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- How Islamic State is using strategic communication to mobilize support for its cause?
- Analyzing the rationale of suicide terrorism in Afghanistan
- How India's growing relations with Vietnam could challenge China's interests in the region?
- Evaluating France's ambitions to strengthen its role in Western Alliance

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How Islamic State is using Strategic Communication to mobilize support for its cause?

Giulia Conci

Introduction

Strategic Communication (SC) has become a key instrument to understand international relations dynamics as well as matters of war, security and strategic affairs. This is mainly thanks to the new communication environment that contributed to the proliferation of new state-challengers able to use communication strategically in the so-called war of ideas. Nowadays, Western countries are faltering at countering the rise of Islamic extremism, especially against the Islamic State (IS), which is using sophisticated techniques of SC to mobilize support for its cause.

The purpose of this essay is to analyze what SC is and how IS is using it to achieve political and social transformation challenging the status quo in Middle East. Despite having lost control over several territories in Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State is still managing to appeal and mobilize support through a smart use of SC, hindering Western countries to counter the menace of global jihad.

This essay is divided in three sections. The first one deals with the complexity and ambiguity of the concept of strategic communication that challenges to find agreement on its definition, its core elements and its relationship with other related terms, such as propaganda. The second section focuses on the new media ecology and the consequent emergence of political and social actors that attempt to challenge other states in the so-called battle of ideas, that is to

produce, project and disseminate appealing strategic narratives to win over others. The third section deals with the case study of IS, on how this terrorist organization is using strategic communication sophisticatedly to alter the status quo and achieve its strategic objective.

What is Strategic Communication?

As mentioned above, national governments and non-state actors are recognizing the important role strategic communication plays in international relations. However, because of the complexity and ambiguity of the term, the international community is still far from consensus on a universally agreed definition.¹ In this paper, it is used Farwell's definition of SC, intended "[...] as the use of words, actions, images, or symbols to influence the attitudes and opinions of targeted audiences to shape their behaviour in order to advance interests or policies, or to achieve objectives".² Nevertheless, the existing literature seems to agree more easily on SC's general nature and what can be qualified as its core activities. According to Christopher Paul, there are four main elements that he defines as unassailable cores without which SC cannot be meaningful.³ First, it is the attempt of an actor to inform, influence and persuade targeted audiences; second, in order to define communication as strategic there is the

1. James P. Farwell, "Persuasion and Power: Art of Strategic Communication", Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012, p. xvi, accessed at: <http://kcl.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1325115>.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. xviii-xix.

3. Christopher Paul, "Strategic Communication", Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2011, accessed at: http://psi.praeger.com/doc.aspx?x=x&d=/books/gpg/A3077C/A3077C-57.xml&original_url=doc.aspx?x=x&d=/books/gpg/A3077C/A3077C-57.xml&ws=WS_PSI&as=doc.aspx&token=C9903F5F3FDD0C-0C894C2EF16E2E820B&count=!

requirement of setting clear objectives that actors attempt to achieve; third, actors need to communicate these aims respecting coordination and avoiding information fratricide and inconsistency; fourth, it is necessary for actors to acknowledge that actions communicate as well, mostly louder than words too.⁴

Even without an agreed definition of SC, some scholars attempted at defining the core activities that can be qualified as SC, such as Professor Taylor who affirmed that the four main pillars of SC are: Information Operations (IOs); Psychological Operations (PSYOPs); Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy.⁵ Furthermore, a similar classification appears in the White House 2010 National Framework for defining Strategic Communication in which it “[...] refers to (a) the synchronization of words and deeds and how they will be perceived by selected audiences, as well as (b) programs and activities deliberately aimed at communicating and engaging with intended audiences, including those implemented by public affairs, public diplomacy, and information operations professionals”.⁶ Drawing from the latter definition, it is important to note that both Information Operations (IOs) and Psychological Operations (PSYOPs) are exclusively military functions therefore they represent prerogatives of the U.S. Department of Defence (DoD). However, U.S. DoD classifies PSYOPs as a sub-category of IOs, differently from Professor Taylor. In Joint Publication 1-02 of the U.S. Department of Defence, IOs are defined as “[T]he integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related

capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own [...]”.⁷ Furthermore, Farwell defines public affairs as an attempt of national governments to influence by informing the public.⁸ In this practice, governments tend to inform both media and domestic audiences without omitting anything, even if inconvenient at the beginning. However, Farwell argues that public affairs qualifies as SC as it is not just about informing, but also influencing, as governments attempt to inform the public by presenting facts in the most favorable way, influencing the perceptions of the audience over a specific fact.⁹ Following, a Congressional Research Service (2009) defines public diplomacy as “[...] a government’s effort to conduct foreign policy and promote national interests through direct outreach and communication with the population of a foreign country”.¹⁰ It is worth noting that these activities are not mutually excludible, but can be rather pursued in combination to support a specific interest.¹¹ Indeed, these functions can be all qualified as SC as their overall aim is to strategically inform, influence and persuade both domestic and foreign audiences for the support of national interest or objectives.

However, there is a more controversial aspect of SC that concerns its relationship with propaganda. Indeed, the existing literature appears to be divided whether to consider the latter as an activity of SC or not, that ultimately seems to depend on which definition of propaganda someone might use.¹²

4. Ibid., in “Introduction: The Promise and Peril of Strategic Communication”.

5. Philip M. Taylor, “Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications”, in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. by Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 14.

6. The White House. National Framework for Strategic Communication, Pursuant to Section 1055 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, March 16, 2010, p. 2, accessed at: <https://fas.org/man/eprint/pubdip.pdf>.

7. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, Washington D.C., Joint Publication 1-02, November 8, 2010, p. 110.

8. James P. Farwell, “Persuasion and Power: Art of Strategic Communication”, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012, p. 5.

9. Ibid., p. 42.

10. Kennan H. Nakamura and Matthew C. Weed, “Summary” in *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Background and Current Issues*, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 18 December 2009, accessed at: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40989.pdf>.

11. Paul Cornish, Lindley-French Julian and Claire Yorke, “Strategic Communications and National Strategy” Chatham House Report, September 2011, p. 17, accessed at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/International%20Security/r0911stratcomms.pdf>.

12. Christopher Paul, “Strategic Communication”, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2011.

Because in history the term received a negative connotation, several scholars argue that propaganda implies manipulation as well as falsification of communication in order to spread and persuade individuals over a specific political or religious view thus national governments tend to distance themselves from it. For instance, Marlin defines propaganda as “[t]he organized attempt through communication to affect belief or action or inculcate attitudes in a large audience in ways that circumvent or suppress an individual’s adequately informed, rational, reflective judgement”.¹³ However, other scholars offer alternative definitions that may imply resemblance to SC. For example, Jowett and O’Donnell describe propaganda as “[...] the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of propagandist”.¹⁴ Additionally, Farwell argues that propaganda qualifies as strategic communication as it aims at informing, influencing and persuading the perceptions and behaviors of targeted audiences.¹⁵ It can be argued that by addressing the information environment in which SC is taking place today the difference with propaganda appears even more blurred. Indeed, the new media ecology offers several means and opportunities to insurgent groups to achieve governmental change and social transformation through the use of SC, proving it is no longer an exclusive tool of states. Bolt defines this attempt as an evolution in the new information environment of the old theory of Propaganda of the Deed (POTD) that he defines not as a form of conventional propaganda, but rather a form of strategic communication used by insurgent groups to win the battle of ideas.¹⁶

The war of ideas and the new media ecology

As mentioned above, national governments are becoming more aware about the increasing capabilities of state-challengers to use SC as a tool for political and social change. This is true especially with the widespread of Islamic extremism in the West after 9/11. The former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair during his speech on the London Bombings 7/7 declared: “What we are confronting here is an evil ideology. It is not a clash of civilisations - all civilised people, Muslim or other, feel revulsion at it. But it is a global struggle and it is a battle of ideas, hearts and minds, both within Islam and outside it”.¹⁷

To understand how state-challengers such as terrorist organizations are using SC as a new weapon it is important to address the new media environment in which SC is being conducted. Indeed, the new media ecology of the 21st century has severely influenced international relations’ dynamics. Castells affirms that power is the most fundamental instrument that builds new international orders, but because there has been the emergence of a new media ecology, which means increasing opportunities to communicate thus exercise power, power is more diffused.¹⁸ He defines power as “[...] the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favor the empowered actor’s will, interests, and values”.¹⁹ He continues by saying that “[p]ower is exercised by means of coercion (or the possibility of it) and/or by the construction of meaning on the basis of the discourses through which social actors guide their action”.²⁰ Castells believes that in the new communication environment a major change has

13. Randal Marlin, “Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion”, Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2012, p. 22.

14. Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, “Propaganda and Persuasion”, Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992, p.7, accessed at: <http://sttpml.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/propaganda-and-persuasion.pdf>.

15. James P. Farwell, “Persuasion and Power: Art of Strategic Communication”, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012, p. 25.

16. Neville Bolt, “The Violent Image: Insurgent Propaganda and

the new Revolutionaries”, London: Hurst, 2012, p. 32.

17. “Full text: Blair Speech on Terror”, BBC, July, 16, 2005, accessed at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4689363.stm>.

18. Manuel Castells, “Communication Power”, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 2012, pp. 10-17.

19. Ibid., p. 10.

20. Ibid.

been the transition from mass-communication to mass-self communication “[...] being the process of interactive communication that can potentially reach a mass audience, but in which the production of the message is self-generated, the retrieval of messages self-directed, and the reception and remixing of content from electronic communication network is self-selected”²¹

The rise of the Internet and social media increased the chances for many more individuals of what he calls the global network society to attempt at using communication strategically.²² Subsequently to the increasing opportunities to communicate, the new information environment lead to the proliferation of new political and social entities that may seek to challenge national states and the international status quo through the creation, projection and dissemination of strategic narratives thus SC. Lawrence Freedman, who first used this expression, defined them as “[...] compelling storylines, which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn[...]”²³ Following, Miskimmon et al. define strategic narratives as “[...] means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors”²⁴, thus to conduct SC and eventually win the battle of ideas. From this definition, it is possible to argue that the ultimate aim is to achieve behavioral influence through compelling and attractive narratives. Therefore, the idea of strategic narratives is closely linked to Nye’s conception of soft power that he formulated once he

realized hard power was not sufficient anymore to win wars.²⁵ Indeed, as Castells did, also Nye recognizes that power may be used either through coercion or through attraction.²⁶ He defines soft power as the ability to attract, which he argues has the ultimate aim to influence others’ behaviors and achieve a desired outcome.²⁷ In order to be attractive and achieving behavioral influence and eventually to shape how people conceive their identity and interests, actors need to produce strategic narratives according to a specific goal, the available types of communication and by addressing the media environment in which strategic narratives will be disseminated.²⁸

First, goals are prerequisites to define narratives as strategic and they can be long, medium or short-term.

Second, according to the goals actors want to achieve they may choose from different communication forms such as persuasion, argumentation, rhetorical force or rhetorical coercion.²⁹

Third, it is important that narrative constructors project strategic narratives in the media ecology that nowadays has been severely influenced by the emergence of the Internet and social media. In order to choose which communication tool is most suitable for the dissemination of the narrative, there is the need for a well and deep understanding of the audience actors may intend to target.³⁰ Furthermore, Betz suggests that narratives need to be vertically coherent in order to be successful and appealing.³¹ He argues that narratives operate at different levels,

21. Ibid., p. xix.

22. Ibid., pp. 24-38.

23. Lawrence Freedman, “The Transformation of Strategic Affairs”, Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013, p. 22, accessed at: <http://kcl.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1207127>.

24. Alister Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughin and Laura Roselle, “Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order”, New York: Taylor and Francis, 2014, p. 2, accessed at: <http://kcl.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1637505>.

25. Joseph S. Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 616, (2008), p. 94, accessed at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/>

[pdf/25097996.pdf](http://kcl.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=25097996).

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Alister Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughin and Laura Roselle, “Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order”, New York: Taylor and Francis, 2014, p. 8, accessed at: <http://kcl.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1637505>.

29. Ibid., p.9.

30. Ibid., p.12.

31. David Betz, “The Virtual Dimension of Contemporary Insurgency and Counterinsurgency”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 19, No. 4, (December 2008), p. 522.

in which the strategic serves as a connection between other two levels. At the top, narrative constructors formulate an idealized vision of the world's future, while at the bottom there is the set of individual visions of people that start to think whether or not to engage in some sort of actions to either halt – if negative and dramatic – or maintain – if positive and rewarding – the idealized vision of humanity's future offered by the overarching narrative. In this framework, Betz argues that strategic narratives function as link between the other two levels in order that the top one resonates within most individuals at the bottom and achieve behavioral influence.³² Nowadays, state-challengers, mostly Islamic terrorist organizations, seem to be extremely successful in achieving this vertical coherence and producing and projecting appealing strategic narratives, hindering Western countries to offer an alternative narrative to the global jihad.

The Islamic State and its Strategic Communication

The Islamic State (IS) is proving to be one of the most prominent terrorist organizations in using SC as an integral part to its military efforts. Despite having recently lost several territories in Syria and Iraq, IS still manages to be very powerful in the battle of ideas by producing and projecting consistent appealing strategic narratives mobilizing individuals to support its cause. According to a recent study, since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011 up to 30.000 individuals from more than 86 countries are estimated to have travelled to Syria and Iraq, most of whom have joined IS.³³ These results seem to

confirm that IS is smartly using SC by developing appealing narratives to attract supporters. It builds them around a clear and comprehensive objective; by taking into account that actions communicate too and need to be consistent with words and by a strategic use of the new media ecology to disseminate strategic narratives according to the audience they aim to target. However, it is important to bear in mind that the exploitation of the new media ecology to broadcast narratives is not an exclusive feature of IS, but it has been rather widespread across other terrorist organizations too, even though IS is using it sophisticatedly.

First, IS' main objective is to build a comprehensive society for all Muslim people and establish a Caliphate – that has been proclaimed on 29th June 2014 – over specific geographical territories where to enforce Sharia law and rule over the population.³⁴

Second, in order to achieve such a political change, it has to build a master narrative, defined by Halverson et al. as [...] a transhistorical narrative that is deeply embedded in a particular culture³⁵ that would resonate and influence individuals' behaviors toward the engagement in some sort of actions that will contribute to achieving IS's strategic objective. IS created its simple and broad overarching narrative around the idea that the Muslim population is under attack by the West – referring to the expression 'War on Islam' rather than on Terror – and therefore it should engage in violent jihad as defence.³⁶ Additionally, it has based it on a misused interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence – the Salafi-jihadist one – in order to legitimize itself as the only entity authorized to establish such a Caliphate and to

32. Ibid., pp. 522-523.

33. The Soufan Group. Foreign Fighters. An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq. The Soufan Group, December 2015, p.4, http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf.

34. Pelletier, Ian R.; Lundmark, Leif; Garner, Rachel; Scott Ligon Gina and Kilinc, Ramazan. "Why ISIS's Message Resonates: Leveraging Islam, Sociopolitical Catalyst, and Adaptive Messaging", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 39, N.10,

(2016), p.874.

35. Halverson, Jeffrey R.; Corman, Steven R.; Goodall, H. L., Jr. *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p.14. <http://kcl.ebib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=665893> (accessed December 14, 2016).

36. Russel, Jonathan and Rafiq, Haras. *Countering Islamist Extremist Narratives: A Strategic Briefing*. Quilliam Foundation, 2016, p.5, <https://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/countering-islamist-extremist-narratives.pdf>.

incite Muslims all over the world to unite and defend the Ummah through violent jihad.³⁷ According to a recent study, IS has been using other six strategic narratives to mobilize support around the concepts of: brutality, mercy, victimhood, war, belonging and utopianism.³⁸ These are then disseminated in the media environment through different channels and in several languages according to the target IS intends to reach.

Third, another striking feature of IS' SC has been the awareness that actions, mainly violent ones, communicate too and once they reflect words coherently, narratives have an exceptional impact. Indeed, the major SC technique used by ISIS is what Bolt defines as the updated version of the theory of Propaganda of the Deeds (POTD) which he defines as "[...] an act of political violence with the objective of creating a media event capable of energizing populations to bring about state revolution or social transformation".³⁹ He continues by arguing that violent actions may be firstly intended to achieve a military advantage, but secondly they might have a communicative impact too.⁴⁰ Therefore, IS projects the above mentioned narratives through the dissemination in the new media ecology of words and violent images representing its actions in order to resonate and attract an increasing number of people.

First, images and videos showing the brutality of IS's actions such as beheadings and executions represent a constant reminder of its supremacy and IS broadcasts them to attempt at demoralizing its opponents.⁴¹

Second, the reproduction of videos in which people pledge alliance to God and join IS are intended to show that IS reserves mercy just towards those who choose what they believe to be the only "true" interpretation of Islam.⁴² These messages seem to be directed towards potential recruits in order to install fear of what could happen if they don't join. Following, IS attempts at portraying the Muslim population being under attack from the West, therefore it projects images and videos of Muslims people's sufferings with the aim to resonate in other individuals' personal grievances and eventually facilitate individuals radicalization processes.⁴³

Fourth, the portraying of its army's power through images and videos of its victories on the battlefield is aimed at strengthening internal moral.⁴⁴

Fifth, IS attempts at fostering a deep sense of belonging and of collective identity sharing by insisting on having one single Islamic State around the Ummah, and therefore it distributes videos, posts and images in different languages trying to reach Western Muslims as well.⁴⁵ According to the study, utopianism seems to be one of the most important and innovative narrative produced by a terrorist organization, as IS is trying to present itself as a real state by broadcasting images and videos of how good are live conditions in the Caliphate and how many services are offered to the population in order to attract potential joiners.⁴⁶

Furthermore, IS is fully aware of the importance of winning the hearts and minds of people in order to achieve its strategic objective, especially because of the asymmetric nature of the conventional

37. David S. Sorensen, "Confronting the 'Islamic State'. Priming Strategic Communications: Countering the Appeal of ISIS", *Parameters*, Vol. 44, No. 3, (Autumn 2014), p. 25.

38. Charlie Winter, "The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy", Quilliam Foundation, July 2015, pp. 22-28, accessed at: <https://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/the-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy.pdf>.

39. Neville Bolt, "The Violent Image: Insurgent Propaganda and the new Revolutionaries", London: Hurst, 2012, p. 2.

40. *Ibid.*, p.3.

41. Charlie Winter, "The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy", Quilliam Foundation, July 2015, pp. 22-23.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

fight against the West where it is constantly losing ground. Moreover, IS also recognizes the increased opportunities of the new media ecology to communicate strategically bypassing geographical and institutional borders. Therefore, since its emergence, IS did focus on developing an effective media campaign that can be labeled as cyber jihad, which according to Hoffman and Schweitzer “[...] refers to use of 21st century technological tools and cyberspace [...] in order to promote the notion of a violent jihad against those classified by its followers as enemies of Islam”.⁴⁷ Indeed, IS seems to be the terrorist organization that relies most on an extensive use of the Internet and mostly social media as platforms for dissemination, recruitment and radicalization.⁴⁸ In addition to its online magazine Dabiq and high quality videos disseminated on mainstream websites such as YouTube, IS mostly rely on social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr to post and disseminate pro-jihadi content.

According to a recent RAND study, even if social media firms have been targeting and shutting down IS's related accounts, they still manage to be very active online, especially on Twitter.⁴⁹ This can be linked to the decentralized organizational structure developed by IS where through the establishment of an official central media wing, known as Al-Furqan, and of several other media outlets throughout its controlled territories, IS allows its members, supporters or just sympathizers to be active online independently.⁵⁰ However, Al-Furqan attempts at assuring that the messages that are promoted and broadcasted appear as unified and coherent, in the sense that they ultimately legitimate and support IS's

actions and objectives.

Lastly, what can be argued is that IS is proving to be successful in merging its actions, either military or terrorist attacks, with what it is professing verbally. In contrast, it seems that Western countries are still struggling in countering its appeal. As Betz argues, the West is faltering at countering the rise of Islamic extremism mainly because it failed to consider the war of ideas as a crucial battlefield.⁵¹ Moreover, because the West puts too much effort on its contribution to the intra Muslim conflict about which is the right interpretation of Islam, it did not focus on Western population, especially Muslims ones, and failed to offer appealing counter-narratives. Additionally, Betz continues that in order to produce attractive narratives, the West needs to grasp the important impact of coherence between words and deeds have on actors' credibility.⁵² Without taking into account the dimension of SC into the overall warfare strategy to counter IS, Western states might have little chances to completely defeat it and avoid its re-emergence in a near future.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to provide a comprehensive framework on what strategic communication is in order to examine how it is used by what appears to be one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations, the Islamic State. Indeed, it seems that IS is winning the so-called war of ideas as it is still attracting an increasing number of new members despite losing control over several territories in Syria and Iraq.

47. Adam Hoffman and Yoram Schweitzer, “Cyber Jihad in the Service of the Islamic State (ISIS)”, Strategic Assessment, Vol. 18, No. 1, (April 2015), pp. 71-72, accessed at: [http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/adkan18_1ENG%20\(5\)_Hoffman-Schweitzer.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/adkan18_1ENG%20(5)_Hoffman-Schweitzer.pdf).

48. Ibid., p. 72.

49. Elizabeth Bodin-Baron, Todd C. Helmus, Madeline Magnuson, and Zev Winkelman, “Examining ISIS Support and Opposition Networks on Twitter”, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2016, p.xi.

50. Christina S. Liang, “Cyber Jihad: Understanding and Countering Islamic State Propaganda”, Geneva Centre for Security:

GSCP Policy Paper, (February 2015), p. 4.

51. David Betz, “The Virtual Dimension of Contemporary Insurgency and Counterinsurgency”, Small Wars & Insurgencies, Vol. 19, No. 4, (December 2008), p. 514.

52. Ibid.

In the 21st century, international relations have been extremely altered by the new media environment, which lead to the proliferation of political and social actors that seek to challenge states and the international status quo. Moreover, the new media ecology provided these actors with increasing means and platforms to exercise power through strategic communication and appeal support. It should be noted that the Islamic State represents the major example of state-challengers using SC more sophisticatedly. Indeed, as it holds a clear and comprehensive objective, IS develops strategic narratives accordingly and exploits the new media ecology to disseminate them. However, what appears to be a striking feature is its coherence between its actions and words that lead IS to gain increasing appeal, legitimacy thus support.

This paper attempts at offering a useful framework for understanding the important role strategic communication is playing in the war of ideas; it points towards the necessity that Western countries do take SC into account when developing future countermeasures to halt its attraction.

Title: How Islamic State is using Strategic Communication to mobilise support for its cause?

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Analyzing the Rationale of Suicide Terrorism in Afghanistan

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Abstract

After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the militants in the country adopted suicide bombing tactics and the war-torn country faced a new threat in the form of suicide terrorism. The main purpose of this research is to review the existing literature on the motives of suicide attackers, mostly from political science perspective. For many scholars and state actors, it is hard to understand the acts of terrorists especially of suicide terrorists. Thus, suicide terrorism and act of blowing oneself was often conceived as “irrational” but many political scientists argue otherwise. Although, most academics agree that there is no single motive for terrorists to conduct suicide attacks, great number of previous researches on suicide terrorism in Afghanistan suggests that religion has played a significant role in promoting suicide bombings in the country. However, this paper argues that militants in Afghanistan conduct suicide attacks mainly for strategic reasons and it is used as a military tactic to challenge well-resourced opponents. In addition to addressing the role of strategic reasons, this article also analyzes other factors including religious, altruistic, economic motivations as well as military and political advantages instigating militants to become suicide bombers.

Keywords

Terrorism, suicide terrorism, suicide attacks, Taliban, Afghanistan.

Introduction

After the events of 9/11, the U.S. initiated war on terror in Afghanistan with the purpose of eliminating Al Qaeda and their hosts Taliban - governing body of Afghanistan at that time. However, the operation of defeating the terrorists and getting rid of fundamentalists in the country faced serious setbacks and one of the major threats was the tactic of suicide attacks on the local forces, the U.S. troops in the country as well as the other foreign forces.

The militants in Afghanistan often use suicide attacks not only on the government and armed forces but also civilian sites and institutions, which led many scholars and policymakers to doubt the rationale of such attacks and raised an international hatred towards Taliban and other militant groups in the country. Since there are several groups and militants operating in Afghanistan, the main focus of this research will be the Afghan Taliban as the group is one of the major stakeholder and prominent militant organization in the country.

By 2005, the number of suicide attacks in Afghanistan had reached unprecedented levels and suicide terrorists were often labeled as irrational actors, while policymakers formulated counter-terrorism strategies accordingly. However, growing number of suicide attacks and a decade of violence led scholars and political scientists to question previous approaches on suicide terrorism and redefine war on terror doctrine, especially in dealing with Taliban. It is also crucial to understand the rationale of suicide terrorism and reexamine the major causes of such form of attacks in order to neutralize such threats.

Therefore, the central piece of this research is to review the literature on rationale of suicide terrorism and the motives of the militant organizations in Afghanistan behind conducting suicide attacks. The research aims to uncover the possible motives of Taliban to conduct suicide attacks and highlight useful viewpoints explaining the mindset of suicide terrorists. Finally, the article highlights the gaps in existing literature defining the rationale of suicide terrorism at a group level, underlines possible causes and approaches to define suicide attacks in Afghanistan and proposes policy recommendations to reduce terrorism and suicide attacks in the country.

Understanding Suicide Terrorism in Afghanistan

To say that suicide terrorism is rational is to say that terrorists, like everyone else, have specific goals that they wish to achieve through their actions; terroristic violence in this regard, is an instrument or means to an end. Therefore the militants in Afghanistan weighed the costs and benefits and chose the best alternative – suicide attacks. Although, it is believed that suicide terrorism is usually a weapon of the weaker groups, in any case for Taliban, suicide attacks proved to be one of the most effective tools.

To understand the logic of the suicide terrorists, we must identify the forces that drive terrorists to abandon their lives and choose premature death as well as kill their targets. Terrorists are usually made through political processes, and militants turn to suicide terrorism when they are exhausted by the other means to achieve their goals. Although, some of the demands terrorists make are unrealistic, that is not a reason to ignore the underlying logic that

informs their actions (Cronin, 2010).¹

Similarly, Trager and Zagorcheva believe that even fanatical terrorists, who are considered to be intensely motivated by religious beliefs, are not irrational in a sense that makes them impossible to deter.²

Suicide terrorism arises when the potential benefits of suicide attacks outweighs the costs. American political scientist, Robert Pape, who studied all the known suicide attacks from 1980 through to 2003, reached a conclusion that for terrorists, conducting suicide attack is a rational act because it is purposive.

The study suggests the suicide terrorists are rational actors, who are religiously, politically or economically motivated, well-organized and are engaged in suicide attacks in order to achieve certain goals. The means of suicide terrorists are rationale in a sense that they use such tactics to achieve certain goals or to justify and promote their cause. The suicide attackers are well aware of the consequences and believe that suicide attack is the only option and the most effective method to attain their objectives.

In the case of Afghanistan, Mujahidin neither used suicide attacks during the Soviet invasion nor during the political struggle between different factions in Afghanistan during 1992 and 2001.³ The Taliban did not conduct suicide operations before the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and turned to suicide terrorism when they believed that no other viable option existed to achieve their political goals and to fight the invaders.

For militants, the costs of suicide attacks are low and cause relatively high damage to their opponents. In

1. Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Are terrorists rational?" *The Jewish Week*, April 29, 2010, accessed at: http://www.thejewishweek.com/blogs/well_versed/are_terrorists_rational

2. Robert F. Trager and Dessislava P. Zagorcheva, "Deterring

Terrorism: It Can Be Done", *International Security* 30, Winter 2005/2006, pp. 87-123.

3. Brian Glyn Williams, "Afghanistan Declassified: A Guide to America's Longest War", PENN: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, p. 202.

most suicide operations, militants send low-level recruits to conduct suicide missions so they do not have worry about those attackers being caught and the organization's central authority remain intact and continue their struggle.

Understanding the Motives of Suicide Terrorists

Once we take suicide terrorists to be rational actors, then we need an appropriate theory to explain their rationale. In order to have clear understanding on the issue and comprehend the motives of suicide bombers in Afghanistan, this part analyzes the literature on suicide terrorism from following perspectives: religious motivations, economic incentives, psychological motivations, altruistic reasons, political gains and military tactics.

The most commonly used approach to describe the acts of suicide terrorists is religious motivation. The theory of religious extremism argues that the radical followers of Islam use violent means to achieve religious goals. Egger (2011) argues that the followers of Islam are radicalized through fundamental interpretations of the Quran's promise of paradise in the afterlife that motivates the Islamic extremists to commit martyrdom (suicide attacks) in the name of religion.⁴

The scholars who have studied suicide terrorism from religious perspective mainly argue that Islam is one of the major factor influencing terrorists to conduct suicide attacks, as Sam Harris (2004) claims that there is sufficient evidence that Islamic

doctrine inspire terrorists and asserted that Islam is the source of violence.⁵

However, such a notion has been disapproved by number of scholars⁶ who argue that religion or Islam is not a sufficient cause for suicide attacks.⁷ Bloom (2005) argues that "even the most religious organization that employs suicide terror is pragmatic and power seeking. Their political survival is ultimately more important than any ideology."⁸ Similarly, Robert Pape (2005) asserts that "religion is rarely the root cause, although it is often used as a tool by terrorist organizations in recruiting and in other efforts in service of the broader strategic objective."⁹

Bryan Caplan argues that although many people claim to agree with the methods used by suicide terrorists, they do not commit suicide themselves: "While millions believe that they earn vast rewards in the afterlife if they engage in terrorism or suicidal terrorism, only a handful put their lives on the line."¹⁰ Many suggest that religion is somewhat helpful to terrorist groups to recruit suicide terrorists and to justify the acts of suicide terrorism, but religion is neither a significant causal factor¹¹, nor encouraging individuals to conduct suicide attacks.

Director of the Center for Security Studies and Director of the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University, Bruce Hoffman argue that terrorism is a threat mainly for political effect; it is "a planned, calculated, and systematic act" which is designed to have comprehensive psychological

4. Bruce Andrew Egger, "Addressing the Cause: An Analysis of Suicide Terrorism", Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, Spring 2011, p. 7.

5. Sam Harris, "The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason". New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2004.

6. Mohammad Hafez, "Manufacturing Human Bombs: The making of Palestinian suicide bombers". Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2006.

7. Barbara Victor, "Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers", Rodale: Distributed to the book trade by St. Martin's Press, 2003.

8. Mia Bloom, "Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror", New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

9. Robert Pape, "Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism", New York: Random House, 2005, p. 4.

10. Bryan Caplan, "Terrorism: The Relevance of the Rational Choice Model", Public Choice, Vol. 128, July 2006, p. 92.

11. Vanessa Harmon, Edin Mujkic, Catherine Kaukinen, and Henriikka Weir. "Causes and Explanations of Suicide Terrorism: A Systematic Review." Homeland Security Affairs 14, Article 9, December 2018, accessed at: <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/14749>

effects beyond the immediate victims or targets.¹²

In explaining the connection between religion and suicide terrorism, Berman and Laitin (2008), extended the “club” model of religious groups and concluded that religious groups are more likely to adopt suicide bombing as a result of intragroup dynamics.¹³ According to Hoffman (2004) and Moghadam (2009) the spread of the suicide tactic and globalization of such campaigns was the result of theology of Salafi Jihadis.¹⁴ Moghadam (2009) argues that suicide missions were a central element of Al Qaeda’s ideology, and the extremists used selective readings of the Quran (Muslim’s Holy Book) to convince their followers to conduct suicide attacks.¹⁵

A study by Kushner suggests that most suicide bombers are voluntarily involved in suicide attacks, and already possess the intention to take part in suicide operations.¹⁶ Kushner argues that in most cases terrorist groups do not force the militants to conduct suicide missions and the attackers are usually volunteers who have chosen to conduct suicide bombings even when other options were available to them (Kushner, 1996). According to Kushner the attackers are already willing to take part in suicide missions and the leaders of terrorist groups just provide them with an opportunity and instructions to conduct the attacks.

Some researches argue that terrorists are more violent in places and suicide attacks are more likely where inequality, injustice, or oppression is high.

Ariel Merari (1998) asserts that religion or Islam is less constant in suicide terrorism and found that suicide attacks are more likely in the context of injuries done to communities by expulsion or occupation. Merari’s findings show that suicide attackers more frequently identified themselves associated with secular organizations rather than religious groups.¹⁷

Krueger and Laitin (2008) argue that there is ample evidence that sectarian division (measured in terms of national population percentages of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and “other” religious groups) is not the main cause of terrorism, while violence is more likely to originate in countries where people are deprived of civil liberties. Krueger and Laitin (2008, p. 150) concluded from their analysis that the origins of terrorism can be traced to “countries that suffer from political oppression” – those that deny “civil liberties”.¹⁸

Researchers, who study suicide terrorism from the aspect of economic incentives, argue that poor economic conditions such as high unemployment can create incentives for groups to conduct suicide attacks (Santifort-Jordan & Sandler, 2014). As, suicide attacks are more common in relatively poor countries and in some cases terrorist groups offer tangible rewards to suicide attackers’ relatives¹⁹, many scholars assert that in order to understand the rationality of suicide terrorism, we must study the issue from financial, socio-economic and welfare benefits perspective.

12. Bruce Hoffman, “Inside Terrorism”, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 15.

13. Eli Berman, David D. Laitin, “Religion, terrorism and public goods: testing the club model”, *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 92, Issue 10-11, 1942-1967, 2008.

14. Bruce Hoffman, “The Changing Face of Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 27, Issue 6, 2004, pp. 549-60.

15. Assaf Moghadam, “Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks”, *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2009, pp. 46-78.

16. Harvey W. Kushner, “Suicide bombers: Business as usual”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 19, 1996, pp. 329-338.

17. Ariel Merari, “The Readiness to Kill and Die: Suicidal Terrorism in the Middle East.” In Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, 192-207. Second edition, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

18. Alan B. Krueger and David D. Laitin, “A cross-country study of the origins and targets of terrorism”, in P. Keefer and N. Loayza (eds), *Terrorism, Economic Development, and Political Openness*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 148-173.

19. Charlinda Santifort-Jordan and Todd Sandler, “An Empirical Study of Suicide Terrorism: A Global Analysis”, *Southern Economic Journal*, Vol. 80, No. 4, 2014, pp. 981-1001.

Some studies find that higher per capita incomes and domestic economic growth decreases the risk of different kinds of violence, including conflict, civil war and terrorism (Krueger and Malecková 2003, Blomberg, Hess and Weerapana 2004).

In some cases, terrorist organizations exploit the economic situation of the individuals and offer social welfare benefits to the militants and their families or relatives²⁰ in return for services and loyalty to the group (Iannaccone and Berman, 2006), and sometimes such services also include conducting suicide missions.

Berman argues that terrorist sympathizers are attracted to religiously fanatically groups primarily because of the social services they provide. According to Berman, terrorist groups attract recruits in part because “they are able to offer very high levels of benefits—not just spiritual ones but real services.”²¹

Rosendorff & Sandler (2010) argue that individuals are more likely to join terrorist groups and conduct suicide attacks when the benefits outweigh their exogenous economic opportunities. However, Krueger (2003, 2007) and Maleckova (2003) concluded in their studies that suicide attackers have tendency to come from slightly higher levels of socioeconomic status within their society. Similarly, other researches also suggests that there is not enough evidence to prove the connection between the individuals’ socioeconomic background and tendency to conduct suicide attacks²²

Similarly, Pape argues that terrorists who commit the acts of suicide “are not mainly poor, uneducated,

and immature religious zealots or social losers”.²³ Pape asserts that terrorist organizations usually use suicide bombing tactic to attract attention towards their struggle and raise the costs to the occupier, in an attempt to force the invaders into leaving. Pape concluded that democratic occupiers were exclusively vulnerable to this type of pressure, and were most likely to suffer from suicide attacks.

Although, some scholars argue that terrorists involved in suicide missions exhibit some psychological tendencies associated with suicide.²⁴ Other scholars who studied the suicide terrorism from individual-level disagree and failed to find a link between tendencies to suicide and suicide bombers.

The vast majority of researchers who studied the psychology of terrorists argue that terrorists are not mentally abnormal (Horgan, 2005), in fact, Rasch (1979) found that terrorists are actually far more stable than other violent criminals and psychologically healthy individuals.

Researchers studying psychological perspective of terrorism assert that there is no clear definition ‘suicide terrorist personality’ and individuals carrying out a suicide attack are not psychologically abnormal but reach to such a point through long process.

Laqueur (1999) argues that terrorism does not have roots traceable to “genetic factors, psychological difficulties in early childhood, a disturbed family life, or identification with the underclass” and asserts that although “most terrorists have been young, and the vast majority have been male”, no aspects of race, ethnicity, education, income, employment or social status can distinguish terrorists from non-terrorist.²⁵

20. Laurence R. Iannaccone and Eli Berman, “Religious extremism: The good, the bad, and the deadly”, Public Choice, Springer, Vol. 128(1), pp. 109-129.

21. Eli Berman, “ Hamas, Taliban, and the Jewish underground: an economist’s view of radical religious militias”, NBER Working Paper No. 10004, 2003.

22. Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is there a causal connection?”, Journal of Economic Perspectives, 17(4), 2003, pp. 119-144.

23. Robert Pape, “Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism”, New York: Random House, 2005, p. 216.

24. Adam Lankford, “Could suicide terrorists actually be suicidal?” Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Vol. 34, Issue 4, 2011, pp. 337-66.

25. Walter Laqueur, “The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction”, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 79.

Another aspect worth exploring is altruistic reason, which is considered by some scholars as one of the main causes of suicide bombing. Some scholars argue that individuals tend to conduct suicide attacks for altruistic reasons such as sense of responsibility towards their community members.²⁶ There is enough evidence suggesting that individuals' decision to participate in suicide attacks are influenced by their personal vengeance and they retaliate under pressure to the losses in the family or community.²⁷

Similarly, Moghadam argues that terrorists do not usually claim to conduct suicide attacks out of despair or for personal reasons, instead, "they usually claim to act as martyrs for altruistic reasons—that is, for the sake of their larger community, their country, or religion."²⁸

Azam (2005) argues that suicide terrorists' actions are based on a model of intergenerational wealth transfer, where attackers aim to protect more wealth for future generations by making sacrifices today. Azam (2005) observed that suicide terrorists transfer their wealth to their parents, siblings and/or children. Moreover, in some cases, suicide attackers believe that their actions may lead to the withdrawal of foreign invaders or creation of an independent state, and consider themselves as the saviors of future generations, who are bequeathing a public good to the next generation.²⁹

It is important to understand the mindset of terrorists, and worth noting that most terrorists

do not describe their acts as "suicide" instead they consider it a higher religious act or "martyrdom", the act of sacrificing oneself for a noble and justified cause. In terms of psychology this symbolizes an important factor in understanding the motives and beliefs of terrorists. David Aaron (2008) quoted Sheikh Yousef Al-Qaradhawi's comment, "those who oppose martyrdom operations and claim that they are suicide are making a great mistake. The goals of the one who carries out a martyrdom operation and of the one who commits suicide are completely different ... The suicide kills himself for himself, because he failed in business, love, an examination, or the like... In contrast, the one who carries out a martyrdom operation does not think of himself. He sacrifices himself for the sake of a higher goal."³⁰

Terrorists often consider themselves as victims and share a sense of injustice and persecution and therefore, the ideologies of sacrificing oneself for "higher goal" emerges and lead to conduct suicide missions for self-proclaimed greater good. As, Silke (2015) argues that it is difficult to comprehend suicide attacks and seeing the attackers as anything but evil psychopaths or brainwashed and manipulated vulnerable individuals without sympathizing with the cause.³¹

Many scholars believe that suicide attackers have tactical advantages on their much stronger opponents (regimes or foreign forces) and suicide bombings have no doubt played an important role in their asymmetric war against their powerful enemies.³²

26. Ami Pedahzur, Arie Perliger, and Leonard Weinberg, "Altruism and Fatalism: The Characteristics of Palestinian Suicide Terrorists." *Deviant Behavior*, Vol. 24, Issue 4, 2003, pp. 405-23

27. Ghulam Farooq Mujaddidi, "Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan: Why Now?," Political Science Department - Thesis, Dissertations, and Student Scholarship. 25, 2013, accessed at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/poliscitheses/25>

28. Assaf Moghadam, "The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks." Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

29. Jean-Paul Azam, "Suicide Bombing as Inter-Generational Investment." *Public Choice* 122, no. 1-2 (2005): 177-198,

p. 179.

30. David Aaron, "In Their Own Words: Voices of Jihad - Compilation and Commentary", Rand Corporation, 2008, p. 89.

31. Andrew Silke, "Understanding suicide terrorism: Insights from psychology, lessons from history", In J. Pearse (ed.), *Investigating Terrorism*, 2015, pp. 169-179.

32. Bruce Hoffman, "The Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1, 2003, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2003/06/the-logic-of-suicide-terrorism/302739>

According to Robert Pape, suicide attacks in Afghanistan are mainly a product of foreign occupation of the country (2003, 2005; Pape & Feldman 2010). Pape argues that nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have one thing in common that is they have specific strategic goal, which is to compel modern democracies to withdraw their armed forces from territories that the terrorists consider to be their homeland.³³

Pape argues that “American military policy in the Persian Gulf was most likely the pivotal factor leading to September 11”.³⁴ Therefore, according to Pape, the only effective way to prevent future attacks on the foreign forces would be for the U.S. to withdraw all its forces out of the Middle East. Robert Pape believes that in order to ensure security concerns the U.S. should form effective alliances with regional nations instead of deploying ground forces in Afghanistan.

Similarly, in “Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review History,” Martha Crenshaw argues that “there is an emerging consensus that suicide attacks are instrumental in or strategic from the perspective of a sponsoring organization.”³⁵ Crenshaw argues that these terrorists serve the political interests of non-states actors and challenging well-armed states, their methods are simple yet tactically efficient.

Some examples of the adoption of suicide methods by the terrorists appear unrelated to a reasonable definition of foreign occupation, as Wade & Reiter (2007) in their study from 1980 to 2003, found no relationship between democratic occupiers and suicide bombing. Nevertheless, Piazza (2009) argues that although the link between democracy and suicide bombing is not strong, the foreign occupation does make suicide attacks more

likely, as opposed to other types of terrorism.³⁶ However, Braun & Genkin (2014) found a positive relationship between occupation and the adoption of suicide bombing by using the group as the unit of analysis.

A senior Afghan Taliban commander Mullah Sabir, who attempted to justify Taliban position by stating that “fighting an American armored vehicle or an aircraft with an AK-47 is not much different from putting on an explosive vest, either way you will be killed”.³⁷ This notion explains the desperate situation the group was faced with and regarded their struggle against the U.S. forces as directly facing death.

Analysis

Most researches on suicide terrorism analyze the group level rationality of the terrorist organizations’ decision to adopt such tactics. Although scholars continue to have disagreements on terrorist groups’ decision to use suicide bombing as a last option when they fail to achieve their strategic goals in any other way (Hoffman 2004, Pape 2005, Crenshaw 2007), most scholars consider suicide attack as strategic choice by a group to achieve their desired goals.

Although, in some cases, suicide terrorists are motivated by religious ideology or political belief that their actions are justified for the greater good of the society, in the case of Afghanistan, suicide terrorism, to some extent, is driven by social injustice, lack of political and economic opportunities as well as the fact that Taliban were fighting a militarily superior opponent. Therefore, it is wise to assume that the tactic of suicide attacks adopted by Taliban is not primarily based on

33. *ibid* 23.

34. *ibid*.

35. Martha Crenshaw, “Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review Essay”, *Security Studies*, Vol. 16 No. 1, January 2007, p. 141.

36. James A. Piazza, “Is Islamist Terrorism More Danger-

ous?: An Empirical Study of Group Ideology, Organization and Goal Structure”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 21, January 2009, pp. 62-88.

37. Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, “Suicide Offensive.” *Newsweek* Vol. 149, Issue 16, 2007, pp. 34-36.

religious and psychological motivations but was mainly used as military tactic for political gains and some cases for altruistic reasons. The logic of suicide attacks in Afghanistan can be better understood from the perspectives of political and military advantages and therefore the militants carrying such attacks can be considered as rational actors.

In this regard, Robert Pape asserts that “offensive military action rarely works” against terrorism, he argues in his “nationalist theory of suicide terrorism” that the removal of the U.S. military from the Arabian Peninsula and other Muslim countries could be the solution to offensive terrorists’ attacks.

Similarly, many scholars and politicians assert that the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan was clearly not welcomed by the local population. In this regard Taliban provide a bleak example of how flawed policies and strategies during the war on terror have encouraged militants and extremists to gain political legitimacy, which they would have otherwise never achieved.³⁸

Although in most societies it is quite difficult to comprehend the act of suicide bombing and killing innocent people, and put these actions on a rational scale. However, from the theoretical perspective, the aim of suicide terrorists in Afghanistan is not to kill many people but demonstrate the act to a large number of spectators. As most of the terrorist attacks are well-planned and politically motivated, the terrorist organizations have certain ideological ideas to promote. Therefore, it is wise to assume that the actions of Taliban in Afghanistan are based on rational behavior, and suicide bombing is one of the military tactics which was adopted by the militants fighting to accomplish their political and strategic goals.

Conclusion

The analysis of the literature on suicide terrorism suggests that most militants use suicide attacks not with the aim to cause damage or kill civilians but to make their voices/ideas known to certain authorities. Although it seems that suicidal attacks in which the attackers kill certain members of the population or community as well as themselves are illogical and cannot be comprehended by the international community. Such attacks are conducted either under frustration, when the attackers who are operating under some kind of belief that they are doing it for honor, religion or for the good of their people, are ready to attack their opponents and literally dying to win. Similarly, in case of Taliban, the literature suggests that the militants in Afghanistan were not prone to suicide attacks prior to the U.S. invasion, and started to use suicide bombings as a tool to fight their much stronger opponents. As the main objective of terrorists is not to militarily defeat the governing regime of the country where they are fighting, but only to avoid losing (Hoffman, 1998).³⁹

Nevertheless, most suicide terrorists are unable to achieve their final objective and majority of the militant groups fail to survive mainly due to use of violence, destructive methods, ineffective policies, absence of long-term vision and lack of support. In the case of Taliban, the group emerged as somewhat successful with adaptableness and changes in their approach and managed to enter the peaceful dialogue with the U.S. as well as the local government. Similarly, the case of Taliban also set an example for other militants in the country who joined the peace process and gave up violent means that led to the decline in suicide attacks in Afghanistan.

It was observed that existing literature on the subject does not touch the issue from socio-economic, social injustice and reconciliation perspective, therefore lack of economic incentives, political opportunities

38. Security and Development Policy Group, “Chronic Failures in the War on Terror: From Afghanistan to Somalia”, MF Publishing Ltd 59 Russell Square, London WC1B 4HP, (May 2008).

39. Ibid 12. p. 52.

for reconciliation as well as widespread corruption are some of the issues worth exploring in further researches. In case of Taliban militants, they adopted suicide attacks as a last resort when they ran out of other options to fight their opponents and therefore it is important to focus on the causes leading to the adoption of suicide bombing tactics.

Moreover, considering the diversity of the militant groups in Afghanistan and low level of governance in the country, it is also worth exploring the aspects of sense of social injustice among certain members of the society who are often recruited by the militant groups for suicide missions as well as the rivalry or competition among different factions of militants which led to adoption of suicide attacks in order to attract more attention and popularity. The situation in Afghanistan suggests that the increasing number of militant groups in the country encourage terrorists to conduct suicide attacks in order to demonstrate their abilities to fight and commitment to the cause by adopting violent tactics.

Another aspect is the group's popularity and their degree of acceptance among the public.⁴⁰ One of the reasons that terrorists adopt suicide tactics largely depends on their relationship with the locals or people who are affected (Kalyvas & Sanchez-Cuenca, 2005). The researches on suicide terrorism have also suggested that militant groups who either have strong public support or completely disconnected from the public are more likely to adopt tactics of suicide bombing without the concern of consequences of their actions on population, while other groups are less likely to conduct suicide attacks in order to avoid public reaction. Therefore, this aspect is also worth examining, especially in the case of Afghanistan, where some of the groups enjoy support of the local community whereas others are completely disconnected from the local population. Future researches can also analyze Taliban's and other militant groups' relations with the local population as well as their reliance on public support.

As we already have discussed number of theories explaining when violent terrorists are more likely to use suicide bombing, it is important to test those theories with the case of Afghan Taliban as well as other militants operating in the country. By developing models of Afghan militants' decision concerning the use of suicide attack tactics at a group level as well as individual level, we can have a better understanding of the decision making process as well as crucial factors leading to such decisions.

Policy Recommendations

The people in terrorism affected Afghanistan have shown their will to get rid of fundamentalists, corrupt politicians and mafia gangs who are eager to return to power in the name of war on terror or fight against Taliban. Therefore, the Afghanistan case suggests that the suicide terrorism can be reduced by adopting effective measures and policies that address the root cause of the problem.

Since terrorism is a global menace therefore it can only be dealt by developing an effective alliance and sincere partnership to address the root causes of terrorism. A formulation of successful partnership with broad capacity of cooperation and collective interests can be achieved by gaining mutual trust and strengthening broader unity. Below mentioned policy recommendations can help reduce the terrorism threat in Afghanistan and decrease suicide attacks by the militant groups in the country.

- 1) The U.S. and allied forces can extend the peace talks with the other militants and give them a chance to join struggle for peace and turn the "war on terror" into a set of strategy i.e. war against crime and corruption, through mass participation and offering opportunities of employment for youths. As many consider corruption in Afghanistan a bigger problem than terrorism,⁴¹ therefore such a measure would

40. Stathis N. Kalyvas, Ignacio Sanchez-Cuenca, "Killing Without Dying: The Absence of Suicide Missions", In *Making of Suicide Missions*, edited by Diego Gambetta, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 209-32.

41. Anna Varfolomeeva, "Are Corruption and Poor Governance Bigger Threats for Afghan Army than Taliban?", IRIA, June 19, 2017, accessed at: <http://ir-ia.com/IRIA-Are-corruption-and-poor-governance-bigger-threats-than-taliban.html>

degrade the legitimacy of the militants, who in some cases enjoy support of the local population due to high levels of corruption by the local government officials.

2) All relevant parties and stakeholders must cooperate with each other and concentrate on efforts towards strong legitimate government and “nation-building” which is the centerpiece of any counter-terrorism strategy. Due to the diverse expectations and policies of different stakeholders to deal with the issue, the people of Afghanistan continue to suffer and the terrorists gain the most out it.

3) An initiative to establish an international aid and fund programs to assist the resettlement program for the victims of terrorism as well as the war on terrorism in Afghanistan can help dissuade the militant activities. This would not only benefit the locals of the country but would also discourage the less privileged members of the society to support the militants and their ideology.

4) The Afghans should be provided with an opportunity to elect or select a government model of their own choice without foreign intervention or influence in their country. This would provide encouragement to the local population to resolve their issues in accordance with their own system while discouraging the narrative of the militants. Such a measure would give no more room to the arguments of the militants and terrorists who claim that their actions are concentrated at getting rid of foreign invasion and they are fighting the freedom war.

5) A reconciliation process should be initiated which may include a general amnesty for militants who are ready to renounce terrorism, give up violent activities and join the peace talks. This will provide an opportunity to make a fresh start for misguided youths as well as members of militant groups to work together to achieve the common goal of peace and prosperity in the country.

6) A fast-track campaign should be launched to uplift the miserable conditions of poor people, particularly youngsters in the tribal areas as the region is still deprived of most basic necessities of life. The development initiative would ensure the essential needs of the poor members of the society and misguided youth would not fall into the traps of terrorists and would not look toward suicidal approaches to make their voices heard and achieve their goals.

Title: Analyzing the Rationale of Suicide Terrorism in Afghanistan

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How India's growing relations with Vietnam could challenge China's interests in the region?

Wang Jinna

Introduction:

Vietnam is one of India's closest international partners and emerging as a pivotal state and a strategic pillar of India's Act East Policy. Over the last decade, Vietnam has also become a vital part of India's strategy to counter China's rise in Asia.

When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Vietnam in 2016 (the first by an Indian prime minister in 15 years), he made it clear that India desires to expand its presence in the Southeast Asia. In recent years, India wants to play a more assertive role in the Indo-Pacific region, as Indian Prime Minister Modi wishes to emerge as leader and promoter of peace, prosperity, and stability in Asia. Therefore, India's ambition to build closer partnership with Vietnam is not only an approach to establish its presence in China's periphery but also promote India's greater interests in the region.

The shared focus of strengthening bilateral ties between India and Vietnam has been regional security issues and trade; however, threats emerging from a rising China and mutual strategic interests have greatly contributed to the deepening of ties between Vietnam and India.¹ Today both countries engage as comprehensive strategic partners. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to analyze to what extent the relations between India and Vietnam could challenge Chinese interests in region.

Strategic Relations:

Today the MTCR membership has grown to 34 India is facing increasing challenges due to China's rise and has been closely examining China's maritime expansion into the Indian Ocean. India considers Chinese engagements as expansionary policy, especially after the standoff between the Chinese and Indian armies at the Doklam Plateau near the China-India-Bhutan trijunction. In response, India has become more active in enhancing its relationship with China's neighbors in the south and engaging other regional countries who share the concerns of India on China.

On the other hand, China's growing engagements in the South China Sea and sea claims is a matter of direct security concern for Vietnam. As Hanoi continue to condemn Beijing's military drills and engagements in disputed sea, the hostilities with China and Vietnam rises.² The fragile relations and growing sense of competition between China and Vietnam has also provided India with an opportunity to increase closer strategic relations with Vietnam.

After the border clashes between China and India and Chinese engagements in the South China Sea, the anti-China sentiment in both India and Vietnam rises significantly. India and Vietnam both believes that China has ambitious plans to increase military deployments in disputed seas and the presence of Chinese military in South China Sea continue to cause apprehensions among the regional countries.

1. Harsh V. Pant, "India and Vietnam: A Strategic Partnership in the Making", RSIS Nanyang Technological University Singapore, Policy Brief, April 2018.

2. Pakistan Today Newspaper, "Vietnam slams China over military drills in disputed sea", September 6, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/09/06/vietnam-slams-china-over-military-drills-in-disputed-sea/>

Chinese military engagements in South China Sea have faced criticism not only from China's neighbors including India, Vietnam and the Philippines, but also from the U.S., UK and other European nations.

The commonly perceived China threat has led to close partnership between India and Vietnam. Defense and security cooperation has become an important pillar of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries as depicted from visits to Vietnam by the Indian National Security Advisor (April 2015) and Minister of Defense (June 2016 and June 2018), and the visits to India by the Vietnamese Minister of National Defense (May 2015 and December 2016) as well as mutual visits by each other's naval/coast guard vessels, particularly in 2018 and 2019.

Reaching out to Indians overseas has emerged as an important instrument of India's foreign policy. There are about 3000 Indians settled in Ho Chi Minh City, who are playing an important role in promoting India's image and interests in the country. India is closely engaging the Indian community in Vietnam to promote multilevel cooperation between the two countries.

Due to Indian community's efforts, in recent years, Vietnam is willing to deepen trade and defense ties with an Asian power, India; However, Vietnam remain cautious of provoking China beyond a point while Indian capacity building assistance to Vietnam is seen by Indian strategic community as a "symmetric response" to China's close military relationship with Pakistan.

In March 2018, Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the two countries in New Delhi to strengthen the technical cooperation in the field of atomic energy for peaceful purposes and cooperation between the DAE's Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP) and the Vietnam Atomic Energy Institute (VinAtom).

Moreover, in November 2018, Indian Chief of Army Staff General Bipin Rawat visited Vietnam to deepen the defense relation between the two countries. Indian Military Chief visited Hanoi after the state visit of Indian President Ram Nath Kovind during

which he was given the rare honor of addressing the Vietnam National Assembly, which only Chinese President Xi Jinping had done before.

Both countries are members of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, created to develop and enhance close ties between India and nations of Southeast Asia. In May 2019, India and Vietnam agreed to further strengthen cooperation in defense and security, peaceful uses of atomic energy and outer space, oil and gas and renewable energy. In August 2019, the two held a launching ceremony for a patrol vessel project to break ground on what is effectively the first specific project to operationalize their defense partnership under \$100 million Line of Credit (LoC) extended by India.

India and Vietnam reached consensus on wide array of issues during State Visit of Vietnamese President on November 21, 2018. Both countries agreed to implement the Joint Vision Statement on Vietnam-India Defense Cooperation for the period of 2015-2020 which includes collaboration between the Army, Air Force, Naval and Coast Guard of the two countries, as well as cooperation in cyber security and information sharing.

Indian side expressed their satisfaction at the progress of implementation of US \$100 million Line of Credit for the building of high-speed patrol vessels for the Vietnamese Border Guards and Indian's offer of the US \$500 million Line of Credit to defense industry of Vietnam.

Both sides agreed that it is essential to strengthen cooperation in maritime domain including anti-piracy, security of sea lanes, and exchange of white shipping. Indian officials believe that expanding defense and maritime ties with Vietnam and extending collaboration with the U.S. is a crucial step to contain Chinese aggressions in the South China Sea.

Indian and Vietnamese officials also reached a consensus on promoting bilateral investments, including cooperation projects between PVN and ONGC in oil and gas exploration on land, continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Vietnam.

The Indian side welcomed and agreed to create facilitating conditions for Vietnamese businesses investing in India, particularly in agriculture, agro-processing, marine products and wood products. India is encouraging Vietnam to come out of Chinese reliance and explore further opportunities to expand trade relations with India.

In the science and technology domain, India and Vietnam have agreement on Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy and have exchange and research activities. Both would have close cooperation for the effective implementation of Project for the construction of the Satellite Tracking & Data Reception Station and Data Processing Facility under the ASEAN – India cooperation framework in Vietnam.

Business Relations:

The economic ties between India and Vietnam date back to 1978 when both countries signed a bilateral trade agreement.³ By 1982, both countries established the joint commission to strengthen economic, technical, and scientific cooperation. Although, initially limited trade was conducted between the two countries, due to the 1997 Asian financial crisis and economic slowdown. The first major Indian investment came from OVL in 1989 off the coast of Vung Tau, located east of Ho Chi Minh City.⁴

However, today, India is among the thirty biggest foreign investors in Vietnam with 223 projects with the total accumulated registered capital of \$913.33 million as of April 2019, focusing on energy, industry park infrastructure development, IT, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture. However, Indian investments are still smaller in magnitude as compared to other Asian countries like China, Japan,

and South Korea and only a handful of large Indian firms such as ONGC Videsh, Marico Industries, TATA Group etc dominate India's portfolio.

Vietnam is the third-largest garments exporter after China and Bangladesh with an export turnover of over US\$ 30 billion and has emerged as the preferred choice of electronics and mobile phone companies due to U.S.-China trade war.

In 2019, a number of Vietnamese and Indian businesses attended a networking event. Businesses include many prominent companies from India and Vietnam such as Saigon-Hue Investment Corporation, FLC Group, CMC Telecom, KinhBac City Development Holding Corporation, Bee Logistics Corporation, Indochine Counsel, IV International Co., Ltd., Tech Mahindra Ltd., MINDA Vietnam Automotive Co., Ltd., JAPFA Comfeed Vietnam Ltd., and others.

Indian engagements with Vietnam are also focusing to promote Indian trade and strategic objectives in the country. Indian Prime Minister Modi described Vietnam as an important trade partner of India and the bilateral trade between the two countries has doubled from USD 7.8 billion three years ago to nearly USD 14 billion.

The two countries also expanded cooperation in areas such as space exploration and cybersecurity. New Delhi and Hanoi signed the Inter-Governmental Framework Agreement for the Exploration of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes, and agreed to conclude the Implementing Arrangement between the Indian Space Research Organization and the Vietnam Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment on the establishment of a Tracking and Data Reception Station and a Data Processing Facility in Vietnam under the India-ASEAN Space Cooperation.⁵

3. Yogendra Singh, "IPCS Special Report: India Vietnam Relations, The Road Ahead", No. 40, April 2007, accessed at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/93321/IPCS-SpecialReport-40.pdf>

4. Shantanu Srivastav in Rajiv K. Bhatia et al, "India-Vietnam: Agenda for Strengthening Partnership", Delhi, Shipra Publications, 2013, p. 26.

5. Ministry of External Affairs, India, 'Joint Statement Between India and Vietnam During Visit of PM to Vietnam', September 3, 2016, accessed at: http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/27362/Joint_Statement_between_India_and_Vietnam_during_the_visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_Vietnam

Vietnam has also granted Indian oil firm ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) an approval to explore oil block 128 which is an area of dispute between China and Vietnam in the South China Sea. Although India does not gain much economic benefits from exploration, India and Vietnam agreed to extend such an agreement in order to put pressures on China and keep Indian presence in the disputed waters.⁶

Defense Relations:

The formal framework of defense cooperation between India and Vietnam is based on defense cooperation signed between the countries in 2000. Back then the training of Air Force pilots, joint naval and coast guard and naval exercises and regular dialogue at Defence Ministers' level were institutionalized. This defense cooperation was further strengthened by the July 2007 Strategic Partnership Agreement which now provides the framework for future of cooperation in the defense field. Under this agreement both the countries committed to strengthen their relations in the political, security, defense, cultural, science and technological fields. However, during the recent years both countries speeded up the engagements due to the concerns on both sides regarding China's growing activities in the South China Sea.

Maritime cooperation between India and Vietnam remains the focus of the defense cooperation between the two countries. Vietnam has also given India the right to use its strategically significant port in Nha Trang, near Cam Ranh Bay. The Indian Armed Forces have been engaged with the capacity building of the Vietnamese military forces particularly the navy of Vietnam. In this field the areas of focus between the navies of two countries have been training, repairs and maintenance support, regular ship visits, as well as exchanges between think tanks. The Indian Navy has also been making regular visits to the southern Vietnamese port.

For Vietnam's deterrence against China's rise and its moves in the South China Sea has been one of the major factors to improve its defense industry and enhance its naval capabilities. In this regard, India is eager to play increased role and support Vietnam through India's indigenous capabilities in defense production and further develop Vietnamese defense industry. Indian navy has already provided assistance to Vietnamese navy through training to operate the new Russian-built submarines. Moreover, India is also a front-runner for upgrading two Vietnamese Petya-class frigates.

India's defense relations with Vietnam are mainly to support Vietnamese endeavors in the region to counter Chinese moves and secure regional interests of India and ASEAN. India also hopes to increase its trade and expand its defense market in Vietnam. In this regard, India and Vietnam have signed a Joint Vision Statement on defense cooperation for 2015-2020, some of the agreements reached between the two countries include:

India had earlier extended a \$100 million Line of Credit (LOC) to Vietnam to help acquire patrol boats and later offered additional \$500 million line of credit to Vietnam for defense purchases from India.

India has offered Akash surface-to-air missile (SAM), which has a range of 27 kilometers and can achieve speeds in excess of Mach 2. Since Akash has more than 90% indigenous content India can transfer this weapon system to Vietnam without taking into consideration the views of a third party like Russia, which co-developed the BrahMos.

India's Bharat Electronics (BEL), opened its first-ever representative office in Hanoi with the objective of marketing the company's weapons systems, radar systems, naval systems, military communication systems, electronic warfare (EW) systems, combat management systems and coastal surveillance systems.

6. The Economic Times India "ONGC Videsh gets 2-year extension for exploring Vietnamese oil block", ET News, Jul 09, 2017, accessed at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/>

industry/energy/oil-gas/ongc-videsh-gets-2-year-extension-for-exploring-vietnamese-oil-block/articleshow/59512891.cms

Cooperation in the sphere of cyber security is epitomized by the Army Software Park in Nha Trang, which is being built with Indian financial support of \$5 million.

Both countries are also looking at the proposal under which India would train Vietnam People's Air Force (VPAF) pilots on their Su-30 MK2Vs which are similar to the Su-30 MKIs operated by the Indian Airforce.

Indian Navy has been training Vietnamese sailors to operate the Vietnamese People's Navy's (VPN's) Kilo-class submarines at Visakhapatnam since 2013. In August 2019, a project launching ceremony was held for 10 high-speed patrol vessels for the Vietnamese Border Guards project under \$100 million line of credit extended by India's Larsen & Toubro.

Challenges for China:

In recent years, India has paced up its' efforts to interrupt China's OBOR/Silk Road, and CPEC projects and discourage other nations from joining such projects, by highlighting the economic traps and China's hidden strategic aims to control the region, as well as undermining China's business and trade with other regional countries.

At the same time, India is also eager to develop parallel alliances in oil transportation sea-lanes and areas of strategic interests against China's quest for bases, port facilities, strategic reserves in South Asia, Central Asia and Indo-Pacific region. In this regard India is increasing its engagements with China's rivals and competitors, with increased collaboration with Vietnam, Japan and Taiwan.

As in 2021, both India and Vietnam would become

non-permanent members of the UN Security Council therefore close cooperation between two countries could further create obstacles for China and could draw world's attention to the Chinese moves in South China Sea as well as its dominating policies towards its neighbors. therefore, close diplomatic relations between India and Vietnam would further encourage India to increase its engagements against China in the South China Sea.

According to a visiting fellow of the NESAC Centre for Strategic Studies, Mohan Malik indicated that India and Vietnam's partnership is much like China's relationship with Pakistan. He pointed out that, "as Islamabad and Beijing closely coordinate and support their military moves against India, New Delhi and Hanoi have now begun briefing and supporting each other vis-à-vis Beijing. And just as Pakistan favors a strong Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean, Vietnam favors an Indian naval presence in the South China Sea."⁷

Mohan Malik believes that both India and Vietnam share similar views on China and perceive it as an expansionist power that can pose a serious threat to its neighbors. Therefore, India by strengthening its cooperation with Vietnam seeks to contain and encircle China in the Southeast Asia.⁸

However, Carlyle Thayer of the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defense Force Academy, believes that close cooperation between India and Vietnam would be threatened by Chinese aggression. Thayer points out that, when India did not sell BrahMos missile to Vietnam mainly due to the fear of China's reaction, hence any move to strengthen the defense cooperation between India and Vietnam would face China's aggression and both India and Vietnam do not wish to further worsen their relations with China.⁹

7. Maria Siow, "Is an India-Vietnam military alliance about to clash with a China-Pakistan one?", *The Star*, August 27, 2020, accessed at: <https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/asean-plus-news/2020/08/27/is-an-india-vietnam-military-alliance-about-to-clash-with-a-china-pakistan-one>

8. Ibid 7.

9. Xavier Francis, "India, Philippines ready to work together in the South China Sea to check Chinese belligerence", *The Eurasian Times*, August 29, 2020, accessed at: <https://eurasian-times.com/after-china-pakistan-india-vietnam-emerging-as-the-next-iron-brothers-of-asia-experts/>

However, India's deepening ties with Vietnam can also bring India long-term benefits and can pose challenges to China in the future. A successful cooperation between India and Vietnam particularly in the defense field could also attract other Southeast Asian countries to strengthen their partnership with India, especially the countries that share India's vision of China threat and considers Chinese foreign policy as increasingly assertive.

The United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has also made statements in support of both India and Vietnam, by stating that the South China Sea is "not China's maritime empire," and calling for a global coalition to counter China's actions.¹⁰

China's claim in the South China sea poses a significant threat to both the U.S. and India's freedom of navigation and economic presence in Southeast Asia. Therefore, in recent years, the U.S. and India have expressed interests in carrying out navigation activities in the South China Sea and expand its relations with Southeast Asian nations.

Both India and Vietnam share the security concerns in the South China Sea. According to Huynh Tam Sang, China's increasing activities in disputed waters and dominating attitude has seriously disturbed Vietnamese leaders, while threatening India's strategic objectives in the region. Therefore it is a logical outcome for India and Vietnam to strengthening defense ties and counter rising tensions from China's attempts to dominate the Southeast Asia region.¹¹

Some experts believe that Indian military presence in the Southeast Asia could not only enhance Vietnam's defensive capability but also reduce defense

expenditures. India's engagement in the disputed waters, as well as its diplomatic and military support to Vietnam is considered important for India has been struggling to play a vital role in Southeast Asian region. While Vinod Anand believe that, India and Vietnam could also extend cooperation with other Asia Pacific countries such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Australia, to further counter Chinese aggression in disputed waters.¹²

Both India and Vietnam consider China as an aggressive neighbor at their land and maritime borders. Therefore, both countries are facing a somewhat similar threat and share security concerns. Being emerging leaders in South Asia and Southeast Asia, India and Vietnam hope to counter China threat by cooperation with each other and believe that increased political interactions, defense cooperation and naval exercises in South China Sea can address their security concerns.¹³

India has already desired to increase its defense exports and Southeast Asian countries could likely be its main target. India hopes to attract the neighborhood of China, and cash the China threat among the ASEAN countries. India has already identified 15 weapon systems for exports including Astra beyond-visual range air to air missiles, Prahar surface to surface missiles, light combat aircraft (LCA), BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, SONARs, Arjun Mk-2 battle tanks, airborne early warning systems, battlefield radars and a variety of unmanned systems.

Both India and Vietnam heavily rely on Russian-made arms, while India accounts for almost 62 percent of total sales but Indian officials are unsatisfied with

10. Remarks to the Press by the U.S. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo, "Secretary Michael R. Pompeo and British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab at a Press Availability", U.S. Department of State, July 21, 2020, accessed at: <https://www.state.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-and-british-foreign-secretary-dominic-raab-at-a-press-availability/>

11. Huynh Tam Sang, "Time to Forge India-Vietnam Defense Ties", Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, August 21, 2020, accessed at: <https://amti.csis.org/time-to-forge-india-vietnam-defense-ties/>

12. Vinod Anand, "India-Vietnam Defence and Security Cooperation", Vivekanade International Foundation, May 12, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2017/may/12/achievements-india-vietnam-defence-and-security-cooperation>

13. Pankaj Jha, "Vietnam- India cooperation against China's aggressiveness", Modern Diplomacy, October 11, 2020, accessed at: <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/10/11/vietnam-india-cooperation-against-chinas-aggressiveness/>

China and Russia's defense cooperation especially because China is buying defense systems that India wants for itself.

Traditionally, India has been trying to step up its engagement with the Central Asian region but CPEC and Pakistan have proved as the biggest hurdle in realizing India's objectives of ensuring strengthened economic-political relations with Central Asia. Therefore, in recent years, India has started to look towards Southeast Asia to extend its sphere of influence and counter much bigger threat, China.

Conclusion

India attaches great importance to its relations with Vietnam and hope to incorporate a similar model in engaging with other Southeast Asian states such as the Philippines and Indonesia. While, India and the Philippines have already agreed to extend strategic partnership in the South China Sea.¹⁴ India seek to further engage with other Southeast Asian nations using similar elements that formulate India-Vietnam relations, including extending line of credit for defense acquisition and increasing India's defense exports.

Despite the developments in India-Vietnam relations, the lack of substantial results on BrahMos cruise missiles and Akash surface-to-air missiles sales show that the strategic relationship between India and Vietnam lacks momentum. However, recent developments indicate that India is more willing to move forward with its relations to Vietnam and shift from its policy towards China, due recent tensions with China and increased moves by Beijing in the greater Indian Ocean region.

It is likely that India and Vietnam would further cooperate with each other to develop Vietnam's

indigenous defense sector and India could increase its defense exports to Vietnam as well as other Southeast Asian nations. India also hopes to formulate intelligence sharing agreement with Vietnam and other nations and strengthen its strategic relationship with China's neighbors. Moreover, India is increasingly enhancing its strategic position and showing interest and commitment in the region by supporting the security concerns of Southeast Asian countries, especially the nations who share concerns regarding China.

Although, economic development remains a priority for India and Vietnam, the development of defense relations between the countries has strengthened significantly in recent years. Both India and Vietnam hope to increase their defense and strategic partnership, especially to counter Chinese moves, however, both countries do not wish to engage in any direct confrontation with China and aim to secure their mutual concerns by maintaining peace and stability in the region.

While both India and Vietnam have witnessed remarkable improvement in economic, defense and strategic relationship, and perceive China as a common threat, it is observed that both India and Vietnam have different approaches when it comes to China. India mainly seeks to promote its defense industry and increase its sphere of influence in Indian Ocean region, while Vietnam being a part of ASEAN seek to address its issue through cooperation and cannot afford to jeopardize its trade relations with China.

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Evaluation of France's ambition to strengthen its role in Western Alliance

Camelia Maria

France is fast emerging world power and is now competing to take over the role of the UK despite the fact that France is neither as deeply penetrated in the developing world nor has traditional connections with former colonial states in Asia and Middle East. Nevertheless, France has managed to improve its role as strategic partners with several African, Middle Eastern and Asian states.

Politically French leaders have adopted a strategy that apparently differ from that of the U.S. but militarily the French Government is drawing closer to the U.S. and NATO and seeking to play a major role within the Western strategic and defense alliance. On the other hand, French military is working to rapidly emerge as the fourth most powerful world power and is expanding its influence from Africa to Middle East and Asia-Pacific Sea.

For the United States, France's role and influence may be more beneficial than the UK and other European nations as it has emerged into a strong defense exporting country to compete with Russia and China.

Similarly, France's support to the United States dates back to the U.S. declaration of independence from Great Britain when France provided the decisive support to the United States as an ally during its war of independence. The Franco-American relationship developed into a strategic alliance under NATO and French assumed the key roles in Europe and Africa.

However, the U.S. had several reservations over French quest for independent role and regional in-roads created some confusion leading to the limitation of French interest in NATO's military wing.

The U.S. received a set-back in 1996 when France decided to limit its involvement in NATO's deterrence and collective defense mission. However, in post 9/11 situation the French interest redeveloped as the U.S. agreed to share power and influence with Paris in Europe and Africa.

The second change in French defense strategy was after Crimea crisis in 2014 and the war in Ukraine when France became closer to the defense of NATO states when it endorsed at Warsaw summit of 2016 decision to enhance air policing missions for allies and deployment of an Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in Poland and the Baltic States. France also backed a NATO decision to strengthen the Forward Presence around the Black Sea. It was during September 2014 that leaders of NATO in Wales Summit gave a serious attention to France's will to overtake challenges with the adoption of a "Readiness Action Plan".

During NATO Summit in Warsaw, in 2016 France played a key role in adoption of Allies' solidarity, determination, and ability to act by triggering an immediate Allied response to any aggression". It was during this Summit that the allied nations welcomed a proposal of France to build their national cyber defense capacities and cyber space was recognized as an operational area.

In 2017 France confirmed its adherence to the strategy set by Atlantic Alliance as a "key component of European security" and agreed to fully take part in a balanced sharing of responsibilities and costs. France also committed to increase its defense spending to 2% of its national wealth in 2025. To fulfill its commitment, French government agreed to enhance its military programming bill 2019-2025 an

unprecedented €198 billion for armed forces over its first five years.

Since 2015 over 4,000 French personnel had been deployed in the region round the year in the form of air policing and intelligence gathering missions (including Airborne Warning and Control System flights every month) and increased roles in about 20 NATO exercises in the region.

In addition to that, France also shares responsibility with the U.S., and to show full commitment, France increased its forward position in Baltic countries and Poland with 300-strong armored, mechanized battalion Leclerc tanks and infantry combat vehicles, integrated over eight months over alternate years in a Western-led battalion in Estonia (2017-2019) and Lithuania (2018-2020) joining Germany and Great Britain.

In the Forward Presence Strategy (in Romania and Bulgaria), France deployed vessels in the Black Sea (two to three per year) and maritime surveillance missions using maritime patrol aircraft.

In support of the U.S. global war on terror, France also managed to regain footholds in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria while it reestablished grip in Africa and Mediterranean Sea particularly in Cyprus, Greece and Malta in close collaboration with Israel.

With the U.S. support, France also strengthened strategic alliance with India and secure defense contracts in competition with Russia. French closeness with India and formation of a strategic partnership with Indian leadership has also convinced the U.S. strategists to see France as the future key ally at a time when UK was losing grounds in many areas particularly Asia and Middle East.

Although, terrorism threat and radicalization remains a major threat to France and its interests and French leaders hope to deal with this common threat with other Western allies. However, for France, the basis of cooperation with the U.S. remains the common incentive for democracy, protecting western ideology and human rights values.

More recently, the U.S. Department of State officials have urged French leaders on number of occasions to take tough stance on both Russia and China and seek France's support in protecting western ideology against communist and authoritative systems.

The U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper during his meeting with French Minister of Armed Forces Florence Parly on September 7, 2019 also restated the importance of defense relations between the two countries and stressed on jointly dealing the Russia and China threat. However, France is still not ready to support direct involvement in an alliance against China and hopes to deal with China threat through joint initiative by European alliance.

Nevertheless, France is eager to explore new markets for its high quality heavy products in the East Asia, Pacific and ASEAN region and is hopeful that French defense products can reach new markets in South East Asian countries. For France, only if China's grip on Asia Pacific is loosened, France can penetrate into ASEAN defense markets, that would become more dependent on Europe, particularly France. Therefore, France may expand its area of influence and make way for its own Navy from Africa to Pacific oceans, by supporting the U.S. campaign against China.

France also hopes to meet China's emerging rival India's needs and by doing so France can expand its market in India and South Asian region. French policymakers also see India as a growing defense market and a largest importer of French heavy machineries therefore can rely on India to support French interests through mutual cooperation.

On the other hand, France sees China as strong competitor and not as a big market for its own products. So, France under the Western alliance joint actions against China, the country can benefit more from China's rivals including Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Following numerous warnings by the U.S. regarding China threat to French interest in the Middle East and African, French government realizes China's growing role in Africa as a future threat to its traditional influence in many Afro-Arab countries. French

government shares the U.S. and NATO officials' suggestions of combined strategy to contain China and restrict growing Chinese influence in other regions. While, France's mixed approach of imposing selected sanctions on China's 5G and cooperating with the U.S., at the same time continuing trade and maintaining somewhat cordial relations with Beijing could also send a desired message to Moscow, as France can follow a similar pattern with the Russia in the future engagements.

For France, in order to establish its authority as growing super power, the country need to expand its area of influence from Pacific to Africa within next decade and establish its strong presence. French politicians have realized that with rapidly increasing nationalist trend in political scenario, the country cannot limit its influence within the region and needs to expand which is only possible with tacit approval from the United States.

The French Government under the leadership of President Emmanuel Macron has been striving to emerge as a powerful country not only in Europe but in the world. The politicians in France due to their own local constraints have quite a few differences with the U.S. administration and see themselves as a peace broker which will allow France to regain the footholds in Africa, Middle East and Asia.

Following the intelligence cooperation by the U.S. Africa Command leading to a successful French move on May 19, 2020 that led to the killing of Mohamed el Mrabat, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara jihadist, the French military is ready to cooperate with the U.S. to further strengthen its foothold in Africa. The U.S. officials have also assured the French officials of continued cooperation and that the U.S. would further facilitate France in Africa.

Consequently, France, along with Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad, created a combined force in January, 2020 in the name of Counter Terrorism Operation and France has been maintaining about 5,100 troops in the region.

Both the United States and France became further closer as the U.S. alarmed the European states against

a possible China's expanded influence in African following China-Africa virtual summit.

France considers Africa an important region as the U.S. role is small in West Africa, there are only around 1000 American troops stationed in West Africa, mostly at a base in Niger, however France has a greater presence in the region and can facilitate Western agendas in the region. Therefore, France is eager to strengthen economic ties with Africa, especially at a time when China is strengthening its footholds in Africa and may directly challenge the French influence.

France's on-ground experience and knowledge of Africa is always appreciated and considered irreplaceable by the United States; however, French military strategists feel that without the support of Americans, the European - and particularly French - interests in Africa may be not in a position to counter Russia's military and China's economic challenges.

As France's historical privileged access to African political leaders and markets is now rivaled by other major players, most notably, China. France has adopted a policy of containing China, by demonizing Chinese presence in Africa as debt-trap and a direct threat to African states' autonomy. France has been moving forward to secure French interests in Africa by emphasizing on human rights and protection of the sovereignty of African states.

For France, the U.S. has little interest for military operations in Africa and they want France to replace the U.S. in the region as well as defend the region against any hostile moves by China. Moreover, France shares the responsibility in Africa, as Americans are now moving towards a burden shifting strategy.

However, the strengthening of Barkhane and the G5 Sahel Joint Force is considered important move by France as it can deepen the roots in African states by developing military cooperation, training missions and taking local leaders into confidence. More recently, France and the G5 Sahel countries decided to set up a coalition for the Sahel. France contributes €1.6 billion to the Sahel Alliance projects portfolio, which has already mobilized a total of €12

billion. On February 25, 2020, on the occasion of the Alliance's General Assembly and G5 Sahel Summit, Foreign Minister Drian visited Mauritania, and the move was applauded by the Americans as it can serve the Western alliance' interest of countering Chinese influence in Africa.

France is also gradually interacting with China's neighbors due to its interests in the region as well as established some economic and defense ties with Taiwan due to its fast developing economy. In other words, it is an act of balancing between France relation with China and France relations with America.

However, French officials have taken China's warning seriously that French engagement will harm Sino-French relations by selling arms to neighboring Taiwan. The French foreign ministry officially adheres to one China policy as agreed with Beijing in 1994 and continues to urge both China and Taiwan to hold dialogue to resolve all matters peacefully.

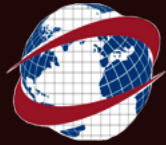
However, French President Macron is under some pressures to choose sides between the U.S. and China; however, it is likely that the official government would continue to play neutral role and would not upset any side. President Macron also hopes to be the right facilitator between the U.S. and China therefore; he would not support any direct involvement in China's internal matters. Nevertheless, the situation would become more complicated for the President Macron if he continues to face pressures from local politicians to take a firm stand against human rights issues.

For French Government, the best possible move is to support the U.S. and Western interests on the backhand as it considers China a threat to French interests and France should gain leverage against both sides. Officially France support Chinese position of no independence of Chinese separatists and only asked China to look into the human rights situation in the country, as Europeans are becoming increasingly concerned about the human rights issues in China.

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