# IDEOLOGY, STRUCTURE AND MODUS OPERANDI: COMPARING TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

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# INDEX

# INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to conceptualize some key structural features of a group of Sunni terrorist organizations with the intent to identify common patterns, benchmarks and similar models of organizational structure. For this task, in this study it is proposes a research methodology based on an interpretative grid which considers three main levels of analysis: (1) ideological; (2) structural and (3) operative; as well as a comparative methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. The grid's purpose is to determine, through a comparison between three categories of attributes of a group of Sunni terrorist organizations, if the internal structure of terrorist organizations may be based on identical, or at least similar patterns. The defining characteristics of attributes taken into account are the ideological direction; the organizational structure; and the modus operandi adopted at local level by particular terrorist organizations. These terrorist organizations are: (1) Al-Qaeda; (2) Hamas; and (3) the self-proclaimed Islamic State. For the first cluster, three recurring ideological orientations have been identified: (1) Jihadism; (2) Salafism; and (3) Wahhabism. The structural cluster consists of three principal models: (1) business; (2) hybrid; and (3) proto-state. Finally, the cluster concerning the modus operandi is composed of three factors: (1) attack type; (2) target type; and (3) weapons type. In order to determinate all types of possible attack, target and weapon, the proposed grid of interpretation uses the categories provided by the Global Terrorism Database (GTD).

Therefore, the research is organized in three main chapters. The first chapter examines the current state of knowledge surrounding the definition of terrorism. This literature review includes all of those articles identified by the author in the relevant academic journals; books; and non-academic articles focusing on the topic. The first section provides a brief overview of the definitional problem, while the second part makes a distinction between terrorism and other forms of political violence such as national liberation, insurgency, guerrilla warfare and ordinary crime. Finally, the last section explains the reasons why it is important to define terrorism.

The second chapter introduces, defines, and frames the methodology and the methods which will be used to provide an answer to the research question '*Can terrorist organizations be based on common patterns and benchmarks, or are they single entities*

*with their own characteristics*? which will be developed in the third chapter where a group of Sunni terrorist organizations will be compared.

The third chapter provides the main case study of the thesis. It also demonstrates how the methodology and methods developed in the second chapter can be used and tested in the attempt to identify common patterns, benchmarks and possible relationships between specific terrorist organizations. In this respect, the first part compares the three terrorist groups according to their ideological orientation; the second part looks at the organizational structures; finally, the third part makes a statistical comparison between the modus operandi adopted at local level by these particular terrorist organizations.

Finally, the conclusion of the research presents the outcomes of the analysis. In particular, what emerges from the study is that, on the one hand, Sunni terrorist organizations, despite sharing often a common ideology and similar goals, are in general single entities with different genealogies and distinct organizational structures. Terrorism, indeed, is a social construct that takes place within a given historical and social context (Schmid: 1992), which means that a lot of different factors, such as political, social, economical factors, contribute to the establishment and development of a terrorism organization. On the other hand, however, the study also demonstrates that, at an operational level, it is possible to identify a common pattern that connects all terrorist organizations examined. In particular, the results of statistical analyses concerning the modus operandi adopted at local level by Al-Qaeda, Hamas and the Islamic State have proven that, in the vast majority of cases, all three organizations decided to hit the same type of target, using the same tactics and weapons.

CHAPTER 1

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the current state of knowledge surrounding the definition of terrorism. This literature review includes all of those articles identified by the author in relevant academic journals; books; and non-academic articles focusing on the topic. The first section provides a brief overview of the definitional problem, while the second part focuses on the essence of terrorism as an instrument to achieve certain political goals, by addressing the key issue of the difference between terrorism and other forms of political violence such as national liberation, insurgency, guerrilla warfare and ordinary crime. Finally, the last section explains the reasons why it is important to define terrorism.

## 2. SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Terrorism is essentially 'a contested concept'[1]. Despite a plethora of scholarly works and more than forty years of political debates, the formulation of a precise — or even agreed upon — definition of the term still remains elusive.

This impasse has led to a polarization within the scholarly community; the majority of the experts tend to believe that the subjective and politicized nature of the term "terrorism" makes it impossible to reach a universal agreement about its meaning. After all, the prevailing idea, according to this school of thought, is that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter'. At the same time others argue that a definition of terrorism is unnecessary since 'all terrorist actions and offences, substantive and inchoate, are already covered by existing criminal law'. (Lord Carlile of Berriew Q.C, 2007: 19). By contrast, Boaz Ganor (2002: 288) strongly supports the idea that 'an objective definition of terrorism is not only possible; it is also indispensable to any serious attempt to combat terrorism'.

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[1] Terrorism is essentially a contested concept since the proper use of the term inevitably involves endless disputes that cannot be settled by appeal to empirical evidence, linguistic usage, or the canons of logic alone.

The inclination of this paper is towards the position of professor Ganor. Today liberal democracies are facing a dynamic form of terrorism that is increasingly *liquid* in its nature; a global, delocalized and pervasive phenomenon which seriously jeopardises international peace and security, causing tens of thousands of victims every year — 32,685 deaths in 2014 alone. In this framework, defining terrorism is essential not only for a better understanding, but also for a more effective international collaboration. For the purpose of this study, therefore, terrorism is defined as 'a type of political violence in which a non-state actor makes deliberate use of violence against civilians to achieve political ends' (Ganor 2015: 8).

## 3. THE DEFINITIONAL PROBLEM: AN OVERVIEW

Over the last decades, academics, security experts and policy-makers have proposed a variety of definitions of terrorism covering a wide range of its attributes such as its symbolic character, its indiscriminate nature, its focus on civilians and non-combatant targets, its provocative and retributive aims, its disregard for the rules of war, the creation of a climate of fear to influence audiences wider than the direct victims, and its asymmetric character (Schmid, 2011: 39). However, while there are several recurring elements[2] among those definitions, a consensus regarding what essentially and precisely constitutes terrorism has not been found.

Brian Jenkins (1980: 2) argues that the problem of defining terrorism — that he has called 'the Bermuda Triangle of terrorism' — 'is compounded by the fact that terrorism has recently become a fad word used promiscuously and often applied to a variety of acts which are not strictly terrorism'. In line with him, Bruce Hoffman in his important

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[2] In 1988 Alex Schmid and Albert Jongman, after analysing 109 different definitions of terrorism, identified the following 22 definitional elements on the basis of their statistical appearance: violence, force (appeared in 83.5% of the definitions); political (65%); fear, terror emphasized (51%); threat (47%); psychological effects and (anticipated) reactions (41.5%); victim-target differentiation (37.5%); purposive, planned, systematic, organized action (32%); methods of combat, strategy, tactics (30.5%); extra-normality, in breach of accepted rules, without humanitarian constrains (30%); coercion, extortion, induction of compliance (28%); publicity aspect (21.5%); arbitrariness, impersonal, random character, indiscrimination (21%); civilians, noncombatants, neutrals, outsiders as victims (17.5%); intimidation (17%); innocence of victims emphasized (15.5%); group, movement, organization as perpetrator (14%); symbolic aspect, demonstration to others (13.5%); incalculability, unpredictability, unexpectedness of occurrence of violence (9%); clandestine, covert nature (9%); repetitiveness, serial or campaign character of violence (7%); criminal (6%); demands made on third parties (4%).

book *Inside Terrorism* provided an explanation of why the term terrorism has become distorted:

> On one point, at least, everyone agrees: *terrorism* is a pejorative term. It is a word with intrinsically negative connotations that is generally applied to one's enemies and opponents, or to those with whom one disagrees and would otherwise prefer to ignore. 'What is called terrorism,' Brian Jenkins has written, 'thus seems to depend on one's point of view. Use of the term implies a moral judgment; and if one party can successfully attach the label *terrorist* to its opponent, then it has indirectly persuaded others to adopt its moral viewpoint.' Hence the decision to call someone or label some organization *terrorist* becomes almost unavoidably subjective, depending largely on whether one sympathizes with or opposes the person/group/ cause concerned. If one identifies with the victim of the violence, for example, then the act is terrorism. If, however, one identifies with the perpetrator, the violent act is regarded in a more sympathetic, if not positive (or, at the worst, an ambivalent) light; and it is not terrorism (Hoffman: 2006).

In particular, Hoffman points out that the difficulties in defining terrorism result from the fact that, besides being a word with intrinsically negative connotations, terrorism has a meaning that has changed over time and it is not entirely dissimilar from other forms of irregular violence. Similarly Ganor (cited in Schmid, 2011: 43-44) identifies 15 reasons for why 'terrorism' is difficult to define including: (1) there are many 'terrorisms' with different forms and manifestations; (2) terrorist organizations are (semi-)clandestine and the secrecy surrounding them makes objective analysis difficult; (3) the definition question is linked to whether or not terrorists work for or against one's own (national) interests, and, consequently double standards tend to be applied; (4) the boundaries with other forms of political violence (e.g. assassination, [guerrilla] warfare) are hazy or unclear; (5) the discussion on terrorism has been linked to issues regarding self-determination, armed resistance against foreign occupation and racist regimes.

David de Vans (cited in Schmid, 2016: 4) remarked the impact of the definition problem on the academic debate, arguing that 'different definitions produce different findings. Consequently, defining concepts is a crucial state of research'. Roberta Senechal de la Roche (2004: 1), in turn, has observed that 'without a useful definition of terrorism, a theory of the subject is not even possible'. However the lack of a universal definition of terrorism, far from being a purely academic issue, has also important

practical implications. In his work on the topic, Alex Schmid (2011: 85) offers an important caveat, concluding that while a definition of terrorism would not solve the underlying problem, 'the absence of a common definition encourages the continuation of double standards and stands in the way of international cooperation'.

## 4. TERRORISM AND OTHER FORMS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

A number of authors suggest distinguishing terrorism from other forms of political violence for a better understanding of the phenomenon. Hoffman (2006: 35), for instance, argues that 'distinctions are a path to definition' and, in this respect, national liberation seems to be a good place to start. The misleading cliché 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' not only has confused the debate for many years, but has led many in the Western world to accept the premise according to which 'terrorism and national liberation are located on two opposite ends of a spectrum legitimizing the use of violence' (Ganor, 2009: 19-20). In particular, terrorism is located on the unjust and negative end of the violence spectrum, while national liberation is its justified and positive polar opposite[3]. That means that a specific organization would never be considered both a terrorist group and a national liberation movement at the same time, since 'terrorism' and 'national liberation' are two contradictory concepts. However, as remarked by Schmid (2016: 8-9) 'freedom is a *goal*, terrorism is a *tactic* and one does note exclude the other [...] to deliberately confuse goals (*ends*) and tactics (*ways*) is an attempt to excuse acts of terrorism based on the perceived justness or nobility of the

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[3] As pointed out by Bruce Hoffman, a further semantic complication stems from the fact that terrorist organizations — who are well aware of the pejorative nature of the term 'terrorism' — 'almost without exception regularly select names for themselves that consciously eschew the word 'terrorism' in any of its forms. Instead these groups actively seek to evoke images of: [1] freedom and liberation (e.g. the National Liberation Front, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Freedom for the Basque Homeland, etc.); [2] armies or other military organizational structures (e.g. the National Military Organization, the Popular Liberation Army, the Fifth Battalion of the Liberation Army, etc.); [3] actual self-defence movements (e.g. the Afrikaner Resistance Movement, the Shankhill Defence Association, the Organization for the Defence of the Free People, the Jewish Defense Organization, etc.); [4] righteous vengeance (the Organization for the Oppressed on Earth, the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide, the Palestinian Revenge Organization, etc.); [5] or else deliberately choose names that are decidedly neutral and there fore bereft of all but the most innocuous suggestions or associations (e. g. the Shining Path, Front Line, al-Dawa (The Call), Alfaro Lives Damn It!, Kach (Thus), al-Gamat al-Islamiya (The Islamic Organization), the Lantaro Youth Movement, etc.)'. (Hoffman, 2006: 21-22)

cause'. Hence, terrorism is a tactic used to achieve certain political goals which in some cases may coincide with national liberation.

Distinguishing terrorism from insurgency is equally important. Insurgency is generally described as 'a struggle between a non-ruling group and a ruling government or authority, where the former uses a combination of political and military means to challenge governmental power and legitimacy, while striving to obtain or maintain control over a particular area' (Moghadam, 2014). Within this framework terrorism is usually indicated as one of the possible tactics which can be used by insurgents[4]. Hoffman (2006: 35) argues that 'insurgencies typically involve coordinated informational and psychological warfare efforts designed to mobilize popular support in a struggle against an established national government, imperialist power, or foreign occupying force'. Similarly, Assaf Moghaddam (2014) points out that insurgents, using a mix of violent and nonviolent methods[5], are capable of controlling territories and seek to achieve high levels of popular support to enjoy a broader supply of manpower. In sharp contrast with this, terrorist groups tend to be smaller in size and generally do not attempt to hold territory. In addition 'their focus on extreme violence prevents them from enjoying much popular support' (Moghadam, 2014).

A further fundamental distinction is that between terrorism and guerrilla warfare. Terrorism is frequently confused with guerrilla warfare, since guerrillas often employ the same tactics for the same purposes as terrorists. In this direction many experts have tried to draw a clearer distinction between these two concepts over the years. According to Hoffman (2006: 35) 'guerrilla warfare, in its most widely accepted usage, is taken to refer to a numerically larger group of armed individuals who operate as a military unit, attack enemy military forces, and seize and hold territory, while also exercising some form of sovereignty or control over a defined geographical area and its population'.

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[4] According to Moghadam (2014) other types of tactics of insurgency can be: propaganda; demonstrations; political mobilization of constituencies; subversion; insurrection; guerrilla warfare; and conventional warfare.

[5] A symbolic case is represented by the self-declared Islamic State. Daesh is part of a broader jihadist Sunni Salafist wave, linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabism in its historical roots. It originated from a combination of Baathist military and intelligence officers from Iraq and Salafist-takfiri jihadists. In particular the Islamic State has used a multitude of different tactics. Some of these are "terroristic", others are from the repressive repertoire of state secret services, some are from the repertoire of guerrilla warfare and others are military in nature.

Similarly, Walter Laqueur writes that the essence of guerrilla warfare is to liberate areas in countrysides and to establish small military units in order to fight against government troops. In the liberated areas, the author adds, 'the guerrillas establish their own institutions, conduct propaganda and engage in other open political activities. None of this applies to terrorists, whose base of operation is in the cities, and who have to operate clandestinely in small units' (Laqueur, 1987: 147). Ehud Sprinzak (cited in Ganor, 2002: 296) affirms that the substantial difference between guerrilla warfare and terrorism is that the former, unlike the latter, is a small war that is subject to the same set of rules as apply to conventional wars. In addition David Rapoport adds that 'the traditional distinguishing characteristic of the terrorist was his explicit refusal to accept the conventional moral limits which defined military and guerrilla action' (cited in Schmid, 1984: 44). Finally, Paul Wilkinson distinguishes between terrorism and guerrilla warfare on the basis of harm inflicted to the civilian population as follows:

> Guerrillas may fight with small numbers and often inadequate weaponry, but they can and often do fight according to conventions of war, taking and exchanging prisoners and respecting the rights of non-combatants. Terrorists place no limits on means employed and frequently resort to widespread assassination, the waging of 'general terror' upon the indigenous civilian population (cited in Schmid, 1984: 42).

To conclude, it is also useful to distinguish terrorists from ordinary criminals. Despite both terrorists and criminals using violence as a means to achieve a specific goal and also perhaps sharing the same tactics and targets, their purpose or motivation tend to be different. In particular, to qualify an act as terrorism, violence must be perpetrated by some organizational entity with an identifiable chain of command beyond a single individual acting on his or her own (Hoffman, 2006: 36-37). Finally, Hoffman points to a fundamental difference when he asserts:

> Unlike the ordinary criminal or the lunatic assassin, the terrorist is not pursuing purely egocentric goals -- he is not driven by the wish to line his own pocket or satisfy some personal need or grievance. The terrorist is fundamentally an *altruist*: he believes that he is serving a 'good' cause designed to achieve a greater good for a wider constituency - whether real or imagined - which the terrorist and his organization purport to represent. The criminal, by comparison, serves no cause at all, just his own personal aggrandizement and material satiation. Indeed, a 'terrorist without a cause (at least in his own mind)', Konrad Kellen has argued, 'is not a terrorist'. Yet the possession or identification of a cause is not a

sufficient criterion for labelling someone a terrorist. In this key respect, the difference between terrorists and political extremists is clear. Many people, of course, harbour all sorts of radical and extreme beliefs and opinions, and many of them belong to radical or even illegal or proscribed political organizations. However, if they do not use violence in the pursuance of their beliefs, they cannot be considered terrorists. The terrorist is fundamentally a *violent intellectual*, prepared to use and indeed committed to using force in the attainment of his goals (Hoffman, 2006: 37-38).

## 5. THE IMPORTANCE OF DEFINING TERRORISM

The definition of terrorism is not merely a theoretical issue but an operative concern of the first order. According to Ganor (2002: 300) 'without a definition of terrorism, it is impossible to formulate or enforce international agreements against terrorism [and] the need for a definition of terrorism can be seen at almost every phase of contending with terrorism'. Specifically, the Israeli expert identifies six different reasons why it is important to define terrorism. These reasons are:

(1) *Legislation and punishment* – the laws and regulations enacted to provide security forces with an instrument for combating terrorism. A definition of terrorism is necessary when legislating laws designed to ban terrorism and assistance to terrorism, as well as when setting minimum sentences for terrorists or confiscating their financial resources and supplies. Barring an accepted definition, this legislation has no value. Legislation and punishment must distinguish terrorism from ordinary crime, even when they might actually be identical in practice. The need for a separate legislation and punishment for terrorism stems from the enormous danger that terrorism, due to its political dimension, as opposed to crime, poses to society and its values, to the government in power, and to the public at large.

(2) *International cooperation* – internationally accepted definition of terrorism is required to strengthen cooperation between countries in the struggle against terrorism, and to ensure its effectiveness. This need is particularly obvious in all that concerns the formulation and ratification of international conventions against terrorism – conventions forbidding the perpetration of terrorist acts, assistance to terrorism, transfer of funds to terrorist organizations, state support for terrorist organizations, commercial ties with states sponsoring terrorism – and conventions compelling the extradition of terrorists.

(3) *States sponsoring terrorism* – modern terrorism is increasingly dependent on the support of nations. States sponsoring terrorism use terrorist organizations as a means to their own ends, while these organizations depend on the assistance they receive from such countries at the economic, military, and operational levels. Some organizations are so closely dependent on the assistance of states that they become 'puppets' functioning at the initiative, direction, and with the complete support of these states. It is impossible to contend effectively with terrorism without severing the close tie between the terrorist organizations and the sponsoring states. This tie, however, cannot be severed without

(4) *Offensive action* – the state struggling against terrorism must retain the initiative. At the same time, attempts must be made to limit, as far as possible, the operative capacity of the terrorist organization. To attain these aims, a continued offensive must be conducted against terrorist organizations. While countries on the defensive naturally enjoy the sympathy of others, countries on the offensive are usually censored and criticized by others. To ensure international support for states struggling against terrorism, and perhaps even for a joint offensive, an internationally accepted definition of terrorism is required that will distinguish freedom fighting (which enjoys a measure of legitimacy among nations) from terrorist activity.

(5) *Attitudes toward the population supporting terrorism* – terrorist organizations often rely on the assistance of a sympathetic civilian population. An effective instrument in the limitation of terrorist activity is to undermine the ability of the organization to obtain support, assistance, and aid from this population. A definition of terrorism could be helpful here too by determining new rules of the game in both the local and the international sphere. Any organization contemplating the use of terrorism to attain its political aims will have to risk losing its legitimacy, even with the population that supports its aims.

(6) *Normative Scale* – a definition that separates terrorism out from other violent actions will enable the initiation of an international campaign designed to undermine the legitimacy of terrorist organizations, curtail support for them, and galvanize a united international front against them. In order to undermine the legitimacy of terrorist activity (usually stemming from the tendency of various countries to identify with some of the aims of terrorist organizations), terrorist activity must be distinguished from

guerrilla activity, as two forms of violent struggle reflecting different levels of illegitimacy (Ganor 2002: 300-302).

## 6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted the importance to define terrorism, distinguishing it from other forms of political violence. Although terrorism is essentially 'a contested concept' and the majority of the experts tend to believe that the subjective and politicized nature of the term makes it impossible to reach a universal agreement about its meaning, however as pointed out by Ganor (2002: 287) 'an objective definition of terrorism is not only possible; it is also indispensable to any serious attempt to combat terrorism'. In particular, the definition of terrorism will be the basis and the operational tool for expanding the ability of the international community to combat terrorism. In this direction, according to Ganor (2002: 304) a global accepted definition of terrorism (1) will enable legislation and specific punishments against those perpetrating, involved in, or supporting terrorism; (2) will allow the formulation of a codex of laws and international conventions against terrorism, terrorist organizations, states sponsoring terrorism, and economic firms trading with them; (3) will hamper the attempts of terrorist organizations to obtain public legitimacy, and (4) will erode support among those segments of the population willing to assist them.

CHAPTER 2

# METHODOLOGY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces, defines, and frames the methodology and the methods which will be used to provide an answer to the research question *"Can terrorist organizations be based on common patterns and benchmarks, or are they single entities with their own characteristics?"* which will be developed in the next chapter where a group of Sunni terrorist organizations will be compared.

While the previous chapter provided a basic overview of two key features of terrorism such as the definitional problem and the distinction between terrorism and other forms of political violence, here, it is proposed an interpretative grid which considers three main levels of analysis: (1) ideological; (2) structural and (3) operative; as well as a comparative methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. The grid's purpose is to determine through a comparison between three categories of attributes of three Sunni terrorist organizations, if the internal structure of terrorist organizations may be based on identical, or at least similar patterns. The three terrorist organizations examined in this study are: (1) Al-Qaeda; (2) Hamas; and (3) the self-proclaimed Islamic State.

## 2. THE IDEOLOGICAL LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

An ideology is a set of beliefs, values and principles that drives human beings into action. According to Jerred Post (cited in Ganor 2009: 15), the ideological dimension plays an important rule for a group since a common ideology not only justifies the group's activity but can quickly transform into the group's moral guide. In particular, Rohan Gunaratna (2005: 1) points out that an ideology 'frames organizational structure, leadership and membership motivation, recruitment and support, and shapes the strategies and tactics adopted by the group'.

Despite the fact that in practice the majority of groups' ideologies are fairly unique (Drake 1998: 3), this paragraph provides a classification of three recurring ideological

orientations among terrorist organizations. These orientations are: (1) Jihadism; (2) Salafism; and (3) Wahhabism.

In a purely linguistic sense, the word 'jihad' means 'effort' or 'struggle'. While in a religious sense the term can refer to the individual's internal effort to be a good Muslim and build a good Muslim society, it can also refer to a war for the faith against unbelievers. According to a BBC article *What is jihadism?*, 'jihadists see violent struggle as necessary to eradicate obstacles to restoring God's rule on Earth and defending the Muslim community, or '*ummah*'[6], against infidels and apostates'. In the event that the '*ummah*' is threatened by an aggressor, 'they hold that jihad is not just a collective obligation, *'fard kifaya'*, but an individual duty, *'fard ayn'*, that must be fulfilled by every able Muslim'. Specifically, Tomas Hegghammer (2009: pp. 244-266) in his report entitled *Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism*, identifies five prominent objectives of jihadists: (1) changing the social and political organization of the state; (2) establishing sovereignty on a territory perceived as occupied or dominated by non-Muslims; (3) defending the *'ummah'* from external - non-Muslim - threats; (4) correcting other Muslims' moral behaviour. (5) intimidating and marginalizing other Muslim sects.

Another common ideological orientation among islamic terrorist groups is Salafism. As remarked by Lorenzo Vidino (2014:13), if during the nineteenth century, in its original manifestation, Salafism 'was a political-religious movement advocating a return to the allegedly uncorrupted form of Islam embraced by the early followers of the prophet Mohammed', over the past 30 years the term has also been used to indicate 'a contemporary ideological movement that, while certainly advocating a return to its early days as the best way forward for the *'ummah'*, has rejected the modernism of

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[6] As pointed out by Eitan Azani (2011: 23), 'the vision common to all Islamic movements is based on the idea of '*ummah*' — the establishing of the Islamic community of believers that will unite all Muslim of the world. The tools for the realization of this vision are Jihad ("holy struggle") and *'da'wa'* ("invitation", "propaganda", or "call"). Both are drawn from the concepts of the classic Islam and express a yearning for the days of Islam's glory. The world, from an Islamic theological point of view, is divided into two parts. The first part, Dar al-Islam, includes territories under islam's control; the second part, Dar al-Harb, is under the heretics's control, and the fighting for its subjugation to Islam is still not complete. The two instruments, *'da'wa'* and Jihad, support and complement each other. However, while *'da'wa'* is based on nonviolent measures designed to rectify Muslim society through the system of education, indoctrination and social solidarity, Jihad, at its origin, strives to achieve this goal through violent measures'.

nineteenth-century Salafism and is characterized by a deep conservatism, literalism and, in some cases, intransigence and intolerance'.

Generally, scholars tend to divide Salafists into three categories: (1) quietist; (2) political; and (3) jihadist. The first one refers to those who believe that 'a strict and literal interpretation of core Islamic texts should shape every aspect of a Muslim's life, but that such efforts should be limited to the private sphere, as they do not seek to be involved in politics' (Vidino 2014: 13). Political Salafists claim that Islam is inherently political and that participation in political life and public affairs is a natural part of their strict adherence to Islamic teachings. Finally, Jihadist Salafists adopt some of the most extreme forms of Salafism and support the use of violence to achieve their goals. However, as mentioned by Vidino (2014: 14) it is important to note that this tripartite division, although useful, 'does not come close to exhausting the complex differences and dynamics within Salafism worldwide'.

Wahhabism, finally, refers to a puritanical form of Sunni Islam that is mainly practiced in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In particular, nowadays the term 'wahhabism' 'is broadly applied outside of the Arabian peninsula to refer to a Sunni Islamic movement that seeks to purify Islam of any innovations or practices that deviate from the seventh-century teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions' (Blanchard 2008: 1).

## 3. THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

A comparison between the islamic groups above-mentioned has shown that it is possible to identify three distinct typologies of terrorist organization in terms of their organizational design: (1) business organization; (2) hybrid organization; and (3) proto-state organization.

## 3.1 THE BUSINESS ORGANIZATION

The business organization is a typological framework elaborated by Aaron Zelinsky and Martin Shubik (2006: 2) for modeling terrorist groups based on their respective levels in terms of their centralization of resources and operations. Specifically, the combination between these two axes results in four types of group, which correspond to a familiar business model. These four types are: (1) hierarchy; (2) venture capital; (3) franchise; and (4) brand.

According to the authors, a terrorist hierarchy uses centralized operations and resources and is characterized by tight lines of command. By maintaining both finances and operations centralized, hierarchies have the capacity to carry out expansive and long-term projects, such as training camps and sustained attacks. Normally, 'the hierarchy model is attractive to an organization with a safe base of operations' since it requires a high level of physical security 'to protect the critical upper-level elements of the hierarchy' (Zelinsky and Shubik 2006: 3). By contrast, venture capital groups have decentralized operations and centralized resources, often with isolated and insulated cells (Schmid 2011: 187). These groups are generally unable to undertake the long-term projects that hierarchies could and this is why they can not perpetrate sustained and consistent attacks. Franchise groups on the other hand, combine centralized operations with decentralized resources. As stressed by Zelinsky and Shubik (2006: 4) 'like venture capital groups, franchise terrorist organizations are unable to maintain large scale operations. For franchises, this inability stems from financial decentralization: the central authority is unable to fund programs. Consequently, training is left to individual groups'. However, contrary to venture capital, franchises are capable of the long-term planning of attacks and can thus conduct prolonged operations. Finally, brand model groups have the lowest degree of centralization possible, with decentralized resources and operations. They rely mainly on 'ideological self-identification and ad-hoc cooperation throughout their loosely knit organizations' (Zelinsky and Shubik 2006: 4). Overall, brand groups are difficult to penetrate since 'there is little, if any, contact among cells; common ideology is the glue which holds brand organizations together' (Zelinsky and Shubik 2006: 4). According to Schmid (2011: 187) 'while underground terrorist organizations are hardly comparable to international business corporations, this typology is actually one of the better ones for explaining the spread of Al-Qaeda'.

## 3.2 THE HYBRID ORGANIZATION

Over the past decades, hybrid terrorist organizations have become key actors in what Boaz Ganor has called 'modern multidimensional warfare'. According to the Israeli professor, a hybrid organization is a new form of terrorist organization consisting of

two, and sometimes three, components: a military or paramilitary wing that engages in terrorism; a political wing that may merely represent the group's ideology, or it may compete in democratic campaigns and elections; and a wing devoted to providing social welfare services and free or subsidized religious and education services with the intent to win the hearts and minds of its potential or actual constituency (Ganor 2015: 2). In particular, the interrelationship of the hybrid organization and its community of origin has been defined by Ganor (2015: 75) as 'a mutual influence' relationship since the community can facilitate an organizations's terrorist attacks, or by contrast, restrict them.

In the context of Islamic organization, a hybrid organization uses '*da'wa*' to provide free or heavily subsidized religious and education services. Ganor (2015: 76) asserts that 'this process of acquiring the public's hearts and minds does not just create a comfortable "work environment" for the hybrid organization but its also enlarges the sector of potential recruits to the organizations'. In addition, by indoctrination and the provision of essential services, the hybrid organization increase the chances of 'political and electoral achievements, which are the harvested by the organization's political arm or by a political party that the public identifies with the organization' (Ganor 2015: 76).

However it is important to note that some terrorist organizations engage in this process gradually.

> At first, their members attempt to become integrated into the community by being elected to professional and academic associations, student unions, and the like. Occasionally, an organization will focus its efforts on the municipal system, participating in local elections. Next, an organization might partecipate in parliamentary elections. When this tactic succeeds, the organization's representatives may gain enough political power to become important members of a ruling government coalition. At no times does the hybrid terrorist organization actually merge into the state's political arena. Thus, its essence as a terrorist organization is preserved, and it can continue to engage in terrorist activity, parallel with its political strivings […] a most insidious process occurs if the hybrid terrorist organization, through democratic elections, succeed in tacking over the state and utilizing its security and intelligence mechanisms, institutions and resources to maintain and intensify its terrorist activities and to initiate and support attacks by other organizations. Such a state may be deemed a "state that perpetrates terrorism" (Ganor 2015: 76-78).

## 3.3 THE PROTO-STATE ORGANIZATION

A proto-state organization can be defined as a political entity that shares some features with a state but which is not capable of fully exerting its national sovereignty due to a lack of resources, institutions and international recognition. Normally, a proto-state entity exists in a historical and social context dominated by wars or by ethnic minority and its wealth and population may be very limited[7]. (Torreblanca 2010).

In his articles *Understanding Jihadi Proto-States*, Brynjar Lia identifies four key characteristics shared by jihadi proto-states. These features are: (1) ideological projects; (2) internationalist projects; (3) aggressive behavior; and (4) commitment to effective governance.

According to the author, ideological projects refer to the idea that the establishment of jihadi proto-states is justified solely by 'the ideological imperative to establish Shari'ah and wage jihad against God's enemies' (Brynjar 2015). These projects can be manifested in numerous ways, such as 'in the harsh treatment of minorities, the public application of physical punishments (*hudud*), and the marketing of their ideological acts in cyberspace' (Brynjar 2015).

A second characteristic is internationalist projects which can be summarized as the desire and ability to attract foreign fighters and obtain funding and material support from external constituencies. As pointed out by Brynjar (2015) 'the influx of foreign combatants and the jihadis' commitment to internationalist causes have led to situations where emerging jihadi emirate projects are seen as being "in, but not of," the local area in which they try to establish themselves'.

The third characteristic of jihadi proto-states is their 'aggressive behavior vis-à-vis neighbouring states and the international community', and evidence is provided for this by the fact that normally, jihadi proto-states do not respect international borders. In this regard, the use of terrorism is considered by jihadi proto-states as 'a legitimate weapon for future territorial expansion, and perhaps more important, it should serve as a "deterrent force" against attempts at reconquering the jihadi proto-state's territory' (Brynjar 2015).

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[7] Torreblanca, José Ignacio. "Estados-embrión", *El Pais*, July 12, 2010. elpais.com/diario/2010/07/12/internacional/1278885612_850215.html

The last feature identified by Brynjar is the commitment of jihadi proto-states to effective governance. In particular, the author claims that when controlling territory, jihadi proto-states have proved '*comparatively* effective in administrating and governing their territories and civilian populations, devoting significant resources to the provision of civilian services, an effective justice system, a commitment to training ideological cadres to administrative and military duties, organizing councils for tribal mediation, and the like' (Brynjar 2015).

## 4. THE OPERATIVE LEVEL OF ANALYSIS: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

The last level of analysis considered in the proposed grid of interpretation is the operative level concerning the modus operandi adopted at local level by the previously mentioned terrorist organizations. Specifically, to identify common patterns and significant benchmarks between these groups, three factors have been combined using a quantitative method. These factors are: (1) attack type; (2) target type; and (3) weapons type. In order to determinate all types of possible target and weapon, it was decided to use the categories provided by Global Terrorism Database (GTD)[8].

### 4.1 CRITERIA FOR DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study was taken from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), maintained by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland[9]. According to GTD Codebook *inclusion Criteria and Variables* (2006: 9), a terrorist attack is defined as 'the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation'. Essentially this means that, in order for an attack to be considered for inclusion in the GTD, three attributes must be present: (1) the incident must be intentional; (2) the incident must

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[8] The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) is an open-source database including information on terrorist incidents around the world over a period of 45 years, from 1970 to 2015. Currently, the GTD includes systematic data on more than 150,000 terrorist events. For each incident, the GTD staff provides information about the date and location of the incident, the weapons used and nature of the target, the number of casualties, and —when identifiable — the group or individual that claimed the responsibility for the attack. As specified on National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) website, the statistical information contained in the GTD is based on reports from a variety of open and unclassified source materials and no information are added to the GTD unless and until GTD staff has determined the sources are credible.

[9]  http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/

entail some level of violence or immediate threat of violence; and (3) the perpetrators of the incidents must be sub-national actors.

For the purposes of this research, a further three filter criteria must be present for an incident to be recognized as a terrorist attack. These filter criteria — that can be employed by the user via the GTD's Advanced Search Page — are:

1.  The act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal. In terms of economic goals, the exclusive pursuit of profit does not satisfy this criterion. It must involve the pursuit of more profound, systemic economic change.

2.  There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience than the immediate victims. It is the act taken as a totality that is considered, irrespective if every individual involved in carrying out the act was aware of this intention. As long as any of the planners or decision‒makers behind the attack intended to coerce, intimidate or publicize, the intentionality criterion is met.

3.  The action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities. That is, the act must be outside the parameters permitted by international humanitarian law (particularly the prohibition against deliberately targeting civilians or non‒combatants).

## 4.2 INCIDENT LOCATION

The proposed grid of interpretation takes into account only those terrorist attacks perpetrated by Al-Qaeda, the self-declared Islamic State, Hamas or the Taliban in which their responsibility is assured and that occurred at a local level. For this reason, the only countries considered in the analysis are: (1) Afghanistan; (2) Iraq; (3) Israel; (4) Pakistan; (5) the West Bank and Gaza Strip; and (6) Syria.

## 4.3 ATTACK TYPE

According to GTD Codebook *inclusion Criteria and Variables* (2006: 21-23), the attack type consists of nine categories. Up to three attack types can be recorded for each incident. Typically, only one attack type is recorded for each incident unless the attack is

comprised of a sequence of events[10]. (Below are defined the nine categories of attack type according to the GTD Codebook).

1. **ASSASSINATION**

   An act whose primary objective is to kill one or more specific, prominent individuals. Usually carried out on persons of some note, such as high‑ ranking military officers, government officials, celebrities, etc. Not to include attacks on non‑specific members of a targeted group. The killing of a police officer would be an armed assault unless there is reason to believe the attackers singled out a particularly prominent officer for assassination.

2. **ARMED ASSAULT**

   An attack whose primary objective is to cause physical harm or death directly to human beings by use of a firearm, incendiary, or sharp instrument (knife, etc.). Not to include attacks involving the use of fists, rocks, sticks, or other handheld (less‑than‑lethal) weapons. Also includes attacks involving certain classes of explosive devices in addition to firearms, incendiaries, or sharp instruments. The explosive device subcategories that are included in this classification are grenades, projectiles, and unknown or other explosive devices that are thrown.

3. **BOMBING/ EXPLOSION**

   An attack where the primary effects are caused by an energetically unstable material undergoing rapid decomposition and releasing a pressure wave that causes physical damage to the surrounding environment. Can include either high or low explosives (including a dirty bomb) but does not include a nuclear explosive device that releases energy from fission and/or fusion, or an incendiary device where decomposition takes place at a much slower rate.

   If an attack involves certain classes of explosive devices along with firearms, incendiaries, or sharp objects, then the attack is coded as an armed assault only. The

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[10] It is important to note that when multiple attack types may apply, the most appropriate value is determined based on the hierarchy below. For example, if an assassination is carried out through the use of an explosive, the attack type is coded as Assassination, not Bombing/Explosion. If an attack involves a sequence of events, then the first, the second, and the third attack types are coded in the order of the hierarchy below rather than the order in which they occurred (GTD Codebook *inclusion Criteria and Variables* 2006: 21).

explosive device subcategories that are included in this classification are grenades, projectiles, and unknown or other explosive devices that are thrown in which the bombers are also using firearms or incendiary devices.

## 4. HIJACKING

An act whose primary objective is to take control of a vehicle such as an aircraft, boat, bus, etc. for the purpose of diverting it to an un-programmed destination, force the release of prisoners, or some other political

objective. Obtaining payment of a ransom should not the sole purpose of a Hijacking, but can be one element of the incident so long as additional objectives have also been stated. Hijackings are distinct from Hostage Taking because the target is a vehicle, regardless of whether there are people/passengers in the vehicle.

## 5. HOSTAGE TAKING (BARRICADE INCIDENT)

An act whose primary objective is to take control of hostages for the purpose of achieving a political objective through concessions or through disruption of normal operations. Such attacks are distinguished from kidnapping since the incident occurs and usually plays out at the target location with little or no intention to hold the hostages for an extended period in a separate clandestine location.

## 6. HOSTAGE TAKING (KIDNAPPING)

An act whose primary objective is to take control of hostages for the purpose of achieving a political objective through concessions or through disruption of normal operations. Kidnappings are distinguished from Barricade Incidents (above) in that they involve moving and holding the hostages in another location.

## 7. FACILITY/ INFRASTRUCTURE ATTACK

An act, excluding the use of an explosive, whose primary objective is to cause damage to a non−human target, such as a building, monument, train, pipeline, etc. Such attacks include arson and various forms of sabotage (e.g., sabotaging a train track is a facility/infrastructure attack, even if passengers are killed). Facility/ infrastructure attacks can include acts which aim to harm an installation, yet also cause harm to people incidentally (e.g. an arson attack primarily aimed at damaging a building, but causes injuries or fatalities).

**8. UNARMED ASSAULT**

An attack whose primary objective is to cause physical harm or death directly to human beings by any means other than explosive, firearm, incendiary, or sharp instrument (knife, etc.). Attacks involving chemical, biological or radiological weapons are considered unarmed assaults.

**9. UNKNOWN**

The attack type cannot be determined from the available information.

## 4.4 TARGET TYPE

The Global Terrorism Database Codebook (2016: 30-34) distinguishes between 22 categories of potential targets. and records information on up to three target for each incident. Specifically, those categories are:

**1. BUSINESS**

Businesses are defined as individuals or organizations engaged in commercial or mercantile activity as a means of livelihood. Any attack on a business or private citizens patronizing a business such as a restaurant, gas station, music store, bar, café, etc.This includes attacks carried out against corporate offices or employees of firms like mining companies, or oil corporations. Furthermore, includes attacks conducted on business people or corporate officers. Included in this value as well are hospitals and chambers of commerce and cooperatives. However, it does not include attacks carried out in public or quasi−public areas such as 'business  district or commercial area', or generic business−related individuals such as 'businessmen' (these attacks are captured under 'Private Citizens and Property', see below.) Also does not include attacks against generic business−related  individuals such as "businessmen." Unless the victims were targeted because of their specific business affiliation, these attacks belong in "Private Citizens and Property."

**2. GOVERNMENT (GENERAL)**

Any attack on a government building; government member, former members, including members of political parties in official capacities, their convoys, or events

sponsored by political parties; political movements; or a government sponsored institution where the attack is expressly carried out to harm the government.

This value includes attacks on judges, public attorneys (e.g., prosecutors), courts and court systems, politicians, royalty, head of state, government employees (unless police or military), election-related attacks, or intelligence agencies and spies. However, this value does not include attacks on political candidates for office or members of political parties that do not hold an elected office (these attacks are captured in 'Private Citizens and Property').

## 3. POLICE

This value includes attacks on members of the police force or police installations; this includes police boxes, patrols headquarters, academies, cars, checkpoints, etc. It includes attacks against jails or prison facilities, or jail or prison staff or guards.

## 4. MILITARY

This value includes attacks against military units, patrols, barracks, convoys, jeeps, and aircraft. Also includes attacks on recruiting sites, and soldiers engaged in internal policing functions such as at checkpoints and in anti-narcotics activities. This category also includes peacekeeping units that conduct military operations (e.g., AMISOM) However, it excludes attacks against non-state militias and guerrillas, these types of attacks are coded as "Terrorist/Non-state Militias" see below.

## 5. ABORTION RELATED

This value includes attacks carried out against foreign missions, including embassies, consulates, etc. Attacks on abortion clinics, employees, patrons, or security personnel stationed at clinics.

## 6. AIRPORTS & AIRCRAFT

This value includes attacks that was carried out either against an aircraft or against an airport. Attacks against airline employees while on board are also included in this value. It includes also attacks conducted against airport business offices and executives, while military aircraft are not included.

**7. GOVERNMENT (DIPLOMATIC)**

This value includes attack carried out against foreign missions, including embassies, consulates, etc. This value also includes cultural centers that have diplomatic functions, and attacks against diplomatic staff and their families (when the relationship is relevant to the motive of the attack) and property.

**8. EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION**

This value includes attacks against schools, teachers, or guards protecting school sites. It also includes attacks against university professors, teaching staff and school buses. Moreover and attacks against religious schools.

**9. FOOD OR WATER SUPPLY**

This value includes attack on food or water supplies or reserves are included in this value. This generally includes attacks aimed at the infrastructure related to food and water for human consumption.

**10. JOURNALISTS & MEDIA**

This value includes attacks on reporters, news assistants, photographers, publishers, as well as attacks on media headquarters and offices.

**11. MARITIME**

This value includes attacks against fishing ships, oil tankers, ferries, yachts, etc. (Attacks on fishermen are coded as 'Private Citizens and Property', see below).

**12. NGOS**

This value includes attacks on offices and employees of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), by contrast it does not include labor unions, social clubs, student groups, and other non-NGO

**13. OTHER**

This value includes acts of terrorism committed against targets which do not fit into other categories. Some examples include ambulances, firefighters, refugee camps, and international demilitarized zones

## 14. PRIVATE CITIZENS & PROPERTY

This value includes attacks on individuals, the public in general or attacks in public areas including markets, commercial streets, busy intersections and pedestrian malls. It also includes ambiguous cases where the target/victim was a named individual, or where the target/victim of an attack could be identified by name, age, occupation, gender or nationality. This value also includes ceremonial events, such as weddings and funerals, however it does not include attacks causing civilian casualties in businesses such as restaurants, cafes or movie theaters.

## 15. RELIGIOUS FIGURES/ INSTITUTIONS

This value includes attacks on religious leaders, (Imams, priests, bishops, etc.), religious institutions (mosques, churches), religious places or objects (shrines, relics, etc.). This value also includes attacks on organizations that are affiliated with religious entities that are not NGOs, businesses or schools.

## 16. TELECOMMUNICATION

This value includes attacks on facilities and infrastructure for the transmission of information. More specifically this value includes things like cell phone towers, telephone booths, television transmitters, radio, and microwave towers.

## 17. TERRORISTS/ NON-STATE MILITIAS

Terrorists or members of identified terrorist groups within the GTD are included in this value. Membership is broadly defined and includes informants for terrorist groups, but excludes former or surrendered terrorists. This value also includes cases involving the targeting of militias and guerillas.

## 18. TOURISTS

This value includes the targeting of tour buses, tourists, or 'tours'. Tourists are persons who travel primarily for the purposes of leisure or amusement. Government tourist offices are included in this value. The attack must clearly target tourists, not just an assault on a business or transportation system used by tourists. Travel agencies are coded as business targets.

### 19. TRANSPORTATION

This value includes attacks on public transportation systems are included in this value. This can include efforts to assault public buses, minibuses, trains, metro/subways, highways (if the highway itself is the target of the attack), bridges, roads, etc.

It is important to note that the GTD contains a number of attacks on generic terms such as 'cars' or 'vehicles'. These attacks are assumed to be against 'Private Citizens and Property' unless shown to be against public transportation systems. In this regard, buses are assumed to be public transportation unless otherwise noted.

### 20. UNKNOWN

The target type cannot be determined from the available information.

### 21. UTILITIES

This value pertains to facilities for the transmission or generation of energy. For example, power lines, oil pipelines, electrical transformers, high tension lines, gas and electric substations, are all included in this value. This value also includes lampposts or street lights.

### 22. VIOLENT POLITICAL PARTIES

This value pertains to entities that are both political parties (and thus, coded as 'government' in this coding scheme) and terrorists. It is operationally defined as groups that engage in electoral politics and appear as 'Perpetrators' in the GTD.

## 4.5 WEAPON TYPE

The last factor considered in the analysis is the type of weapon used to perpetrate an attack. In this regard, GTD Codebook (2016: 26-27) identifies 13 different categories of weapons. These are:

### 1. BIOLOGICAL

A weapon whose components are produced from pathogenic microorganisms or toxic substances of biological origins.

**2. CHEMICAL**

A weapon produced from toxic chemicals that is contained in a delivery system and dispersed as a liquid, vapor, or aerosol.

**3. RADIOLOGICAL**

A weapon whose components are produced from radioactive materials that emit ionizing radiation and can take many forms.

**4. NUCLEAR**

A weapon which draws its explosive force from fission, fusion, or a combination of these methods.

**5. FIREARMS**

A weapon which is capable of firing a projectile using an explosive charge as a propellant.

**6. EXPLOSIVES/BOMBS/DYNAMITE**

A weapon composed of energetically unstable material undergoing rapid decomposition and releasing a pressure wave that causes physical damage to the surrounding environment.

**7. FAKE WEAPONS**

A weapon that was claimed by the perpetrator at the time of the incident to be real but was discovered after−the−fact to be non−existent or incapable of producing the desired effects.

**8. INCENDIARY**

A weapon that is capable of catching fire, causing fire, or burning readily and produces intensely hot fire when exploded.

**9. MELEE**

A weapon—targeting people rather than property—that does not involve a projectile in which the user and target are in contact with it simultaneously.

**10. VEHICLE**

An automobile that is used in an incident that does not incorporate the use of explosives such as a car bomb or truck bomb.

**11. SABOTAGE EQUIPMENT**

A weapon that is used in the demolition or destruction of property (e.g., removing bolts from a train tracks).

**12. OTHER**

A weapon that has been identified but does not fit into one of the above categories.

**13. UNKNOWN**

The weapon type cannot be determined from the available information.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the methodology and the methods which will be used to provide an answer to the research question. Specifically, in this chapter has been proposed an interpretative grid which considers three main levels of analysis: (1) ideological; (2) structural and (3) operative; as well as a comparative methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative methods.

The next chapter will apply the methodology and methods developed here to three different cases of study. As previously mentioned the Sunni terrorist organizations that will be compared are: (1) Al-Qaeda; (2) the self-declared Islamic State; and (3) Hamas. It is important to emphasize that these terrorist organizations are complex entities endowed with a highly variable internal structure, different ideological orientations, and several modus operandi. However, the proposed grid has been designed to test if common patterns, benchmarks and possible relationships between these organizations can be identified.

CHAPTER 3

# CASE STUDY

# COMPARING TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the main case study of the thesis. It also demonstrates how the methodology and methods developed in the second chapter can be used and tested in the attempt to identify common patterns, benchmarks and possible relationships between specific terrorist organizations. For this task, here, a classification of three sunni terrorist groups is provided. Specifically, the chapter is organized in three parts. The first part compares the three terrorist groups according to their ideological orientation; the second part looks at the organizational structures; finally, the third part makes a statistical comparison between the modus operandi adopted at a local level by these particular terrorist organizations.

## 2. THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

— AL-QAEDA

**Ideologies:**        Sunni**,** Jihadist, Salafist,

**Place of Origin:**   Afghanistan and Pakistan

**Year of Origin:**    1988

**Doctrine:**

Al-Qaeda (AQ) is one of the largest and longest-operating terrorist groups in the world. Founded by Osama Bin Laden on August 11, 1988, the organization has become over the years a jihadist network with affiliates and supporters all over the world. The core Al-Qaeda's strategic priority is to rid the Muslim world of foreign influence and establish a global Muslim state (caliphate) under Islamic law (sharia). Specifically, according to the report[11] on Al-Qaeda issued by the Counter Extremism Project the

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[11] "Report on Al-Qaeda", *Counter Extremism Project*. http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/al-qaeda

three cornerstones of Al-Qaeda's doctrine are: (1) to unite the Muslim population under sharia at a global level; (2) to liberate the 'holy lands' from the 'Zionist-Crusader' alliance; and finally (3) to alleviate perceived economic and social injustices.

Today, the organization claims that it is fighting a 'defensive jihad' against the United States and its allies, defending Muslim lands from the 'new crusade led by America against the Islamic nations'.

— HAMAS

**Ideologies:**         Sunni**,** Jihadist, Salafist,

**Place of Origin:**   Gaza Strip

**Year of Origin:**    1987

**Doctrine**

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) was founded in 1987 after the beginning of the first intifada against the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip by Israel. Hamas's ideology mingles Palestinian nationalism and radical Sunni Islamic worldview. For instance, article 8 of the Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, sums up the terrorist group's belief system, as followed: 'Allah is [our] target, the Prophet is [our] model, the Koran [our] constitution: Jihad is [our] path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of [our] wishes'.

According  to Ganor (2015: 155) the goals of the organizations are to carry out an armed struggle against the state of Israel in order to establish a Palestinian Islamic state from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, and ensure that the state is governed by Islamic law. In particular, Hamas 'views the entirety of the land of Mandate Palestine — excluding the 80 percent of Palestine that became modern-day Jordan—as an Islamic birthright that has been usurped. To that end, Hamas does not recognize Israel's right to exist and has dedicated itself to violently seeking Israel's destruction'. Moreover, since 2005, Hamas has engaged in the Palestinian political process, becoming the first Islamist group to gain power democratically[12].

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[12] "Profile: Hamas Palestinian movement", *BBC,* July 11, 2014. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13331522

— ISLAMIC STATE

**Ideologies:**        Sunni**,** Jihadist, Salafist,

**Place of Origin:**   Iraq and Syria

**Year of Origin:**    2013

**Doctrine**

The Islamic State (IS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS or ISIL) is a Salafi militant organization based in Syria and Iraq. It is part of a broader jihadist Sunni Salafist wave, linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabism in its historical roots. The overarching goal of the organization is to establish a global Islamic caliphate, however, unlike Al-Qaeda, which views a global caliphate as a long-term goal, the self-proclaimed Islamic State sees it as its proximate objective. Since the foundation of the organization in June 2013, this doctrinal commitment 'has translated into a quest for territory across Iraq and Syria', as reported by the Counter Extremism Project[13].

Underpinning the allegiance to the caliphate, ISIS adheres to a literalist interpretation of Sunni Islam embracing beliefs according to an extremist Salafi vision. Specifically, the organization has supplemented its Salafist world-view with a belief in the revival of takfirist practices[14]. In addition, as pointed out by Greame Wood in his article *What ISIS Really Wants* the islamic State also adheres to a form of millenarianism with the ultimate hope of 'bringing about the apocalypse'[15]. Indeed, according to the English version of *Dabiq*, the online magazine published by ISIS, the apocalypse will be preceded by 'one of the greatest battles between the Muslims and the crusaders' in the town of Dabiq, located northeast of Aleppo in the Syrian countryside.

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[13] "Report on ISIS", *Counter Extremism Project*. http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/isis

[14] As a Salafi-Takfiri group, the "enemies of Islam" may be Muslim too. In this direction, according to ISIS doctrine, 'almost 200 million Shiite Muslims—as well as Sufis, Yazidis, and Ba'hai—are all apostates and deserving of death'. http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/isis

[15] Wood, Graeme. "What ISIS Really Wants", *The Atlantic*, March 2015. http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/

## 3. THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

— AL-QAEDA

**Locations:** Since the American invasion of Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda has started to operated out of Pakistan. Actually, the core of Al-Qaida is located between Pakistan and Afghanistan, even though its affiliates have significant presence in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Algeria, Mali and Niger.

**Resources:** Al-Qaeda has an annual turnover of 150 million dollars. According to Forbes its main sources of finance are: financial assistance and donations; kidnapping; ransom; and drug trafficking.

**Size Estimates:** 3000-4000 members[16]

**Structure**

Over the first fifteen years of Al-Qaeda's existence, the organization has used a hierarchical structure characterized by centralized operations and resources and tight lines of command. But following the overturn of the Taliban regime, Al-Qaeda began to decentralize. Today, according to Seth Jones (2014: 10), the organization can be divided into four tiers: (1) the core of Al-Qaeda; (2) affiliated Al-Qaeda groups; (3) other Salafi-jihadist groups; and (4) inspired individuals and networks.

Al-Qaeda's core leadership 'seeks to centralize the organization's messaging and strategy rather than to manage the daily operations of its franchises'. However, the organization's senior leadership retains some oversight of the affiliates — which are required to consult with the core of Al-Qaeda before launching any large-scale attacks — and in some cases may attempt to adjudicate disputes among them (Jones 2014: 10).

The organization operates a 'general command', which includes: (1) a Shura Council that directs the overall strategy of the organization; (2) a Sharia Committee that is responsible for issuing '*fatwas';* (3) a Military Committee that is responsible for conceiving and planning operations, as well as managing training camps; (4) a Finance

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[16] Bialik, Carl. "Shadowy Figure: Al Qaeda's Size Is Hard to Measure", *The Wall Street Journal*, September 10, 2011.
http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424053111903285704576560593124523206

Committee that is responsible for fund-raising and the concealment of assets; (5) a Foreign Purchases Committee that is responsible for the acquisition of foreign arms and supplies; (6) a Security Committee that provides physical protection and intelligence, as well as counter-intelligence services; and (7) an Information Committee that is responsible for propaganda[17].

**Figure 1:** Al-Qaeda organizational structure[18]
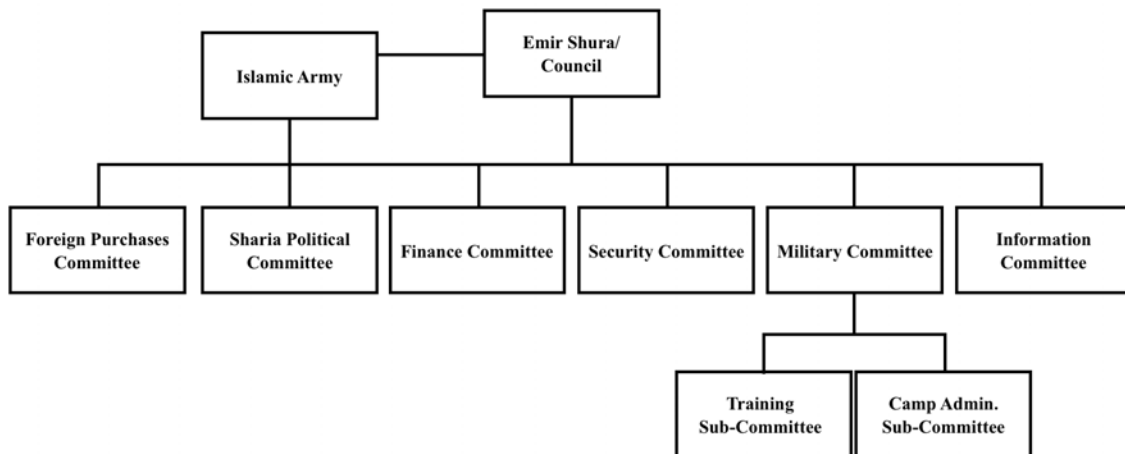


The second tier includes affiliated groups that became formal branches of Al- Qaeda. As pointed out by Jones (2014: 10) what distinguishes 'affiliates' from other types of Salafi-jihadist groups is 'the decision by their emirs to swear '*bay'at*' [the oath of allegiance] to Al-Qaeda leaders, which is then formally accepted by Al-Qaeda leaders'. Actually, the formal branches of al Qaeda include: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) based in Algeria and neighboring countries; Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) based in Yemen; Jabhat al- Nusrah based in Syria; and Al Shabaab based in Somalia.

The third tier concerns other Salafi-jihadist groups. As pointed out by Jones (2014: 11) these groups, despite having established a direct relationship with Al-Qaeda, 'were not created by the core of Al-Qaeda, have not become formal members, and their leaders have not sworn "*bay'at*" to the core of Al-Qaeda'. This arrangement allows

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[17] "Al-Qaeda Organizational Structure", *Global Security*. http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/al-qaida-structure.htm

[18] Source: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/al-qaida-structure.htm

these groups 'to remain independent and pursue their own goals in general, but to work with Al-Qaeda for specific operations or training purposes if their interests converge'.

The last tier identified by Jones (2014: 12) is the inspired individual and networks. According to the author, this level includes those who have no direct contact to the core of Al-Qaeda or an organizational structure, but who 'are inspired by the Al-Qaeda cause and outraged by perceived oppression of Muslims in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Palestine, and other countries'.

— HAMAS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Locations:** | Hamas has a particularly strong presence in West Bank and Gaza Strip. In particular, on January 26, 2006, the terrorist organization won a stunning victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections that ensured it a decisive majority in the legislature. |
| **Resources:** | Hamas has an annual turnover of 1 billion dollars. According to Forbes its main sources of finance are: taxes and fees; financial aid; and donations (especially from Qatar). |
| **Size Estimates:** | No data |

 **Structure**

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), which won the Palestinian elections in 2006, has over the years adopted a hybrid organizational model, undermining and exploiting the Palestinian political system to further its terrorist activities (Ganor 2015: 79). As set out in Chapter 2, a hybrid organization is a new form of terrorist organization consisting of two, and sometimes three, components: a military or paramilitary wing that engages in terrorism; a political wing that may merely represent the group's ideology or which may compete in democratic campaigns and elections; and a wing devoted to providing social welfare services and free or subsidized religious and educational services with the intent to win the hearts and minds of its potential or actual constituency.

**Figure 2:** The spheres of activity of the hybrid terrorist organizations[19]
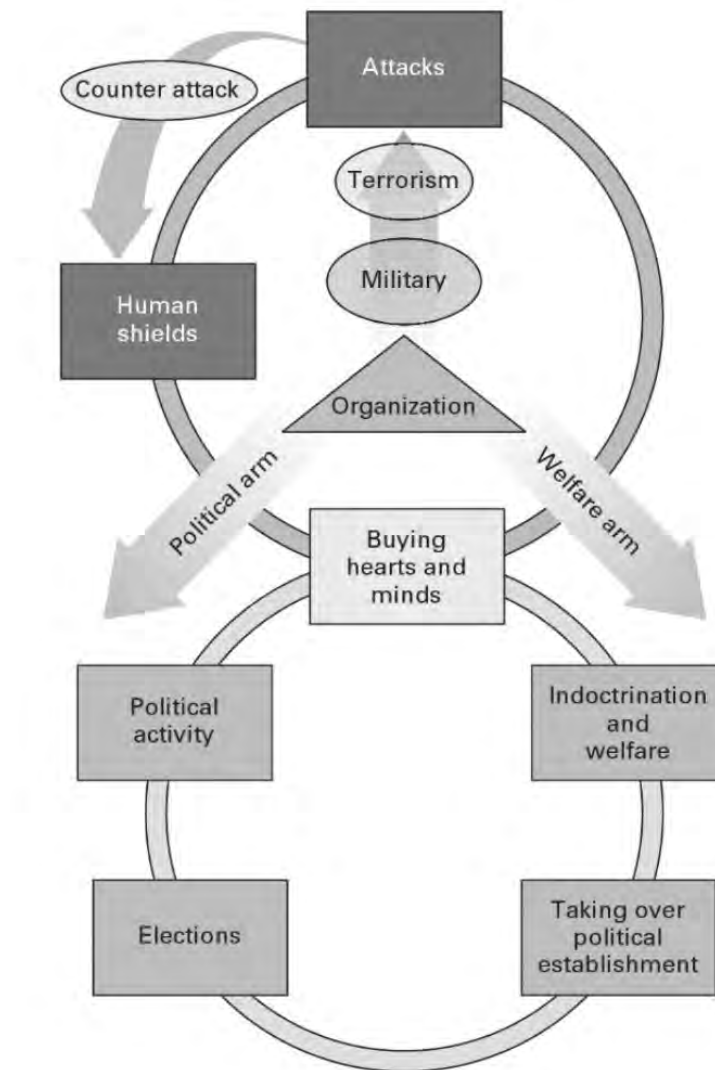


Ganor (2015: 76-77) points out that Hamas used the culture of martyrdom (*shuhada*) and incitement to terrorism to win its constituents' hearts and minds. The organization has for years used '*da'wa*' to generate sympathy for terrorism in general, and for suicide attacks in particular. For instance, Hamas members create public support for their activities and their continued growth 'by plastering posters extolling the acts of suicide terrorists throughout Palestinian villages and cities, by disseminating video clips and photographs of martyrs on social networks and websites, through imams who incite to terrorism at mosque, through the education system, and through summer camps where

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[19] Source: Ganor, Boaz. *Global Alert: The Rationality of Modern Islamist Terrorism and the Challenge to the Liberal Democratic World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, p.82.

children learn how to use weapons and survive in the field'. In addition, children who have from a young age been raised to identify with the model of *'shahid'*, 'aspire to martyr themselves when they grow up, and thus they constitute a cadre of future recruits and supporters for terrorism'. Finally, when they reach voting age, these young people and their relatives, who receive financial support and welfare services from Hamas, 'vote for the representatives of the organization with which they have long identified'.

In this way, according to Ganor (2015: 77), Hamas has used democratic electoral processes to establish and strengthen its political power in its community of origins.

— ISLAMIC STATE

**Locations:** The self-proclaimed Islamic State began operating into Syria in 2013. Over the last four years, ISIS has been able to take and maintain control of several cities in both northern Syria and western Iraq, including Raqqa, Fallujah, and Mosul. According to the Mapping Militants Project "ISIS has also taken control of nearly all official border crossings between Iraq and Syria, and the only border crossing between Iraq and Jordan". But in 2015 ISIS lost territory in northern Syria because of "a combination of Kurdish forces and air strikes from the American-led coalition".

**Resources:** The Islamic State has an annual turnover of 2 billion dollars. According to Forbes its main sources of finance are: oil trade; kidnapping and ransom; collection of protection and taxes; bank robberies; and looting.

**Size Estimates:** 30,000 members[20]

**Structure**

The self-proclaimed Islamic State is much more than a terrorist organization; it is a terrorist state with almost all governing elements[21]. According to Fred Haentjens[22] there

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[20] "Mapping Terrorist Organizations: Al-Qaeda", *Stanford University*, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1#cite138

[21] Neriah, Jacques. "The Structure of the Islamic State (ISIS)." *The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, September 8, 2014. http://jcpa.org/structure-of-the-islamic-state/

[22] Haentjens, Fred. "ISIS organized: Islamic State Charts reviewed." *Linkedin*, January 4, 2016.

are three remarkable aspects of the structure of ISIS. Firstly, it uses a centralized corporate departments to plan, support and control the regions. Secondly, it has an important administrative structure decentralized by country, region, town and even village. Finally, it has a Shura council that works as an advisory, audit and compliance unit. Actually, the Islamic State is run by a Caliph, who is the sole decision-maker and sits atop a pyramid of power, and its organizational structure includes: (1) a Military Council whose task is to plan and supervise the military commanders and the actual operations in the field; (2) a Shura Council — which can be considered as the nerve system of the Caliphate — whose task is supervising affairs the state; (3) a Legal Council that deals with all judicial issues as well as spreading the message of the Islamic State by means of recruitment and preaching; (4) a Security and Intelligence Council that is not only responsible for the personal security and safety of the Caliph, but also serves to implement orders, campaigns, judicial decisions and the collection and dissemination of intelligence; (5) an Institution for Public Information that is responsible for the propaganda; and (6) a cabinet dedicated to the daily administration of the state[23].

**Figure 3:** Islamic State organizational structure[24]
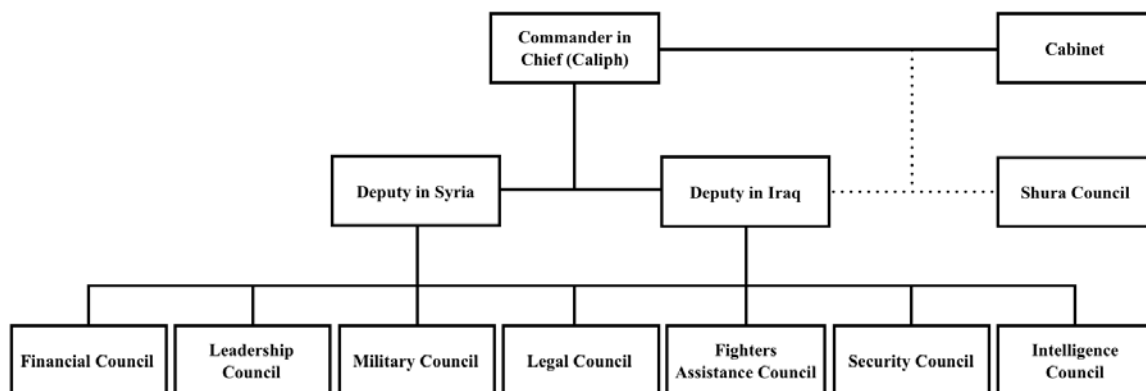


According to a report published by the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs entitled *The Structure of the Islamic State (ISIS),* the Islamic State's first priority was 'to wage "ethnic cleansing" to eliminate any potential foes and opposition as well as to observe

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Source: http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2014/09/world/isis-explained/

its religious creed. Specifically, once the area controlled by the Islamic state became more or less homogeneous, the Islamic State decided to implement Phase Two in its pursuit of power: Islamic education according to the Islamic State philosophy'[25].

# 4. THE MODUS OPERANDI

— AL-QAEDA

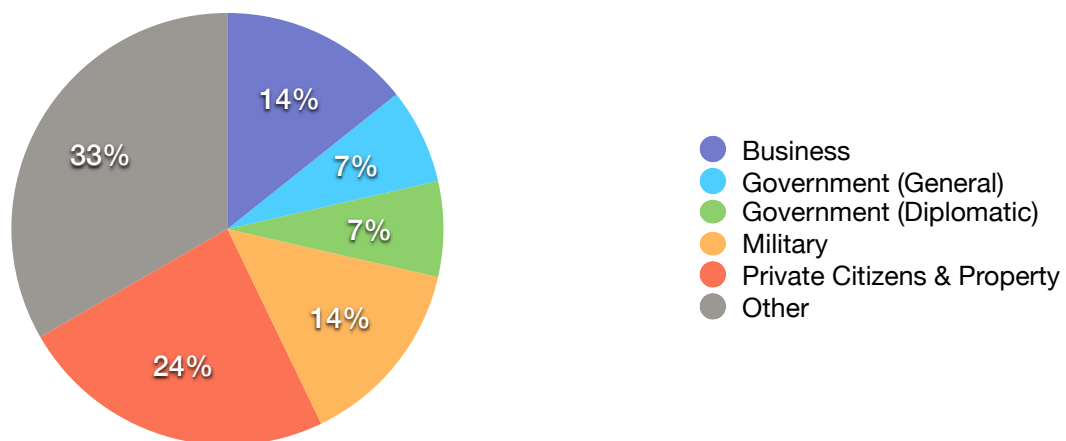| | |
|---|---|
| **Incident Location:** | Afganistan and Pakistan |
| **Time Period:** | 2001-2015 |
| **Number of Attacks:** | 36 |
| **Fatalities:** | 178 |
| **Injured:** | 635 |

## 1. Target type



| | |
|---|---|
| Business | **6** |
| Government (General) | **3** |
| Government (Diplomatic) | **3** |
| Military | **6** |
| Private Citizens & Property | **10** |
| Other | **14** |

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[25] Jacques Neriah, "The Structure…, Cit.

## 2. Attack type
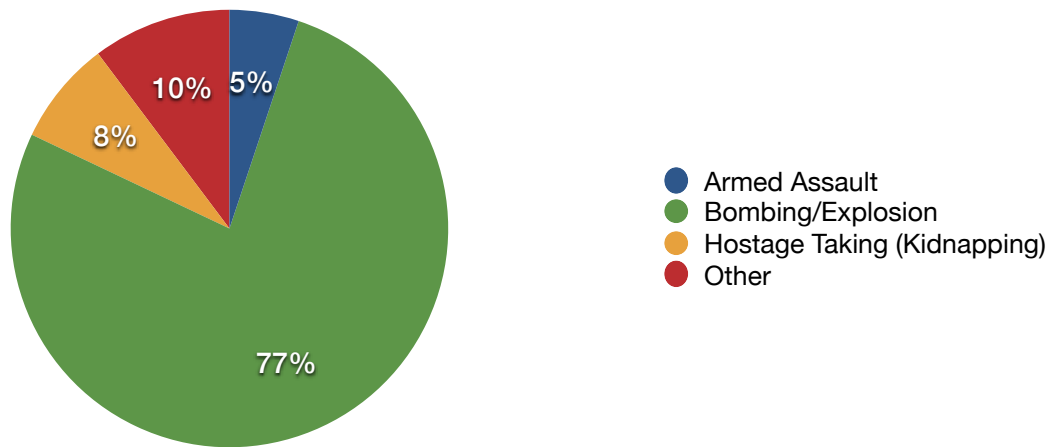


| Armed Assault | 2 |
|---|---|
| Bombing/Explosion | 30 |
| Hostage Taking (Kidnapping) | 3 |
| Other | 4 |

## 3. Weapon type
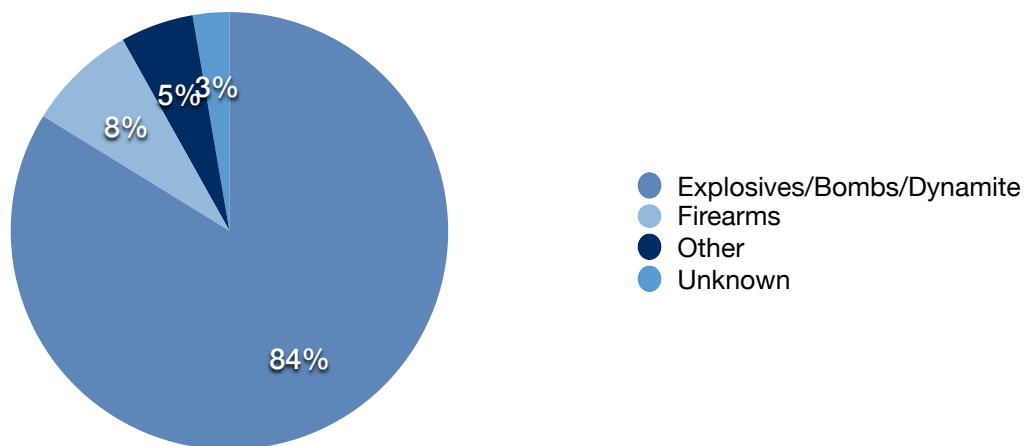


| Explosives/Bombs/Dynamite | 31 |
|---|---|
| Firearms | 3 |
| Other | 2 |
| Unknown | 1 |

— HAMAS

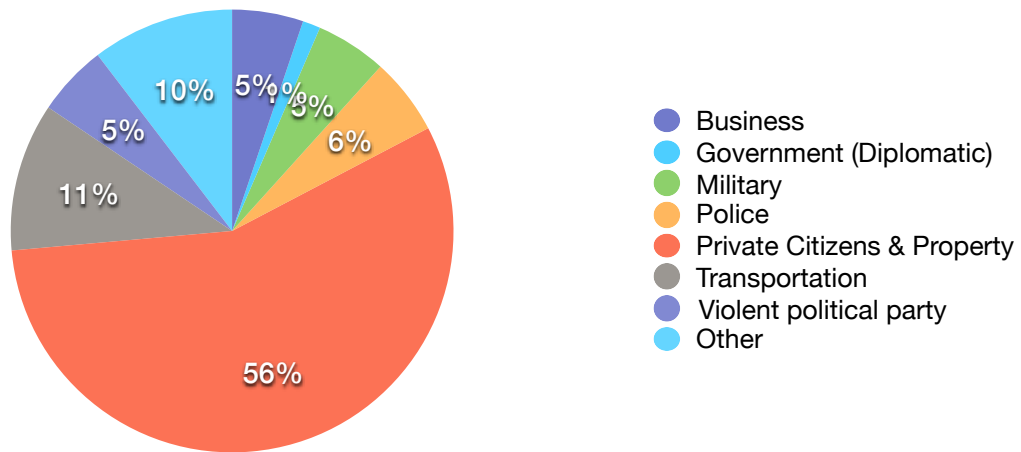**Incident Location:**   Israel, West Bank and Gaza Strip

**Time Period:**   2001-2015

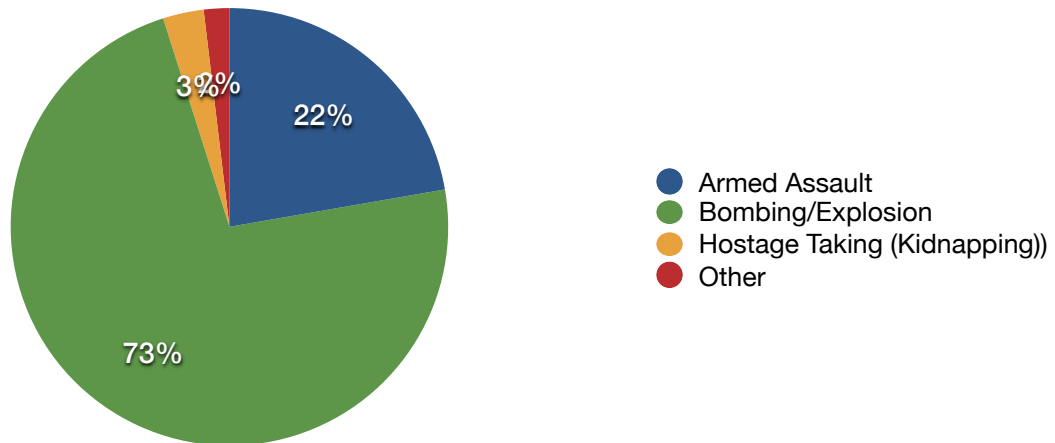**Number of Attacks:**   229

**Fatalities:**   529
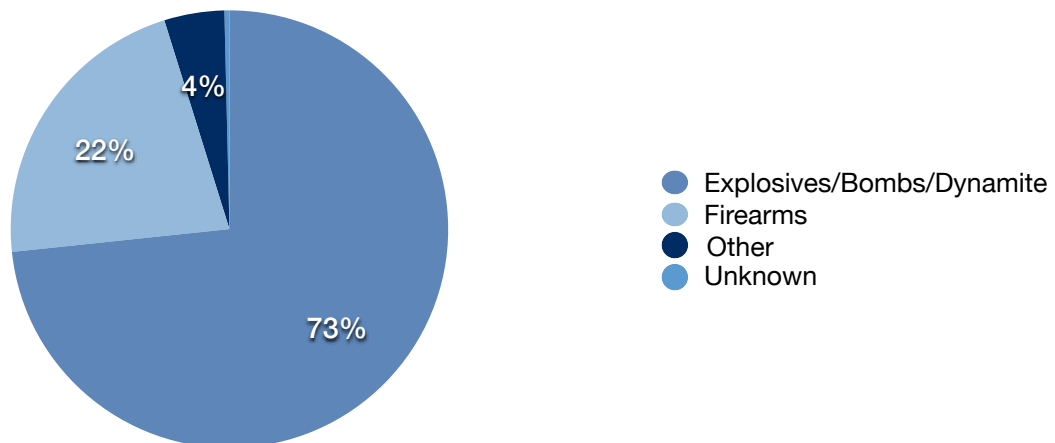
**Injured:**   1553

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**1. Target type**



| Business | 12 |
|---|---|
| Military | 12 |
| Police | 13 |
| Private Citizens & Property | 130 |
| Transportation | 25 |
| Violent political party | 12 |
| Other | 24 |

## 2. Attack type



| Armed Assault | 59 |
|---|---|
| Bombing/Explosion | 193 |
| Hostage Taking (Kidnapping) | 8 |
| Other | 5 |

## 3. Weapon type



| Explosives/Bombs/Dynamite | 198 |
|---|---|
| Firearms | 59 |
| Other | 12 |

— ISLAMIC STATE

| | |
|---|---|
| **Incident Location:** | Iraq and Syria |
| **Time Period:** | 2007-2015 |
| **Number of Attacks:** | 2309 |
| **Fatalities:** | 14216 |
| **Injured:** | 18819 |

## 1. Target type
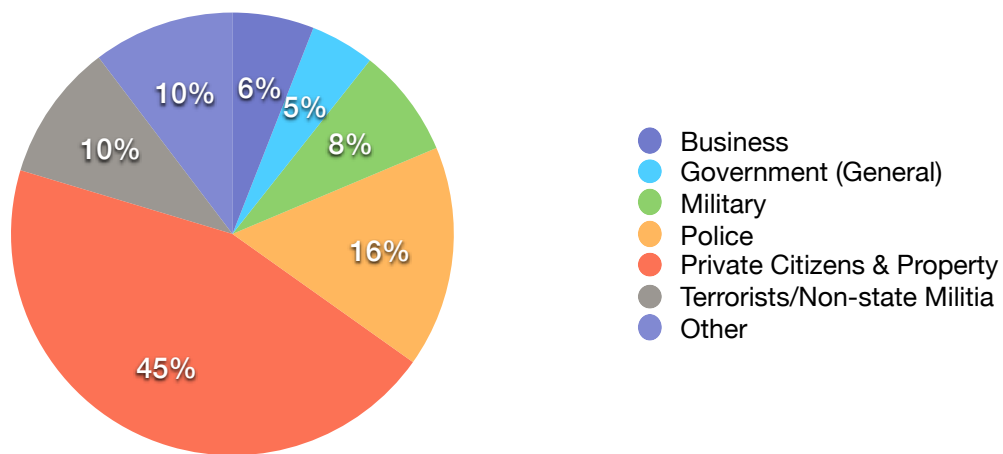


| | |
|---|---|
| Business | **161** |
| Government (General) | **127** |
| Military | **216** |
| Police | **437** |
| Private Citizens & Property | **1.211** |
| Terrorists/Non-state Militia | **271** |
| Other | **279** |

## 2. Attack type
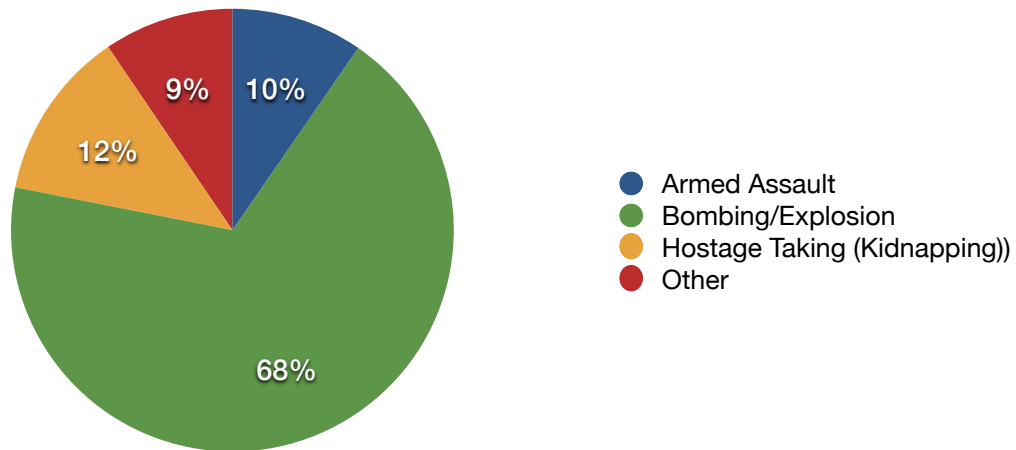


| Armed Assault | **231** |
|---|---|
| Bombing/Explosion | **1.645** |
| Hostage Taking (Kidnapping) | **298** |
| Other | **228** |

## 3. Weapon type
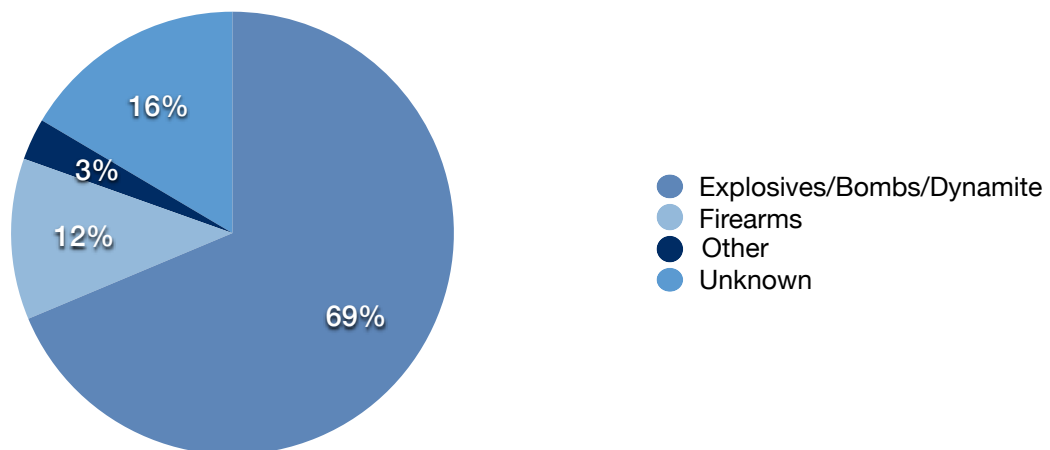


| Explosives/Bombs/Dynamite | **1.686** |
|---|---|
| Firearms | **289** |
| Other | **75** |
| Unknown | **405** |

## 5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has analyzed three different Sunni terrorist organizations using an interpretative grid which considers three main levels of analysis: (1) ideological level; (2) structural level; and (3) operative level. What has emerged from this study is that, on the one hand, Sunni terrorist organizations, despite sharing often a common ideology and similar goals, are in general single entities with different genealogies and distinct organizational structures. On the other hand, this study has also demonstrated that, at an operational level, it is possible to identify a common pattern that connects all the three terrorist organizations examined. In particular, the results of statistical analyses concerning the modus operandi adopted at local level by Al-Qaeda, Hamas and the Islamic State have proven that, in the vast majority of cases, all three organizations decided to hit the same type of target, using the same tactics and weapons.

According to data collected, Private Citizens & Property were the favourite targets of terrorism organizations with an average percentage of 41% of cases. Specifically, between 2001 and 2015 civilians were targeted by Al-Qaeda in 24% of attacks. Similarly, the self-proclaimed Islamic State hit private citizens in 45% of attacks, while Hamas even in 56%. In terms of type of attack, instead, all three organizations not only preferred bombing and explosion, but also share almost the same percentages with Al-Qaeda that used tactical bombing in 77% of cases, Hamas in 73% and the Islamic State in 68% of attacks. Finally, the most common weapons used among these terrorist organizations during the period taken into account in this study, were explosives, bombs and dynamite with an average percentage of just over 75% (Al-Qaeda in 84%, Hamas in 73% while the Islamic State in 69% of attacks).

This operational conservatism shows that in the main, the vast majority of terrorists do not deviate from established patterns. According to Hoffman this is because of their fundamental desire to succeed. Because they know if they do not succeed in an attack, they can not terrorize anyone. For this reason, terrorist organizations continue to rely on what they know will work, what they are familiar with, technologies that they have already mastered. In short, what continues to be a pattern of terrorism, even in the 21st

century, as technologically savvy and advanced as it is, is that 'the sophistication of terrorist devices is in their simplicity'[26].

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[26] Hoffman, Bruce Lecture. "Tactics and Technology Use: Modern Warfare vs. Terrorism." *Georgetown University*, December 2015. https://courses.edx.org/courses/course-v1:GeorgetownX+GUIX-501-02x +2015_3T/courseware/5d8b210a56f54548914dd6b5db9ea9f1/d5fac0cfe3b548398f510afdb480588b/

# CONCLUSION

Today we increasingly live in what Zygmunt Bauman has called 'liquid modern society'; a society 'in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines' (Bauman 2005: 1), and where things move and evolve before they solidify.

Unfortunately, terrorists have adapted to the feverish pace of liquid modernity so much so that liberal democracies are now facing a dynamic form of terrorism that is increasingly *liquid* in its nature; a global, delocalized and pervasive phenomenon which seriously jeopardises international peace and security, causing tens of thousands of victims every year — 32,685 deaths in 2014 alone. Modern terrorist organizations are constantly traversing a learning curve. They study different societies and seek out the weakest points to increase the chances of success of their operations. They planted sleeper cells all over the world, have several offices, headquarters and training camps in various country and in many cases receive assistance and support from different states with different cultures. In addition, terrorists study international counterterrorism efforts and adapt to them, which means that they are able to change their modus operandi, their immediate goals, as well as the structure and deployment of their organizations when circumstances require it (Ganor 2015: 13).

Within this framework, understating how modern terrorists operate, distinguishing between the different ideologies and motivations that guide terrorist groups, identifying the principal tactics used among these groups; and above all classifying the main models of organizational structure that islamic terrorist organizations can adopt, can not only help to comprehend modern terrorism — and this is obviously valuable in its own right —, but can also provide insight into policy debates by providing a stronger foundation for thinking through what we should expect groups to be able to do under different scenarios.

In the light of this, this work was written in effort to elaborate a broaden understanding of modern terrorist organizations. It has striven to do so by presenting a comparative grid of interpretation which combines a qualitative analysis of the organizational structures of three specific terrorist groups with a quantitative analysis of

the modus operandi adopted at local level by these. The test cases chosen to illustrate this — Al-Qaeda, Hamas and the self-proclaimed Islamic State — present distinct models of organizational structure, albeit some similarities between Al-Qaeda and Islamic State, which share a certain level of hierarchy and centralization. However, while Al-Qaeda's core leadership 'seeks to centralize the organization's messaging and strategy rather than to manage the daily operations of its franchises'[27], the Islamic States combines a centralized corporate departments, which are used to plan, support and control the regions, with an important administrative decentralized structure by country, region, town and even village.

The heterogeneity in the organizational models of modern islamic terrorist groups can be explained by the fact that terrorism is a social construct that takes place within a given historical and social context (Schmid: 1992). Consequently, a lot of different factors, such as economical, geographical, political, and social factors, contribute to the establishment and development of a terrorist organization, thus making it a single entity with its own characteristics. This study, however, has also shown that, at an operational level, it is possible to identify a common pattern that connects islamic terrorist organizations. In particular, the results of statistical analyses concerning the modus operandi adopted at local level by Al-Qaeda, Hamas and Islamic State have proven that, in the vast majority of cases, all three terrorist groups decided to hit the same type of target, using the same tactics and weapons.

Undoubtedly, the limits of this work are many. Classifying all different organizational structures and identifying all operative tactics used by Al-Qaeda, Hamas and Islamic State is an extremely difficult task, also because in some situations there is a lack of information relating to the internal dynamics of these organizations. However, it is important to emphasize that this work does not intend to provide the final and conclusive answers to the research questions, but merely explores the research topic with varying levels of depth.

In conclusion, the proposed grid of interpretation should be considered simply as a sort of theoretical container divided in various areas within which are grouped some of the main characteristics of islamic terrorist organizations. Basically, it is only a

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[27] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/al-qaeda-v-isis-leaders-structure

preliminary grid, a general framework supported by a few examples and, hopefully, a base for further studies.

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