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The Islamic State as a Unique Social Movement: Exploiting Social Media in an Era of Religious Revival

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The Islamic State as a Unique Social Movement:

Exploiting Social Media in an Era of Religious Revival

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to

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Global and Regional Studies Program

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Abstract

The Islamic State (IS) is a reminder that religious terrorism in the Middle East remains a threat. However, this organization has been unique in its ability to emerge so aggressively, recruit large numbers of fighters from abroad, and establish a semi-functioning political state. In this thesis, I will explore this unprecedented phenomenon, focusing especially on the ways that trends of modernization, globalization, and sacralization have shaped the movement. As part of this work, I will specifically consider IS' use of social media to recruit members and disseminate information and how this new technology has operated in tandem with the aforementioned trends to frame IS as a unique terrorist organization.

Introduction

The threat of religious terrorism in the Middle East and abroad is still imminent. Terrorism is conventionally understood as “public acts of destruction, committed without a clear military objective, that arouse a widespread sense of fear” (Juergensmeyer 2003, p. 5). While IS has engaged in these acts, it has eclipsed this formerly accepted characterization. It has captured large territories in Iraq and Syria, establishing an Islamic caliphate within these nations’ borders. IS has even been able to recruit numerous followers from over 90 different countries (Levitt & Youkilis, 2015). These facts prove that IS is unlike other modern terrorist groups.

The way IS rose to power is exclusive to the climate of the twenty-first century. The recent success of this organization must be considered in contexts of geopolitical, social, and technological trends that we associate with globalization and modernity. The shift from secularization to the development of more religious mindsets in many societies has allowed religious groups to gain traction when the nation state is perceived to be failing its subjects. When geopolitical disputes like those in Iraq and Syria become more volatile and certain citizens feel betrayed by their governments, religious responses tend to be more combative.

The Islamic State has carefully crafted an anti-secular, anti-Western rhetoric that presents itself as a righteous alternative to the nation state. Through its various media institutions, IS disseminates propaganda that presents the organization in this way. It has created an official online magazine, *Dabiq*, which explicitly states the organization’s ideology and the logical basis for its methods. The publication’s content directly addresses grievances towards secular nationalism and the failure of national governments in the Middle East, presenting IS as an answer to the anxieties of globalization.

A key technological development has greatly aided IS in its rise to prominence: social media. This new media represents a fundamental shift, and proliferation of, human communication that allows people from across the globe to share information regardless of nationality or geographic distance between users. Social media has proven invaluable to IS, which has exploited the horizontal nature of this new communication technology to achieve a more ubiquitous distribution of propaganda than ever before. The organization's followers share propaganda material, which eventually makes it out of the jihadist social media circles. IS uses social media to publicize accounts of their terrorist violence, effectively bypassing mainstream media, allowing them to imbue such accounts with their official narrative. These exploits give IS an edge in recruiting followers from abroad, convincing many to join the jihad in Iraq and Syria. Even more problematic, IS has been able to inspire many "lone wolf" attackers, who carry out terrorist attacks in the name of Islamic State in their home nations. Due to unique changes to the global sociopolitical milieu and the development of new communication technology, the very nature of terrorism has changed. Islamic State, an organization that is largely a product of this particular moment in history, is on the forefront of this new brand of terrorism.

In this thesis, I will attempt to understand the relative success of IS as a social movement. I will consider social contexts such as the failure of secular nationalism in the Middle East, the increased global prevalence of religion, and the psychological anxieties and sentiments associated with globalization. I will investigate how the new communication technology available to IS has enabled the organization to seize the opportunity presented to them by these contexts, and how the group's rhetoric addresses the grievances associated with them. I will then consider how the dissemination of this narrative contributes to the group's success in recruiting members and inspiring independent attackers.

I will build first upon insights of scholars who examine the global rise of religion, the nature of religious terrorism, and the characteristics of successful social movements. I will rely heavily on Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah's 2011 work to refer to trends in global religiosity and their social implications. The authors identify a commonly held theory that religion was gradually losing its significance. This "secularization thesis" has actually "proven a poor guide to global historical reality" (Duffy Toft, Philpott, & Shah, 2011, p. 2). Major religions like Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism have gained popularity over the course of the twentieth century. They also claim that religion's influence on politics has been increasing globally (Duffy Toft et al., 2011, p. 3). Referring to religious terrorism, Duffy Toft et al. suggest, "many of these movements have escaped [state] borders and become regional or global thanks to globalization" (Duffy Toft et al., 2011, p. 122). These theories help support my argument that IS is in part a product of recent trends that promote the fusion of religion and politics.

I will also draw from the work of Mark Juergensmeyer to place IS in a context of religious terrorism. *Terror in the Mind of God* (2003) explores why "violence has accompanied religion's renewed political presence" (Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 2003, p. 248). I will focus on his chapter, "Theater of Terror" to explain the effectiveness of social media in spreading images of terror for symbolic and strategic purposes. He explains how high-profile terrorist acts can affect perceptions of power (Juergensmeyer, 2003, p. 135) and inform a narrower, more specific audience (Juergensmeyer, 2003, p.145). In the case of IS, this audience would likely consist of the organization's fighters on the ground in Iraq and Syria or the Shia governments they oppose.

The works of social movements theorists, especially Tilly, Tarrow, and Castells, help to understand the technological basis of IS' success as a social movement. Castells identifies social

media as a valuable new tool to social movements, which serves to connect members and disseminate information in a horizontal, as opposed to top-down, fashion. Tarrow refers to “print and association” as factors that disseminated social movements, allowing geographically distanced people to “know of one another’s actions and join...in national social movements” (Tarrow, 1998, p. 43). IS uses social media to serve this purpose.

I will draw upon Jytte Klausen’s *Tweeting the Jihad*, which analyzes how IS is using social media, particularly Twitter, to disseminate information to members, recruit, and spread violent media. IS uses social media as “a tool of offensive psychological warfare” for basically no cost (Klausen, 2014, p.20). The Brookings Institute published *The ISIS Twitter Census*, which characterizes IS affiliated Twitter users. They found that of more than 46,000 Twitter accounts used by IS supporters, many had more than 1000 followers, and that a significant portion used English as their primary language (Berger & Morgan, 2015, p. 3). These two studies will provide much of the data that I will refer to in regards to IS’s use of social media sites like Twitter, as they are the most comprehensive studies on the issue that are currently known to me.

Using secondary sources such as scholarly works and journal articles, I will first investigate how global social trends of recent decades have shaped perceptions of both the nation state and religion’s place in the public sphere, particularly in the Middle East. I will trace the roots of secular nationalism to understand how it evolved differently in distinct regions. This will allow me to analyze how the introduction of secular nationalism in the Middle East shaped the region’s perception of this novelty political concept. I will consider these developments within the context of globalization, incorporating the nuances of this process into my analysis.

Next, I will conduct a rhetorical analysis of the Islamic State’s main official online periodical, *Dabiq*, and consider how the organization shapes their propaganda to address the

grievances regarding secular nationalism in the Middle East and abroad. I will investigate how speculation toward the very concept of the nation state, secular nationalism's inadequacy in accommodating Islam, the failure of nation states in the Middle East, and anxieties of globalization are incorporated in IS' rhetoric. I will infer how these rhetorical devices could make the group more enticing to disgruntled and disaffected Muslims worldwide.

Finally, I will investigate how social media has benefited the Islamic State in their distribution of propaganda, and in what ways it sets the group apart from others before it. Using a variety of primary and secondary sources, from IS official content to scholarly articles, think tank reports, and news reports, I will attempt to analyze how the organization harnesses the communicative power of social media to heighten its global influence. Considering the rapid dissemination of propaganda, the ability to portray acts of terror on its own terms, and the ability to establish direct contact with potential recruits regardless of geographic location, I will attempt to understand how the Islamic State's exploitation of social media represents a paradigmatic shift in terrorist strategy, framing the organization as a unique social movement.

Chapter 1: Understanding Religious Movements Against the State

In recent decades, religion has seen significant resurgence in politics. Not only has there been an increase in religious influence within existing political structures, but also numerous religiously fueled rebellions against state governments have emerged with notable vigor. It is no coincidence that the rise in prevalence and frequency of violent rebellions against state governments comes after a period of nation building, economic development and imperialism in the third world, and rapid globalization. Notable catalysts for anti-state religious responses include the conflicting sovereign natures of religion and secularism, the failure of the nation state to deliver, in many cases, adequate leadership and support, and the perpetuation of these anxieties and other harmful processes through globalization. These factors leave a void in confidence and legitimacy of government, one which many individuals believe could be more adequately occupied by religion. However, where the rigid structure of the nation state is already in place, it often proves difficult to create change through traditional means. In many of these cases, movements turn to violence to achieve their goals.

The Unnatural Divide

When considering entities that have traditionally guided both society as a whole and the actions of the individual, two systems come to mind: religion and government. Although our society conceives of these as two mutually exclusive entities, they had existed almost jointly for centuries. Western thinkers consider these concepts so distinctly separate because of the zealous nature with which secular nationalism has divorced itself from religious intuitions. However, before this cleavage occurred, political and religious apparatus often worked in synchronization. In premodern societies that existed under Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, political rulers often relied on the support of religious leaders as the legitimation and moral foundation for

their rule. Before the rise of humanist, secular ideologies, the moral guidance of religion provided motivation for compliance. Religion compelled the citizenry to observe the sovereignty of government, a quality that the political apparatus lacked on its own. On the other hand, religious leaders received support from political institutions both financially and militarily, but also to enforce their decrees. Without governing bodies, there would be no structural means to align a population under unified religious teachings. Duffy Toft et al. identify these relationships as a trend of “friendly mergers”, where “religious actors and political authorities the world over tended to be intertwined in relationships that were both integrated and consensual”. They go on to explain that the entities were “firmly integrated into organic, holistic systems of authority” which “lacked defined boundaries” (Duffy Toft, Philpott, & Shah, 2011, p. 57). These relationships existed in various parts of the world, including Christian Europe. However, the Western world experienced a unique dissolution of this bond, one whose intensity and conclusiveness was not experienced elsewhere.

We can trace this split in ideologies as far back as the 16th century, during which European rulers were battling the increasingly powerful role of the Catholic Church in their ability to govern. This contention culminated in the Protestant Reformation, which began to change the political layout of Europe based on religious divisions. A series of bloody, religiously fueled wars broke out, which would eventually conclude in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. As Peter Mandeville explains, this event “did mark a watershed moment in the reorganization of the relationship between church and state as societal institutions” (Mandaville, 2014, p. 10). However, this agreement and the grievances that led up to it comprise only some of the catalysts for the split between religion and secularism.

The Age of Enlightenment in Europe during the 18th century compounded on both individualist sentiments that emerged during the Renaissance and political liberalism that emerged after the Peace of Westphalia. This ideological movement focused even more on the acquisition of knowledge and attention to the self, but it also led to the crystallization of new thoughts on religion. Juergensmeyer points out that this consisted of “a narrower definition of the term that encompassed institutions and beliefs that were regarded as problematic, and conceptually separated them from the rest of social life, which was identified by a new term, ‘secular’” (Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, From Christian Militias to Al Qaeda*, 2008, p. 17). Animosity towards the Church remained, and this new conception of religion allowed liberal thinkers to compartmentalize religious ideology as an optional activity separate from everyday life. This distinction is vastly important in understanding the development of the modern nation state, as it made room for an understanding that the individual was not required to be subject to the authority of religious hierarchy, and that a state could govern without the influence of a religious body.

It is important to note that these specific societal developments, and therefore the shifts in ideology that accompany them, occurred exclusively within “the sociocultural bloc commonly known as ‘the West’” (Mandaville, 2014, p. 9). Understandings of religion in other parts of the world did not experience the same division, and often continued to coexist with government structures. The Western conception of nationalism that emerged from this separation of religion and secularism is at variance with many civilizations’ ideologies of order as they have existed throughout history. Juergensmeyer underlines this conflict: “Contemporary religious politics, then, is the result of an almost Hegelian dialectic between two competing frameworks of social order: secular nationalism (allied with the nation state) and religion (allied with large ethnic

communities, some of them transnational)” (Juergensmeyer, 2008, p. 17). The apparent friction of these frameworks begs the question: can they exist together?

Secular Nationalism’s Struggle in the Middle East

The Western world holds its secular political system in high regard. Its relative success in the United States and various European countries signals to Western leaders, intellectuals, and citizens that this system is one that works. If it works here, why couldn’t it work there? After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Middle Eastern territories were divided by Europeans based on culturally arbitrary demarcations. These European governments introduced secular polity in the region, which was later solidified by the United States through the Eisenhower doctrine. Duffy Toft et al. point out that this process has roots in colonialism, and is echoed throughout the world: “It was also through colonization and eventual independence that states around the world developed institutions of law and governance—including relationships between religion and the state—that reflected European models” (Duffy Toft, Philpott, & Shah, 2011, p. 58). These newly introduced principles were unfamiliar to the Middle East, which had previously existed under the Islamic rule of the Ottoman Empire. Today, many of the region’s inhabitants are Muslim, followers of a religion that was originally structured to guide both spiritually and politically. Islamic law, or sharia, is a system that is actually ‘secular’ in its reach, in the sense that it is better-suited to govern the public realm than Christianity. This distinction makes clear the unfamiliarity of the Western secular model within the Muslim world. As Christianity failed to keep up with ideological modernization, the Church was singled out for its opposition to emerging ideologies. On the other hand, Islam’s adaptability and applicability to daily life prevented this repudiation. Because the distinct cleavage between religion and politics never

happened in the Middle East, many Muslims hesitate to accept a system that so ardently separates the two.

A prominent concept within Islam is *hakimiyya*, or God's sovereignty. This implies that God is the only authority capable of governing. Humans were only sanctioned to "interpret, execute, and adjudicate God's law; they could not create new, man-made laws...for that would by definition contravene Islamic teachings" (Ayoob, 2008, p. 67). Therefore, secularism inherently interferes with this widely accepted aspect of Islam. As mentioned before, this new compartmentalization of religion and the state is alien to Muslims, as there exists "a continuous lineage of widely accepted and legitimate Islamic political order up until the Ottoman caliphate's abolition in 1924" (Hamid, 2016, p. 47). Many of the newly created nations were subjected to a political system that is ultimately incompatible with local cultural tradition and history. Juergensmeyer illustrates the danger here: "The problem, however, was that in asserting that the nationalism of their country was secular, the new nationalists had to have faith in a secular culture that was at least as compelling as a sacred one" (Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, From Christian Militias to Al Qaeda*, 2008, p. 12). The decades-long presence of an alien political structure has nurtured animosity towards both the nation state itself and the Western actors that have imposed it globally.

When nationalism was introduced in the Middle East after the fall of the Ottoman caliphate it was expected to bring with it all the benefits of the modern state. Many of the region's inhabitants looked to successful Western nations as examples of how nationalism and political liberalism function, and developed high expectations for the potential good that these systems could bring to a suffering region. The model of secular nationalism was championed by some Arab leaders during the 20th century, perhaps most notably by Gamal Abdel Nasser. He

and others espoused this idea of nationalism as a means of distancing their countries from their colonial predecessors: “[Nationalism] was shaped by home-grown elites who had fought to break the stranglehold of European colonization and who led their countries to independence in the aftermath of World War II” (Kepel, 2002, p. 24). However, the very essence of secular nationalism was a foreign import. After an overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy, Nasser strove to implement principles that were largely based on secular Western ideals, such as self-determination and the concept of nationhood based on linguistic commonality. This push for pan-Arabism never fully took hold, as the emerging secular nationalism within the region brought with it divisions based on disparities in interest and ideology. For example, the progressive nationalists like Nasser, Syrian Baathists, and Iraqis were opposed by the conservative nationalists of Jordan and other Arabian monarchies (Kepel, 2002, p. 63).

Not only did the new nationalism fail to create bonds between the Arab States, but it also failed to support them from within. In his article, *Islam, Democracy, and Constitutional Liberalism*, Fareed Zakaria bluntly suggests that “Arab regimes chose bad ideas and implemented them in worse ways” (Zakaria, 2004, p.8). During this period, Middle Eastern intellectuals such as Muhammad Abduh felt that the beneficial aspects of the Western system could be extracted and utilized to the advantage of the Muslim community, but it seems that the opposite occurred: in an attempt to modernize and adopt only useful aspects of Western society, nationalist regimes like Nasser’s modeled policies and institutions from less practical Western ones. In many cases, these were based in historical contexts exclusive to the regions in which they function properly. Socialism, for example, failed in Egypt and other parts of the Arab world because there was no comparable historical clash between the working class and elites as there was in Eastern Europe. The inherently secular nature of socialism provides further insight into its

incompatibility with the region. The emergence of democracy to the region also proved less effective than expected. Zakaria notes that in many of these Arab states, “the republics calcified into dictatorships” (Zakaria, 2004, p. 8). With no historical impetus for democratic political structures, foreign imposition of democracy would inevitably deteriorate. The initial fervor over nationalism that characterized the late 1950s was sharply declining, and an Arab defeat against Israel in the Six Day war of 1967 confirmed the region’s doubts.

Nation State Failure

Over these decades it was made clear that the expectations held both by those living in the Middle East and those working to implement a nationalist, politically liberal system within the region have gone largely unmet. Even the basic function of a nation state, the delivery of political goods, has missed the mark. Robert I. Rotberg notes that these goods consist of “security, education, health services, economic opportunity, environmental surveillance, a legal framework of order and a judicial system to administer it, and fundamental infrastructural requirements such as roads and communications facilities” (Rotberg, 2002, p. 87). In the present day, enduring inabilities of the state to deliver these basic securities characterize much of the Middle East. In Syria, for example, more than half of the population is unemployed, and 75% of the population lives under the poverty level. Agricultural production has diminished significantly and malnutrition is commonplace (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). Syria is an extreme case, but similar situations exist in other countries within the region. Many governments here have benefitted profusely from the oil trade, putting the wealth in the hands of a select few. This massive influx of wealth, coupled by large sums of aid from countries like the United States, eliminates the need for some governments to tax their citizens. If they do not collect taxes from their citizens, they are not held accountable to provide political goods. This repressive style

of government prevents states from developing in significant ways and creates a harmful cycle: “As the state becomes more repressive, opposition within society grows more pernicious, goading the state into further repression. It is the reverse of the historical process in the Western world, where liberalism produced democracy and democracy fueled liberalism” (Zakaria, 2004, p. 3). Not only did Arab nationalism fail to rally public support in the same way as its Western counterpart, but many new states have proven unable to deliver basic political goods to their citizens.

Islamism as a Response

Perhaps secular nationalism’s greatest failure within the Middle East is its alienation of Islam on a political level. This new ideology called upon its citizens to put their religious affiliations aside and adhere to a different uniting factor. As Hamid explains: “there is a different, deeper failure, one that is likely to plague the region for decades to come: the fundamental inability of secular state systems to accommodate Islamist participation in the democratic process” (Hamid, 2016, p. 37). Many Muslims living under secular nationalist regimes during the mid 20th century harbored this animosity. They felt that their new government was unable to take into consideration their spiritual wellbeing with its legal apparatus.

This social dissatisfaction explains the emergence of the period’s prominent Islamist thinkers, who expressed these shared grievances constructively. Figures like Qutb and Mawdudi wrote extensively on the issue of Islamic jurisprudence and the inadequacy of nationalism to accommodate for Islam. Regarding the incorporation of Islam in government structure, Mawdudi said of secular leaders:

It is also natural for them to sidetrack or suppress the issue, as they are ignorant of even the ABCs of the Islamic shari'a. Their education and intellectual development has alienated them so completely from the spirit and the structure of Islam ideology that it is, at least for the moment, very difficult for them to understand such demands. (Mawdudi, 2009, p. 87)

These Islamic philosophers expressed their perception that secular governments were inadequate, a commonly held sentiment within the Middle East, and proposed a seemingly appropriate solution: the implementation of sharia.

As mentioned above, Islam is a religion that traditionally pervades every aspect of life, whose texts provide solutions to a wide range of secular issues. As Shadi Hamid points out, "This is a critical point of departure, since it is the sharia's very secularity that makes it more relevant and resonant in today's politics" (Hamid, 2016, p. 69). In their writings, Qutb and Mawdudi propose detailed methods for how the Islamic body of law, or sharia, could replace contemporary secular governments. They posit that this new legal system could eliminate blasphemous, corrupt leadership while simultaneously creating a society free of vice and hardship. To those who criticize the sharia for being barbaric and overly punitive, Mawdudi would argue that they take single aspects of sharia out of context:

For example, we all know that Islam imposes the penalty of amputating the hand for the commitment of theft. But this injunction is meant to be promulgated in a full-fledged Islamic society wherein the wealthy pay zakat to the state, and the state provides for the basic necessities of the needy and the destitute". (Mawdudi, 2009, p. 95)

In a nation governed by sharia, therefore, theft would not occur out of necessity, and the harsh punishment mentioned above would be withheld. However, in nations where sharia was only partially implemented and Islam served more as a set of moral guidelines, a similar punishment would only serve to perpetuate inequalities. This was especially true for Mawdudi in the presence of a secular nationalist government. His guidelines for the implementation of sharia presented embittered Muslims with a seemingly logical alternative to the secular nation state, one that was based in what they held most dearly: Islam.

Mawdudi and others' proposed alternatives, most notably the implementation of an Islamic government and sharia law, resonate most in weak and failing states. The greater secular nationalism's perceived failure, the more rational the adoption of Quranic law will seem. In failing states such as Afghanistan, a political vacuum emerged, where a prime opportunity presented itself to the Taliban, who took power without a fight. In weak states, the attainment of power by Islamist groups is slightly more complicated, and requires that these groups demonstrate their superior ability to provide for citizens when the state fails to do so. Mandaville explains, "Islamist actors who are well organized, well funded, and well managed may emerge as parallel service providers or, in some areas, may even begin to resemble 'shadow governments' in terms of how deeply they become entrenched as legitimate guarantors of welfare and public order" (Mandaville, 2014, p. 271). When living conditions are particularly unbearable, and the government seems to have neglected its citizens completely, Islamist organizations are welcomed with open arms so long as they take some steps to restore order. In many cases, their doctrines are overlooked or even fervently accepted due to their ability to function where the secular state could not.

Globalization as a Catalyst

Globalization, a process that brought political concepts like the nation state and liberal democracy to the Middle East, has only exacerbated Islamist grievances towards these Western values. Through economic flows, political and cultural interaction, and military involvement, globalization has made countries more interconnected than ever before. While these processes have had profound effects worldwide, they have affected the Muslim world in a particularly interesting way. As Zakaria puts it: “The new, accelerated globalization that flourished in the 1990s has hit the Arab world in a strange way. Its societies are open enough to be disrupted by modernity, but not so open that they can ride the wave” (Zakaria, 2004, p. 11). Investigating the effects that economic and cultural globalization have had on the Arab and Muslim worlds may give us insight to how Islamist, anti-Western sentiments have begun to take hold.

One of the main driving factors behind the extensive and accelerating globalization that is characteristic of the 20th and 21st centuries has been economic interaction between different countries. This economic side to globalization has had profound and complex effects on less developed nations, many of them negative. According to Sandbrook and Romano:

Virtually the entire human population has been drawn into a growing dependence on markets that, because they are now scantily regulated, subject people to rapid and sometimes devastating changes in fortune. The distributional shifts, new forms of insecurity, and external shocks demand strong, coherent states to take defensive action and mediate domestic conflicts; yet these new tensions, combined with externally influenced austerity programmes and anti-state ideologies, challenge the legitimacy and coherence of already weak states. (Sandbrook & Romano, 2007, p. 1008-1009)

This dependence on markets can be attributed largely to neoliberalism, which is an economic philosophy promoted by rich Western nations that prescribes laissez-faire style approaches to development. Over time, neoliberalism has allowed the free-market policies favored by the already developed Western nations to enter the economies of most modern countries. Much to the chagrin of the societies upon which these economic policies are imposed, their standards of living have not seen improvements similar to those of their Western counterparts. These vast differences in economic wellbeing are often attributed to both the Western nations from which they came and the local nation state. Sandbrook and Romano continue to explain that these “tensions and grievances” have in many cases created the perfect environment for social movements against the state.

In the updated 2001 introduction to his book, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, Benjamin Barber attempts to interpret the attitudes of those adversely affected by globalization. He posits: “What they seek is not vengeance. Their quarrel is not with modernity but with the aggressive neoliberal ideology that has been prosecuted in its name in pursuit of a global market society more conducive to profits for some than for justice for all (Barber, 2001, p. xv). Although now over 20 years old, Barber’s work is prophetic and nuanced in its predictions of violent responses to globalization. It isn’t the global capitalist system itself that individuals in lesser-developed nations vilify, but the fact that the system seems to have left them behind. For this reason, the system, and those who uphold it, emerge as the obvious targets. Many members of developed nations do not consider the external effects that their behavior might have in other parts of the world. Our enjoyment of the latest technology might be directly tied to cyclical poverty and oppressive working conditions in China or India. The luxury of buying cheap corn may actually mean that small farmers abroad are losing their livelihood. As Barber explains: “too often what

we understand as the market-driven opportunities to secure liberty and prosperity at home seems to them nothing but a rationalization for exploitation and oppression in the international sphere” (Barber, 2001, p. xvii). Imagining the world from the perspective of those that globalization has failed to benefit gives us a chance to understand their responses to these processes.

The interdependence that is characteristic of economic globalization, and the increased rate of interaction between members of distinct nations that this entails, allowed for the spread of not only money and material goods, but culture. Western nations have flooded the global economy with their goods and services, which have become ubiquitous. Many of these goods are cultural, leaving a lasting imprint on the communities that consume them. Barber uses MTV as an example for how widespread the reach of Western (specifically American) culture has become. He observes that as of the mid 1990s, MTV was reaching a “half billion viewers in seventy-one countries” (Barber, 2001, p. 104). Today, MTV broadcasts its exclusive television programs in addition to music videos. To consider how American culture impacts other societies, one need only turn on MTV during primetime, catch an episode of *Teen Mom 3*, and empathize with a conservative Muslim family sitting down to enjoy some after-dinner entertainment only to learn about a young, single mother struggling to cope. If they happened to see an episode of *Teen Mom 2* the week before, followed by a screening of *16 and Pregnant*, what might their perception of American culture be? While this example may be hyperbolic, the vast majority of American culture is rife with content that directly contradicts the values of many cultures that consume it. Barber notes: “one nearly hysterical Islamic youth confesses to an Iranian newspaper, ‘I can’t study anymore, I have become impatient, weak and nervous. I feel crippled...so vulgar and stimulating’ are the images of Western TV and MTV being beamed down from satellites” (Barber, 2001, p. 108).

A critical view of both the nature of American culture itself and its dispersal worldwide sheds light on the adverse effects it has globally. Sandbrook and Romano closely examine these impacts:

Neoliberal globalisation is not just a matter of economics; it also threatens entire ways of life. The global penetration of the mass media and the values, images and tastes they purvey, have a powerful impact upon non-Western cultures.

Television, films, popular music and advertising, industries dominated by US mega-corporations, pervade the world. These industries transmit a possessive individualism that fragments tightly knit communities; propagate consumer tastes that influence the dress, language, food and attitudes of young people; popularise notions of sexual, gender and authority relations that often clash with local notions of virtuous behaviour; and reflect a secular, narcissistic outlook usually in conflict with sacred worldviews defended by local elites. (Sandbrook & Romano, 2007, p. 1013)

These effects of globalization are especially acute in the Muslim world, and have exacerbated anti-Western tensions. These shared attitudes have served as a breeding ground for Islamist ideologies.

Islamist figures such as Ayatollah Khomeini, Qutb, Bin Laden, and others exploited the shared discontent for the presence of American culture, striking a chord with many angry Muslims. In opposition to Iran's Western-leaning Shah, Khomeini distributed thousands of cassette recordings of his teachings, which "taught people a new, angry, austere Islam in which the West is evil, America is the 'Great Satan,' and the unbeliever is to be fought" (Zakaria, 2004, p. 13). These Islamists were not indirect in their identification of America as a threat to the

Muslim way of life, and this animosity largely stems from the undesired presence of America, both economically and culturally, in the Middle East.

The underlying, complex processes of globalization are not the only aspects of the phenomenon that have exacerbated tensions in the Middle East. The United States and members of NATO have maintained an undesired, often aggressive military presence in the region for decades. With the primary objective of enacting liberal democracy in the region, the US and its allies have intervened in various conflicts, perhaps most notably going to war with Iraq on two separate occasions. In a 2003 speech, President George W. Bush remarked that “As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment and violence ready for export”. Under the guise of freedom, the United States government and its allies have remained active in the middle east for decades. Bush continues to explain that under this warrant, “the United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East” (Daalder, 2003). The assumption that what the US understands as “freedom” would solve the region’s problems has led only to more problems in the region, but also to an ardent animosity towards the US and their military apparatus.

The United States’ intrusive foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly after the September 11th attacks, has been the cause for skepticism and contempt towards the nation’s military presence. As Juergensmeyer points out, “the American military incursions in Afghanistan and especially in Iraq were perceived as motivated in large part by efforts to ‘control Muslim politics,’ as a mullah in Baghdad put it in a conversation with me after the U.S. invasion of Iraq” (Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, From Christian Militias to Al Qaeda*, 2008, p. 206). These widely unpopular military actions have been a catalyst for anti-Western, anti-American sentiments, most significantly among

jihadist networks. In his manifesto, Osama Bin Laden proclaims that “there is no more important duty than expelling the American enemy from the Holy Land” (Bin Laden, 2009, p. 443). They have given weight to Jihadist rhetoric that frames America as the primary aggressor, bolstering ideological support for their movement as well as discontent for secular nationalism.

Chapter 2: The ISIS Model

The radical jihadist group known as the Islamic State (IS), also commonly as ISIS or ISIL, has proven to be acutely aware of the trends noted in Chapter 1. The organization has designed a propaganda machine, led by its Al Hayat media group, that attempts to capitalize on global tensions that have been rising in recent decades. IS has sensed the Muslim community's dismay at the presence of secular nationalism within the Middle East, projecting a message of transnational religious unity and Muslim governance. The group has paid particular attention to areas where these secular governments are failing, namely Iraq and Syria. IS steps in to provide temporary support and then widely publicize their efforts, using their actions as supposed proof that they are more equipped to govern than the state. Perhaps most interestingly, IS has been able to tap into anxieties of globalization both at a regional and international level. They have tailored their content to invoke a sense of certainty and comfort during such rapidly changing times, while singling out a common enemy: America and her allies in NATO. Much of the popularity that IS has gained in recent years can be attributed to its unique nature. No other jihadist organization has been able to capture and then govern such vast territory and implement sharia law within its lands while marketing itself so consciously and pointedly.

Rejection of the Secular Nation State

As discussed in Chapter 1, the concept that state and religion should be two separate entities is foreign to many in the Middle East, as Islam is a religion that accounts for both faith and governance in its scriptures. Upon exporting their secular structure of government to the Middle East, Western colonizers alienated many Muslims committed to the belief that religion and government should come from the same source. It is a shared belief among devout Muslims that government should be religious in nature, and that the secular nation state has only served to

divide members of the Muslim community. The Islamic State is well aware of this shared grievance, and seems to have tailored its propaganda to target this audience of disgruntled conservative Muslims.

A prominent theme in IS rhetoric is the uniting of the umma, or global Muslim community, across national borders. The idealized “state” that IS is building is a direct contradiction of modern national borders. Given the history of secular nationalism within the region, it is apparent why IS identifies it as an ideological target.

One of the Islamic State’s primary tenets is their vilification of Western ideals and ways of life, identifying them as a direct threat to the Muslim community. In the first issue of their propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, the organization clarifies this stance:

The Muslims today have a loud, thundering statement, and possess heavy boots. They have a statement to make that will cause the world to hear and understand the meaning of terrorism, and boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy, and uncover its deviant nature. (Harris, 2014, *Dabiq* 1:8)

From the start, the group has made it apparent that democracy and nationalism are their ideological enemies and that this repugnance upholds the ideological foundation of their movement. IS founders, like many jihadists that came before them, view secular nationalism as an ideological framework that was forced upon them. Their version of the caliphate, or a state under Muslim rule, is their response to secular nationalism, and constitutes an outright repudiation of the modern global political system.

The specifics of the Islamic State’s anti-nationalist rhetoric begin in its unwillingness to recognize perhaps the most tangible and fundamental characteristic of the secular nation state:

borders. In a video produced by the group's media arm, Al Hayat, a Chilean IS fighter is shown walking in the desert, AK47 over his shoulder, approaching a raised mound of dirt. He identifies this structure as the Sykes-Picot barrier, which today serves as the border between Iraq and Syria. The border was constructed as the result of a territorial agreement between France, Great Britain, and Russia. To IS, the demarcation is a prime example of the imposition of secular nationalism in the Middle East, which has served to divide the umma, leaving the global Muslim community in a state of unrest. The Chilean fighter shows his audience around a deserted border outpost, which the Islamic State had recently succeeded in capturing, and proclaims to the camera, "as Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi used to say, he is the breaker of barriers. God willing, he will break the barriers of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon...all the countries. This is the first barrier of many barriers we will break" (Syria - ISIS Movie - The End of Sykes-Picot, 2014). Fundamental to the concept of the modern nation state is its border. It serves as a demarcation and defines what is and what is not included. When capturing territory in Iraq and Syria, IS acts deliberately about destroying physical representations of these borders, rejecting the nation states that they see as representations of Western hubris and replacing them with their own.

Another integral part of IS' anti-nationalist rhetoric is the reunion of the umma. That the Muslim community is divided between nation states and ruled by the secular kufr governments is a great tragedy for the organization. Their propaganda is imbued with calls for Muslims to leave their homeland and join their religious counterparts in the fight against 'evil'. An excerpt from *Dabiq* reads, "rush O Muslims to your state. Yes, it is your state. Rush, because Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis". This statement expresses the groups' disregard for the concept of nationality, asserting that Islam is transcendent. Later in the same issue, the propagandists call for a united umma: "The State is a state for all Muslims. The land is for the

Muslims, all the Muslims. O Muslims everywhere, whoever is capable of performing hijrah (emigration) to the Islamic State, then let him do so, because hijrah to the land of Islam is Obligatory” (Harris 2017, Dabiq 1:10). This rhetoric clearly expresses IS’ belief that the Muslim religion, not a person’s nationality or geographic location, is the correct basis for statehood.

A key aspect of the Islamic State’s anti-nationalist rhetoric is the totalizing nature of the organization’s theory. By rejecting the concept of the state outright, as opposed to infusing their Islamism into an existing national structure, the organization has been able to attract ideologues who feel that Islamism is inherently incompatible with notions of the secular nation state. Other groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, attempted to incorporate Islamism to the nation state system. This approach received harsh criticism from more radical organizations, like al-Qaeda, who believed that this approach was too sympathetic to the existing government structure. However, they failed to back their criticism with a tangible improvement to the Brotherhood’s approach. This is where IS has excelled. As Shadi Hamid explains,

Although the Islamic State’s forerunners in al-Qaeda offered a vicious critique of the Brotherhood’s accommodation of the secular state, they fell well short of constructing a coherent alternative in its place. This is where the Islamic State filled the ideological and intellectual vacuum, offering a vision for what the new Islamic caliphate could actually mean in practice. (Hamid, 2016, p. 219)

The organization’s maximalism resonated with jihadists worldwide who believed that prior approaches to merging Islamism and the state have fallen short. In *Dabiq*, IS explicitly expresses its polarizing beliefs:

O Ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: The camp of Islam and faith, and the

camp of kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy – the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by American and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews. (Harris, 2014, Dabiq 1:10)

The distinction between “us” and “them” is made apparent here, signaling that IS is entirely unwilling to entertain the opinions, ideas, or even existence of others. This is especially true for those who subscribe to the ideology of secular nationalism.

The Failure of Secular Governments and the Islamic State Alternative

Just like how it capitalized on Muslim sentiment towards secularism and its inability to accommodate Islam, IS has been able to incorporate the widely perceived failure of the secular nation state into its rhetoric. Secular nationalism has been largely unsuccessful during its short tenure in the Middle East, and citizens are largely aware of this. As we have seen, many national governments are failing to support their citizenry, which is serving to further this disapproval. The Islamic State’s anti-nation state treatise directly addresses this failure, and makes an appeal to skeptical citizens of Arab nations.

The Islamic State’s unwillingness to concern itself with the system of secular nationalism proved advantageous not only from an ideological standpoint, but also from a strategic one. Instead of organizing and participating in the democratic system, IS focused on building its state with little regard or concern for the governments of Iraq and Syria. These governments were failing to provide a key service to their citizenry: security. McCants explains “the major reason why the Islamic State was so successful from 2013 to 2014: It was left alone. Whereas other Sunni rebels in Syria tried to overthrow their government, the State focused on making its own government in the Sunni hinterlands” (McCants, 2015, p. 153). While the organization’s

rejection of the nation state was a major catalyst to its success, it has certainly benefited from the failure of national governments.

Acting pragmatically and in typical fashion, IS seized the opportunity that this lack of security provided. The organization has demonstrated a tendency to target government institutions in an attempt to undermine state credibility and simultaneously promote itself. Charles Lister notes this behavior in the period leading up to the Islamic State's capture of Mosul, during which the organization worked continuously to weaken the Iraqi security apparatus:

IS forces carried out a covert campaign of intimidation targeting military and government officials, reinforced by assassinations of senior, experienced individuals. Crucially, this impaired the government's ability to effectively control the city, thus allowing IS to establish a shadow authority capable of exerting covert influence by day and sometimes almost overt control by night.

This, in and of itself, undermined the community's belief and trust in its government-appointed protectors. (Lister, *The Islamic State: A Brief Introduction*, 2015, p. 30)

This strategy is emblematic of IS's approach of systematically replacing nation state-supported structures with its own renditions. By demonstrating their capability to provide security, in addition to a wide array of other political goods, they began to build the support of Muslims both locally and worldwide. This gave substance and credibility to their fierce anti-nation state rhetoric.

In some instances, Iraq and Syria's governments have also been ineffective at providing more tangible political goods, like functioning infrastructure, food, water, and electricity. As was noted in the previous chapter, this vacancy is seldom overlooked by Islamist actors, who are

often better equipped than state government in certain regions. In areas that IS has captured, they have been relatively successful in providing these goods, largely due to their once strong economic arm and consistent sources of capital, like the sale of captured oil and ancient relics, ransom of foreign hostages, and sophisticated tax structure (Shatz & Johnson, 2015, p. 8). The complexity of the Islamic State's regulation of ground transportation and trade demonstrates the organization's relative proficiency in governing economic affairs within its territories:

Not only does the Islamic State offer protection from bandits, but its tax collectors also provide traders with paperwork that shows they've paid Islamic State taxes as well as counterfeit government tax receipts that truckers can show to Iraqi army checkpoints, which allow them to pass without further payments. (Prothero, 2014)

This is just one example of the various economic and governance mechanisms that IS has constructed within its controlled territories, which include education, police forces, armed forces, courts, a treasury, and various ministries, allowing it to "set itself apart as the richest and most destabilising jihadi group of the past 50 years" (Malik, 2015). The organization's ability to back its anti-state rhetoric with a functioning government and military apparatus is a key aspect of the ISIS model. By pointing out where the state has failed, supporting those areas with its pseudo-government structure, and then publicizing its successes, IS makes itself appear as a legitimate alternative to state governments.

Not only does the organization's ability to operate a state-like entity endow it with economic and therefore military strength, but it also bolsters the ideological support for the Islamic State. Jihadists who already subscribe to the group's radical religious doctrine are further captivated by its apparent ability to fulfil the promise of a caliphate. IS is careful to publicize content that demonstrates its distribution of political goods in order to promote support:

As al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula had done, the Islamic State addressed the economic needs of its subjects or at least wanted to be seen as trying. It distributed videos of fighters handing out food and humanitarian relief, introduced price controls and regulations, and attempted to keep the lights on. (McCants, 2015, p. 135)

In areas where the national governments of Syria and Iraq left their citizens to fend for themselves, the Islamic State stepped in. By allowing this void in governance to develop, the nation state has created a perfect opportunity for IS to put their rhetoric into practice.

The Islamic State as an Answer to the Anxieties of Globalization

The Islamic State has demonstrated its ability to interpret and exploit animosities shared by members of the Muslim community, particularly residents of the Middle East. This region has been affected and afflicted by the processes of globalization in such a unique way, as the process has disrupted society without bringing many of the benefits commonly associated with it. Grievances are widespread and sentiments of many Muslims have been strongly vocalized. It seems that IS has adapted its propaganda to incorporate criticism of these processes through harsh anti-Western, anti-modern rhetoric in an effort to appeal to those alienated by globalization.

Further analysis of the Islamic State's online magazine *Dabiq* reveals that their rhetoric not only constitutes an adamant rejection of secular nationalism, but points out how the globalization of Western culture and influence directly effects the Muslim community in a negative way. A passage from *Dabiq* reads:

We hate you because your secular, liberal societies permit the very things that Allah has prohibited while banning many of the things He has permitted, a matter

that doesn't concern you because you separate between religion and state, thereby granting supreme authority to your whims and desires via the legislators you vote into power. (Harris, 2014, *Dabiq* 15:32)

This statement, directed at the “crusaders”, or Western societies, explicitly identifies Western cultural values as a threat to the Muslim way of life. As mentioned in the previous chapter, globalization has served to disseminate these cultural themes in a way that is often perceived to be oppressive and undesirable. By incorporating criticism of this aspect of globalization in their rhetoric, IS effectively manipulates these shared grievances, possibly garnering the support of disillusioned individuals.

Through *Dabiq*, IS has also been vocal about its hatred towards Western political and military influence. The military campaigns of America and her allies in the Middle East have been the source of great controversy among the Muslim community. It would be wrong to say that the processes of globalization have not played a part in the West's interests in the region. IS propagandists realize that many individuals worldwide, both Muslim and not, share negative opinions of America's involvement in global affairs: “You've made it your mission to ‘liberate’ Muslim societies; we've made it our mission to fight off your influence and protect mankind from your misguided concepts and your deviant way of life” (Harris 2014, *Dabiq* 15: 32). This message caters not only to the devoutly religious but also to those who share the belief that America and NATO have over-extended their role in global issues. Perhaps the most prominent and most vilified version of this involvement has been carried out by America's military. Even more controversial than the spread of Western culture has been the repeated instances in which NATO forces have intervened in military conflicts in the Middle East. The same section of *Dabiq* provides an explanation of how this phenomenon fuels jihadists' hatred of the West:

We hate you for your crimes against the Muslims; your drones and fighter jets bomb, kill, and maim our people around the world, and your puppets in the usurped lands of the Muslims oppress, torture, and wage war against anyone who calls to the truth. (Harris, 2014, Dabiq 15: 32)

By affirming the grievances that many in the Middle East share, IS aims to appear empathetic to a cause with which disgruntled Muslims can identify.

Another notable theme within the IS propaganda model is eschatology. This can be characterized as repeated references to the ‘end times’, during which a supposed final battle will occur within the organization’s territory. These notions of eschatology have a significant influence in the very notion of a caliphate. As Fromson and Simon explain, “according to Islamic tradition, the refounding of the universal caliphate is a prerequisite for ushering in the end times” (Fromson & Simon, 2015, p. 30). The concept of an impending apocalypse is central to the Islamic State’s propaganda, and may serve as an alternate narrative to globalization. Within the Muslim tradition, this notion is far from farfetched. A Pew Research Center poll revealed that 51% of Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa believe that the return of the Mahdi, an event signifying the dawn of the end times, is imminent (Pew Research Center, 2013). In a rapidly modernizing world characterized by uncertainty, the touting of ancient scripture that promises an alternate ending may be exactly what some Muslims want to hear. McCants mentions that an IS fighter once explained to a reporter that as a recruitment tactic, “the apocalyptic pitch ‘always works’” (McCants, 2015, p. 100).

Globalization is inevitably accompanied by modernization. This too is a process of which many Muslims are apprehensive, because they see it as contradictory to many of their traditions (recall the MTV example from Chapter 1). The IS model incorporates these sentiments, and

seems to harken back to what its members see as a 'golden age' of Islam: "Take a look at the State's propaganda, and you will see that its leaders have sought, from its founding, to restore the glory days of the Abbasid caliphate that ruled its empire from Baghdad" (McCants, 2015, p. 131). The Islam that IS glorifies is not one that coexists with modernity or Western culture, but one that eliminates the influence of these alien forces.

By preaching the rejection of secular nationalism, globalization, and modernity, the Islamic State has been able to gain significant ideological footing. The organization's propagandists are apparently skillful at tailoring their content to a Muslim, and in some cases, even secular, audience that demonstrates aversion to the aforementioned concepts. By creating a rhetoric that denounces so many of the forces perceived as threats to the Muslim community, and then backing them with the creation of a relatively successful and functional caliphate, IS has won over thousands of jihadists both in the Middle East and globally.

Chapter 3: The Globalization of Media and the Islamic State Advantage

In the previous chapters, I have explored how the rise of the Islamic State is linked to tensions and grievances associated with globalization and how the group has exploited those grievances using specialized propaganda. In this chapter I examine how their success is also linked to important developments with respect to technology, developments that are part and parcel of our modern globalized era. As I discuss, IS has harnessed the new technology of social media, and with it that of the Internet and mobile phones, to cause the proliferation of a social movement fueled by hatred of secular nationalism and Western cultural dominance.

Media as a Catalyst for Social Movements

Social movements have always relied to some extent on information technology, benefiting from the spread of knowledge of the movements and issues surrounding them. However, in the past the relationship between social movements and media faced notable limitations, such as geographic reach, reaction time to a movement's developments, and the influence of vertical ownership such as corporate or state interests. The technological developments of the past decades, most notably the internet and social media, have lifted many barriers faced by social movements in their access to mass communication. Social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and others, has presented both the leaders and participants of social movements with the ability to disseminate information regarding their movement to thousands in a fraction of the time as conventional media outlets. This new technology has allowed social movements to connect with large numbers of other people, including those of similar demographics and social circumstances that may be predisposed to the movement's ideology. The potential audience of a movement's content are now not restricted to one nation's borders. Importantly, the media content now belongs to the movement, not

corporate or state interests, and therefore has the potential to be delivered in an unadulterated form. Social media have not only drastically changed the way that humans communicate, but how people organize and work to change society and politics. Unfortunately, as the emergence of IS has demonstrated, these new technologies are available not only to populist or socialist movements, but also to violent extremists.

In understanding how social movements utilize media to expand communications and awareness, we must first understand what constitutes a social movement and how they emerge. In the words of Tilly and Tarrow, a social movement is “a sustained campaign of claim making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on organizations, networks traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities”. They go on to explain that “the shape of institutions and regimes always affects movements” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 145). A social movement always exists in the context of a dominant social structure, and its goals and means are shaped by these structures. They can range from relatively innocuous, like petitioning to alter the specifics of a new bill, to monumental, like the Arab Spring that started in 2010 and toppled several Middle Eastern regimes.

Social movements, and particularly their leaders, rely on what Tarrow calls “repertoires of contention” to carry out their attempt at social change. These can serve as loose guidelines or even expectations for how a movement will grow and unfold, but also include the resources a movement has access to. As Tarrow explains, “The repertoire is at once a structural and a cultural concept, involving not only what people *do* when they are engaged in conflict with others, but what they *know how to do* and what others *expect* them to do” (Tarrow, 1998, p. 30). As we will see, the repertoires of social movements have changed drastically in past decades, largely due to technological change and the emergence of new forms of media.

Before the average person had access to print media, social movements as we know them today were rare. Even if people shared a grievance or an opinion of how society should be changed, they faced extreme difficulty in forming connections and gaining popular support for their ideas. Contentious politics relied on word of mouth to gain traction. The invention of print media forever changed social movements by giving disaffected individuals access to knowledge of other's hardship and dissatisfaction with social institutions. It created a group consciousness among individuals who previously internalized their struggles or lacked a way to express them to unfamiliar people. As Tarrow puts it, commercial print media "did not themselves produce new grievances and conflicts but diffused ways of mounting claims that helped ordinary people to think of themselves as part of broader collectives and on the same plane as their betters" (Tarrow, 1998, p. 43). Print media, and later other forms of commercial media, like television, broadened the repertoire of social movements. It gave leaders the means to share their message and intentions with substantially more similarly affected individuals.

Closely linked with progress in communication technology has been the prevalence of mass media's role as a space through which social movements visibly develop. With the development of radio and television broadcasting, media's potential benefits to social movements expanded vastly, bringing timely coverage of contentious issues and of the movements themselves to an expanded audience. In her research on social movements in Latin America, Susan Eckstein points to mass media as a notable catalyst:

Because mass media coverage may be decisive in informing elites and mass publics about movement actions as well as in forming the morale and self-image of movement activists, the mass media are important actors in political conflicts. The media can become a channel through which alternative views, symbols, and

meanings get expressed. This implies that media discourses frame issues for the public, and that the media may become an arena in which groups struggle over the definition and construction of social reality. (Eckstein, 1989, p. 35)

Her analysis stems from case studies such as that of Argentina's "Dirty War" of the 1970s and 1980s and the Aymaran movement in Bolivia, but her conclusions are applicable outside of the Latin American social context. In her essay, "Communication Technology and Social Change", Carolyn A. Lin identifies the United States' 2003 campaign in the Iraq war as the first military conflict to be reported entirely live, reaching audiences around the world simultaneously. She claims, "from the viewpoint of social change, the communication technology advances have helped shape the world's views toward the Iraq war—from one living room to another—across the globe" (Lin, 2007, p. 5). Although the coverage of the event came largely from major media outlets, spectators were left to draw their own conclusions.

Social Media as a new Paradigm for Social Movements

As advancements like print media, radio, and television had done in the past, the emergence of social media offered a new set of tools for instigating social change. But social media is different. Not only has it greatly extended the reach of information, causing more potentially sympathetic individuals to be exposed to the developments of social movements and the issues behind them, but social media has drastically altered the way that humans communicate. Thanks to social media, paired with the prevalence of mobile devices, communication between users has become instantaneous and accessible almost anywhere. Perhaps most important, social media has decentralized information technology, minimizing the role of state and corporate influence over content and democratizing authorship among users instead of institutions.

The development of social media, like advancements in communication technology before it, has increased both interconnectivity between people and viewership of content. But previous technological advancements pale in comparison to social media in influence, particularly in regard to the scale of participation. In his book, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, Manuel Castells explains how social media has profoundly changed how social movements emerge and unfold. He observes the differences between communication technology in past and present:

Historically, social movements have been dependent on the existence of specific communication mechanisms: rumors, sermons, pamphlets, and manifestos, spread from person to person, from the pulpit, from the press, or by whatever means of communication were available. In our time, multimodal, digital networks or horizontal communication are the fastest and most autonomous, interactive, reprogrammable and self-expanding means of communication in history.

(Castells, 2015, p. 15)

Castell's analysis compares the previously discussed developments in communication technology to this most recent one, pointing to the vast expansions in the possibilities for human communication that it has brought about. He separates social media as a development that is independent of the internet: "This new communication system is not just the Internet, but the digital social networks based on the Internet and wireless communication that have exploded in the last decade...In 2013, there were 3 billion users on these social networks" (Castells, 2015, p. 22). Although the internet served as the platform for the emergence of this new communication technology, the new system of human communication is social media itself.

A particularly notable contribution that social media has made to social movements is the capability of instant communication, regardless of geographic location or familiarity. During the time of print media, an organizer may have come up with an idea to distribute, but would have to wait days or weeks for the content to be produced. That content would then have to be distributed to the population, and only then would the idea spread. This dispersion was also contingent on geographic proximity to the desired audience. Reaching people at a distance would incur transportation costs. Castells makes clear how significant the development of social media has been here: “The faster and more interactive the process of communication is, the more likely the formation of a process of collective action becomes, rooted in outrage, propelled by enthusiasm and motivated by hope” (Castells, 2015, p.15). With the advent of social media, news breaks almost instantly. With mobile devices, viewers can react and respond to content at a similar pace from almost anywhere in the world. Individuals can now instantly share grievances with other community members, or even across borders, connecting with others who may be sympathetic to a cause.

Another important aspect of social media that has been crucial for social movements is the horizontal, rather than top-down, ownership of content on social media networks. Although radio and television offered a vast expansion in the viewership and accessibility of content, its networks are controlled by state and corporate influences, limiting or censoring much of the content that is produced. These restrictions were subverted with the invention of the Internet. As Ogan explains, “Compared with VCRs and satellites, the capabilities of the Internet to cross borders and circumvent government and market control of information are much greater” (Ogan, 2007, p. 20). She posits that this capability is a result of the decentralized structure of the internet, which is capitalized upon by social media networks. This innovation in communication

technologies is crucial for social movements, who are now able to disseminate their own information, without it being first viewed or altered by corporate and state entities. Castells muses, “It is this connection between the public cyber-space, bypassing the controlled mainstream media, and the public urban space, whose occupation challenges institutional authority, that is at the core of the new social movements” (Castells, 2015, p. 226). Anyone with internet access and an email can set up an account on major social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, post content at their will, and connect with anyone regardless of nationality or geographic location. Social movement organizers are no longer necessarily the well-connected, creative, skillful and powerful, but any impassioned individual with access to these new revolutionary communication networks.

The ISIS Model Exported on Social Media

As established in the previous section, social media has changed the way by which social movements develop. Although popular discourse of this topic largely centers around more positive examples like the Arab Spring and consumer behavior, the terrorist organization Islamic State is emblematic of this. IS has pioneered the way that social media can be used for extremist movements, setting a dangerous precedent for this relatively new technology. The organization has employed an efficient and effective communications strategy that includes the manipulation of social media as an expanded platform for the discussion of jihadist ideology, an effective means of bypassing mainstream media to disseminate propaganda and accounts of terrorist violence, and a tool for direct communication with, and eventually the recruitment of, vulnerable individuals from across the globe. As Charles Lister reports, “IS has arguably proven a more successful organization than al-Qaeda” (Lister, Profiling the Islamic State, 2014, p. 1). I argue

that this relative success is largely due to the Islamic State's exploitation of social media communications, their "particular innovation of terrorist strategy" (Klausen, 2014, p. 20).

Social media maintains a strong presence in the Middle East, and as demonstrated by the Arab Spring movements, it simply required the application of a pragmatic approach to be effectively harnessed. The technology is used ubiquitously by young people, who also often serve as the driving force behind social movements. As Castells explains, "These youth were familiar with the use of digital networks, as the penetration of mobile phones exceeded 100 percent in half of the Arab countries, with most others over the 50 percent mark, and many in the urban centers had some form of access to social media" (Castells, 2015, p. 97). With an existing reliance on social media networks, the opportunities for social movement communication were already in place. As mentioned in earlier chapters, turmoil in Syria and Iraq had created power vacuums and feelings of animosity toward national governments. Seizing the opportunity presented to them by these technological and social conditions, the Islamic State developed a potent media strategy around the use of social media for propaganda, terrorism, and recruitment unlike any terrorist organization before it.

Social Media as the New Radical Mosque

Few radical Islamists independently form their own perceptions on Islam, the state, and the relationship between the two. Converts to jihadist ideology are almost always approached by other members of their community, often in mosques or bookstores, and educated on the principles of radical Islam. Over time, their beliefs develop and the individual becomes radicalized. In the social media age, this process occurs much differently. Charlie Winter explains:

Social media has emerged as this decade's 'radical mosque'. While radicalisation, for the most part begins offline, Islamic State, along with other groups, has nurtured a situation in which the curious are able to have direct contact with former or current fighters, hear first-hand accounts from the battlefield and swap logistical advice. In decades gone by, this was a function served by so-called 'radical mosques'. In the digital era, social media platforms are the space where this happens. (Winter, 2015, p. 7)

In the past, radicalization would usually take place over several face to face interactions, limiting the speed and breadth of a jihadist's ability to convince others to join Islamic movements. Now, social media serves as a continuously running forum for supporters to discuss radical ideology, share information, spread propaganda, and communicate with potential recruits.

Social media has vastly expanded the reach of Islamic State's communications and has therefore served as the optimal platform for the organization to spread its propaganda. The success of any terrorist organization relies largely on its ability to convince others that its actions are justified. Through social media, IS has marketed its brand. It has created a narrative that focuses on in-group versus out-group, and glorifies life within the caliphate. James Farwell has pointed out that "its communication strategy aims to persuade all Muslims that battling to restore a caliphate is a religious duty. The group's narrative portrays IS as an agent of change, the true apostle of a sovereign faith" (Farwell, 2014, p. 49). Through its central media centers al-Hayat, al-Furqan, al-Itisam, and Ajnad, the organization carefully crafts propaganda material that promotes these themes. But it is not these media centers that are most crucial to the spread of IS propaganda, but the group's members and supporters, who "exponentially increas[e] the reach"

of Islamic State communications through their presence on social media (Ingram, 2015, p. 734-735).

While it may be tempting to credit al-Qaeda with pioneering the use of digital communication for the radicalization of individuals and preaching of extremist ideology, their online jihadist forums were nowhere near as effective as social media platforms have been for IS. Although Al-Qaeda lacked access to social media as we understand it today, they too were innovative in their use of technology, setting up online forums where jihadists could discuss tactics and ideology. But restricted access to these forums impeded their effectiveness: “The requirement that participants be ‘vetted’ by administrators limited the ability of Al Qaeda to spread its message beyond the circle of those who were already motivated to seek out contact with *jihadist* extremists” (Klausen, 2014, p. 3). The potential benefits that social media present to extremist groups significantly outweigh means of Internet communication that were available in decades past. Grouping the media strategies of IS with the developments in social movement communication offered by the Internet would therefore be a grave oversight.

The New Theater of Terror

Social media has not only offered new tools for radical groups’ information operations, but has fundamentally altered the publication and portrayal of terrorist acts. Terrorist acts are acts of violence that aim to instill fear, confusion, and uncertainty in the viewer. In *Terror in the Mind of God*, Mark Juergensmeyer posits that these acts constitute a sort of theatrical performance used to display the power of violence. He calls this phenomenon the “theater of terror”, explaining: “The street theater of performance violence forces those who witness it directly or indirectly into that ‘consciousness’—that alternative view of the world. This gives the perpetrators of terrorism a kind of celebrity status and their actions an illusion of importance”

(Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 2003, p. 128). In the 17 years since Juergensmeyer first published this work, the theater remains, but the stage has changed drastically. Through the uninterrupted stream of social media, terrorist groups can reach a far greater audience with accounts of brutal violence. Due to the horizontal nature of social media communication, the terrorists are now the primary authors of content, bypassing the middleman of corporate and state media outlets. The development of social media has brought about crucial changes in the ways that terrorism occurs and the impacts it has.

In Mark Juergensmeyer's analysis, he points to mass media as a key factor in the emergence of the "theater of terror":

The worldwide media coverage of the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Bali nightclubs, Israeli markets, and the Oklahoma City federal building illustrates a new development in terrorism: the extraordinary widening of terror's audience.

Throughout most of history the audiences for acts of terrorism have been limited largely to government officials and their supports, or members of rival groups.

(Juergensmeyer, 2003, p. 144)

Social media has expanded the audience of these attacks even further. With people monitoring their phones throughout the day, many are now just a notification away from bearing witness to a recent or ongoing attack.

Social media has crucially changed the way that news is distributed, and has therefore enabled the terrorists themselves to be the authors of the publicity of their violent acts. In the past, extremist social movements were reliant on mainstream news coverage to reach large audiences with their terrorist attacks. They were only able to inflict terror upon those who consumed traditional news media, which came from a

limited number of corporate and state sources. This format also enabled the media outlets to lace the coverage of terrorist attacks with messages of patriotism and community, but also of disgust, painting the terrorists as the monstrous Other and stripping them of moral basis for their actions. The emergence of social media has drastically diminished mainstream media outlets' ability to maintain a Manichean narrative of patriotism, optimism and unity against the terrorists: "Captives of the social media streams, mainstream media have become more vulnerable to misinformation campaigns and tactics of deception and misinformation. Social media amplifies false images of strength" (Klausen, 2014, p. 20). The Islamic State, for example, uses social media to publicize terror. While their attacks abroad will inevitably be covered by mainstream media, the group documents violent acts within the borders of the caliphate to emphasize its anti-Western message. In January 2015, the group released a video in which a captured Jordanian air force pilot was burned alive by IS members.

In the immediate minutes prior to the scene, graphic images of the burned bodies of children civilians being buried under rubble and the aftermath of air strikes flashed on-screen as the pilot walked through bomb-ravaged streets toward a cage. Thus, the vast majority of the video was devoted to increasing perceptions of crisis in its in-group audiences and unambiguously constructing the pilot as a symbol of the malevolent Other.

(Ingram, 2015, p. 745)

The video, although created by an IS media outlet, was posted to social media and distributed widely among followers, certainly making its way out of the typical jihadist networks and to the eyes of viewers worldwide. This example is emblematic of how IS manipulates social media to

bypass the mainstream news media, presenting documentation of terrorist acts with its own narrative in the new “theater of terror”.

The Globalization of Islamic State Recruitment

Social media has proven perhaps most useful to the Islamic State as a platform for recruitment. An information operations campaign that focuses on mass distribution of content via platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube has allowed IS operatives reach global audiences with its propaganda. Importantly, these networks allow operatives to establish a link of direct communication with potential recruits, often serving as the tipping point for prospective converts. Increased exposure to radical Islamist propaganda and expanded online interaction between disaffected individuals and IS operatives has generated a new wave of terrorism, carried out by “lone wolf” attackers in cities across the world.

The Islamic State’s social media propaganda does not only serve to create an in-group out-group narrative or project a righteous image of the group, but has real effects on the effectiveness of IS recruitment. As previously mentioned, social media operates as the new “radical mosque”, where individuals are exposed to extremist ideology and are proselytized by active IS members. Although content distributed over social media may not be the sole reason for an individual’s radicalization, it may influence it significantly. Winter points out that “What propaganda does do, though, is catalyze the individual’s radicalisation and concentrate their already-held sympathies” (Winter, 2015, p. 8). Social media, then, is the perfect way to disseminate propaganda to individuals who are predisposed to radicalization. IS propaganda incorporates different themes and is produced in multiple languages so as to reach the widest audience possible. From graphically violent images to depictions of a religious utopia, IS propaganda has something for everyone. As Charlie Winter explains,

By channeling multiple narratives, from the overtly theological to the political, it can project its message across a broader set of demographics than it otherwise would. Thus, it is able to draw in ideology-seekers almost as skillfully as it can attract those who reject the global status quo. (Winter, 2015, p. 35)

In the digital era, social media serves as the platform through which jihadist propaganda is disseminated, replacing the mosque, bookstore, and even Internet forum. Propagandists can reach a far greater number of eyes with their content, increasing the rate at which they can proselytize and recruit. As J.M Berger and Jonathon Morgan reveal, as many as 70,000 Twitter accounts were operated by IS supporters as of late 2014. About 51% of those users selected English as their preferred language for the platform, allowing them to reach a wider audience than with Arabic alone (Berger & Morgan, 2015, pp. 2, 14). In the past, reaching a potential recruit with the goal of convincing them to enlist was a costly, time-consuming, and risky task. Now, any disgruntled individual can stumble across IS propaganda on Twitter, or easily find recruitment videos on YouTube. With access to social media, the curious outcast has become the prime target of IS recruiters.

Not only does social media expose disgruntled individuals to a plethora of IS propaganda, but it also allows recruiters to establish direct contact with potential recruits. Sites like Facebook and Twitter have messaging platforms that allow people to communicate across national borders instantly, even if they do not have common connections. An IS operative might come across a Twitter user who interacted with a post created by someone within the jihadist network, presenting themselves as a potential target. From here, the recruiter can send a direct message to the user, opening a channel through which the operative can discuss radical ideology and send further propaganda materials. As Charlie Winter observes, “no curious observer graduates from

potential recruit to active member without direct engagement from another party, either on- or offline” (Winter, 2015, p. 35). Direct contact through social media often serves as a turning point in the radicalization process, where the individual makes the final decision to enlist and fight the jihad. From here, social media can provide further logistical utility, as “potential recruits have also used it to coordinate their arrival in Syria or Iraq, and to secure tazkiya” (Lister, Profiling the Islamic State, 2014, p. 25). Many IS recruits are promising candidates to commit hijrah, the pilgrimage to holy lands to fight alongside other jihadists, as tens of thousands already have (Winter, 2015, p. 9).

For young London girls Khadiza Sultana, Amra Abase, and Shamima Begum, direct contact from an IS recruiter was not necessary. Seeing IS propaganda that depicts the group the only righteous place to practice Islam, the girls misinterpreted their adolescent confusion over identity and religion as a calling to migrate to Syria. In August of 2015, the girls joined an estimated 4,000 Westerners before them, boarding a flight to Turkey with hopes of reaching Syria (Bennhold, 2015). IS members work painstakingly to recruit Westerners, establishing effective links of communication through social media and forming relationships with potential recruits. Alex, a 23-year-old woman from Washington state was drawn into an online relationship with an IS recruiter, who convinced her to convert to Islam. Although their relationship was discovered before Alex could migrate to Syria, the strong bond formed on social media reveals the recruitment potential of social media, even for non-Muslim Westerners:

Increasingly, they were telling her about the Islamic State and how the group was building a homeland in Syria and Iraq where the holy could live according to God’s law. One in particular, Faisal, had become her nearly constant companion, spending hours each day with her on Twitter, Skype, and email, painstakingly

guiding her through the fundamentals of the faith. (Callimachi, ISIS and the Lonely Young American, 2015)

Social media, by providing a direct line of communication between recruiter and potential recruit, expands the grasp of the organization, and has enabled members to lure thousands from the West alone to the caliphate. For some, however, the recruitment process never reaches this stage, as individuals decide to carry out the jihad in their homeland.

The “Lone Wolf” Threat

Terrorism is reaching a turning point. Targeted attacks on government facilities and coordinated strikes like those in Paris on November 13, 2015 remain threatening, but the frequency of “lone wolf” attacks has increased significantly in recent years. This trend has grave significance: “Unfortunately, as the world has seen, it doesn’t take many jihadists to constitute a threat, especially with the recent rash of ‘lone wolf’ attacks, usually described as leaderless jihad” (McCabe, 2015, p. 143). These attackers do not belong to a covert terrorist cell, nor do they travel to Syria or Iraq to join their brothers on the frontlines. They carry out attacks on their own terms, often in their home towns or cities. These attacks have been on the rise in terms of frequency. In a comprehensive study on lone wolf terrorism in the United States, Mark Hamm and Ramon Spaaj found that “Of the 98 cases in the database, 38 cases occurred before the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 60 took place after 9/11”. Also significant, “Not a single member of the U.S. military was targeted by lone wolf terrorists prior to 9/11. Since 9/11, lone wolves have killed or wounded 47 members of the military” (Hamm & Spaaj, 2015, pp. 4-5). Attacks allegedly inspired by, but executed independently of, Islamic State include the attack on a San Bernardino office holiday party that resulted in the death of 14 people in December of 2015, the shooting at an exhibit featuring cartoon images of the prophet Mohammad, and the murder of 49

partygoers at a nightclub in Orlando in June of 2016 (Callimachi, Was Orlando Shooter Really Acting for ISIS? For ISIS, It's All the Same, 2016).

Realizing the potential benefits that independent terror attacks present, the Islamic State has begun to encourage them through propaganda. In another official propaganda magazine, *Rumiyh*, IS illustrates the most effective way to carry out knife attacks in a section titled “Just Terror Tactics”. As IS assures its believers abroad, “one need not be a military expert or a martial arts master, or even own a gun or rifle in order to carry out a massacre or to kill and injure several disbelievers and terrorize an entire nation” (Harris, 2014, *Rumiyh* 2:12). The IS spokesperson, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, said recently, “The smallest action you do in the heart of their land is dearer to us than the largest action by us, and more effective and more damaging to them” (Callimachi, Was Orlando Shooter Really Acting for ISIS? For ISIS, It's All the Same, 2016). By promoting lone wolf terrorism through propaganda and public rhetoric, the organization is working to increase its frequency and prevalence.

Lone wolf attacks demonstrate the effectiveness of IS propaganda. From thousands of miles away, IS media centers can create content that inspires disaffected individuals to carry out acts of terrorism, often resulting in the deaths of compatriots. These attacks are cheap and risk-free for IS, as the group’s operatives are not connected directly to the attacks. But these attacks offer an even more potent advantage to IS. As Barak Mendelsohn points out, “such attacks are damaging to both a nation’s psychology and its leadership, raising fear and inciting alarmism among civilians while making governments appear helpless and even incompetent” (Mendelsohn, 2016). These attacks achieve the same means as traditional terrorism, but for a fraction of the organizational cost to the organization of origin. But perhaps most importantly, they prove that Islamic State is succeeding. Despite the efforts of national governments, the ISIS

model has worked to catalyze the radicalization of thousands of predisposed individuals, resulting in the deaths of thousands.

Conclusion

In recent decades, the world has seen dramatic shifts in global religious sentiment. A significant disparity in willingness to accept the separation of church and state has led to the dissatisfaction with secular nationalism in many parts of the world, perhaps most notably in the Middle East. Many Muslims view Islam as a religion that is well suited to govern in both private and public life. Paired with a global resurgence in religiosity, these sentiments have gained traction not only in the Middle East, but worldwide.

In the Middle East, secular nationalism has been largely unsuccessful. Regimes like Nasser's in Egypt, for example, were widely regarded as disappointments. Secular governments in the Middle East brought only the negative aspects of nationalism while leaving behind many of the benefits of modernity and liberalism. In many cases, the nation state has failed outright, proving unable to deliver basic political goods to its citizenry. In cases like these, Islamism emerges as a popular response to secular nationalism, especially when Islamist groups step in to provide government-like services.

Anxieties of globalization have contributed to the general discontent with secular nationalism, and the Western values with which it is associated. Globalization has affected the Middle East in an interesting way: it has disrupted tradition without bringing any of the tangible benefits commonly associated with it. The average citizen of the Middle East has not seen their standards of living increase in comparison with their Western counterparts. Globalization also brought with it the ubiquity of Western culture, which directly conflicts with many of Islam's conservative values. Furthered by prolonged military occupation within the Middle East, the United States and other Western powers began to take much of the blame for the region's ills.

Under these sociopolitical conditions, the Islamic State has been able to emerge vigorously, gaining ideological traction both in the Middle East and abroad. IS is acutely aware of the shared grievances toward secular nationalism, the United States, and her allies. The organization has thus launched a carefully crafted propaganda campaign that presents itself as an alternative to the status quo of Western political ideology and globalization. Through an analysis of the Islamic State's primary official propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, we see how the group has tailored its rhetoric to address these shared grievances, making itself more attractive to disgruntled Muslims.

Although the organization has a media branch that creates and disseminates content, the true innovation that IS has made in extremist strategy has been the exploitation of social media. This new technology has provided a new set of tools to social movements, allowing for increased horizontal communication and distribution of content. IS has harnessed the decentralized nature of social media to disseminate propaganda at a significantly increased rate. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have replaced radical mosques and jihadist Internet forums, serving as a space where everything from extremist ideology to tips for migrating to Syria can be discussed freely. Social media has replaced mainstream media as the most common source for news, allowing it to serve as the new "theater of terror". IS members can post documentation of terrorist acts straight to their social media profiles, which is then quickly shared by thousands of followers. Reaching the consumer of this content directly, IS bypasses the censorship of mainstream media, ensuring that the violence retains the group's seal of ideological justification.

Through social media, IS operatives can establish direct contact with prospective recruits, drastically increasing their ability to convince individuals to join the group. IS has been successful at luring thousands of foreigners to join the fight in Syria and Iraq, aided greatly by

the distribution of propaganda and direct recruitment through social media. IS has not only been able to draw people to the jihad within its territorial caliphate. The wide reach of its propaganda has inspired disgruntled individuals all over the world, including in the United States, to carry out independent terrorist attacks without direct funding or logistical support from the Islamic State. These “lone wolf” attackers have served as a valuable asset to IS, as they damage national morale and faith in government at little or no cost to the organization. But more significantly, they foster the perception that the Islamic State’s strategy works. Through the manipulation of social media, IS has harnessed the sentiments of a particular moment in history and in doing so, has fundamentally changed the nature of terrorism.

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