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THE "JIHADI WOLF" THREAT

THE EVOLUTION OF TERROR NARRATIVES BETWEEN THE (CYBER-)SOCIAL ECOSYSTEM AND SELF-RADICALIZATION "EGO-SYSTEM"

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1 Introduction

In this paper, the JIHAD concept has to be understood not as the original spiritual meaning in Islam, but the violent-based ideological distortion of terrorism as reported in Open Source Jihad (OSJ), a key-section of the digital magazine 'Inspire', published by al_Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as of 2010, and to date at its 16th issue.

The use of the term '(cyber-)' - in brackets - aims to highlight the already blurred boundary between 'real' and 'cyber' (as not real) dimension of life. Nowadays, the 'cyber' dimension can no longer be considered 'other' in comparison with the uniqueness of the human experience, especially within social dynamics. This blurring is totally redefining the concept of criminality. This imposes the introduction of new semantic, new methodological and technical approaches to monitor, analyse, prevent, anticipate and counter the evolving terrorist threat.

Considering the aniconism and iconoclasm in Islam, the evolution of 'Internet Jihadism'[1] points out the complete revolution represented by the born of a specific (cyber-)visual-storytelling. The violent videos, infographics and images reinforce the cultural impact of the pseudo-religious messages. That gives jihadism the power to re-shape reality, alter the declared religious and cultural roots, elaborate and celebrate the 'cult' of the jihadi wolf as a sort of super-human fighter, absolutely opposite to the human submission to God, as in Islam.

The analysis proposed in this paper is based on a cross-disciplinary approach based on the interconnection between Criminology and Communication and Media Studies to create a multidimensional framework for analysing the strategic media campaign of the main Jihadi entities, al_Qaeda (AQ) and Islamic State (IS) by means of graphic storytelling and visual narratives of the 'jihadi wolf'.

During the last years, both al_Qaeda and the Islamic State have dedicated a relevant part of their online media campaign to promote the so-called 'Lone Jihad' in Western countries. The jihadisphere[2] has been populated by specific narratives aimed to celebrate the 'jihadi wolf' as 'viralized' weapon in the process of the globalization of terror. This situation redefines the threat scenario in metropolis and points out the complexity of a framework characterized, at the same time, by the pervasiveness of the (cyber-)social ecosystem and the polarization on vulnerable individuals as ego-

system - self-isolation and self-radicalization - with the aim to inspire them to attack soft targets, thanks to the mobile spread of the 'culture of terrorism'.

2 Jihadi wolf

The author intends to use the concept 'jihadi wolf', instead of lone wolf terrorist, lone wolf, lone mujahid, because it was used for the first time by several web-communities, in a derogatory sense, to label Nidal Hasan - the former army major and psychiatrist convicted of killing 13 people and injuring 42 in the 2009 mass shooting at Fort Hood military base - as the 'jihadi wolf in Army clothing'. His figure is relevant because, before attacking, he communicated with Anwar al_Awlaki - the US-born radical cleric from AQAP considered as the 'recruiter and motivator' for al_Qaeda - and uses social media with the aim to spread his message of violent jihad, especially in the West. Al_Awlaki is a key-player in contemporary jihadism because of his ability to 'cross-inspire' both AQ and IS groups and individuals. In 2014, the mobile app for radicalization named 'Generation Awlaki' was created to celebrate him after his death in a drone attack in 2011. These details are not just simple anecdots and/or factoids, they represent the 'cornerstones' of Internet Jihadism myths, globalized propaganda, seductive storytelling and narratives.

Going back to the concept of 'jihadi wolf', it is useful deleting the word 'lone' to underline its semantic oxymoronic nature connected to the word 'wolf', considering the specific behaviour of the wolf in the pack as its social life basic unit. Additionally, in ethology, the concept of 'lone wolf' is used to describe some rare cases of isolation in older and weaker wolves. The jihadi wolf is not weak and alone: just think of the 'cultural' and (cyber-)globalized dimension of terrorist narratives inspiring and promoting the 'Lone Jihad' against the West. He is completely mobile-connected and immersed into the magmatic, interacting and (cyber-)socializing jihadisphere - the terrorist infosphere[3] produced by the massive uploading of 'open' jihadist multimedia products. At the beginning, in the late 1990s, the jihadisphere was considered a mere online repository, a sort of terrorist online library. Nowadays, the (cyber-)social evolution fosters its development and expansion of interactive power, representing: 1) the 'living' core of the 'culture of terrorism', 2) the socio-relational (cyber-)environment promoting the appealing, persuasive and seductive power of the 'jihadentity'[4].Then, the jihadisphere has to be considered a dy-

namically resilient (cyber-)environment aimed to create and reinforce identity and experiences of the audience for operational purposes. It has a strong impact on youngers potentially representing 'Generation-T', the next generation of lone wolf terrorists 'cultivated' by *ad hoc* specific narratives, motivated and incited to attack. Therefore, the author proposes to adopt the concept of 'jihadi wolf' to describe an apparently 'lone' - but continually mobile-connected and (cyber-)jihadi inspired actor attacking (in a very asymmetric do-it-yourself modus operandi), without any strategic and/or long-term planning, Western civilians as 'soft targets' in their day-life routine.

2.1 'Mediamorphosis' of Terrorism and Internet Jihadism

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century represent a crucial segment of time for jihadism because of the 'mediamorphosis'[5] process, as the rapid transformation in which the medium is not only a container of messages aimed to generate terror, such as in traditional propaganda strategies, but it also becomes 'media-terror' itself, an asymmetric weapon of the globalized contemporary reality throughout the violent action/representation digital nexus. The 'mediamorphosis' is strongly linked to the transition from the 'analogue' world - organized in a hierarchy and institutional centres of information and knowledge production which used a one-to-many communication model - to the digital world. The latter is a reticular and globalized world, exclusively based on a many-to-many communication model - founded on cross-mediality and populated by users - generated and remediated[6] contents disseminated across the Web.

The (cyber-)social nature of Internet Jihadism is the *passepartout* necessary to deeply understand the jihadi wolf phenomenon and its evolving change. In 2005, Ayman al_Zawahiri, the strategic leader of al_Qaeda, wrote a letter to al_Zarqawi, the leader of al_Qaeda in Iraq, in which he pointed out the main role of media:

[...] however, despite all of this, I say to you:
that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media and that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our umma. [...]

One of the main errors was (and is) to consider 'the race for the hearts and minds', the 'media battle', as the mere techno-capability implementation of terrorist entities in terms of (cyber-)means and assets. The author wants to underline the need

to focus on the evolving (cyber-)social ecosystem and conflict environment grown-up as the result of the Internet Jihadism phenomenon characterized *in primis* by the massive exploitation of the Web by AQ. Then, since 2014, in only three years, the self-proclaimed Islamic State has been developing the first globalized collective imaginary of the Digital Age. Many roots of such imaginary are connected to Western visual and media cultures, as in the case of splatter and gore movie narrative codes.

The ongoing evolutionary change of Internet Jihadism is strongly connected to the progressive 'mobile convergence'. It is not a static and monolithic phenomenon but it is extremely dynamic and its development occurs according to a complex evolution, as follows:

Internet Jihadism					
Phase	**Timeline**	**Communication Model**	**Web**	**Main Actors**	**Main Devices**
TERROR ARENA	**1998 - 2004**	POST-ANALOG	**1.0**	**GROUPS (AQ, HAMAS, HIZBOLLAH)**	**DESKTOP**
DIGIHAD	**2004 - 2014**	POST-ANALOG, EARLY DIGITAL	**1.5**	**GROUPS (AQ) AND VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES**	**LAPTOP**
CYBER-JIHAD	**2014 - 2016**	DIGITAL, CYBER-SOCIAL	**2.0**	**GROUPS (IS, AQ) HACKING GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS**	**TABLET/MOBILE**
LONE JIHAD	**2016 -**	CYBER-SOCIAL	**2.5**	**INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS (IS, AQ)**	**SMARTPHONE**

Table 1: Internet Jihadism

The primordial exploitation of the Internet for terrorist purposes became popular in the late 1990s with groups like Hamas, Hizbollah and al_Qaeda that created their own digital identity and placed the electronic jihad into a very static digital arena.

The 'Digihad' is a crucial step, not only for its ten-year time frame, but for the massive exploitation of the Internet carried out by al_Qaeda through the dissemination of violent propaganda videos, technical/tactical manuals and doctrine documents. Since 2010, thanks to the issue of Inspire, the first jihadist serialized online English language magazine published by AQAP, the Open Source Jihad (OSJ) violent concept began to 'pollinate' the Web, forums, blogs and sharing platforms, promoting do-it-

yourself attacks and inspiring young generations of self-proclaimed 'jihadi warriors'.

The 'Cyber-Jihad' is characterized by the globalized exploitation of the Internet by the Islamic State, which represents itself as the Cyber-Caliphate by creating specific narratives, to involve hacking crews and individuals all over the world to take part in the media-war against the 'crusaders' and definitively join the United Cyber Caliphate (UCC).

The 'Lone Jihad' is the cross-platform glocalized massive media campaign launched by the Islamic State to target the Enemy, celebrate the lone wolf terrorist and promote the spontaneous and atomized killing based on the asymmetric power of tactical-violent actions to create fear and reinforce the perception of insecurity in Western countries, especially European ones. Civilians become the soft target to be hit by shooting, stabbing, bombing and suicide-bombing, mowing down, stoning, intoxicating and insulting. Then the jihadi wolf can be inspired both by AQ and IS media to improve his skills.

The global circulation of mobile devices and the fast spread of mobile cultures are key-factors that increase the ability of the Islamic State to disseminate its messages and influence vulnerable individuals.

The 'jihadi wolf' can be considered a vulnerable violent individual:

A. face-to-face radicalized - by means of the so-called 'imam of hate' preaching and/or recruitment in prison;
B. (cyber-)radicalized – by means of the Jihadisphere in two different dynamics:
    a. (cyber-)ecosystem - (cyber-)social radicalization across social media platforms;
    b. (cyber-)ego-system - 'mobile radicalization' in terms of (cyber-)social isolation and self-radicalization.

The prevention and countering of (cyber-)radicalization represent a completely new challenge for Law Enforcement, crucial to understand the evolution of the terrorist threat and its potential change in a sort of 'Islamic State of Mind'[7]; with a relevant impact in 'jihadi wolf' phenomenon.

The (cyber-)social radicalization across social media platforms highlights the reshaping reality function of (cyber-)social experience influenced by:

- mediamorphosis of terrorism and terrorist avatarism
- 'intimate visual co-presence'[8]
- re-codification of pures/un-pures dichotomy into (cyber-)cultural jihadi-sphere complexity.

Therefore, the jihadentity model and its impact in terms of self-identification for individuals have to be analysed mainly considering:

- violent cultivation – the offering through digital narrowcasting of a formal and informal violence-based system of justice;
- personal vulnerabilities – the capability to target selected/specific audiences all over the world to inspire vulnerable people to attack;
- 'culture of terrorism' – the sub-culture glocally widespread to reinforce in-group dynamic;
- mobile generational issues - digital natives and mobile born generations perceiving space and time in a new way - more familiar - with a 'tactical' vision of life in terms of capability to produce change;
- cyber-narcissism and compulsive selfism – the need of self-representing through the Web, sharing of oneself's image and actions, using emphatic models and linguistic codes based on the strained jihadi myth.

The self-radicalization digital media diet is based on a captivating mobile (cyber-)experience made of:

1. literacy and education – books, magazines and app which, since his early childhood, provide the person with a view of life based on the recognition of the Enemy and the need/legitimacy to eliminate him;
2. economy – misrepresentative exploitation of the zakat as a religious pillar based on the fake coining of Dinar, the coin of the Caliphate;
3. creativity – encouraging the realization of user-generated contents, such as wallpapers, stickers, photos, magazines, books, videos, comics, nasheeds, app, videogames and game mods. In this way, young individuals reinforce the collective identity, jihadist visual identity and the gamification dynamics used to activate hetero-direct violence;
4. glocalization – building and reinforcing of the collective consciousness and jihadist critical mass able to involve more individuals in the active participation and/or promotion of the online spread of jihadism at a global level. Hence the main role of the followers guaranteeing the cross-media 'bounc-

ing' of the jihadist media campaign promoting violent self-determination at a local level according to always more asymmetric modalities;

5. sadistic behaviour – posting, reading and watching violent contents through hyper violent tubes, social media, reinforced from the 'post-branding' following the attacks;
6. technical training – manuals, handbooks, magazines and training videos;
7. multi-actoriality - rhetoric and narratives which glorify and put several jihad interprets in connection, such as 'classic' mujahidin, foreign terrorist fighters, self-started actors, home-grown, lone wolf terrorists, followers, United Cyber Caliphate, sleeping cells;
8. money income – dirty money from trafficking, THB, narcotics, money-laundering.

The relevant role of IS narratives in digital media underlines that IS has to be considered the first global entity – in general, not only in terrorism - developing a globalized collective imagery. It is very attractive and seductive because it is based on violence, as an ancestral drive. Then, the jihadi wolf is driven by a destructive creativity fuelled by the continuous diffusion on social media platforms of the culture of terrorism 'cultivating' the 'Generation T'. In this scenario, the instant messaging applications make mobile devices an essential weapon in the hands of terrorists and proto-terrorists, especially to learn the 'rules' of Lone Jihad and the do-it-yourself *modi operandi* to attack, as the dual-use of the pressure cooker bomb, between AQ and IS as follows:

- Jan 2010, AQAP - the first appearance of the pressure cooker bomb in section Open Source Jihad - Inspire #1;
- May 2010, AQ trained -NYC Time Square terrorist attack attempt;
- April 2013, AQ self-proclaimed fighters - Boston Marathon Bombing;
- Sept 2016, IS inspired - NYC Chelsea attacks;
- Nov/Dec 2016, AQAP - 'culture of terrorism' dissemination and serialization by celebrating the pressure cooker bomb in special issue of Inspire #16 and Inspire Guide with the aim to re-codify specific Lone Jihad tactics and Lone Wolves attacks;
- Nov 2016, IS – posting in Telegram public channel a new step-by-step guide to make pressure cooker bomb;
- Dec 2016, IS – posting in Telegram invitation-only channels a video-tutorial to reach Jihadi Wolves, inspire and trigger them.

It is particularly relevant to stress the '(cyber-)tailoring' dynamics as a result of the cross-platform transition of the above-mentioned do-it-yourself guide from the open Web, by using static contents, to mobile app with the assistance of video-tutorial. Additionally, such dynamics highlight the 'cross-group' (AQ and IS) nature of the evolving Internet Jihadism. It enhances the Jihadisphere power and role of jihadentity maker especially for the jihadi wolf, going beyond the affiliation with a specific terrorist group. Jihadism transforms itself into a cultural state of mind.

3 Conclusions and future considerations

In order to understand the current jihadi wolf threat scenario and anticipate the future, it is fundamental to consider the (cyber-)resources always indissolubly linked to communication devices and models, never forgetting the resulting impact on individual and social behaviours.

For that reason, it is important to focus on the rise of mobile chatbots that can be exploited for terrorist purposes as technologies, as 'Be a [Lone] Wolf' and 'Bot Mujahideen' in Telegram. Their implementation will be a serious threat in terms of capability to 'keep glued', foster mobile addiction, seduce, influence, inspire, motivate and train vulnerable individuals and/or to impede the natural development of critical thinking in young people.

Moreover, considering the evolution of the Jihadisphere and the spread of jihadi wolf narratives, soon we will watch the first 3D-video jihadi attack shared by mobile devices. Their stylistic features, similar to Hollywood's blockbusters, will be particularly 'attractive' especially for the new generation of jihadi wolves in the West. Besides, the need to strengthen the (cyber-)connection - in terms of sharing (cyber-)experience – between fighters and audience, we will probably deal with 'GoPro style' attacks disseminated on live streaming social media platforms by mobile. Then, for the jihadi wolf interconnected commandos will be possible to kill civilians with merciless violence while chatting with followers laying comfortably on their couches, thousands of kilometres away, enjoying the gruesome show of death. That will contribute to expand the 'culture of terrorism' and make the (cyber-)social experiential identification stronger.

With the aim to call the attention on the near future vulnerabilities, it is necessary to highlight the development of the augmented reality's game and commercial plat-

forms. This technology might be considered a dual-use mobile resource to cultivate the new generation of jihadi wolf:

- exploitation of microblogging and social media platforms to identify potential easy and crowded targets to attack, thanks to the massive concentration of young players immersed in an 'off-the radar' scenario (in terms of traditional approach to risk and threat assessment);
- illusion of 'real' living in a caliphate, through the creation of an augmented scenario which deeply engages and highly motivates the jihadi wolf to attack the 'Crusaders'.

The potential evolution of the jihadi wolf threat imposes to take into consideration two different near future urban warfare scenarios at the same time:

- hi-tech - exploitation and development of sophisticated cyber-resources and/or weapons to attack;
- low-tech - sophisticated planning and management of serialized and highly coordinated attacks by using low cost, raw and open technologies (3D-printing, mobile devices, automated management systems for houses, vehicles, drones and wearable devices within the upcoming Internet of Things).

The abovementioned perspectives should incite to reflect on the potential evolution of the jihadi wolf phenomenon, self-radicalization dynamics and jihadi exploitation of mobile technology, (cyber-)sociality and culture to deeply understand the resulting impacts on the new mobile born generations. Only a holistic and comprehensive cross-disciplinary approach based on deep knowledge of the (cyber-)social jihadi threat can prevent and anticipate the advent of the 'Swarm Wolf'[9].

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