“Jihaspora” and millennials: complexity, evolution, change and hybridization of terrorism in the EU

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Abstract
The military campaign in Syria against the Islamic State, along with the consequent fall of Raqqa and Mosul, fostered the “Jihaspora”: it is the diaspora of many foreign terrorist fighters who have moved from the Caliphate territories to new “jihadi magnets” far from their home countries. If we focus on their countries of provenance, we notice how the “Jihaspora” has generated a sort of magnetic effect which can potentially attract many fighters and direct them to several geopolitical magnets. In the last two years, Europe has been facing the Millennials wave, a new surge of young terrorists inspired by the Lone Jihad narratives (cyber-)cultivated within the ever-increasing “Jihadisphere” and dominated by an “Islamic State of Mind”. While the Member States are committed to set a legal framework and promote effective solutions to face the returnees-phenomenon, the security scenario is characterized by the “Jihaspora” multi-faceted threat. This study also aims at explaining why we should abandon the monolithic interpretation of the EU foreign terrorist fighters-phenomenon, in order to develop and adopt different perspectives, as well as methodologies and techniques to face the criminal hybridization of the terror threat.

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“JIHASPORA”

The Caliphate territorial coverage, as a sort of pseudo-State, represented an opportunity for the Islamic State militants - not only the real fighters - who had the opportunity to develop specific skills and find a job (Dearden, 2015). The military campaign in Syria against the Islamic State, along with the consequent fall of Raqqa and Mosul, fostered the “Jihaspora” which is the phenomenon concerns the Foreign Terrorists Fighters that leave the Islamic States’s territories and migrate toward Countries different than the ones they came from. Nowadays, despite the loss of hegemony in its territories, along with its physical presence within them, the Islamic State is still characterized by a wide and globalized trans-generational consensus.

CRIMINAL HYBRIDIZATION

Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State express the same strategic continuity to “colonize” the so called “no man’s land” with the aim, from a geopolitical perspective, to fill in the “empty spaces”. Therefore, it is necessary to pay very close attention to the criminal hybridization phenomenon, as a direct consequence of the changed scenario, fostered by several trigger factors:

a) “Jihaspora” - the exodus of Foreign Terrorist Fighters - some of them searching for new lands where establish with their families - from the Syriaq front. It represents a serious threat for EU security because it is born of new organized crime and terrorism actors. The Tunisian Southern border able to link Maghreb to Sahel seems to be particularly vulnerable to the jihadi penetration: jihadists now act not only as terrorists, but importantly as affiliated and/or workforce in organized crime groups in Sahel. The jihadi groups are increasing their military benefits in terms of weapons, mobility, logistics, illicit proceeds and intelligence assets (Raineri & Strazzari, 2017).

From a security perspective, considering al-Qaeda and the Islamic State attacks in Europe, the transcontinental character of the huge criminal networks across Europe and Africa imposes to look at that Region as the “far frontier” for EU;

b) refugee camps in Mena Region - Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran and Jordan are in the top 10 countries hosting refugees, followed by Libya (European Commission, 2017). In these camps, the huge number of refugees, the conditions of life are already or can generate a hidden and informal system for recruiting young men to join local extremist groups, taking advantage of their need of money to support their families. As
a consequence of that, violent extremist/terrorist groups select some of these young men to lead local attacks reinforcing the terrorist threat in these countries;
c) narco-jihadism – the increasing of drug trafficking in the Sahel Region (United Kingdom Government, 2013) where AQIM (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) controls the no man's land located between the borders of Mali, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Nigeria, Libya. The Qaeda’s branch was responsible for a series of terrorist attacks: Mali (November 2015), Burkina Faso (January 2016) and Ivory Coast (March 2016). AQIM’s interest in Sahel Region stresses the importance of taking part to several illicit trafficking in that area, especially the Cocaine business, as a strategic asset aimed at supporting the military campaign and spreading the influence of the Maghrabian affiliate. Furthermore, in Morocco AQIM controls the drug trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2015) from Rif where half of the world’s Hashish is produced (Blickman, 2017) - final destination Northern Africa and Europe drug markets;
d) “Black Jihad” – AQIM, al Mourabitoun and Boko Haram represent a threat for security in Africa and Europe, as well as three different jihadi entities, with their own interpretations of pseudo-religious ideology, geopolitical and strategic visions. One of the most relevant effects on the African social-fabric is given by their capability to use money to develop and strengthen their recruitment networks in the small villages of Guinea Region, with the aim to involve young soldiers of fortune and searching for cash for their military campaign (Ewi, 2012);
e) migrant-smuggling networks – the criminal networks manage more than 90% of the migrants coming to the EU. This transcontinental phenomenon is overflowing due to the increasing demand and has serious consequences on borders security, because of the creation of illegal corridors for migrant smuggling. Considering the multi-national engagement of migrants smuggling business - suspects originating from more than 100 countries both inside and outside of the EU - developing an estimate yearly turnover of an average US$ 5 to 6 billion turnover in 2015 (Europol & Interpol, 2016). The resilience of organized crime networks improves the smugglers capability to quickly adapt and sell different “products”, from drugs to humans. Besides, we do not have to forget that many migrants are indebted to their smugglers and this condition makes them vulnerable again and subjected to be “placed” in the labour or sexual exploitation market in EU. Moreover, in this well-networked criminal system, the terrorist groups can use migrant smugglers’ assets, means and routes to achieve their goals as the need to infiltrate EU.
THE MAGNETIC EFFECT OF JIHASPORA

Considering the heterogeneous origins of foreign terrorist fighters, if we focus on their countries of provenance, we notice how the “Jihaspora” has generated a sort of magnetic effect which can potentially attract the foreign terrorist fighters from Syria to several geopolitical magnets that represent the main jihadi hotbeds. For the most, these areas are characterized by peculiar geomorphologic conditions able to guarantee protection, high level of trafficking interconnections and, at the same time, they impede security controls.

1. Khorasan - in this Region al_Qaeda, the Islamic State, the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban are competing to promote their own personal version of jihad: the “Islamic State Khorasan Province,” the “Islamic State of Khorasan”, the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan of Waziristan”. The battle or, on the contrary, the convergence between branches and groups, as well as between Talibanism - strongly characterized by the tribal roots -, Qaedism and Takfirism as professed in the Islamic State, will produce a significant change both in the jihadi identity and control system of territory in this area;

2. “Balkisistan” - The movement of foreign terrorist fighters to the Balkans and the living memory of the Srebrenica genocide (1995) can reinforce the transnational jihadi identity which gathers individuals and groups from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia under the black flag of the Islamic State. For the first time in history, we might observe the result of the dangerous mixture between traditional mujahideen - who established after the Balkans war leading many criminal business as THB, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, traffic in stolen cars, smuggling, etc. - characterized by “veterans” strong criminal skills, on one hand, and the massive presence of young audacious European jihadists;

3. Caucasus - This region is populated by Caucasus mujahideen from the Caucasus Emirate - one of the main Islamist insurgent group operating in the North Caucasus (2007 - 2015) - and militants from the Islamic State Caucasus. The resources wealth, the geostrategic profile of the region and the anti-Russia sentiment can foster the merger of many small groups into a completely new jihadi macro-actor, more likely an informal militia movement, just like the Chechnya’s Islamic insurgency;

4. Southeast Asia - The radical extremist groups have opened a new Southeast Asian front through which disseminate their campaign of violence aimed at spreading the global jihad. In the region, the Islamic State seems to be more transnational and pervasive than al_Qaeda. The revenge of the foreign terrorist fighters might start from here, if we consider how easier - than in Western countries - it would be attacking residents or Western visitors as soft targets and, in some cases, global company representatives;

5. Sahel - this region has been becoming the first magnet for the foreign terrorist fighters, as previously explained.
EU FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL THREAT

We can estimate that the number of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters that will decide to go back home will be scarce: they do not want to come back home particularly because of the frustration to be constantly controlled by EU police forces and security agencies.

Considering the finite resources of EU and Member States, in any case, the returnees phenomenon needs to be addressed focusing on the multi-dimensional nature of both the threat and categories of actors, as follows:

a) foreign fighters not involved in crimes;
b) foreign terrorist fighters ready to attack because of preexisting “sleeping cell” capability;
c) returnees who decide to join a non-violent extremist movement/party;
d) foreign terrorist fighters who decided to come back home just to carry out a preordained attack;
e) foreign fighters who can be considered living icons and/or magnets for face-to-face radicalization (family, friends, prison, etc.);
f) returnees who can be considered as low-profile hubs connected to relevant global jihadi movements of actors;
g) highly frustrated potential foreign terrorist fighters who were not able to travel to join the Caliphate;
h) proto-foreign fighters who are waiting for the next call to jihad;
i) foreign terrorist fighters who turn into lone wolves.

Moreover, especially in the West, the spread of the “Islamic State of Mind” virus has been becoming always more relevant, as in the last terrorist attacks in EU.

Taking into account those elements, it is clear that we need to abandon the monolithic interpretation of the EU foreign terrorist fighters-phenomenon in order to develop and adopt different perspectives, as well as methodologies and techniques to face the threat.

2016-2017 TARGET EUROPE - THE MILLENNIALS WAVE

Three years after Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack in Paris we can explain why it represented the 9/11 for EU: it had the same strength to redefine the security balance, perceptions and priorities in the continent. For the first time, a European capital was attacked by two terrorists symbolically dressed as foreign terrorist fighters, using the same weapons and asymmetrical tactics. It was so relevant because this terror attack breaks the boundary between the quiet and peaceful European continent and the bloody war zones, making...
EU enter a new world of danger and fear. From that time, the “world of peace” and the “world of war” as to separated dimensions ceased to exist. The globalized world is just one and it is infected by the jihadi virus which goes beyond any border. Everyone can be the testimonial of the jihadi violent campaign against the West - the infidel crusaders - in his own city and daily-life with no need to be in Raqqa or Mosul.

Now, considering the arrangement of the low-cost jihadi attacks carried out in Europe during the last two years (2016-2017), we can deduce how old the perpetrators and accomplices are. Excluding Khalid Masood, the lone actor who attacked the pedestrians in Westminster Bridge and Parliament Square, the other terrorists are mainly Millennials - individuals born between 1980 e 2004 -, thus they belong to the known “Generation Y” or “Millennial” generation (Goldman Sachs, 2017). Such generation is completely different from the previous ones (Pew Research Center, 2010): they are followers/influencers/prosumers who spend most of their daily-routine interacting in the (cyber-)social ecosystem.

Therefore, it is necessary to highlight some key-elements that can facilitate the comprehension of their behavior, vulnerabilities, modi operandi and goals. For example, despite terrorists are frequently connected by blood ties and/or close links - some of them are brothers, cousins, friends, etc. - We think that “families of terrorists” - and/or group of terrorists well-integrated into family networks - concept is not applicable to the last wave of terrorists. Indeed, exploring their past, family structure, relationships and quick radicalization process is relevant to focus on their need to “reboot” life in terms of creating a new jihadi life based on “peer family”, which replaces their own family. That is why they decide to break the ties with their parents before attacking.

The ICT evolution assumes a key role in the terrorist threat transformation and, contextually, the development of new social dynamics and codes affects the ICT development trends. This happens since the cyberspace is not a mere space of information sharing, but a real (cyber-)social ecosystem: we have to definitively consider it as the environment in which human existence “materializes” day by day.

In this context, the incessant action/representation of digital circularity and the media coverage of terror, fear and insecurity is the main asset employed to implement the asymmetric power of terrorist entities, especially of jihadi groups because of their specific violent and sadistic rhetoric based on horrific images.

Twenty years ago, the websites which developed and spread the online terrorist propaganda were only ten, while, nowadays we estimate they are about ten thousand and the most of them refer to the jihadi threat. The Internet Jihadism has to be considered a complex and evolving phenomenon (Antinori, 2017) which needs to be studied and tackled through specific cross-disciplinary skills. The rapid rise of the Islamic State, espe-
cially among the Western Millennials, demonstrates that the traditional nature of propaganda - actions used to target local audiences as masses and then aimed at compacting them against a specific target – has been changing in a more pervasive and seductive mobile “individualized globalization” (Antinori, 2018).

That is the reason why we need to move from an approach merely based on conflict of 2nd and 3rd generation of migrants and their integration/inclusion in society, to a new and more effective multi-dimensional approach focused on the 1st generation of Millennials as terrorists, also considering the spontaneous-violent and low-cost modalities which characterized the last wave of terrorist attacks occurred in EU. The Millennials roots are not linked to traditions nor cultural origins. Their roots are more superficial but very extensive and interconnected in the “infosphere” due to the “superficial complexity”. Such concept is quite relevant if we want to deeply understand current and future (cyber-)social violent radicalization in the cyberspace. This generation is particularly characterized by specific vulnerabilities, as below specified:

- the need to be always interconnected but, in fact, deeply alone;
- the lack of a strategic vision of the future;
- the consciousness of being world citizens;
- the extensive use of a “visual” language and a storytelling;
- the main role of peer groups;
- the lack of local ties;
- the rampant narcissism and “selfism”;
- the need to be protagonist of the history perceived as the present;
- the belief that “smart” is “clever”;
- the post-truth era and the overexposure to fake news, cyber-trolling and misinformation. The concept of (real) truth seems to depend on a sort of (cyber-)relational adhesion often allowed without any previous verification of authenticity from the supporters.

Now, taking into consideration the “generational vulnerability” in addition to the individual vulnerabilities, it is possible to understand how the evolution of the exploitation strategies related to (cyber-)social mobile-media for terrorism purposes has to be considered one of the main assets to develop the jihadi hybrid warfare. In this scenario, the User Generated Contents (UGC) are the tools used to create the cross-groups influence across the (cyber-)social ecosystem, which allow the new young terrorist generation to change target: moving from the terrorist groups to the individual target, that is the core business of the Millennials next wave of terror.

That is why, after the fall of Mosul and Raqqa, we are not living in a time characterized by a “Virtual Caliphate”, as many authors affirm. Instead, we have to consider the generation-
al and individual vulnerabilities which strongly reinforce the “Islamic State of Mind”, that is, the concrete manifestation of the - (cyber-)social - Caliphate.

CONCLUSION

The first wave of jihadi Millennials terror in Europe and the unceasing evolution of the Internet Jihadism points out the hybrid warfare capability and strategy to create new and more sophisticated asymmetric tactics and modi operandi - strongly supported by User Generated Contents (UGCs) disseminated across the Web. The “Islamic State of Mind” spread continues to inspire violent creativity and incite to attack soft targets.

Law Enforcement Agencies in Europe have to face the hard challenges given by complexity, evolution, change and hybridization of terrorism in EU between the cyber and “physical” world. There is an urgency, with the aim to innovate in EU Law Enforcement, to promote awareness of the new security challenges. The Law Enforcement has to deeply understand that the current threats are characterized by a converging dynamic both in cyberspace and territory. It implies to develop scenarios based on cross-disciplinary skills to deal with terrorism new issues such as, for example, jihadi hybrid warfare, fake news, lone wolf culture of terrorism, (cyber-)tailored narratives, UGCs, Islamic State of Mind, cyber-trolling, low cost/dual use modi operandi, caliphacking, visual-storytelling, violent cultivation, chatbots and mobile addiction.

REFERENCES


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