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## What is the Impact of Foreign Military Intervention on Radicalization?

By: Tom Pettinger<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

In an era where the use of military intervention is being debated by governments and societies all around the globe, the potentially radicalizing impact of the specific *form* of intervention has remained chronically underexplored. The article addresses this lack of research, by examining the radicalizing effects of full-scale military engagement and the consequences of more limited, aerial intervention. In an effort to inform the contentious discussion around foreign military intervention, it draws examples from the 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the more recent airstrikes employed through the US drone programme against Al-Qaeda and coalition strikes against the so-called Islamic State, illustrating the risks and outcomes of 'boots on the ground' versus engaging in more 'distant' warfare. It concludes that whilst other factors clearly play a role in an individual's journey towards extremism, intervention by a foreign power can encourage the process of radicalization, or 'de-pluralization' - the developing perception that there exists only one solution, extreme violence - to take place. However, it finds that the *type* of intervention plays a critical role in determining how individuals experience this process of de-pluralization; full-scale intervention can result in a lack of monitoring alongside frustrations (about lost sovereignty for example), a combination which paves the way for radical ideology. Conversely, airstrikes present those underneath with unequal and unassailable power that cannot be fairly fought, fuelling interest in exporting terrorism back to the intervening countries.

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## Introduction

Foreign military intervention has been a defining feature of 21<sup>st</sup> century life in many regions across the globe, notably in Central Asia and the Middle East. Western intervention in these regions has caused social and political upheaval, and also a rise in terrorism with attacks being exported from these countries to the West.<sup>2</sup> Johnson notes there is a “strong correlation”<sup>3</sup> between military intervention and terrorist ‘blowback’, a relationship which is perhaps a result of the ‘de-pluralization’ of ideas and therefore actions that the perpetrators perceive.<sup>4</sup> However, current literature pays scant attention to the impact of military intervention on terrorism,<sup>5</sup> and, given the huge surge in terrorist attacks across the world,<sup>6</sup> understanding whether this correlation amounts to *causation* - and if it does then why - has never been more important. Choi also argues that any future research on this field should explore more detailed consequences of different types of intervention.<sup>7</sup> Defining terrorism as *behaviour which attempts to affect policy by causing fear through threats or hostile action*,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Whitehead, T. (2015), *Paris Attacks: Special Forces on Streets of UK Amid Fears Britain Could Be Next Target for ISIL*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11995716/Paris-attacks-Britain-on-security-alert-in-wake-of-terror-attacks.html>, The Telegraph, published 15/11/15, accessed 22/11/15

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, C. (2000), *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (Henry Holt: New York), p. 11

<sup>4</sup> Koehler, D. (2015), *Violent Radicalization Revisited: A Practice-Oriented Model*, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=191575>, The International Relations and Security Network, published 26/06/15, accessed 22/11/15

<sup>5</sup> Choi, W. (2011), *Does US Military Intervention Reduce or Increase Terrorism?*, [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1900375](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1900375), American Political Science Association, published 2011, accessed 04/01/15, p. 23

<sup>6</sup> Global Terrorism Database (2015), *Browse by Date*, <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/BrowseBy.aspx?category=date>, Global Terrorism Database, published 2015, accessed 22/11/15

<sup>7</sup> Choi, W. (2011), *log. cit.*, p. 24

<sup>8</sup> Based on: UN (2004), *UN Security Council Resolution: S/RES/1566* (2004), 08/10/04. For more readings on definitions, see: Perry, N. (2004), ‘Numerous Federal Legal Definitions of Terrorism: The Problem of Too Many Grails’, in *Journal of Legislation*, Vol. 30, pp. 249-50

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and in a framework of de-pluralization - whereby individuals perceive ever fewer alternatives to extreme violence - this discussion helps to fill that void by examining whether intervention is responsible for causing terrorism, and exactly what about military intervention could motivate such backlash. To achieve this, it firstly explores the impact of full-scale intervention (with boots on the ground), looking at how national sovereignty is undermined, civil order compromised, and cultural conflict maximized. The discussion then turns to limited intervention (with strikes solely from the air); investigated are the unequal power dynamics, the lack of human interaction, and the perceived 'War on Islam'. Finally, it briefly touches on some of the other factors outside of military intervention necessary for radicalization to occur, and also the challenges of defining terrorism in such circumstances. A crucial aspect of this article is the examination of the de-pluralization of choices along with an increased urgency to act perceived by those radicalized (Koehler even suggests this process itself *is* radicalization).<sup>9</sup> It concludes that full-scale intervention and limited intervention have different outcomes: *boots on the ground* leads to a rise in suicide attacks, as well as civilian and cultural casualties which encourage retribution, whilst *strikes from above* are perceived as unfair, and the unequal power struggle without human interaction causes more widespread support for terrorism.

### Full-Scale Intervention

Militarily intervention with boots on the ground is often an enormously contentious issue for citizens of the occupied country, as well as for observers around the world. Indeed, the 'mere' US military presence in Saudi Arabia, given that Islam's holiest locations were nearby, was "a huge recruiting device for al-Qaeda"<sup>10</sup> and one of bin Laden's principal

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<sup>9</sup> Koehler, D. (2015), *loc. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Wolfowitz, P. in Quandt, W. (2005), *Peace Process* (University of California Press: California), p. 503

grievances.<sup>11</sup> The large-scale interventions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were undertaken primarily by the US in the War on Terror, with combat troops being sent to both Iraq and Afghanistan. In this context, the discussion examines the consequences of full-scale intervention on perceived territorial sovereignty (notably suicide attacks), civil order, and finally cultural conflict.

As the US led its allies in the War on Terror by occupying Iraq and Afghanistan, its reputation in the region was already waning because the sanctions against Saddam Hussein's regime had caused enormous civilian suffering,<sup>12</sup> and also for its close ties with Israel.<sup>13</sup> The territorial integrity of local tribes and individuals was therefore being challenged by an unpopular (and non-Islamic) force. It also appeared unaccountable; for example, US troops in Afghanistan were immune from being tried by local courts for crimes carried out in the country.<sup>14</sup> In this context, "[occupier] military assaults cause local people to turn to terrorist tactics... as a way to preserve their territorial integrity"<sup>15</sup>, an option which seems especially justified if the power is perceived as unjust.<sup>16</sup> For those who are taken in by the propaganda presented to them by recruiters (or other already-radicalized individuals in their social networks), terrorism is displayed - and soon becomes for the new recruits - "an

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<sup>11</sup> Crenshaw, M. (2001), 'Why America? The Globalization of Civil War,' in *Current History*, Vol. 100, Issue 650, pp. 425-32

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF (1999), Iraq Surveys Show 'Humanitarian Emergency', <http://www.unicef.org/newsline/99pr29.htm>, UNICEF, published 12/08/99, accessed 22/11/15; Bowen, J. (1999), *World: Middle East Iraqis Blame Sanctions for Child Deaths*, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/418625.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/418625.stm), BBC, published 12/08/99, accessed 22/11/15

<sup>13</sup> Prados, I. (2001), *CRS Report: Middle East Attitudes towards the United States*, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/crs/rl31232.pdf>, The Library of Congress, published 31/12/01, accessed 06/01/15

<sup>14</sup> DeYoung, K. (2008), *Only a Two-Page 'Note' Governs US Military in Afghanistan*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/27/AR2008082703628.html>, Washington Post, published 28/08/08, accessed 22/11/15

<sup>15</sup> Choi, W. (2011), *log. cit.*, p. 9

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

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*inevitable* backlash against the violations of others (author's emphasis)".<sup>17</sup> This concept of inevitability is explained by Koehler, who suggests that because of an

“erasure of competing issues [which makes] the need to address the problem appear increasingly urgent... some radicalized individuals *need* to act and behave violently [and] beyond a certain point, other options are not visible or feasible to them.”<sup>18</sup>

Echoing this sentiment, Crenshaw notes that those who are subject to foreign military occupation often feel “constrained in their options... by the superior power arrayed against them”.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, practically, insurgent and terrorist attacks on occupiers are occasionally successful in regaining their sovereignty by coercing military occupiers to withdraw; French troops for example were withdrawn from Lebanon following a terrorist attack on their barracks in the 1980s.<sup>20</sup> Therefore in the face of the powerful Western forces in their War on Terror, fighting back seemed an attractive option to many to attempt to regain their local territorial sovereignty from a perceived un-Islamic and unjust force,<sup>21</sup> and terrorist attacks rocketed in both Afghanistan and Iraq (see Graphs 1 and 2). The success is built into the ideology that promotes the idea that there is no other alternative to extreme reactions; as Koehler writes, the process of “radicalization leading to acts of violence and terrorism is essentially a de-pluralization process”.<sup>22</sup> Other issues become more and more

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<sup>17</sup> Victoroff, J. (2006), *Tangled Roots: Social and Psychological Factors in the Genesis of Terrorism* (IOS Press: Amsterdam), p. 296

<sup>18</sup> Koehler, D. (2015), *Violent Radicalization Revisited: A Practice-Oriented Model*, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=191575>, The International Relations and Security Network, published 26/06/15, accessed 22/11/15

<sup>19</sup> Crenshaw, M. (1990), ‘The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behaviour as a Product of Strategic Choice’, in eds. Reich, W., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Washington DC), pp. 7-24

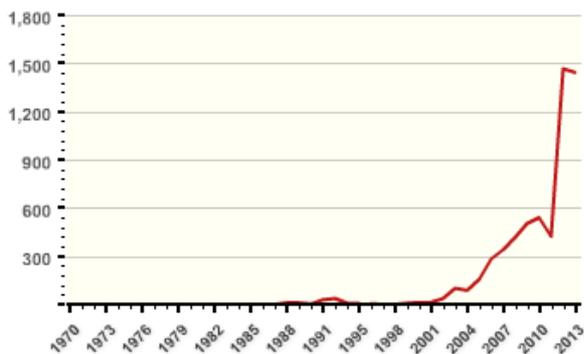
<sup>20</sup> Cronin, A. (2009), *How Terrorism Ends* (Princeton University Press: New Jersey), p. 6

<sup>21</sup> Prados, I. (2001), *op. cit.*

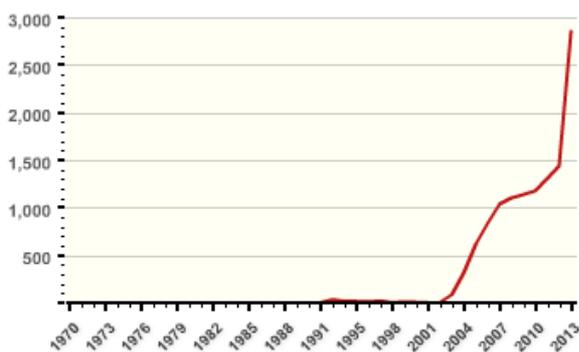
<sup>22</sup> Koehler, D. (2015), *loc. cit.*

unimportant as the ideology - which suggests only one logical solution - takes a hold, and the “the need to address the problem [appears] increasingly urgent”,<sup>23</sup> essentially causing the radicalization.

**Graph 1: Terrorist Attacks by Year: Afghanistan<sup>24</sup>**



**Graph 2: Terrorist Attacks by Year: Iraq<sup>25</sup>**



<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Global Terrorism Database (2015), *Browse by Country*, <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/BrowseBy.aspx?category=country>, Global Terrorism Database, published 2015, accessed 22/11/15

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

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Suicide attacks, provoked by and targeted at a perceived unaccountable and overpowering occupying force, are primarily focussed on ending the foreign occupations or as a measure to counter the subjugation of ethnic groups.<sup>26</sup> Senior CATO Institute fellow Bandow notes that over 95% of suicide attacks are motivated to compel foreign occupations to withdraw.<sup>27</sup> In fact, Pape emphasizes that “from Lebanon to Israel to Sri Lanka to Kashmir to Chechnya,”<sup>28</sup> every single suicide attack campaign between 1980 and 2001 was aimed at regaining its community’s sovereignty by compelling foreign military intervention to withdraw. Because “the most important goal that a community can have is the independence of its homeland... from foreign influence or control,”<sup>29</sup> when a community’s sovereignty is challenged, those affected are more willing to pay the ultimate sacrifice to achieve their goals. Enhancing Koehler’s claims that the process of radicalization is one of realizing only one logical solution (of radical violence) exists, Asad suggests that suicide terrorism occurs by virtue of having no other alternative to prevent “the coercive transformation of [a particular] way of life”.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, a recurring side-effect of full-scale intervention is that civil order is compromised. For Afghanistan, the Taliban government had instilled law and order, albeit very ruthlessly, and the Western intervention from 2001 brought back scenes of chaos similar to the 1990s civil war. It is widely-accepted that failed states breed terrorism;<sup>31</sup> full-scale military intervention is liable to produce similar effects of considerable political and social instability. Destabilized local political systems, as a result of intervention, serve as “a

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<sup>26</sup> Bjørge, T. (2005), *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Reality and Ways Forward* (Routledge: London), p. 257

<sup>27</sup> Bandow, D. (2010), *Terrorism: Why They Want to Kill Us*, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/doug-bandow/terrorism-why-they-want-t\\_b\\_631942.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/doug-bandow/terrorism-why-they-want-t_b_631942.html), Huffington Post, published 07/01/10, accessed 05/01/15

<sup>28</sup> Pape, R. (2003), ‘The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism’, in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, Issue 3, pp. 1-19

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Asad, T. (2007), *On Suicide Bombing* (Columbia University Press: New York), p. 37

<sup>31</sup> Howard, T. (2015), *Failed States and the Origins of Violence* (Ashgate: Surrey), p. 3

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lightning rod for terrorism”<sup>32</sup> because they discourage the effective monitoring of law enforcement.<sup>33</sup> Bouhana and Wikström state that where individuals experience a high degree of monitoring, they are unlikely to perceive negatively abnormal (in their study *criminal*) behaviour as viable, but where this monitoring is curtailed and the less they are sanctioned for such behaviour, the more they view negatively abnormal behaviour as viable.<sup>34</sup> Koehler extends this notion to the process of radicalization, arguing that this process necessitates one solution, or a very limited number of solutions.<sup>35</sup> Disrupting sensitive local power relations between individuals, religious factions or ethnic groups by occupying military forces therefore almost always has an “unforeseen consequence [of] an increase of terrorist activity”.<sup>36</sup>

Where intervention leads to civilian casualties, it can seriously hamper military missions, as such instances lead directly to greater levels of terrorist attacks against the occupiers.<sup>37</sup> This cycle occurs because such casualties play into the hands of recruiters, who strive to advance the notion that the *only* solution to protect the local population is radical violence in return - essentially the process of de-pluralization. This is often successful where civilian deaths occur, as a greater pool of potential recruits is available who are understandably aggrieved at the loss of family or friends, and who are therefore more

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<sup>32</sup> Eland, I. (2007), *Excessive US Military Action Overseas Breeds Anti-US Terrorism*, [http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/615\\_Eland.pdf](http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/615_Eland.pdf), Religion and Terrorism Conference Paper, published 2007, accessed 04/01/15, p. 13

<sup>33</sup> Bouhana, N., Wikström, P. (2011), *Al Qa'ida-Influenced Radicalization: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory*, Occasional Paper 97, Home Office, published Nov 2011, p. 28

<sup>34</sup> Bouhana, N., Wikström, P. (2011), *loc. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> Koehler, D. (2015), *loc. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Choi, W. (2011), *op. cit.*, p. 16

<sup>37</sup> Condra, L. et al. (2010), *The Effect of Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq*, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w16152.pdf>, National Bureau of Economic Research, published July 2010, accessed 06/01/15, pp. 33-5

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vulnerable to recruitment.<sup>38</sup> The Taliban found this to their advantage following the US bombing raids of Afghanistan in 2001, which caused many civilians to die as ‘collateral damage’, enabling them to recruit more easily.<sup>39</sup> Possibly as a result of affected locals feeling that their sovereignty and self-determination is under fire from being occupied militarily *by foreigners*, the backlash from civilian casualties occurs to a far greater degree *against the occupiers* compared to civilian casualties caused by terrorists and insurgents.<sup>40</sup>

The final aspect of full-scale intervention investigated is how cultural conflict comes to the fore. US values in particular are often viewed as “fundamentally alien, if not hostile, to Islamic beliefs and values”.<sup>41</sup> Given the overbearing force that appears arrogant, causes instability and occasionally results in civilian deaths, a cocktail of motivations is produced for locals to become vulnerable to the process of radicalization - or de-pluralization of values and therefore behaviours<sup>42</sup> - by recruiters. As well as being perceived to hold diametric values, inadvertent cultural offences - like the burning of Korans in Afghanistan in 2012 - play a role in an increase in attacks on foreign troops.<sup>43</sup> This sort of insult against culturally important symbols can play into the ideology that describes the intervening force (and even groups as generalized as ‘America’ or ‘the West’) as inherently evil, which can in turn be explained by recruiters as needing a radical rather than a truly considered solution. Where this preconception of the ‘evil occupier’ already exists, such events easily exacerbate the

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<sup>38</sup> Merari, A. (2007), ‘Psychological Aspects of Suicide Terrorism’, in eds., Bongar, B. et. al., *Psychology of Terrorism* (Oxford University Press: Oxford), pp. 101-115

<sup>39</sup> Rashid, A. (2010), *Taliban* (IB Tauris: New York), p. 223

<sup>40</sup> For more information, see: Condra, L. et al. (2010), *The Effect of Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq*, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w16152.pdf>, National Bureau of Economic Research, published July 2010, accessed 06/01/15, pp. 33-5

<sup>41</sup> Prados, I. (2001), *log. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Koehler, D. (2015), *loc. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Whitlock, C. (2012), *US Troops Tried to Burn 500 Korans in Blunder, Investigative Report Says*, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/military-disciplines-9-service-members-in-connection-with-afghan-incidents/2012/08/27/a25b6eaa-f065-11e1-8b5e-add8e2fb7c95\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/military-disciplines-9-service-members-in-connection-with-afghan-incidents/2012/08/27/a25b6eaa-f065-11e1-8b5e-add8e2fb7c95_story.html), Washington Post, published 27/08/12, accessed 06/01/15

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process of de-pluralization, and therefore cause a greater level of radicalization, as the group begins to understand that “a decreasing number of viable solutions and methods are available to tackle [the growing problem]”.<sup>44</sup> Where the soldiers are culturally uneducated or do not speak the language of the region which they occupy, the probability of cultural offences rises. Had local Afghans (and thus native Pashto speakers) been charged with disposing of the Korans rather than US troops with little experience of Islamic culture, they may have been able to prevent the burning of the religious texts and the consequential backlash. Globalization has forced an aspect of this clash of Western and Islamic cultures<sup>45</sup> upon regions around the world, however the presence of militaries with little understanding of other cultures brings this clash to a physical reality,<sup>46</sup> and “represents an onslaught to less privileged people in conservative cultures repelled by the fundamental changes that these forces are bringing.”<sup>47</sup> The increasing proximity of different cultures brings a “tension [which] leads to aggression [which in turn] leads to conflict.”<sup>48</sup> To combat this fundamental challenge to traditional and particularly conservative Islamic ways of life, recruiters are able to promote the idea of two disparate cultures and two choices: joining ‘them or us’, either the evil West, or the terrorist group with one solution of extremist violence.<sup>49</sup> This de-pluralization is made more effective where cultural clashes are notably frequent, offensive and visible.

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<sup>44</sup> Koehler, D. (2015), *loc. cit.*

<sup>45</sup> Huntington, S. (1993), ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’, in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, Issue 3, pp. 22-49

<sup>46</sup> Cronin, A. (2002), ‘Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism’, in *International Security*, Vol. 27, Issue 3, pp. 30-58

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Galtung, J. (1974), *A Structural Theory of Revolutions* (Rotterdam University Press: Rotterdam), p. 67

<sup>49</sup> Aly, W., in Manser, E. (2015), ‘Islamic State is Weak’, Says Waleed Aly,

<http://thenewdaily.com.au/news/2015/11/17/isil-weak-waleed-aly/>, The New Daily, published 17/11/15, accessed 10/12/15

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## Limited Intervention

Another form of military intervention is through targeted air strikes with manned planes and drones, without sending combat troops to support operations on the ground. The discussion looks at the different consequences from this limited form of intervention, notably the outcome in Iraq and Syria, as well as countries ‘underneath’ drone strikes. It explores the impact of the unassailable power of jets and drones, the consequences of no human interaction, and how primarily air strikes are perceived widely as a ‘war on Islam’.

As with full-scale interventions, airstrikes contribute a similar dynamic of compromising the sovereignty of other states’ territory.<sup>50</sup> However, they demand far less risk from those carrying out the intervention, because their soldiers, drone controllers and pilots are largely out of harm’s way, especially in contrast with infantry carrying out foot patrols for example. In regions where the US drone programme has taken place, the perception is of dishonourable, cowardly and unequal warfare, because the airstrikes are not matched with risk to US personnel.<sup>51</sup> For this reason “there is a psychological acceptance of al-Qaeda”<sup>52</sup> against such ‘distant war’<sup>53</sup> in many of these places. Such warfare gives rise to the seeming invulnerability of those intervening, and the hopelessness of living under the threat of drone or air strikes can cause - especially where civilian casualties are caused - the de-pluralization, and thusly the radicalization, of individuals rapidly, even of individuals who would have previously supported anti-terrorist measures.<sup>54</sup> The would-be Times Square bomber gave

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<sup>50</sup> Singer, P. (2010), *Wired for War* (Penguin: London), p. 310

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 313

<sup>52</sup> Mayo, A. in Raghavan, S. (2012), *In Yemen, US Airstrikes Breed Anger and Sympathy for Al-Qaeda*, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/in-yemen-us-airstrikes-breed-anger-and-sympathy-for-al-qaeda/2012/05/29/gJQAUmKIoU\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/in-yemen-us-airstrikes-breed-anger-and-sympathy-for-al-qaeda/2012/05/29/gJQAUmKIoU_story.html), Washington Post, 29/05/12, accessed 05/01/15

<sup>53</sup> Singer, P. (2010), op. cit., p. 310

<sup>54</sup> International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic (2012), *Living Under Drones*, <http://www.livingunderdrones.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Stanford-NYU-Living-Under-Drones.pdf>, New York University School of Law, published Sept 2012, accessed 07/01/15, p. 135

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his motivation as revenge for indiscriminate air strikes.<sup>55</sup> This occurs as a result of affected individuals coming to understand that nobody will be held to account for deaths caused by such strikes, and terrorist groups encourage the view that only radical solutions are viable, and they are necessary to prevent a greater death toll. The logic that strikes would go unanswered except for terrorism is persuasive; the lack of human interaction from the strikes and the apparent immunity of the US and other countries to any repercussions has fuelled interest in creating these repercussions on Western soil.<sup>56</sup> After all, as Cronin points out, “The relative preponderance of US military power virtually guarantees an impulse to respond asymmetrically.”<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Beyer stresses that “the chronically oppressed often [end up being] the ones that resorts (sic) to violence”<sup>58</sup> because they feel that only a radically violent solution will succeed in countering the intervention. Cronin notes that terrorism is a weapon of the weak;<sup>59</sup> by giving those underneath no chance to fight back fairly, the strikes force considerable weakness upon them, which results consequently in asymmetric revenge attacks. This stark imbalance of power makes it easier for terrorist groups to recruit, as vulnerable individuals are drawn away from reasoned discussion and towards a radical solution through “targeted propaganda, invoking and effectively altering individual values or political concepts”<sup>60</sup> based around the imbalance, until they understand that only extreme actions will suffice.

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<sup>55</sup> Shifrel, S., Gendar, A., Martinez, J. (2010), *Remorseless Times Square Car Bomber Faisal Shahzad Warns: 'We Will Be Attacking the US'*, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/remorseless-times-square-car-bomber-faisal-shahzad-warns-attacking-u-s-article-1.181486>, New York Daily News, published 22/06/10, accessed 07/01/15

<sup>56</sup> O'Connell, M., *Testimony Submitted to US House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform: Lawful Use of Combat Drones*, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Second Hearing on Drone Warfare, 28/04/10, p. 5

<sup>57</sup> Cronin, A. (2002), log. cit.

<sup>58</sup> Beyer, C. (2008), *Violent Globalisms: Conflict in Response to Empire* (Ashgate: Surrey), p. 55

<sup>59</sup> Cronin, A. (2009), op. cit., p. 198

<sup>60</sup> Koehler, D. (2015), loc. cit.

The lack of human interaction through aerial intervention is known to radicalize individuals and communities swiftly in affected areas: this lack of face-to-face contact causes misunderstanding of the consequences on the ground by the ‘attackers’, and also limits how the intentions of the attackers are understood by those underneath. Yemeni activist al-Muslimi told US Congress that drone strikes, which cause an “astonishingly high rate”<sup>61</sup> of civilian casualties, lead to people previously opposing al-Qaeda turning to the terrorist group for support and revenge against the US.<sup>62</sup> Backed up by other research, this dissatisfaction and ultimately radicalization can sweep across whole communities.<sup>63</sup> In the location of the first 2009 Yemen airstrike in which 21 children died, the *Washington Post* reports that - albeit perhaps hyperbolically - “all the residents of the area have joined al-Qaeda.”<sup>64</sup> Since the US began regular drone strikes in Yemen in 2009, terrorist attacks rose from 20 to 400 by 2013, with similar figures in Somalia.<sup>65</sup> Due to the lack of human interaction, the impact of strikes on the communities below, which assume a fear of an insensitive and arrogant oppressor,<sup>66</sup> is widely misunderstood.<sup>67</sup> As there is no human face of intervention to allay concerns of affected civilians or provide explanation for the *intent* of the strikes, a vacuum for terrorist propaganda is established, enabling killed terrorist leaders

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<sup>61</sup> Kennedy, C., Rengger, N. (2012), *The New Assassination Bureau: On The ‘Robotic Turn’ in Contemporary War*, [https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics\\_online/0075.html](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics_online/0075.html), Carnegie Council, published 06/11/12, accessed 11/03/14

<sup>62</sup> al-Muslimi, F. (2013), *Testimony of Farea al-Muslimi*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlbowMfOFhw>, YouTube: SenatorDurbin channel, published 23/04/13, accessed 19/04/14

<sup>63</sup> International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic (2012), op. cit., p. 80-8

<sup>64</sup> Raghavan, S. (2012), log. cit.

<sup>65</sup> Interventions Watch (2014), *Obama’s ‘Successful’ Airstrike Strategy in Yemen and Somalia Resulted in Major Increase in Terrorist Attacks*, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/obamas-successful-airstrike-strategy-in-yemen-and-somalia-resulted-in-major-increase-in-terrorist-attacks/5401129>, Global Research, published 11/09/14, accessed 05/01/15

<sup>66</sup> McChrystal, S. in *Wired* (2013), *Report: US Drone Attacks Rapidly Increasing in Afghanistan*, <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2013-02/20/un-afghanistan-drone-deaths>, *Wired*, published 20/02/13, accessed 03/04/14

<sup>67</sup> Singer, P. (2010), op. cit., p. 311

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to be “[turned] into [local] heroes”,<sup>68</sup> and the notion allowed to spread that only one solution of radical action against the faceless intervener can ensure citizens’ families and communities remain safe. Furthermore, without soldiers on the ground, local circumstances can far less easily be appreciated: airstrikes in 2014 on Syria attempted to prevent IS advances and reduce their capacity for engaging militarily in the region. However, refineries, granaries and crucial infrastructure were hit, with the side-effect of badly affecting civilians in the run-up to winter; situations like these can anger ordinary citizens who feel they are being unfairly targeted.<sup>69</sup> This sort of perceived unfairness increases individuals’ vulnerability to being socialized into a group which shares their concern, a group which then feeds their already-held perspective that they are being unfairly attacked.<sup>70</sup> Once recruited into the group, the individual is exposed to de-pluralization and provided with a gradually narrowing set of solutions, ultimately being presented with little or no choice but to engage in extreme violence.<sup>71</sup>

The US drone programme and airstrikes against IS, because they have predominantly been undertaken over Muslim-majority states, are sometimes understood as a ‘War on Islam’;<sup>72</sup> Bin Laden claimed that his grievance was ultimately against “aggressive intervention against Muslims in the whole world”,<sup>73</sup> and in response to this perceived attack on Islam, Jabhat al-Nusra threatened “to attack [the] worldwide interests of coalition

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<sup>68</sup> al-Ahmadi, M. in Raghavan, S. (2012), log. cit.

<sup>69</sup> Mahmood, M., Black, I. (2014), *Coalition Air Strikes against ISIS Aid Bashar al-Assad, Syrian Rebels Claim*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/09/syria-isis-bashar-al-assad-coalition-air-strikes>, The Guardian, published 09/10/14, accessed 07/01/15

<sup>70</sup> Staub, E. (1990), ‘Moral Exclusion, Personal Goal Theory, and Extreme Destructiveness’, in *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 46, Issue 1, pp. 47-64

<sup>71</sup> Koehler, D. (2015), *loc. cit.*

<sup>72</sup> BBC (2014), *Armed Forces Imam: UK ‘Not at War with Islam’*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25680658>, BBC, published 13/01/14, accessed 07/01/15

<sup>73</sup> Crenshaw, M. (2001), log. cit.

members”.<sup>74</sup> It is arguably natural that “the attacked respond with violence”<sup>75</sup> to counter and end the threat against them. The coalition airstrikes in Syria in 2014/5 are similarly condemned in some quarters for seeming to be attacking the entire religion of Islam, particularly as Western help was not forthcoming against the Assad regime’s oppression.<sup>76</sup> However, on this point the argument for de-pluralization may be extended rather than just through indoctrination to practical necessity; the militants may not have become radicalized through ideology but instead through a need to provide for their families or protect themselves against Islamic State repercussions. Adam Holloway MP commented that “most of the people whom we call Daesh in Syria and Iraq are the ordinary Sunnis. We have to give them a more meaningful choice”<sup>77</sup> than being involved with either Islamic State or other militias.

## Limitations

Foreign military intervention is doubtlessly a factor in encouraging extreme behaviour because of the limited solutions it presents people with, the number of people vulnerable to socialization and recruitment, and the messages and propaganda that thrive in such an environment. However, even where terrorism is inspired by foreign policy, other factors also play a role.<sup>78</sup> The discussion turns briefly to examining the individual’s

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<sup>74</sup> G4S (2014), *Impact of Coalition Airstrikes against Islamic State*, <https://www.gis.g4s.com/files/Impact%20of%20Coalition%20Airstrikes%20against%20the%20Islamic%20State.pdf>, G4S, 28/10/14, accessed 05/01/15

<sup>75</sup> Beyer, C. (2008), op. cit., p. 62

<sup>76</sup> Murad, in Mahmood, M. (2014), *US Air Strikes in Syria Driving anti-Assad Groups to Support ISIS*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/23/us-air-strikes-syria-driving-anti-assad-groups-support-isis>, The Guardian, published 23/11/14, accessed 05/01/15

<sup>77</sup> HC Deb 2 Dec 2015, c. 414

<sup>78</sup> For more information, see: Crenshaw, M. (1981), ‘The Causes of Terrorism’, in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 13, Issue 4, pp. 379-99

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opportunity to engage in radical behaviour, including the role of the Internet, and then challenges the definition of 'terrorism' within the setting of foreign interventions.

The opportunities available to an individual to engage in terrorism are a crucial determining factor in whether they become involved in extremism. Bouhana and Wikström suggest that where the behaviour of individuals is monitored, people act in a way more conducive to society and it is less likely that they will perceive criminal, immoral or anti-social actions as a "viable alternative"<sup>79</sup> to pro-social behaviour. Koehler's argument goes further than Bouhana and Wikström, as noted, suggesting that rather than extremism just being a viable behaviour, the process of radicalization is defined by extreme action (in the context of ideological urgency) being the *only* perceived choice.<sup>80</sup>

Likewise, where monitoring is reduced or removed altogether, such as in a time of civil war where the State cannot enforce its laws effectively, Bouhana and Wikström comment that individuals are more prone to engaging in radical behaviour.<sup>81</sup> The *threat* of sanctioning, as well as the actual sanctioning of criminal and extreme behaviour, plays a part in determining the individual's path to radicalism. Where social order is prevalent, states prevent unrestricted access to extremist organizations through the enforcement of law;<sup>82</sup> this successful monitoring by the State of their citizens reduces what Bouhana and Wikström describe as the individuals' 'propensity to commit crime'.<sup>83</sup> However, civil strife lowers the barriers to entry of terrorism for vulnerable people, as they see opportunities that would cost more than they are willing to sacrifice - such as their freedom - where the criminal justice system is effective.<sup>84</sup> Foreign military intervention can be the cause such breakdown of legal systems that ensured some level of monitoring, restricting vulnerable people from

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<sup>79</sup> Bouhana, N., Wikström, P. (2011), *loc. cit.*

<sup>80</sup> Koehler, D. (2015), *op. cit.*, figure 1

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>82</sup> Bjørgero, T. (2005), *op. cit.*, p. 258-9

<sup>83</sup> Bouhana, N., Wikström, P. (2011), *loc. cit.*

<sup>84</sup> Gurr, T. (1968), 'Psychological Factors in Civil Violence', in *World Politics*, Vol. 20, Issue 2, pp. 245-78

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perceiving radical actions as viable behaviour. For example, the Western wars in Iraq and Syria have been argued to have caused the breakdown of civil governance in the region, and a subsequent rise in extremism because of the relative lack of legal ramifications for such behaviour.<sup>85</sup>

Alongside lower monitoring through State apparatus - like the force of the law - where foreign intervention occurs, the 'Internet Age' has rendered joining a terrorist organization much easier by reducing monitoring of citizens by their own social networks (like parents, friends or teachers for example). Awan, for example, notes that online forums such as Mujahedon.net are often not monitored by the site moderators.<sup>86</sup> As grooming becomes easier due to the limited oversight of online interactions,<sup>87</sup> it arguably paves the way for real grievances - like foreign military intervention - to play a diminished role, and critically, a sense of belonging to a social network<sup>88</sup> through interactions on the Internet having a greater radicalizing influence on individuals.<sup>89</sup> These online interactions provide them with increased opportunity to engage, contributing towards the lowering of barriers which would prevent them from seeing extreme actions as possible.<sup>90</sup> This socialization or 'grooming', presents recruiters with an ideal opportunity with which to de-pluralize their targets; they identify an individual's problems, contextualizing it with their "background and experiences to connect wider, global problems with [the individual's] micro-social

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<sup>85</sup> Cordesman, A. (2015), *Iraq Stability and the 'ISIS War'*, <http://csis.org/publication/iraqi-stability-and-isis-war>, Center for Strategic and International Studies, published 12/08/15, accessed 13/10/15

<sup>86</sup> Awan, A. (2007), 'Virtual Jihadist Media', in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 10, Issue 5, pp. 389-408

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Boudreau, C. (2015), *Personal Communication with Author: Structured Interview*, Skype, 11/08/15

<sup>89</sup> Conway, M. (2012), 'From al-Zarqawi to al-Awlaki: The Emergence of the Internet as a New Form of Violent Radical Milieu', in *Combating Terrorism Exchange*, Vol. 2, Issue 4, pp. 12-22

<sup>90</sup> Burke, J. (2014), *Islamic State: What Factors Have Fuelled the Rise of the Militants?*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/20/islamic-state-isis-rise-militants-al-qaida-somalia-arab>, The Guardian, 20/08/14, accessed 05/01/15

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issues”.<sup>91</sup> Once this has occurred and the target feels part of the social network as a result, it allows the recruiters to push the message that few solutions are available, and the urgency to act is heightened.<sup>92</sup>

Moreover, the definition of terrorism is subjective particularly where foreign military intervention is concerned. Attacks against soldiers occupying Afghanistan or Iraq, forces who were perceived to undermine states’ sovereignty and inhabitants’ way of life, are more difficult to categorize; cases like these largely appear as ‘terrorism’ to the West but as ‘fighters of freedom’ to those supporting an insurgency against those intervening. Furthermore, sometimes even the understanding of ‘extremists’ changes through time: many who later formed the Taleban were supported by the West as liberators in the 1980s against Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, but 20 years later denounced as terrorists.<sup>93</sup> Often, there are also significant differences in the aims of members and factions within extremist groups - such as the differences between the moderate and more hardline Taleban factions<sup>94</sup> - despite these organizations generally being categorized as unified ‘terrorist groups’.

## Recommendations

Where it *does* occur, radicalization needs to be countered with re-pluralization, which may take place through various routes. Firstly, the sharing of ideas and communication in communities should be encouraged, possibly through physical discussion

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<sup>91</sup> Koehler, D. (2015), *loc. cit.*

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Global Research (2012), *Sleeping with the Devil: How US and Saudi Backing of Al-Qaeda Led to 9/11*, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/sleeping-with-the-devil-how-u-s-and-saudi-backing-of-al-qaeda-led-to-911/5303313>, Global Research, published 05/09/12, accessed 18/10/15

<sup>94</sup> The Guardian (2010), *US Embassy Cables: Moderate Taliban Distance Themselves from Regime*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/164257>, The Guardian, published 02/12/10, accessed 18/10/15

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groups, to demonstrate that there are multiple choices in any situation. Where radicalization has occurred already but they are willing to engage in discussion, employ non-confrontational programmes like the Aarhus Model<sup>95</sup> to help them understand again that the world is complicated and full of complex and varied solutions. A focus should be made on their family and friends where possible, to help them provide support and understand the individual's struggle, enabling those around to empathize with them. More broadly, an effort should be made to discourage divisive narratives in the media, particularly regarding the Muslim faith. Furthermore, on a foreign policy level, the author argues that political solutions rather than purely military intervention should always be the primary and ultimate answer.<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion

In sum, therefore, foreign military intervention causes backlash through terrorism, and the form of input (of intervention) affects what the output (of terrorism) looks like. However, importantly the individual's propensity to engage in extremism, based on their level of de-pluralization, plays a critical role in determining their level of radicalization. The US in particular is seen as an overbearing and unaccountable force when it engages in full-scale interventions, undermining nations' and inhabitants' sovereignty; suicide attacks especially occur as a result as they are notoriously successful at repelling these perceived attacks on local integrity. Full-scale intervention often leads to the destabilizing of local power structures, which, like failed states, establish a breeding ground for terrorism. Foreign troops generally under-appreciate local cultures and largely do not speak local languages, resulting in tension and therefore greater levels of backlash, which is only exacerbated by

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<sup>95</sup> BBC (2015), *How I Was Deradicalized*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-33344898>, BBC, 02/07/15, accessed 22/11/15

<sup>96</sup> HC Deb 2 Dec 2015, c. 414

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inevitable civilian casualties. Limited interventions through airstrikes provide different results; the lack of human interaction is decisive in how repercussions occur, and importantly how individuals' levels of de-pluralization are managed. Similarly overawing, the aerial attacks override territorial sovereignty but provide attackers with complete safety, giving rise to the perception of an unfair and dishonourable 'distant war' that provides no recourse to mutual understanding, enhancing the perception that few alternatives are available except to engage in radical behaviour. Where civilian casualties occur, whole communities as well as individuals turn against those intervening and towards a radical solution because of the attacker's "unjust and arrogant exertion of power"<sup>97</sup> without explanation of intent. However, why terrorism exists is a multi-faceted answer.<sup>98</sup> Many variants affect an individual's journey towards extremism; clearly terrorism does not exist solely as a result of foreign military intervention, although aspects of foreign intervention cause the process of de-pluralization to quicken. But where foreign policy is a key factor in radicalization, individuals are affected by opportunities to engage they are presented with, notably social networks online. However, it should be noted that whilst terrorism caused by foreign intervention is clearly a tragedy on many levels, an intervention could aid the transition from a dictatorship to democracy and lower terrorism levels overall could result in the long-run.<sup>99</sup> Ultimately, where it occurs, foreign military intervention is a powerful factor that has the capacity to push people strongly towards terrorism in different ways depending upon the type of intervention.

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<sup>97</sup> Beyer, C. (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 66

<sup>98</sup> Crenshaw, M. (1981), *loc. cit.*

<sup>99</sup> Abadie, A. (2004), *Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism*, <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/aabadie/povterr.pdf>, Harvard University, published 2004, accessed 10/11/14

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