurriya is an alias used by CNN to protect the identity of the quoted former recruiter.

(@CENTCOM), which also tweets about current operations in Iraq and terrorism. For the most part, this account chooses to use the hashtag #Daesh to refer to the Islamic State (U.S. Central Command).

The Global Engagement Center Twitter account routinely tweets out messages intended to discourage Internet users from joining or sympathizing with ISIS. Common hashtags in the posts include #UnitedAgainstDaesh, #ENOUGH, #FATE and #DefeatingDaesh. The use of hashtags makes the content searchable in Twitter, allowing a wider range than just the page's followers to see the tweets. The account alternates between using the terms ISIS and Daesh (the Arabic acronym for ISIS). The account @TheGEC has tweeted about 11,700 times and has almost 26,200 followers. The account is fairly active and tweets several times a day. While ISIS-related tweets make up the majority of the content, it is not restricted to only tweets about the Islamic State. The account also tweets about other terrorist groups, including Boko Haram. The tweets range from posts about atrocities committed by ISIS, links to testimonies of families affected by ISIS, calls to action and updates on troop activity. Below are sample tweets from the @TheGEC account (Global Engagement Center).

Social Media Outreach

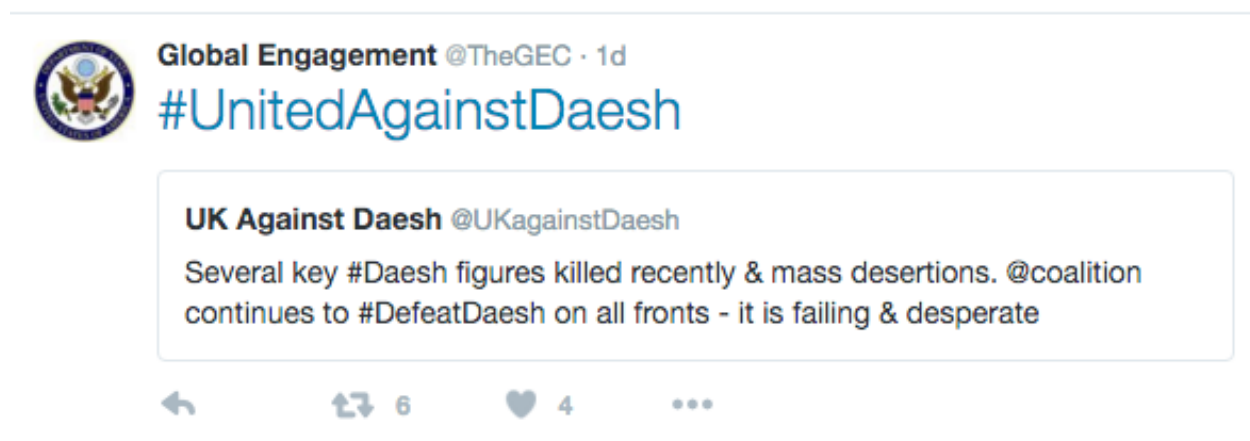


Figure 1



Global Engagement @TheGEC · Apr 5

The pain of losing a loved one to violent extremism: a tragedy that can be prevented. #FATE youtu.be/vb1U5qQQwwU



Figure 2



Figure 3

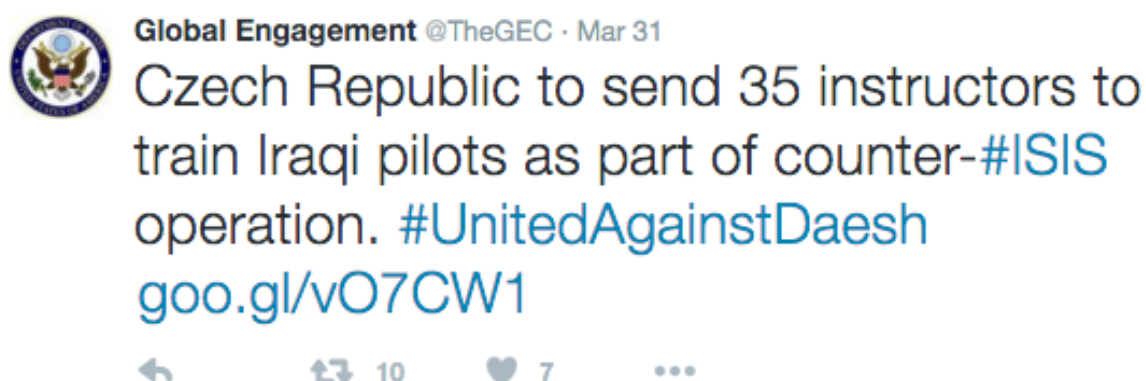


Figure 4

While the Department of State has an active presence on Twitter, as discussed earlier in this chapter, several scholars of counterterrorism policy do not believe that the online efforts are not effective. The presentation and content of the tweets is part of the problem, according to Abu Hurriya. For example, in one of the above tweets, the Department of State notes that Czech Republic is to send instructors to Iraq to train pilots in the fight against ISIS. Hurriya notes these types of tweets can be seen as confrontational and fulfillment of a prophecy that other countries will rise against the Islamic State (Cohen and Goldschmidt 2015).

The United States' current online counterterrorism policy has roots in Bush-era policy. The early iterations of the current policy came into effect during George W. Bush's presidency and his "War of Ideas" created to combat al-Qaeda. Post-9/11, the Bush administration began working on a counterterrorism policy that focused both on physical actions and a fight for the hearts and minds in what became known as the "War of Ideas" doctrine (Aistrope 2016, 124). Combating anti-American sentiment and anti-American induced terrorism was and continues to be one of the issues at the forefront of U.S. counterterrorism policy. When the War of Ideas doctrine was first implemented, the United States was primarily concerned with combating al-Qaeda. In 2016, the focus has shifted to ISIS, but there are subtle influences of Bush-era doctrine in current policies.

One of the hallmarks of the online counterterrorism offensive is the Digital Outreach Team. Established in 2007, the DOT is comprised of a team of bloggers that attempt to counter anti-American sentiment by meeting users where they are and doing so in a variety of languages popular in the Middle East, including Urdu, Pashto, Arabic and Persian (Aistrope 2016, 130). The DOT uses facts and objectivity to contrast the emotion-driven propaganda online. Although some parts of Bush-era counterterrorism have since been disbanded, the DOT was expanded under the Obama administration under the auspices of then-Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton (Aistrope 2016, 131). Under the Obama administration, online counterterrorism used to fight ISIS incorporates other programs, including U.S. Central Command (which has been previously discussed in this chapter) and other divisions. In 2011, the public became aware of some of the newer tactics, which included a unit of CentCom (known as the Joint Psyops Support Element or JPSY) that contracted out to a California firm to use software that allowed operatives to control multiple Internet personas. Unlike DOT operatives who are required to identify themselves as State Department employees, JPSY employees are not held to the same requirement (Aistrope 2016, 131). Although this strategy allows JPSY employees to operate on a much wider scale than the DOT, it does raise some questions about credibility.

However, the DOT's strategy and effectiveness has also been called into question. After a case study analysis, findings indicated that the DOT strategy of posting messages with a positive view of the United States actually contributed to an increase in anti-American sentiment (Aistrope 2016, 132). This has serious implications for counterterrorism policy, especially since the nature of terrorism has changed. Counterterrorism policies must adapt and change with the type of terrorism in order to be effective.

Part of this disconnect comes from fast-changing nature of ISIS' brand of terrorism. The ways in which ISIS is exerting terror online are changing faster than the United States government can keep up. Perhaps the solution lies in looking outside of the current government agencies. A CNN Money Reports by Jack Regan and reported by Laurie Segall, outlines the efforts of Ghost Security Group, a group of IT specialists, ex-military and former members of the hacking group Anonymous. The group monitors and

hacks the internet activity of ISIS and ISIS members and then shares that information with the U.S. government via an intelligence officer. According to the group, its efforts have seen the take-down of almost 150 ISIS propaganda sites at the time of publication in November 2015 (CNN Money could not independently verify this). Michael Smith, the intelligence officer Ghost Security passes their information to, acknowledges the group's success in stopping ISIS attacks. The work of Ghost Security Group is not necessarily legal under the current laws — but it is effective (Regan 2015). The gray area gap between illegal hacking and state-approved counterterrorism is growing smaller, and traditional counterterrorism techniques are not effective. Outsourcing counterterrorism efforts might become a viable option to stop ISIS' spread online.

Conclusion

Counterterrorism policy has been at the forefront of political thought for the better part of the last decade and a half. One of the strongest militaries in the world is struggling to contain and stop the spread of terrorism. Countless policies have been implemented to varying degrees of success. As terror changes and iterates, so must counterterrorism policy, especially in regards to ISIS. The United States government must begin to look outside its usual methods. The counterterrorism policy of ten years ago is not an effective stop against the rise of ISIS. The nature of terrorism is changing, and in order to effectively combat it, so must the methods of counterterrorism change.

Chapter 7

The Relevance and Future of Mainstream Media

Introduction

In the last decade, the news business has been changing at a more rapid pace than ever before. There is a growing divide between “legacy” media sources and newer forms of journalism and communication. For hundreds of years, people consumed their news from newspapers. Eventually, television and radio became other sources of news, but even with the invention of these new mediums, newspapers still held the monopoly on news consumption. However, that began to change after the invention of the Internet. In the last decade, news has moved online and people are no longer consuming news from the same source. Instead of a newspaper — which put all the important stories of the day in one place — people are now consuming news from multiple online sources. People are now seeking out the news from multiple sites and platforms, rather than being presented the news in one source. This phenomenon raises many questions about the viability of legacy media, its role in the media landscape moving forward and the role of online media.

For the purpose of this paper, the term “legacy media” refers to more traditional media outlets, such as newspapers and radio and television stations. In his paper, “Legacy Media: A Case for Creative Destruction,” Francisco Perez-Latre refers to legacy media as “mass media companies, usually large and always old. They have had significant resources to hire large numbers and have been required to pay well and to provide various social benefits” (Perez-Latre 2014). This paper will also use his definition for purposes of clarity. Additionally, this paper will look at the role of legacy media in a purely content-based

context. It will not explore the implications of new and legacy media in terms of financial structures or advertising.

Dichotomy of the Media Landscape

The popularization of the Internet and online news reporting often forces established news organizations to play catch up in order to compete with the influx of new media. This is especially true in the coverage of current events. In an age of social media, newspapers and television stations often struggle to produce quality content quickly enough to compete with platforms focused on putting content online first. Finding the balance between legacy media practices and newer online practices often leads to tension between practitioners of the two types. For example, in his paper, Perez-Latre notes that legacy media has built the reputation of being responsible for “preservation of the ideals of journalism and its community-building purposes” (Perez-Latre 2014). Additionally, legacy sources are looked to as the standard-bearers of sound journalistic practices. Following this line of thinking, many media professionals believe newer media platforms don’t hold the same type of cache in the media landscape. However, despite differing opinions, this paper posits online media is now a permanent fixture in the media landscape. Ten years ago, social media was thought to be a passing fad, but now it is a vital part of the way people consume news. Perez-Latre notes that the disruption between legacy and online media should be looked at in a positive light. He writes, “new online outlets and some individuals become part of the flux of news and information; this, per se, strikes us as a positive development” (Perez-Latre 2014).

With these differences, it can be easy to assume legacy media no longer has a place in the current news landscape and online media is overtaking the landscape as the preeminent news platform. However, this thesis suggests the idea that legacy platforms are still vital to the media landscape. Many scholars believe that the two are not as completely separate identities as previously suggested. For example, online

media often cites back to legacy sources in coverage. Additionally, legacy and new media often cover the same topics, simply in different ways.

In a 2014 presentation for Poynter News University, Zella Bracy, looked into the future of legacy media by tracing its history. The Poynter Institute is a school for journalism professionals, which keeps itself at the forefront of journalism news and innovation. Bracy's presentation was a deep dive into the history of online and legacy media in the last six years and her predictions for the future of the media landscape. As the internet has grown and changed since 2008, so has the media landscape. Bracy notes that much of the journalism industry is still heavily focused on a print-centric strategy (Bracy 2014). In this line of thinking, digital content is seen as an afterthought or continuation of the print content. However, that strategy is not effective or sustainable in the realities of media. With the popularization of online news, digital and multimedia content must be given the same weight as print content. As early as 2010, news professionals were realizing the role social media would play into their chosen fields. Bracy even goes as far as to suggest the digital departments of legacy organizations be given their own separate divisions in order to best curate and produce content (Bracy 2014).

Conclusion

Despite the assumptions legacy platforms are no longer relevant in today's media landscape, this paper suggests that the opposite is actually true. Legacy media still plays a vital role in the news cycle and news landscape. However, the way people are consuming news is changing, and the media landscape must adapt and change accordingly. Bracy's presentation suggests a number of ways in which legacy sources can keep themselves relevant. Audiences now tailor their news consumption to fit their individual needs and opinions. No longer is the newspaper the only trusted source for information. But, newspapers and television stations have the potential to still be a part of the new landscape. Just as the headlines are

constantly changing, so are the innovations in the field. This paper believes the place legacy media is still of importance as the media landscape continues to adapt and grow.

Chapter 8

Findings and Conclusions

Introduction

The world is now more connected than ever. People across the world are now connected with those they might never have met previously. The Internet and online communication have played a major role in this global shrink. But this increased connectivity does not only apply to people on the individual level. In actuality, this hyper-connectivity has implications for many groups. But perhaps some of the most significant implications of online media are those related to terrorism and the Islamic State.

This thesis set out to examine the relationship between terrorism and the media. By looking specifically at ISIS, this project looked to find the significance of online communication in both the execution and prevention of terror. Through the course of research, three primary research questions emerge. This thesis sought to determine both the media strategy of ISIS as well as the ways in which various news sources covered terrorism. Additionally, this project was, in part, an examination and critical look at current counterterrorism policies. Finally, this paper looked to examine the dichotomy of legacy media and social media. In order to contribute to existing literature, this thesis sought to find the connections between the use of media and the ways in which terror activities were conducted, as well as answer the aforementioned questions. Much of the current literature addresses one of the above topics, but does not examine the implications and connections between media and policy. The two topics are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they inform the other. This thesis seeks to address those connections.

Journalism is an ever-changing field, and the ways in which people consume news are vastly different now than they were ten years ago. The media landscape — which used to be dominated by print newspapers and television statements — is changing every day. This project outlined the recent changes in journalism media. Platforms that were once considered novelties for college students, such as Facebook

and Twitter, are now vital to the reporting and consumption of news. Social media has cemented its place alongside the legacy heavyweights in the industry, such as the New York Times and CNN.

With this increase in online news platforms comes the increased use among groups and organizations. Perhaps some of the most significant users are those from terror organizations. One of the key tenets of terrorism is the ability to spread an ideology and send a message. Previously, terror groups were forced to rely on coverage from legacy news sources. But now, groups such as ISIS are creating their own content to present a carefully crafted image to the world. Terrorism is no longer confined to an act of violence or manipulation nor can it be combated effectively with “boots on the ground” methods. Terrorism is now just as major a threat online. This threat has significant implications for counterterrorism policy and strategy.

Findings

ISIS has developed an extremely sophisticated effective media strategy that employs social media, propaganda and highly produced videos to both spread its message and ideology as well as recruit more followers to the Islamic State. This thesis sought to find the connection between ISIS’ seemingly innovating media strategy and the media strategy of previous terrorist groups. Much has been written regarding ISIS’ innovations in using social media as a tool of terrorism. However, this project sought to take a different route by examining the history of terrorism coverage and the connections between ISIS’ strategies and those of al-Qaeda (ISIS’ precursor). During the course of this project, this thesis found that ISIS is currently employing a very effective strategy by producing recruitment videos with a high production value as well as utilizing social media platforms to engage with and recruit followers. In doing so, they are able to directly control their own message.

Additionally, this thesis found that current counterterrorism strategy used to fight ISIS is not effective. Rather than combating terrorism online, the current policies are ineffective and possibly

encourage anti-American sentiment online. Counterterrorism policy must be examined and changed in the hopes combating ISIS online. Finally, this thesis examined the nature of legacy media coverage and its place in the media landscape. Despite the importance of social media, legacy news outlets are not yet obsolete, nor are they headed toward imminent closure. Rather, legacy organizations have an important place in the media landscape as long as print organizations embrace digital journalism.

Future Corollary Questions

While this thesis attempted to answer the primary research questions, the research of this topic did shed light on potential corollary questions, namely, the nature of counterterrorism policy. Just as the media industry is changing, so is the intelligence industry. Groups of anonymous hackers are having success in shutting down ISIS online, but some of their work can be questionably legal at best. This thesis begs the further question if the State Department needs to revisit its strategy and the laws surrounding it. Additionally, this thesis raises the question of how the United States can create better content to be shared online in order to compete with the high production level of current ISIS videos.

Conclusion

The nature of terrorism is changing. The United States government is facing an entirely new brand of terrorist. The terrorism war being fought now is one of words and blog posts rather than bullets and guns. The ways in which the news media cover terrorism are also changing. Both governments and news outlets alike must continue to change and adapt their policies in order to keep pace with the constant iterations and changes of ISIS. Neither terror nor the media is a monolith. They are ever-changing groups. The connections and implications of both media and terrorism are perhaps some of the most significant factors to consider if the war on terror is truly to be won.

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