

# **Dont Play Into Their Hands**

What Every Journalist Should Know about  
the Media Strategies of Isis and al-Qaida

**Jukka Huusko**

Europäische Journalisten-Fellowships

Freie Universität Berlin

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## Contents:

1	Introduction	3
2	The Interplay Between Terrorism and Media	6
2.1	Types of Terrorism: From State Terrorism to Religious Terrorism	9
2.2	In the Name of the Faith - What is Religious Terrorism?	10
3	In the bookshelf of a Jihadi – the Worldview of Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu Bakr al-Naji	13
3.1	Abu Musab al-Suri’s Theory of Globalized Individual Jihad	14
3.2	The Media ”Theory” of Abu Musab al-Suri: Instigating the Masses	19
3.3	The guidebook for Polarization: Management of Savagery	21
4	From Theory to Practice: Development of Jihadi Media 26 from Early 2000’s to Present	26
4.1.	From Twitter to Telegram and the Making of a “Media Muhajideen”	30
5	Short history of German Jihad	33
5.1	Terror in Germany 2016-2017	37
6	Conclusions: Ten Theses on Terrorism and Media	42
7	Sources:	53

## 1 Introduction

In February 2016 the newly elected president of the United States, Donald Trump, attacked the international news media with a surprising claim. In his speech to the United States Central Command Trump argued that media doesn't want to cover anymore terrorist attacks carried out by the Islamist extremist. "You've seen what happened in Paris and Nice", Trump said according to the USA Today newspaper. "All over Europe it's happening. It's gotten to a point where it's not even being reported. And in many cases, the very, very dishonest press doesn't want to report it. They have their reasons and you understand that."

Trump's claim generated of course wide opposition from the news media industry. Many newspapers and tv-channels proved that they had covered terrorist attacks and that Trumps arguments had no factual basis. Indeed, terrorist attacks carried out in European soil during 2015-2017, especially those that took place in France, Belgium and Germany, have been widely covered by the professional news media. One can easily say that during two last years the jihadi motivated terrorist attacks in Europe have become one of the main security-related topics in the continent. The attacks have shaken the security of the European countries, or at least the sense of security. Increasing jihadi motivated terrorism, while still very unlikely source of a threat to individuals, has become a media topic that could have far reaching political consequences. Terror and fear, combined with the ongoing refugee crisis that also has security impacts, can be exploited not only by the terrorist themselves but also by other extremist political or insurgent groups who are seeking attention to their own political aspirations.

In this report I will focus on the troublesome relationship between terrorism and the media. It has been long understood by terrorism analysts that modern terrorism is to a large extent a media phenomenon. The simple but powerful logic of terrorism is to spread fear among the target group/audience and by this way to destabilize the societies. To spread terror efficiently modern

terrorists need publicity and the mass media. It is possible to say that without media attention these groups can hardly exist. Terrorist groups such as al-Qaida and the Islamic State (from this on: Isis) have very well understood the important role of media in a war against their enemies. The importance they see in media strategies can be easily found in the strategic handbooks written by the jihadi thinkers themselves. Al-Qaida and Isis have indeed weaponized the media. According to their own handbooks they consider the "media jihad" at least as important as or even more important than the actual military jihad.

What is the role of media in terrorist violence? Do the global jihadis, the most notorious terrorist groups of our time such as al-Qaida and Isis, have specific media strategies? To answer these questions I have studied the strategic texts of the two probably most important and well known jihadi strategists of our time. They are Syrian jihadi and al-Qaida strategist Abu Musab al-Suri and a pseudonym Abu Bakr Naji. Al-Suri has written probably the most well-known jihadi strategic work, the 1600-pages long manifest "Call for the Global Islamic Resistance". Naji has written another jihadi strategic text called "Management of Savagery", which is considered to be the handbook for Isis on how to create a territorial Islamic state.

The aim of this paper is to give especially for journalists some basic information about jihadi ideology and the troublesome relationship between media and terrorism. Before taking a look at the strategic texts of the jihadis I will present in Chapter 2 the communicational theory of terrorism, which is the baseline of my argument. In the same chapter I will shortly try to define, with help of academic literature, some relevant but complicated concepts concerning the topic. Answers to the basic questions like what is terrorism, what is religious terrorism and what is the relationship between Islam and terrorism will be given in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3 of this paper I will take a closer look on strategic texts of al-Suri and Naji and try to find out what these influential jihadi thinkers have written about media - and what kind of media strategies they envision for the global jihadi movement. Reader will find out that media, both independent jihadi media but also the professional mainstream media that covers terrorism, have always played a very important role for the global jihadis. Actually, Abu Musab al-Suri in his personal life made big efforts to establish independent jihadi media in 1990's and even co-operated with the mainstream Western media to get more media coverage for al-Qaida. In Chapter 4 I

will overview how Isis made practice out of media "theories" of al-Suri and Naji. If we look at the success of Isis as a global jihadi movement, the role of their media operations should not be belittled. As Charlie Winter from Kings College has noticed after studying Isis' media handbook: Isis has deliberately weaponized media and journalist should be aware of this.

In Chapter 5 I make a short look on the history of jihadi movement in Germany focusing especially on the role of propaganda and media operations in the development of "German Jihad". I will end up looking at the German terrorist attacks in two past years and try to put them into context. In the last and concluding chapter, Chapter 6, I will present ten thesis on the relationship of media and terrorism and the challenges we may be facing in Europe in the coming years. The last chapter is based on my readings on jihadi media strategies and especially on five interviews with experts conducted during my scholarship in Freie Universität Berlin in 2016-2017. I have interviewed German journalist and counter-radicalization expert Claudia Dantschke, Security Analyst and Consultant Florian Peil, chief reporter Florian Flade from Die Welt, PhD candidate in KLC and expert of jihadism in Germany Jan Raudszus and Finnish expert on jihadism Juha Saarinen.

My hope is that especially the last chapter, with ten thesis on terrorism and media, could work as a teaser that could trigger more discussion among journalists and other media experts on the complicated relationship between media and terrorism. My main argument is that journalists, who are not aware about the relationship between media and terrorism and the media strategies of the global jihadis can easily end up playing into hands of the terrorists.

This paper doesn't however give any (or at least not many) practical solutions to the dilemma of terrorism and media. I believe that the most important key to this dilemma is awareness. When journalists know about the media strategies of global jihadis and when they are aware of the role of media in this conflict, I believe professional media can actually work as an effective antidote to any extremist propaganda. Eventually, this paper could serve as an evidence to president Trump and any others who are (falsely) accusing "dishonest press" of not covering terrorism. Yes, we want to cover terrorism, but this is not simply a question of covering or not covering. Journalists and their audience should understand that terrorism is a form of psychological warfare and political propaganda. Terrorists are desperately seeking media attention, because they

want to use media as a weapon against the audience. Terrorists are deliberately trying to exploit media to make themselves look bigger than they are. This is why I believe that it is very important for professional journalists to have a deeper understanding of this whole phenomena - also of the role media is playing.

## 2 The Interplay Between Terrorism and Media

"The terrible events, which capture the peoples' attention and which the mujahid movement endures, and the steadfastness of human exemplars in the face of the horrors resulting from these events firmly roots ideas in the hearts which could not be taught to people in hundreds of years of peaceful education."  
-Abu Bakr al-Naji in "Management of Savagery"

You may have heard this popular truism about the ambivalence of terrorism: "One person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter". It may be a cliché and definitely a controversial claim, but it has also a grain of truth inside. Those labeled as terrorists often think they are actually freedom fighters and that they are struggling for a legitimate cause. On the contrary, those who are fighting against terrorism or terrorist organizations often think terrorists represent the pure evil. But is it possible for one to consider him-/herself a terrorist and a freedom fighter at the same time? If you look at the ideology and self-understanding of the global jihadis, it seems to be possible.

What is terrorism and who is a terrorist? Even the academic experts on terrorism do not have a solid consensus on the definition of terrorism. I will not go too deep into this academic discussion. I just want remind the reader that there is no complete unanimity among experts what kind of violence constitutes an act of terrorism (Martin 2010: 41). There is however enough agreement. In its most straightforward definition, terrorism can be defined as political violence, which is usually committed by non-state actors. Terrorism is violence or a threat of violence that is usually targeted against the "soft targets", i.e. the civilian people. Targeting civilians has its own simple logic: attacking those who cannot defend themselves is pretty simple and it easily spreads fear around. Dramatic events generate (media) attention and wide attention is always one of the main goals of a terrorist attack. Yes, state actors can also use terrorism against their enemies, even against their own citizens, but perhaps the main difference between state terrorism and insurgent terrorism is the attitude towards publicity: State terrorism usually does not want to stir

up wide global media attention. On the contrary, insurgent terrorism usually seeks wide media attention.

Experts have tried to define terrorism for decades. The baseline of this study is the idea, that modern terrorism cannot be fully understood without understanding the interplay between political violence and the media. At least since 1970's experts have understood the communicational core of a terrorist act. In 1974 American terrorist expert Brian Michael Jenkins formulated a definition that terrorism is "choreographed violence" that always targets to audience. "Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims. Terrorism is theater", Jenkins wrote in his study "International Terrorism: A New Kind of Warfare" (Jenkins, 1974:4).

Another definition of terrorism that meritoriously pays attention to communicational, attention seeking aspect of terrorism, comes from the beginning of the 1980's:

"Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought." (Schmid; Jongman, 1984: Political terrorism : a research guide to concepts, theories, data bases, and literature. In: Linder, 2011: 75).

Many states and international organizations or political unions such as European Union have their own definitions of terrorism. According to European Union definition, terrorism or terrorist offences" are defined as acts committed with the aim of 'seriously intimidating a population', 'unduly compelling a government or international organization to perform or abstain from performing any act', or 'seriously destabilizing or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization'."<sup>1</sup>

The British have defined terrorism as "the use or threat, for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause, of action which involves serious violence against any person or property" (Martin 2010: 42). According to the government of Germany terrorism is an "endu-

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<sup>1</sup> ([http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/571320/EPRS\\_ATA\(2015\)571320\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/571320/EPRS_ATA(2015)571320_EN.pdf))

ringly conducted struggle for political goals, which are intended to be achieved by means of assaults on the life and property of other persons, especially by means of severe crimes” (ibid.).

To emphasize the ”fear factor” of terrorism, here is another widely accepted definition: Terrorism is ”ineluctably political in aims and motives; violent – or, equally important, threatens violence; designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target; conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia); and perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity. We may therefore now attempt to define terrorism as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of change.” (Hoffman, Bruce, (Inside Terrorism) 1998: p.43).

As Bernadette Linder (2011) has outlined, terrorism can be defined as political violence, where the act of violence serves as a transporter of a message, thus constituting a communicative act:

”Terrorismus kann somit als Gewalt gegen willkürlich oder selektiv gewählte Ziele verstanden werden, wobei der Gewaltakt wesentlich als Transporteur einer Botschaft dient und somit einen kommunikativen Akt darstellt. Zudem sind die Attentate meist gegen Nicht-Kombattanten gerichtet und gehen von nicht staatlichen Akteuren aus. Der Terrorakt soll eine politische Reaktion im Sinne der Terrorgruppe herbei führen. Das Zielpublikum soll durch den Anschlag zu einer aktiven Teilnahme mobilisiert und eingeschüchtert oder ein Gefühl von Angst verbreitet werden, damit das Zielpublikum nicht mehr gewillt ist, ein bestimmtes Regime oder dessen Politik zu unterstützen. Die Herrschenden hingegen werden durch den Terrorakt zu einer unverhältnismäßigen Reaktion verleitet, um die innergesellschaftlichen Unstimmigkeiten zu verstärken. Weiters kann Terrorismus als politische Strategie verstanden werden, die einen Wandel der Politik oder der herrschenden Ordnung gewaltsam herbeiführen möchte. Der Begriff des Terrorismus ist eine Zusammenstellung von Einzelmerkmalen, die je nach Betrachter variieren können.” (Linder, 2011: 78).

Because this paper focuses on the interplay between media and terrorism, I will use this communicational theory of terrorism as the baseline of my argumentation. To conclude, terrorism can be defined as a military tactic, committed against ”soft targets”, in order to attract attention, send messages and to reach political goals. As Martin puts it, terrorists seek ”attention and legitimacy for their cause by engaging in publicity oriented violence” (Martin: 49). Terrorist try to deliver ”symbolic messages to a target audience and to large segments of an onlooker audience” (ibid). One message could be to ”show their power preeminently through deeds that embarrass their more powerful opponents”. (ibid: 49-50).



After these definitions it is possible to draw a difference between traditional guerrilla warfare and terrorism, which have a lot of common characteristics. According to Bernadette Linder (2011:79) guerrilla war and terroristic violence are both types of asymmetric warfare. But whereas guerrilla warfare is a *military strategy* by an insurgent group that usually targets states and their representatives such as police and the army, terrorism is a *communication strategy*, where the primary goal of an insurgent group is to send messages to the public. Moreover, where the guerrillas usually aim to conquer a territory, terrorists, according to Linder, are more interested in dominating the public awareness in order to spread their messages, ideology and fear. (Linder 2011: 79).

## 2.1 Types of Terrorism: From State Terrorism to Religious Terrorism

Terrorism can be labeled in different categories. The following classification comes from Gus Martin's book *Understanding Terrorism* (2010). As Labeled according to the perpetrators, terrorism can be:

1) *State terrorism*, terrorism "from above". It is committed by governments against perceived enemies. 2) *Dissident terrorism*, "terrorism from below". It is committed by nonstate movements against governments, ethnonational groups, religious groups or other perceived enemies. 3) *Religious terrorism*, which is motivated by an absolute belief that an otherworldly power has sanctioned or commanded the application of terrorist violence for the greater glory of faith or for the defence of what believers consider to be the one true faith,. 4) *Criminal terrorism*, which is motivated by sheer profit or an amalgam of profit and politics. 5) *International terrorism*, that spills over on the world's stage, and the targets are selected because of their value as symbols of international interests (ibid: 46).

These categories are of course analytical, and in the real world different types of terrorism may overlap. The type of terrorism I'm discussing in this paper will go at least in two of the categories, namely 2, 3 and 5.

Next I will take a closer look to a one specific category of terrorism which is the subject of this paper: religious terrorism.

## 2.2 In the Name of the Faith - What is Religious Terrorism?

According to Martin, terrorism in the name of a religion has become the predominant model for political violence in the modern world. The old ideologies of class conflict, anticolonial liberation and secular nationalism have been challenged by sectarian and religious ideologies. Extremist support for religious violence, Martin states, "has been most widespread among the people living in repressive societies." (Martin: 171.)

In religious terrorism the religious belief system is the main driving or motivating force behind the violent behavior. Acts that are committed in the name of faith will be forgiven by the otherworldly power or even rewarded in an afterlife. According to Martin, "religious faith legitimizes violence so long as such violence is an expression of the will of one's deity." (ibid: 172). Religious terrorism is found today especially in the Middle East and elsewhere among Islamist fundamentalists, in India among Hindu extremists, but also in the Western world, for example in the USA among violent Christian antiabortionists. Religious terrorism is not a phenomenon pertaining only radical Islam. Other religions can become a source of motivation for a violent behavior, and examples can be found in the history (for example Crusaders, Zealots). But it is obvious that currently the most threatening and most widely spread form of religious terrorism comes from the realm of radical Islam.

In the religious ideology of radical Islam the Islamic concept of "jihad" has a very central role. The concept of jihad is indeed a central tenet in Islam in general. Term literally means a sacred struggle or effort. But the radical Islamists, who are often labeled by the Western experts as Salafi-Jihadis, emphasize the meaning of jihad as an armed struggle against the "non-believers", Western "Crusaders" and the "Zionists". According to Martin there is a lot of misunderstanding in the Western world about jihad and it's meaning for the mainstream Muslims. One such misunderstanding is the common belief that the "concept of holy war is an underlying principle of the Islamic faith. Another misunderstanding is that Muslims are united in supporting jihad". (Ibid. 175)

Modern Salafi-Jihadis are, or at least say they are, devoted Muslims. They use religious texts to justify their armed struggle and their political agenda. But this is not to say that Salafi-Jihadis represent the "real Islam" or the essence of the religion of almost two billion people. According to Youssef H. Aboul-Enein and Sherifa Zuhur, global jihadi figures like Osama Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, or Abu Musab al-Zarqawi are not totally ignorant of Islamic law - they are just using it selectively to pursue their own political agenda. "The simplistic visions of paradise for suicide bombers preached by militant jihadist clerics defy over 1,400 years of Islamic history and wisdom", they argue (Aboul-Enein & Zuhur, 2004: 1)

The rise of the violent Salafi-Jihadi ideology in the modern age has a lot to do with the modern history in the Muslim world. According to Martin, the causes for the modern resurgence of the armed and radical jihadi movement are twofold: the revolutionary ideals and ideology of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the practical application of radical Sunni jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. "Some radical Muslim clerics and scholars have concluded", Martin writes, "that the Afghan jihad brought God's judgement against the Soviet Union, leading to the collapse of its empire. As a consequence, radical jihadis fervently believe that they are fighting in the name of an inexorable force that will end in total victory and guarantee them a place in paradise. From their perspective, their war is a just war."

The modern conceptualization of the jihadis, or muhajideen ("holy warriors") began during the Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979-1989). During the war Muslim volunteers around the world came to fight alongside with the Afghan mujahideen. After war those fighters came back to their countries and started spreading the jihadi ideology throughout the Muslim world. The Soviet Union was collapsed, but there were other enemies that could be blamed as an enemies of Islam: Mainly USA and its allies and Israel – and of course the Arab regimes that were allied with USA, and all other religious groups in the Middle East that didn't agree with the worldview of the radical Salafi-Jihadis.

According to Martin, the muhajideen can be characterized by their faith in several basic values:

”The ideology of the modern mujahideen requires selfless sacrifice in defence of the faith. Accepting the title of mujahideen means that one must live, fight and die in accordance with religious teachings. They believe in the inevitability of victory because the cause is being waged on behalf of the faith and in the name of God; both the faith and God will prevail. During the defence of the faith, trials and ordeals should be endured without complaint because the pain suffered in this world will be rewarded after death in paradise”.

According to Robert Marquand, modern jihadist ideology is however a ”hybrid and simplistic blend of Islamic fundamentalism. This Islam seeks to eradicate all forms of Islam other than its own strict literal interpretation of the Koran (...) and justifies violence as a means of purging nations of corruption, moral degradation and spiritual Torpor” (Martin: 195). Or as Jan Raudzsus, German expert on jihadism and PhD Candidate in Kings College London, said:

”It is an argument of statistic really. There are 1,6 billion Muslims and maybe a hundred thousand of terrorists. This doesn’t make the religion a problem. You will always have groups of people that use political violence. I don’t think you need religion or Islam to really explain the political violence because from ever religion you can find some justification and also counter-justification [for violence]. Many social movements and ideologies have a totalitarian version, and the totalitarian version will support political violence.”<sup>2</sup>

But at the same time there is no way to deny, that Salafi-Jihadi’s are motivated by their religion, which is a strict version of Islam. As Juha Saarinen, Finnish expert on jihadism said<sup>3</sup> we should stop debating whether Islam has anything to do with jihadism (of course it has). Instead we should analyze what in jihadi ideology can be explained by religion and what by other factors.

After this short and definitely incomplete overview on the academic definitions of terrorism, I will have a look at the self-understanding of the global jihadis. I will do this by studying the two main strategic books written by the global jihadis themselves.

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<sup>2</sup> Jan Raudzsus, phone interview 12.1. 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Juha Saarinen, Skype interview 12.1. 2017.

### 3 In the bookshelf of a Jihadi - the Worldview of Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu Bakr al-Naji

”Yes, we are terrorists towards God’s enemies. We have already struck terror in them, and we have made them tremble in their holes, in spite of the hundreds of thousands of agents in their security agencies, praise God, and this happened after they had terrorized the countries and the humankind.“

- Abu Musab al-Suri in ”The Call for Global Islamic Resistance”

It is impossible to go inside a head of a jihadi. It is, however, possible to take a look at a bookshelf of a jihadi. From that bookshelf one may find not only Islamic literature but also strategic manifests written by the modern jihadi thinkers themselves. These texts, which keep on circulating on jihadi forums on the Internet, may be considered as a sort of guidebooks to modern Salafi-Jihadi mindset.

There are two main texts terrorism experts consider as the most important pieces of the strategical thinking of Salafi-Jihadis: First is 1600-pages long ”The Call for the Global Islamic Resistance” (from this on: ”The Call”), written by Syrian al-Qaida strategist **Abu Musab al-Suri** (born **Mustafa bin Abd al-Qadir Setmariam Nasar**). Second is ”Management of Savagery” written by pseudonym **Abu Bakr al-Naji**. The previous book is considered to be the main strategic text for global al-Qaida network. The latter is thought to be a main strategic guideline for Isis. Isis and al-Qaida have same ideological and organizational roots but they have been fighting against each other in Syria for years. This doesn’t mean, however, that Isis, for example, does not capitalize the doctrines of al-Suri, even though Isis’ strategic focus in the last few years have been different from al-Suri’s ideas.

In this chapter I will take a look at these texts and try to figure out, how the global Jihadis depict themselves and their cause and why they (from their own point of view) have chosen terrorism as their main military tactic against their enemies. After general overview I will focus on media strategies or notices on the role of media that can be found in these texts. It should be noted that these manifests are theoretical texts. They should not be taken as face-value or over-interpreted as actual operational guidelines for jihadi activities. Salafi-Jihadis probably don't slavishly obey the doctrines formulated in these manifests. But there is a common agreement among the experts that these texts have indeed widely influenced the global jihadi thinking and still are. As German Security Analyst & Consultant Florian Peil put it:

”They are still of a very great importance to jihadi community. Many of those ideas are now common knowledge anyway. People may act like this [= according to al-Suri's ideas] without knowing there was a man who formulated the strategy”.

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Finnish expert on jihadism Juha Saarinen said that these texts are relevant in understanding the global jihadi movement, but they don't ”deterministically drive” their behavior:

“It is reasonable to use these strategic texts to a certain extent. They are guidelines, they have generated discussion and from these discussion the organization has deduced something. But what has always been problematic in studies of war history is that when a militant group produces a text, which is characteristically strategic, and then if you think that they act in this way because these texts were written, then you may have get lost. [...] [Strategic texts] don't deterministically drive their behavior, but the texts can create conditions for thinking and discussions, and based on these discussions they can act in various ways.”<sup>5</sup> [translation from Finnish by Jukka Huusko]

### 3.1 Abu Musab al-Suri's Theory of Globalized Individual Jihad

Syrian jihadist strategist Abu Musab al-Suri is considered to be the main architect of global jihadi strategy. He is known from his youtube video lectures and of his 1600-pages manifest and the history of global jihadi movement ”The Call for Global Islamic Resistance”. This book was downloaded on internet in 2004. Only part of it has been translated to English.

Al-Suri's personal role inside the global jihadi scene is rather ambivalent. For example, he has been criticized in Isis' propaganda magazine Dabiq. On the other hand he has been recommended by the current leader of al-Qaida, Ayman al-Zawahiri. In 2008 al-Zawahiri recommended his followers to explore al-Suri's work. ”The suggestions of Abu Musab [al-Suri] (...) present rich thoughts from which the mujahideen can benefit”, he stated in an audio message according to Site Intelgroup.<sup>6</sup> According to Brynjar Lia, Norwegian professor of history who have translated in English the key excerpts of the ”The Call” and who have written a biography of al-Suri, the

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4 Florian Peil, interview 23.2. 2017, Berlin.

<sup>5</sup> Juha Saarinen, Skype interview 12.1. 2017.

<sup>6</sup> <http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/about-us/21-jihad/21-suri-a-mili>

strategic thinking of Jihadis was for long underestimated. It used to be a common argument to assert that al-Qaida didn't have any strategic plan or strategic thinking. "The accepted argument", Lia writes in the introduction of his book on al-Suri, "was that the obsessive fanaticism of jihadi terrorist, their religious dogmas, their pursuit for martyrdom, and visceral hatred for the West made them blind, and their behavior was not rooted in any kind of rational strategy." (Lia 2008: 4) The emergence of "The Call" on Internet in the middle of Afghanistan war proved however, that there indeed was a rational strategy.

In "The Call" al-Suri presents the history of the modern global jihadi movement and takes a look both in the mistakes and successes of the *mujahideen* (jihadis). Moreover, al-Suri presents his theory of how to wage jihad in the future. Book presents the most effective strategies for waging guerrilla war against the West. According to al-Suri, the most successful way of organizing the jihad is individuals or cells of few people who are not connected to any jihadi organization. These cells operate to support the global jihadi movement in their common cause. This system consist of both propaganda cells and terrorist cells.

The basis of al-Suri's military thinking is following: There is no military balance between the jihadis and the West (or the USA) (Lia: 349). The West has an "unimaginable technological superiority", "especially in the air", al-Suri states (Lia: 372). Also, the history of modern jihad has proved, according to al-Suri, that a strategy of secret military organizations in the Middle East against the regional governments have been "a complete failure on all levels". Especially after the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 the situation became very difficult for the global jihadis (who by then had their main strongholds in Afghanistan and Pakistan). "America has employed her stunning technological superiority, and used it for her strategy of decisive air strikes and complete control over space and the electronic world", al-Suri writes (Lia: 363). Al-Suri's answers to the militarily asymmetric war against a superpower are "individual jihad" and "small terror cells". He wanted to globalize the jihad in all fields.

The core of al-Suri's book outlines a future strategy in pragmatic means. According to al-Suri, jihadi military theory is based on two key facets: First on is the solo or cellular jihad, the action of individual jihadis organizing and carrying out attacks without any connection to or support from an established jihadist group. "The basic axis (...) of the Resistance's military activity

against America and her allies now, must lie within the framework of 'light guerrilla warfare', 'civilian terror' and secret methods, especially on the level of individual operations and small Resistance Units completely and totally separated from each other." (Lia: 373) The Second is military jihad in the open front lines of Middle East, which means "[t]ravel to and establishment of "open jihadi fronts", areas of the world with conditions suitable for sustained urban and guerrilla warfare (Ibid: 374-382). Al-Suri thereby divides the global jihad in two fronts: 1) Open military fronts in the Middle East or anywhere, where jihadis have an open warfare against a regional government and its Western allies. 2) Individual jihad fronts, which means that anyone committed to the ideology of Salafi-Jihadis can support the jihadi cause by acting anywhere he or she is located.

Al-Suri says he is not a religious scholar. He states in the beginning of his book that what he is writing is not about religion but warfare. He uses one verse from Quran's (al-Anfal Sura) to religiously justify the "righteous" terrorism of the jihadis. The verse goes as following:

"We will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve for what they have associated with Allah of which He had not sent down [any] authority." (Qur'an 3:151)

Al-Suri even tries to define the concept of terrorism. According to him the jihadis indeed are terrorists. But according to his worldview there are good and bad terrorists and the *mujahideen* simply represent the good. The "praiseworthy terrorism" is "terrorism by the righteous that have been unjustly treated", he writes (Lia: 383). According to him, terrorism by the *mujahideen* is terror against terror – he argues that in the end "Muslims" are those who have actually been terrorized the most.

According to al-Suri the future of global jihadi movement should not be a hierarchical organization but rather a "system of action" that consists of jihadi individuals or small cells. They share the ideology but don't have any organizational links between each other. He explains that terrorist attacks in the past were merely "emotional reactions following hostile acts against Muslims" (ibid: 390). But in his new idea of globalized jihad "[t]he goal of the operations of the Resistance and the Individual Terrorism Jihad is to inflict as many human and material losses as possible and to *make them feel that the Resistance has transformed into a phenomenon of popular uprising against them.*" [Italics by Jukka Huusko] When this "system of action" extends to a



sustained global phenomenon, it will work effectively against the militarily overwhelming enemy, because it "[C]onfuses the enemy, exhausts him and heightens the spirit of the Islamic nation" (ibid: 393).

The main goal of the global jihad outlined by al-Suri is to make an end to the "New World Order" that took place after the collapse of Soviet Union. "New World Order" is to him the overwhelming power of the United States in the world. Al-Suri wants to make this era to an end by exhausting the superpower with a globalized jihad – much in the same way they believe they defeated the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. "When defeated, this alliance will break up and we will move to a new historical era", he promises (Lia: 395).

However, al-Suri reminds that the violent actions should always be calculated according to political benefits versus political harms. "At the same time one has to adopt a strategy of winning the support of the people and avoid harming them." Al-Suri argues that conflict with the America is fundamental while Europe is secondary. The goal in attacking Europe is "making her leave the alliance by putting pressure" (Ibid. 412). The main example for a successful pressure are the Madrid train bombings in 2004 (which, according to reports, was planned by al-Suri himself)<sup>7</sup>. Throughout the history, al-Suri writes "armed terrorism has proven its usefulness as the best political method to persuade an opponent to surrender to one's will".

According to Suri, the main battle will be in the "open fronts" in the Middle East between the jihadis and the local governments. The West is the secondary theater of jihad, and in the West the preferable method of the warfare is individual jihad or small cell attacks. He outlines the main targets in Europe: 1) Main political figures who lead the campaign against the Muslims: head of states and ministers. 2) Large strategic economic targets. 3) Military bases and barracks, especially American military bases in Europe. 4) Media personalities and media centers that are leading the war against the Muslims and justifying the attacks on them. 5) Centralized information and computer centers. 6) Places where the Jews are gathered, but avoiding places of worship and synagogues. (ibid. 410-411).

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<sup>7</sup> The terrorist attacks, that killed 192 people, changed the public opinion in Spain and after few months Spain withdraw from Iraq.

In short, al-Suri offers an operational method for a globalized jihad against the USA and its allies. His plan is to make a global jihadi movement a global system, which will not be a secret, hierarchical organization. The only unitive bond in the system is the common name, common doctrine and a common goal, which is to resist the "invaders and their allies". The system, according to al-Suri, can be created by spreading the ideology, methods and program or by directing the youth to strike enemy targets wherever they can. He says that every group should handle themselves without any central command from above. There should be no organizational bounds of any kind of between the members. Those concentrating on missionary work (*dawa*), spreading the ideology or the religion, should keep themselves totally separated from those who are actually planning attacks.

According to al-Suri his method makes possible for even a single individual or a very small cells to act anywhere in the world. If one individual or one cell get caught or destroyed, the system will still roll on, because the cells have been separated from each other in the first place. His creation is an "organization which is directed by the idea, trained by the instructions, united by the goal and the common name and administrated secretly from a distance" (ibid. 424).

Al-Suri created his vision for the coming jihadi generation in 1990's and early 2000's. But the rise of the "Islamic State" in Iraq and Syria during the Syrian war brought up a new vision for the global jihadis. In that new vision the most important goal for the global jihadis was to create immediately a territorial Islamic state. After the territory is captured, the goal would be to remain on that territory and expand it while at the same time instigating Muslims all over the world to travel there and join the jihad. This was the vision of Isis, but that vision is not realistic, at least not anymore. In July 2017, when I'm writing this, Isis as territorial state in Syria and Iraq was rapidly vanishing. After the likely collapse of "Islamic State" it is possible, as Brynjar Lia has estimated, that Isis will be forced to return back to ideas of al-Suri<sup>8</sup>: to forget the Islamic state, to disperse the strict organizational structure and continue existence as 'system of actions'.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.hs.fi/ulkomaat/art-2000002901281.html>. "Brynjar Lian mukaan on silti mahdollista, että al-Surin opit yksilöllisestä jihadismista saattavat nousta Isisin kannattajien keskuudessa jälleen arvoonsa, jos kalifaatti luhistuu. (Eng: According to Brynjar Lia it is still possible, that al-Suri's doctrines of individual jihad will be in the future more valueable among the supporters of Isis, if the Caliphate collapses).

### 3.2 The Media "Theory" of Abu Musab al-Suri: Instigating the Masses

Abu Musab al-Suri's manifest has one chapter that is dedicated to the "media theory" of the jihadis. This 64-pages long chapter with a title "Media and Instigation" outlines al-Suri's vision for an independent jihadi media. Basically its role is to spread the jihadi ideology globally and instigate Muslims to join the jihad.<sup>9</sup> To understand the importance al-Suri pays to the media strategies, it is worthwhile to take a short look at al-Suri's experience with Western media in 1990's and his role as a "media jihadi" of the al-Qaida.

Abu Musab al-Suri was originally a member of a militant offshoot organization of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. This same group was the forefront in the Islamic uprising against **Hafez al-Assad's** government in Syria in early 1980's. After the conflict al-Suri emigrated to France and Spain. He got a Spanish citizenship, and in the late 1980's he joined the war in Afghanistan and met **Osama bin Laden**. In 1994 al-Suri moved in London and joined the large exiled community of jihadis living there at the time (Lia: 149). In the following years al-Suri worked as a sort of a jihadi journalist. His main preoccupation was first the al-Ansar Newsletter, which was considered a GIA (Groupe Islamique Armé, Algerian Islamist group that fought against the government in Algerian civil war) mouthpiece (Ibid: 153). In 1996 al-Suri founded a "media and studies center" in London, registered as the Islamic Conflict Studies Bureau Ltd. He was contacting the mainstream media, because he wanted mainstream media to pay attention to al-Qaida-leader Osama bin Laden and his ideology. In the following years al-Suri actually built relations to several news agencies in London and even worked as an intermediary or a sort of "fixer" for Channel 4 and CNN as they went to Afghanistan to interview bin Laden in 1996 and 1997. (Ibid: 162) "The CNN interview in particular", Lia writes, "was one of bin Laden's most important steps on his ascent to global notoriety."

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<sup>9</sup> Chapter "Media and Instigation" in al-Suri's book has not been translated in English. I thank Professor Brynjar Lia for providing me the original version of that chapter in Arabic. Due to my very basic Arabic skills I asked Jordanian journalist Moath Abed to read it through. Afterwards I interviewed him. My overview on the content of chapter "Media and Instigation" is based largely on interview with Moath Abed, to whom I am grateful.

But the co-operation with Western media didn't go according to the plans or will of al-Suri and bin Laden. Although the interviews brought bin Laden's cause to worldwide attention, al-Suri learned that the Western media and journalist didn't work or act according to his or al-Qaida's will (Ibid. 165). Moreover, al-Suri had in the 1990's problems with Saudi newspaper al-Hayat, which exposed his role in militant jihadi groups. All these experiences made al-Suri hostile to "enemy's press": "[T]hese were all the Tyrant's newspapers and the enemies of Islam", he stated (Ibid: 180). After these experiences Al-Suri came to a conclusion that jihadis should have their own media and propaganda channels.

The "Media and Instigation" chapter in al-Suri's book doesn't contain any specific theory or ideas how to manipulate the Western mainstream media. But it gives some hints which kind of messages should be fed to international press by the jihadis. The chapter is rather a guidebook to individual "media jihadis": It gives advices how to produce the jihadi propaganda and how to formulate messages so that they are appealing especially to the younger Muslim generations. Al-Suri seems to view media primarily as a tool for spreading the religion and the ideology and to call people for jihad against the West.

For example, al-Suri recommends the propagandists to emphasize positive messages in their media work, to offer carrot instead of a stick. Youths should be encouraged to join the jihad with a promise of rewards (Paradise) instead of threatening or inculpatory messages. Also he points out, that in the propaganda targeted to Western audience, the suffering of Muslims and human rights violations against Muslims should be highlighted. These are messages that some segments of Western audience are willing to hear and receive. Al-Suri notes, that media strategies of former jihadi generations were failures, because the propaganda was too much targeted to the elites of the jihadis, narrow segments of the society. He emphasizes that media propaganda should not be targeted only to elite but to the masses. To win the battle, it is necessary to win the hearts of the masses.

Al-Suri's "The Call" contains all in all countless references to mainstream (Western and international) media. Al-Suri outlines that the mainstream international media is not a neutral observer but an enemy of Islam. This is why Western media can and should be targeted. Western Media, according to him, is covering the conflicts against the Muslims in a distorted manner, but not

only that. Media, according to him, is spreading "rotten torrent and sweeping epidemic of a culture of corruption" (Lia: 407). One of the "greatest tools" to destroy the "Muslims religious, moral, cultural and ideological basis" (ibid:406) is, according to al-Suri, "the satellite TV channels". He goes further by saying that dialogue with media and its advocates is not enough and uses arguments he sees "logical" and "rational" when arguing that "[o]nly insecticides, and medicines to kill bacteria [is enough] [...] It is therefore necessary, legally, logically and rationally, that these institutions and their most important men, advocates, and leaders become targets of explosions, destruction and assassinations." (Ibid.)

It seems like Al-Suri had utterly lost his belief, if he ever had one, that Western Media could somehow serve the cause of jihadis. Instead, Western media was to him part of Western dominance. He had understood that if the jihadis wanted to win the media battle, they would need their own media. Medium was already there, the Internet. In the realm of Internet al-Suri's ideas of globalized jihad could be spread easily. Indeed it was al-Qaida that originally initiated and theologically sanctioned the use of Internet as a basic tool to convert people to Islamic extremism. They saw this recruiting work inseparably tied to militant actions and terrorist operations, all of them which were openly explained in al-Suri's book. (Prucha 2016)

Three years after US attack in Afghanistan in 2001 al-Qaida understood that their strongholds in Afghanistan and Pakistan are may soon be destroyed by the coalition. In 2004 al-Qaida decided to download all their essential doctrines (texts, video lectures etc) on global jihad and extremist ideology, including bomb manufacturing instructions, on Internet. In the coming years al-Qaida continued and increased their propaganda efforts on Internet, spreading extremist material produced in the "open fronts" of Afghanistan and Iraq to a global audience. This propaganda was designed to reach not just the "jihadi elites" but the masses, especially Muslim youth masses, everywhere in the world.

### **3.3 The guidebook for Polarization: Management of Savagery**

If Abu Musab al-Suri's work inspired al-Qaida to transform itself from a militant insurgency group based in "open fronts" of the Middle East and North Africa to a global jihadi network, the

second book I'm focusing is a handbook for creating a territorial Islamic state. Book is written by a pseudonym Abu Bakr Naji with a title "Management of Savagery".<sup>10</sup> There is not much information about the author himself, but based on some expressions he uses in original Arabic manuscript, the experts believe the writer comes from somewhere in North Africa, possibly Egypt. The text was published online in the same year as "The Call", in 2004. According to Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, Naji's book was "widely circulated among provincial Isis commanders and some rank-and-file fighters" (Weiss&Hassan 2015: 41). According to William McCants, Naji's visions of maximal violence were widely read by the experienced jihadis in Syria and Iraq, while the supporters of Isis on social media praised and shared the book as a concrete plan how to establish a Caliphate (McCants 2016: 89)

Naji's manifest explains how societies are polarized and destabilized, how territories are seized, how to establish a sharia-ruled state and how to make it an ever expanding "Caliphate". It will all start in the "open fronts" of the Middle East. To create conditions for an emerging Islamic State, the terrorist groups should engage on constant "vexation" operations against the crucial targets of the enemy states, such as oil pipes or tourist attractions (in the Middle East and North Africa). When the enemy states deploy their security troops to protect fragile targets under terrorist attacks, security vacuums will emerge in the hinterlands of those countries. That is when the jihadis step in. Jihadis will take control of territories in unprotected hinterlands and start to build their own state by introducing the sharia law. (McCants: 88). Naji does not embellish the violence that is necessary in this stage of state building. Vice versa, he argues that lots of violence will be needed, and those who are not tough enough, should stay at home.

"One who previously engaged in jihad knows that it is naught but violence, crudeness, terrorism, frightening (others), and massacring.—I am talking about jihad and fighting, not about Islam and one should not confuse them (...) It is better for those who have the intention to begin a jihadi action and are also soft to sit in their homes."

One of the main tactical means Naji advocates in this stage of state building is the polarization of societies. Polarization is method that paves a way to destabilization of societies.

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<sup>10</sup> The direct quotes from "Management of Savagery" in my paper are from the online version of the book translated in English by William McCants and downloaded from this address: <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf>

”By polarization here, I mean dragging the masses into the battle such that polarization is created between all of the people. Thus, one group of them will go to the side of the people of truth, another group will go to the side of the people of falsehood, and a third group will remain neutral, awaiting the outcome of the battle in order to join the victory. (...) Dragging the masses into the battle requires more actions which will inflame opposition and which will make the people enter into the battle, willing or unwilling, such that each individual will go to the side which he supports. We must make this battle very violent, such that death is a heartbeat away [lit. “the closest thing to the souls.”], so that the two groups will realize that entering this battle will frequently lead to death. That will be a powerful motive for the individual to choose to fight in the ranks of the people of truth in order to die well, which is better than dying for falsehood and losing both this world and the next. This was the policy of battle for the pioneers: to transform societies into two opposing groups, igniting a violent battle between them whose end is either victory or martyrdom, whose emblem is either glorious war or humiliating peace.”

Naji emphasizes the significance of youth and their rebelliousness for the jihadi movement. He points out how important it is to attract youth to the jihadi work by grabbing their attention by terrorist attacks. After the jihadis have seized the territory, the plan will move to next stage that Naji calls ”the management of savagery”. Legions of Muslim youth are lured to travel from all around the world to the territory, where they receive military training and participate in battles that will lead to expand of the region of ”savagery”.

According to Naji’s plan, the ”Islamic Nation” will expand from the hinterlands of the enemy states, spreading outwards along the chaos that emerges when the jihadis deliberately polarize the surrounding societies by terror. Jihadis take over the chaotic lands introducing a strict sharia law, which will be accepted by the people because sharia will bring stability in the middle of the chaos that was created by the jihadis themselves in the first place. Another goal is to draw the Western countries, especially United States into open warfare in the Middle East. This tactic he calls the ”power of vexation and exhaustion”. Naji believes that once the American soldiers are killed by the jihadis on the battlefield, the ”media halo” surrounding their presumed invincibility would vanish and Muslims everywhere would join the jihad (Weiss&Hassan: 40).

Naji points out, that the battle for an Islamic State is not just military battle. It is also a media battle. This is why the jihadis should have their own media plan and media departments. According to Naji media plan should be formulated in a way that it takes into account the importance of youth audience. Jihadi propaganda should be targeted to the youth all over the world, so that

they will fly to the regions managed by the jihadis and join the movement. The basis of Naji's "media theory" is similar to al-Suri's. According to Naji, Western or international media is an enemy media that is spreading a distorted image of Muslims. One goal for the jihadi movement is to "Reveal the deceptive media to be a power without a force", Naji states. That's why the jihadis need their own media, their own mouthpiece that communicates directly with their own audience. The main mission of this jihadi media is to instigate Muslims to "join the jihad".

Also, Naji points out that understanding the media policy of the enemies is very important "in winning the military and political battle". There should be different media plans for different audiences: for the jihadi-supporters but also for the masses of the enemy.

"Therefore, understanding the media politics of the adversaries and dealing with them is very important in winning the military and political battle. One of the most important things that will assist our media policy is to communicate our media material to its intended audiences. One should note that some of the media committees in previous stages failed in communicating media material to the intended classes of people, especially that material which targeted (a certain) class of people and the masses, such that the media material was often only communicated to the class of the elite, while several other Islamic movements succeeded in communicating their statements and media materials to every home and civilized class. Therefore, this important point should not be ignored, especially since we want to communicate our sharia, military, and political positions to the people clearly and justify them rationally and through the sharia and (show that) they are in the (best) interest of the Umma. Therefore, a group should be formed whose purpose is to communicate what we want to say to the masses and focus their attention on it, even if this requires exposing the group to danger that is comparable to the danger of a military operation, like a division which distributes (provisions) and an armed division which advances and guards from afar."

Naji points out that sometimes, when the jihadis want to spread their message to whole world, it would be necessary just to create global media attention, for example by kidnapping a Western journalist.

"[I]t is possible for the kidnapped person to be a Western reporter and others who are easy to kidnap from among people who are not employees in the petroleum sector, if kidnapping him serves the media plan connected with this operation. Or, instead of the kidnapping operation, it is possible to undertake any act which will capture the attention of the world and make it want to hear the statement which will follow that action."

In conclusion, both Naji and al-Suri seem to have relatively good understanding of modern media society and the role of media for the jihadi cause. They both openly urge the jihadis to seek



media attention. While they are emphasizing the role of the media in their strategies, they however seem to lack a sophisticated theory or methodology how to *manipulate* Western mainstream media. Probably they don't need one, because the common knowledge is that dramatic terrorist attacks, especially when targeted to the Western people, will be enough to capture the media attention and to "confuse the enemy" as al-Suri stated. "Terrible events" of terrorist attacks will open the connection to mainstream publicity for terrorists to spread their messages. They both seem to have an assessment that Western media is an "enemy media". Because of that they see western media an enemy that also should be targeted.

Moreover, both Naji and al-Suri emphasize the importance of an independent jihadi media. They see (their own) media mainly as a tool of instigation and spreading their ideology. But while they seem to lack a sophisticated methodology on how to manipulate media, they are still very well aware of the power of mainstream media. They know how to capture attention of the world and understand the importance of it. They emphasize the importance of different media target groups. Different target groups should be approached in different ways and with different messages.

To strengthen my argument and the baseline of this paper, which is the interplay between media and terrorism, I would like to add notions from William McCants, who studied the strategic thinking of three different Jihadi strategists and tried to build up a synthesis. The thinkers McCants studied were Abu Musab al-Suri, Abu Bakr Naji and Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi. According to McCants, these authors had at least three things common in their strategic thinking:

1. "It [the strategic thinking] is very secular. They are preaching to the choir. Just outlining tactics. Doesn't mean that religion is irrelevant, just means that scripture isn't invoked as much as people think.
2. All strategies rely on direct U.S. military action in the region.
3. All believe that media is the center of the struggle; creating the perception of success is more important than actual military success."

McCants continued with an assessment, that "[t]hey believe that military success matters less than the perception of it in the media." 11

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11 [http://web.mit.edu/SSP/seminars/wed\\_archives07spring/McCants.htm](http://web.mit.edu/SSP/seminars/wed_archives07spring/McCants.htm)

In the next chapter I will take closer look how the current jihadis, especially Isis, have turned the media theories of al-Suri and Naji into practice. The development of jihadi media praxis have developed hand in hand with the development of modern communication technology.

#### **4 From Theory to Practice: Development of Jihadi Media 26 from Early 2000 's to Present**

After introducing two main jihadi thinkers and their contribution to global jihadi strategies, I will go deeper to the actual media practices of al-Qaida and Isis in the last 15 years. From the beginning of the 2000's the Internet became an important platform for the global jihadis to spread their radical theology. This was based to a large extent on strategic thinking by jihadist theoreticians like Abu Musab al-Suri of al-Qaida. It was precisely Al-Qaida that initiated and theologically sanctioned using the Internet as a basic tool to call people to "come to Islam", which in the radical interpretation of Islam means joining the jihad (Prucha 2016:49). Also, al-Suri and other jihadi theorists realized, that the missionary work of radical Islam is inseparably tied to the militant actions and terrorist operations. They realized that terrorist operations, when effectively mediated through different platforms of the Internet, served also as an effective recruiting tool for the Jihadis.

The following chapter is based mainly on three articles, Craig Whiteside's "Lighting the Path, The Evolution of the Islamic State Media Enterprise (ICCT Research Paper 2016), Nico Prucha's "IS and the Jihadist Information Highway – Projecting Influence and Religious Identity via Telegram" (2016) and Charlie Winter's "Media Jihad: The Islamic State's Doctrine for Information Warfare" (2017).

Isis as a jihadi movement and later as a territorial, state-like entity, began as a small group of jihadis under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq. Al-Zarkawi was a Jordanian jihadi with a petty criminal background. He had established a jihadi camp in Afghanistan that collected displaced fighters and families from the Levant in the late 1990s. Al-Zarqawi led the group into Northern Iraq after being ejected from Afghanistan by US. forces in 2002. Year later, when US invaded in Iraq, al-Zarkawi had already established a network of jihadis in Iraq. The network was later known as the "al-Qaida of Iraq".

When US-led troops invaded Iraq in 2003, al-Zarkawi organized his first terrorist strikes. In the late summer of 2003 his group attacked the United Nations, the Jordanian Embassy, and the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf with large car bombs. The attacks went unclaimed – at first nobody had a clue who was behind them. The reason for the silence was Zarkawi’s group’s inability to effective media operations. Sunni resistance against the US invasion in Iraq was growing. Zarkawi understood that they need to create a local media organization from the scratch in order to increase visibility both nationally and internationally (Whiteside, 2006: 5).

Whereas the jihadis in the 1980’s and 1990’s had to rely on audio tapes and video footages which were mostly circulated among the elites of the jihadi movement, the growth of the Internet allowed Zarkawi’s group to spread their messages more efficiently to a diverse, global audience. As Whiteside puts it, “[T]he growth of the internet allowed jihadists to greatly expand their prospective audience at low cost. Jihadist theorist Abu Musab al-Suri commented on the dynamics of the new media and its paradigm change in his epic tome *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*: it changed the audience from the elite to the masses, communicated a popular purpose (the call to jihad to protect Muslim communities), injected passion and emotion into what had been an academic discussion, and moved from clandestine distribution to an open system.” (ibid. 6.)

In the hands of Zarkawi’s new media department the propaganda of the global jihadis started to transform. The main difference was the amount of violence that was shown in their propaganda videos. Zarkawi’s group started to download first propaganda videos online on jihadist websites in early 2004. Later in that same year Zarkawi’s group started to produce propaganda videos that showed executions and beheadings of kidnapped people. These videos were at the beginning strongly criticized both outside and inside of jihadi circles, but it turned out, that the brutal videos were actually increasing the flow of new recruits to the group (ibid. 7).

In the coming years the media department of Zarkawi’s movement was small but highly centralized cell that maintained close ties to Zarkawi himself. Meanwhile, the Coalition Forces developed an efficient man-hunting machine trying to kill the leaders of the Iraqi insurgency group. Because of the proximity of the ”Information Department” to Zarkawi, many media producers or spokespersons were actually killed in those airstrikes. Zarkawi, a jihadi who was at beginning

rejected by the al-Qaida leadership because of his tendency to overly brutal violence, was killed in a US airstrike in Falluja, Iraq in 2006.

But the death of Zarkawi didn't stop the media/propaganda wing of the al-Qaida in Iraq from pushing ahead, even though the Coalition Forces willfully and particularly targeted the media wing. In 2007 the group, now known as the "Islamic State of Iraq", had a whole network of local media producers in Iraq. Propaganda material was edited at central level. In 2007 Coalition Forces discovered "a media centre near Samarra belonging to the newly established video production company al-Furqan. The center contained 65 hard drives with 18 terabytes of data, 500 compact discs of material, and twelve computers. The facility had the capability to mass-produce 156 CDs in eight hours and had a fully functioning film studio with first class equipment. In all, over eight separate media offices were destroyed all over Iraq in mid-2007." (Ibid : 12) At the same time The Islamic State of Iraq had developed, according to Whiteside, "strategic communication" that was more advanced than any other insurgent groups communication in Iraq. They were denying false media reports, criticized f the Iraqi administration, announced new military campaigns, described their own programs and fundamentals and even clarified their own messaging. (Ibid: 13) .

It should be noted, as has been reported by Der Spiegels Christoper Reuter and many others, that many high positions in Isis' regime are occupied by officials from Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime and intelligence service.<sup>1213</sup>. This means that Isis probably had media/propaganda/intelligence professionals in their ranks from the beginning - and this knowhow was capitalized by the group.

Continuous crackdown against the group and arrests of its prominent figures forced the movement to go underground. In 2010 a Syrian jihadist called **Abu Mohammad al-Adnani** had his voice first time heard on group's propaganda. In the same time the group started to produce popular, Hollywood-style video series as "Clashing of the Swords" and the "Windows upon the

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<sup>12</sup>"Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State" <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-files-show-structure-of-islamist-terror-group-a-1029274.html>

<sup>13</sup> "How Saddam's men help Islamic State" rule <http://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/mideast-crisis-iraq-islamicstate/>

Land of Epic Battles”. The videos were nothing more but combinations of real battle footage with nasheeds (Islamic a cappella songs). But the cutting and visual elements of the videos were professional. According to Whiteside it was al-Adnani, the main spokesperson for Isis until his death in August 2016, who had a central role in the production of these propaganda films. When Islamic State of Iraq had spread its tentacles to Syria during the Syrian civil war around 2012-2013, the group had almost a dozen central media organs with diverse purposes mediums and target audiences (Ibid. 18).

In the same year, 2012, Isis jumped into social media domain and started to spread its propaganda outside the semi-closed jihadi circuits. This move ”produced synergistic effects in recruitment, foreign fighter flow, fund raising, and improved brand image” (ibid). Newly established al-Hayat Media Center started to produce jihadist propaganda in many languages. Al-Furat on the other hand focused on non-Arab contingents of Isis and its products were targeted to their respective populations at home. Al-Adjnad produced religious songs (nasheeds) that were used on the background of propaganda videos. The establishment of the *A'maq News Agency* was an attempt by IS to create an independent news service that produced ”scoops” by movement insiders to sway a target audience that might be hostile or sceptic of Western or regional media outlets. (Ibid). Dabiq was a magazine that aimed to communicate with English speaking world. The content of the magazine was nothing but theological justification of atrocities like slavery or genocide of the ”non-believers” such as Yazidies. In the end of 2015 Isis had a media infrastructure that was able to produce over 200 unique propaganda products a week and relied heavily on visual as opposed to text-based propaganda (ibid. 3).

According to Whiteside, Isis put its most talented commanders into the media department. This tells how big value they gave for media and propaganda operations. To the Muslims the main message was about revenge and call to fight, to the Western audience the message was shock and fear. As Whiteside puts it, “[T]he intentionality of summoning film crews for a genocidal massacre, then releasing excerpts of the incident piece meal for strategic effect – while still protecting the identity of the emirs – is a level of expertise that arguably has not been seen in propaganda campaigns of the past.” What is most important, Isis tried all the time to control and manage the story itself. Constant flow of propaganda proved to its supporters and enemies as well that the Caliphate was real and alive.

#### 4.1. From Twitter to Telegram and the Making of a “Media Muhajideen”

Invention of social media gave a new boost to jihadi media practice. From around 2011 the social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook became the main platforms for the global jihadis online. In that same year social media activists helped to trigger so called Arab Spring uprisings in the Arab world. These uprisings later sparked the Syrian civil war.

It was the Syrian offshoot of al-Qaida, Jabhat al-Nusra that first pushed effectively into Twitter. Since at least 2013 Isis, a rival group of Nusra, adopted social media channels and started to spread propaganda which later reached a massive, global audience. This paved a way for thousands of new recruits from all over the world. During 2013-2015 Isis produced and released thousands of videos and photos from the Syrian/Iraqi jihadi theater. This material was spread by thousands of Isis supporters around the world on their Twitter accounts. This propagation by the so-called “mediamujahidin” was approved and sanctioned by the leaders of Isis (Prucha: 50).

According to Prucha, members of jihadi forums have since 2011 issued media strategy advice that encourages the development of a *media mujahidin* (a media jihadi). The idea of media mujahidin has been accompanied by the release of guides on how to use social media platforms, often included lists of recommended accounts to follow. “With relatively small efforts, IS was able to maintain massive networks on *Twitter*. This gave the media operations a whole new and unprecedented window of opportunity: the releasing of videos from within what is defined as ‘Islamic territory’, liberated from their enemies, to a massive number of active or passive followers.” (Prucha: 50).

Until t2015 Isis was exploiting Twitter rather freely. Then Twitter started to shut down Isis-linked accounts and to adjust spam settings. Hardened measures forced Isis members and supporters early 2016 to shift to a new social media platform called Telegram (Prucha: 51). Telegram is a social networking site founded by a Russian entrepreneur Pavel Durov (also a father of Russian VK social networking platform). It is a cloud-based instant messaging service that provides end-to-end encrypted messaging. Telegram is free and open, and it has no limits on how much data individual users can share. In February 2016 Telegram had around 100 million monthly active users while at the same time Twitter had over 300 million monthly active users and Face-

book almost 2 billion. According to Prucha, Telegram is now being used to share content produced by 'official' Isis channels: "Often more than 30 000 Telegram messages are being pushed out by them [Isis members or supporters] each week".

When supporters of Isis left the mainstream social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, many Western observers believed that Isis in general was in a decline. It was only an optical illusion, since the same stuff keep on circulating in Telegram. The move to Telegram allowed Isis to operate from the 'dark web' and orchestrate media raids and sting attacks into the 'surface web', such as Twitter and Facebook. Several hundred IS channels on Telegram ensure that the content, the videos and writings, of IS are disseminated without much interruption, Prucha writes.

Anyhow, the expulsion of Isis-supporters from Twitter has been a blow to Isis. While Isis found a new safe haven on Telegram, the leaders of the movement worried that the "media mujahideen" are isolating themselves into an application which has no connection to the mainstream publicity. In Isis leadership there was already growing anxiety in summer 2016, when one of Isis' media groups, al-Wafa, released a statement that urged jihadis to continue missionary work in Facebook and Twitter and warned about a risk of losing the audience.

"Return to Twitter and Facebook, for our missionary operations (da'wa) have greater reach on these platforms. Those we intend to reach [and influence] are not on Telegram, rather we find them on Twitter and Facebook." (Prucha 2016: 56).

In 2016 Isis seemed to have lost the game in Facebook and Twitter while it was also rapidly losing territories in Syria and Iraq. But the life of Isis still continued on virtual realm. The supporters of Isis were translating theological and propaganda material in different languages like French, German, Italian, Russian and even Finnish. The material was spread mainly on Telegram. The main purpose seemed to be the jihadi identity building: "to explain who the "*mu-jahidin*" are, what they are fighting for, and whom they are fighting against" (Prucha: 48).

According to Charlie Winter from Kings College London (2017) , Isis published in April 2016 an official online document with a title "Media Operative, You Are a Mujahid, Too". This 55-page manifest is a kind of a "motivational literature intended to inspire media operative in his (or her) work" (ibid.: 9). According to Winter, the manifest emotionally encourages those involved in "media jihad" to continue their work. It states, for example, that:

-“[T]he media jihad against the enemy is no less important than the material fight against it”

-“[T]he media is a jihad in the way of Allah [and that] you, with your media work, are therefore a mujahid in the way of Allah”. (Winter: 13)

-“Inciting others to join the jihad is tantamount to engaging in the jihad oneself.”

Isis’ media handbook for jihadis seems to rely on old ideas of jihadi thinkers such as Abu Musab al-Suri. In the spirit of al-Suri it argues that the mainstream media is nothing but a propaganda tool with “daily lies and professionalized falsification” (ibid. 17). It also states that while the media mujahids, those carrying cameras and shooting live-footage in battles or terrorist attacks are real “holy warriors”, the media itself works as a weapon against the enemies. According to the handbook, offensive information warfare is a central part of the jihad, for, as it states, “everything that angers the enemies of Allah, be it speech or deed [...] is a form of jihad” (Ibid. 17). It goes on by saying that media can be a powerful psychological weapon, because it can “shatter the morale of the enemy”, and sometimes even substitute military or terrorist operation (ibid. 18).

According to Winter, Isis media guide book proves the estimations by many experts that Isis has indeed “weaponized” the media. Moreover, it proves that Isis is intentionally trying to exploit the mainstream media coverage as a weapon in psychological warfare. Mainstream media should be understand that they are weaponized, transformed into a weapon by the terrorists, and that weapon is actually pointing at the audience. According to Winter,

“[T]he mainstream news industry must recognize that the Islamic State deliberately weaponizes media coverage. Whether they consist of video executions or vague statements in the wake of terrorist operations, the Islamic State’s media ‘projectiles’ enable it to dictate its own story, quite literally in its own words, to a captive audience of millions. The Media Operative document makes it unambiguously clear that the caliphal propagandists are well aware of this – indeed, much of what they do is geared towards benefiting from this exact state of affairs. Hence, it is of the utmost importance that media organisations resist the inherent ‘clickability’ of the group’s propaganda and take none of its messaging at its word, let alone broadcast its contents without accompanying them with nuanced analysis. If such measures are not taken immediately, media organisations run the risk of becoming unwitting instruments of the Islamic State’s propagandists.”



This simple means that mainstream media should not forget its role as a filter or a gatekeeper. If mainstream media doesn't filter or contextualize but only spreads 'clickable' content, it will be a useful tool to any group that wants to spread extremists propaganda.

## 5 Short history of German Jihad

After an overlook to the development of jihadi media strategies from theoretical writings to the actual media praxis of Isis, I will take a short look on the development of the jihadi scene in Germany. This short history of "German Jihad" further points out the importance of media and propaganda practices in Isis's strategies. It also paves way to final conclusions about the terrorist threat in Europe and the interplay between terrorism and the media.

Comparing to some other powerful European countries like France and Britain, Germany used to have fewer security problems with Islamist extremists until 2016. This is not to say that Germany didn't have any extremist on their soil. For example the "Hamburg Cell", a group of students based in Hamburg, were key operatives in al-Qaida's attack against the United States in 11.9. 2001. But there was no islamist-related terrorist attacks on German soil until 2011, when **Arid Uka** opened fire against United States Air Force bus parked outside Frankfurt Airport killing two American soldiers and wounding two others. According to German authorities, Uka had connections to a Salafist movement inside Germany.

Germany's homegrown jihadi scene has from the beginning developed synchronously with the conflicts abroad. According to German expert on jihadism, **Guido Steinberg**, it was the Chechen war (1999-2009) that first persuaded German Islamist extremists to join the violent jihad (Steinberg 2015: 159). Even the members of the "Hamburg Cell" tried first to join a war against Russia in North Caucasus, but as they had no military training they couldn't get in. Instead they ended up in Afghanistan and connected there with the global terrorist network of al-Qaida.

The US attack in Afghanistan in 2001 pushed some Germans to join the ranks of *mujahideen* in Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, it was the invasion in Iraq by the US in 2003 that really

started changing rapidly the jihadi scene in the German speaking countries. The central figure in this development was a citizen of Austria (with origins in Egypt), **Mohammed Mahmoud**. He traveled to Iraq in 2003 and received training from the Iraqi jihadi groups, and after few months returned back to Austria. In the coming years Mahmoud became the leading jihadi propagandist in German speaking world. In 2005 he founded a German section of "The Global Islamic Media Front", GIMF. Mahmoud and his fellows translated jihadi propaganda from Arabic to German and published it on their website. According to Steinberg, Mahmoud was ideologically close to leader of Iraqi al-Qaida (later Isis), al-Zarkawi. Despite the increasing jihadi propaganda on Internet not so many Germans actually left the country and joined the war in Iraq. Probably it was too difficult to travel there. Instead, during the war in Iraq the radical "Zarkawian" ideology and jihadi propaganda material was spread and established on Internet in German language. The growing availability of jihadi propaganda in German started to attract young German speakers who had interest in Islamist extremism. All in all it was the war in Iraq that played an important role in radicalizing the German jihadi scene and helped German jihadis to connect with other jihadi circles around the globe (ibid: 160, 164).

German journalist Florian Flade from *Die Welt* was one of those reporters, who were covering the rapidly growing German jihadi scene on the Internet already in the early 2000's. Flade simply joined the German jihadi forums on internet as an alias and monitored discussions there.

"I realized that a new generation, young generation of Muslims were connected with actually a very small group of very radical preachers. They had become successful in connecting with these young people. And you could see that these young people were not going to Mosques anymore but they were actually on the Internet. And being very radical and spreading brutal propaganda."<sup>14</sup>

According to Flade many of those young Germans who traveled to Syria or Iraq to wage Jihad didn't actually seem to be very religious at all, rather "fanboys" of an extreme social movement.

"Many were just sympathizers of this and for them it was all about action, all about videos. It was almost like pornography to them."

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<sup>14</sup> Interview 8.2.2017 in Berlin.

German jihadi action on Internet get a new boost when social media sites like Facebook and Twitter started to become more common. According to Flade, the jihadis were from the beginning professional in the way they used Internet and social media for propaganda purposes.

”I was very interested [...] how it is possible that the Jihadi propaganda, if you compare it to other forms of extremism, like right wing, neo-Nazi extremism, it was very professional. It was very well-made. And it was very appealing to young people.”

In 2008 Mohammed Mahmoud called for attacks in Austria and Switzerland during the European Football Championship. Before that in 2007 GIMF’s website had already published a video that threatened Germany and Austria by attacks if they don’t withdraw troops from Afghanistan. These threats lead to arrest and Mahmoud was sentenced to four years in prison in Austria. However, imprisonment made him even a bigger star among the German speaking jihadi scene. After his release in 11.9. 2011 (exactly ten years after 9/11 terrorist attacks) Mahmoud moved to Berlin and founded a Salafist group called Millatu Ibrahim (and a website with a same name). According to Steinberg it was Millatu Ibrahim that established German jihadi connections to Salafi-Jihadist groups in Egypt, Libya and Syria (Steinberg 2015: 164). One of Mahmoud’s most important aides was **Daniel Cuspert**, former petty criminal from Berlin’s Kreuzberg who had converted to Islam (before that he was already known as a rapper with an artist name ”Deso Dogg”). Millatu Ibrahim group draw attention in Germany when they took a control of a small mosque in Solingen and took part in violent demonstration in that same city and Bonn in May 2012.

During that time the war in Syria had already began. If the war in Iraq had helped to pave a way to the popularity of Islamist extremism in Germany, the war in Syria was a real game changer. It really made possible for young Jihadis to join the war. Probably it was at least partly about the accessibility: It was relatively easy and cheap to buy a flight from Europe to Turkey, where there was a ready-made infrastructure that allowed foreign fighters to cross the border and join the jihadi ranks in Syria. German authorities were worried about Millatu Ibrahim movement and banned the group in June 2012. Mohammed Mahmoud had already left Germany and moved to Egypt. Later he moved from Egypt via Turkey to Syria and joined Isis. Dennis Cuspert and many other members of Millatu Ibrahim followed him. In April 2014, over two years after the war had begin and just few months before Isis established the ”Caliphate”, Isis released a video

featuring Dennis Cuspert. In that video Cuspert told that he had abandoned German citizenship and joined the "Islamic State". He called others in German speaking world to join him. That video was the first evidence of a prominent German jihadist who had become a propagandist for the Isis.

Isis proclaimed its "Caliphate" in Iraq and Syria in July 2014. A month later US started bombing Isis targets in Iraq (and later also in Syria). It seems that US-lead war against the Isis was exactly what the terrorist group was expecting. In October 2014 Isis published a propaganda video that showed an execution of 18 Syrian soldier. Later in that propaganda video there was an episode under a title "Message from Dabiq". It showed three European Isis-recruits standing in the front of a camera on a top of a hill addressing speeches in their mother tongues: Abu Abdallah al-Britani ("British"), Abd al-Wudud al-Faransi ("French") and Abu Dawud al-Almani ("German"). The film was shot in a small village in northern Syria called Dabiq – the English propaganda magazine of Isis has the same name. According to the ideology of Isis, Dabiq is the location where the last big battle between the believers and non-believers will take place. The real name of Abu Dawud al-Almani was Michael N. He is a convert from Gladbeck, Nordrhein-Westfalen, who joined the German jihadi group Millatu Ibrahim already in Solingen in 2012. Here is what Abu Dawud shouted to the camera:

"We are now in a historical place. This place is called Dabiq. Oh you Romans, you Germans, you Englishman, French, Dutch, Italians, Americans, you who have gathered to fight against Islam. Come! We are waiting for you."<sup>15</sup>

He continued threatening Angela Merkel, the Bundeskanzlerin of Germany:

"Das Gleiche gilt für euch, ihr Deutschen! Die schmutzige Merkel! Nachdem du deine Geschenke abgegeben hast an Israel. Versammelt ihr euch alle! (Steinberg 2015: 173).

Video is a good example how Isis used the European converts in their propaganda: To show, that they were ready to leave everything behind and join the "Caliphate". To encourage still undecided jihadis in the West to join the epic war of creating and defending of the Caliphate. And more over, to provoke their past home countries to attack Isis, lure them to join a new war in the

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<sup>15</sup> <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/british-french-and-german-is-fighters-challenge-coalition-to-send-ground-troops-in-video.html>

Middle East. This propaganda turned out to be a success. According to BKA (Bundeskriminalamt) around 800 people from Germany have joined the war in Syria/Iraq in the ranks of Isis. Comparing to for example France and Belgium the figure is clearly smaller but anyway bigger than it has ever been before.

And precisely this phenomenon of European radicals joining Isis – and later coming back, or if not coming back, at least keeping connections to their home countries and instigating other radicals to terrorist acts – has created the most threatening security problem and increase of terrorism threat in Europe. The backlash started in Belgium and France in 2015 and spread to Germany next year after. It is possible that terror related to Isis will have an impact on the security of Europe years to come.

## 5.1 Terror in Germany 2016-2017

Threat of jihadi-related terrorism inside Europa has increased in recent years, according to Europol, and remains on an upward trajectory (Europol 2016: 6). The main reason for this is the war in Syria/Iraq and the rise of the so called Islamic State. The main concern of Europol in 2016 was the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters who are traveling to and from conflict zones. Almost all the jihadi-related terrorist attacks in Europe since 2015 have had connections with Isis (Notable exception is the attack against Charlie Hebdo newspaper in Paris in January 2015. Al-Qaida claimed it). The increase of threat in Europe has followed the global trend, which has been increasing since 2014 (Peil, 2016: 54).

The series of terrorist attacks by Isis against Europe started in France and Belgium in 2015. The attack in Paris on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2015 was the deadliest terrorist attack in Europe since London bombings in 2005 and Madrid train bomb 2004. There was already growing threat of Isis-related terrorism in Germany in 2015. According to German intelligence Isis planned attacks in Braunschweiger Schoduvells carnival in Braunschweig in February 2015 and in football match in Hannover in November 2015, but both of them were prevented by the authorities. Few months later the pace of attacks that had connections to Isis started to quicken. Here is a list of the jiha-

dist-related attacks or failed attacks in Germany that drew international media attention in 2016-2017.<sup>16</sup>

1. **February 2016:** 15 years old German-Moroccan Isis sympathizer stabbed police officer with a knife in Hannover. Few weeks before perpetrators brother had tried to throw firebombs in a shopping mall, but he failed. According to officials, the girl had announced in personal chat earlier that she will do this for Isis.
  
2. **April 2016:** Two 16-17 years old Salafis attacked a Sikh Temple in Essen with a self-made bomb. Three people were wounded, one of them severely. Both of the attackers were Isis-sympathizers. They were arrested later.
  
3. **July 2016:** 17 years old refugee from Afghanistan attacked with an axe in a regional train in Würzburg. Five tourists from Hong Kong were wounded. The perpetrator was arrested later. Before the crime the perpetrator had contacted Isis and confessed on a video that he belongs to the group.
  
4. **July 2016:** Only days later a 27 years old refugee from Syria blew himself in Ansbach. The perpetrator was killed and 15 other were wounded. He had sent a video to Isis and confessed he belongs to the group.
  
5. **October 2016:** 22 years old Syrian asylum seeker Jaber al-Bakr was catch by a German police with a help from other Syrian refugees. He had handled highly explosive chemicals and planned an attack to Tegel airport. Few days later he hanged himself in jail.
  
6. **December 2016:** So far the worst jihadi-related terrorist attack took place in Germany, when 24 years old Tunisian petty criminal and asylum seeker **Anis Amri** hijacked a truck and drove it into a crowd in Christmas Market in Berlin. 15 people were killed and dozens wounded. The perpetrator managed to escape all the way to Italy, where he was shot to death by a police officer. Amri had connections to a hardliner German-Iraqi Salafi preacher **Abu Walaa**, who was arrested month before the attack. Abu Walaa was known to have links to Isis.

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<sup>16</sup> Tagespiegel 13.4. 2017: 2

In addition to the attacks there has been dozens of Isis-related arrests in Germany during two recent years. One of the most noteworthy was the arrest of Salafist preacher Abu Walaa in November 2016. Iraqi-born Walaa who was considered to be the "last big fish", or one of the last prominent Salafi preachers that had direct connections to Isis in Iraq and Syria and was suspected of recruiting young German Muslims to fight for jihad in the ranks of Isis.<sup>17</sup>

Federal Criminal Police Office of Germany (Bundeskriminalamt) announced in the end of March 2017, that there were still 616 Islamist extremists in Germany, that have been labeled by the authorities as "Gefährder" (people that have been identified as terror threats). From these 616 "Gefährder" around 50 percent were inside the borders of Germany, and of them around 100 arrested. It means that there were still around 200 known Islamist extremists inside Germany, that were identified as a terror threat. According to a Tweet from Bundeskriminalamt from 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2017 there was in the same time 22 far-right "Gefährder" and 5 far-left "Gefährder" in the country.

As the summer 2017 closed by, the phenomenon of terrorism in Germany started to have new and confusing characteristics. In 11<sup>th</sup> of April three roadside bombs exploded in the vicinity of the bus that was carrying Borussia Dortmund football team. One player and a police official were slightly wounded. The initial line of inquiry assumed that it was a jihadi terrorist attack due to letters found at the scene claimed the attack as retaliation for Muslims killed in the German military intervention against the Islamic the, and threatened further attacks unless Germany withdraws and the US military base in Ramstein is shut. On 21 April 2017, German police arrested a man on suspicion of planting bombs to drive down the Borussia Dortmund share price and profit by put warrants he bought prior to the attack. Another "false flag" terrorist attempt was revealed later in April when German police arrested a German soldier who was posing as a Syrian asylum seeker. According to the authorities the soldier was allegedly planning a "false flag" shooting attack that would be blamed on asylum seekers. The soldier was detained when he went to retrieve a loaded pistol he had hidden in a bathroom at Vienna International Airport. These incidents seemed to prove out, that radical Islamists are not the only ones that currently poses a terrorism threat in Germany. There are groups of people that are deliberately trying to

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Jan Raudszus 12.1.2017

use the threat of radical Islamists terrorism as a smoke screen for other kind of terrorism or just for gaining personal benefit.

To return back to the jihadi-motivated terrorist attacks that took place in Germany (and which are the subject of this paper), one can make a couple of notices. First, the age of the perpetrators is eye-catching. In 3 of the 5 "successful" attacks in Germany the perpetrators were underaged. Jalal al-Bakr, who did not manage to implement his plan, was a Syrian asylum seeker that obviously had not connections to radical Islamist before coming to Germany, and the perpetrator of the most serious attack, Anis Amri, was a petty criminal who was obviously exploiting the asylum system to enable his criminal life in Europe. Al-Bakr and Amri were just recently arrived in Germany. Many of the attackers in German have been so called "lonely wolves", and at least the both attackers in July 2016 reportedly had psychological problems. But they also had connections to Isis and their confessions on video were published on Isis media channels. As Florian Peil puts it, Isis has and is willing to exploit people with psychological problems in their campaign of terror (Peil 2016: 60).

None of the attacks in Germany were as sophisticated and complicated as for example the Paris and Brussels attacks. But there are no reasons to belittle attacks on German soil. The most worrying features of these attacks are the known connections/contacts to Isis-representatives and the video testimonies of the perpetrators, that they were doing this in the name of Isis. And what comes to the most serious attacks in German, Anis Amris truck attack to the Christmas market, it should be remembered that it is precisely these type of attacks that late Isis-spokesperson and foreign operations chief al-Adnani was urging the followers to conduct in his last speech in May 2016<sup>18</sup>.

Since the US and the allies started the airstrikes against Isis in 2014 and later on Iraqi army and the Kurdish Peshmerga forces started to liberate areas occupied by Isis, the "Islamic State" has been rapidly vanishing. Already in that same year Isis started to develop its foreign operations in order to conduct terror strikes in the Middle East, Europe and the United States. In Europe the main targets from 2015 on seemed to be France and Belgium, the countries from where

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<sup>18</sup> <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/abu-muhammad-al-adnani%E2%80%99s-may-21-2016-speech>



thousands of radical Islamists had travelled to Syria and joined Isis. The most dangerous terror cell was Brussel/Paris cell that carried out multiple Paris attacks in 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2015 and Brussel bombings in 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2016 (the attack against Charlie Hebdo satirical newspaper in Paris year before was by al-Qaida, not Isis’).

For a while it seemed that Isis is focusing solely on France and Belgium. Indeed there is some evidence that Isis does have way better connections in France and Belgium than in Germany. For example, the German Isis defector Harry Sarfo who returned from Syria to Germany and is now in prison has claimed that Isis had problems to recruit people from Germany to conduct attacks in their own country. According to media reports quoting Sarfo, Isis has plenty of members who are willing and prepared for attacks in France.<sup>19</sup> Also it is notable, that the main members of Paris/Brussels terror were born and grown up in France. On the contrary in Germany most of the perpetrators were just arrived in the country and didn’t have any good networks. As Jan Raudzus put it:

”Those who attacked in France were people who were actually French and Belgians. They had lot of contacts, they had contacts in petty crime, some of them to organized crime as well. They had social networks they could draw and trust. But those in German were mostly isolated people and recent arrivals. The Syrian (al-Bakr) was caught up by the fellow Syrians, because he didn’t have anyone else he could rely. So far the people that Isis get to launch attacks are people without a lot of connections, comparing to France.”

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After the Paris and Brussels attacks and the revelation of Isis terrorist cell in Brussels lead by the Abaaoud, the German authorities started to investigate if there is an organized Isis terror cell in Germany too. Is there somewhere in Germany a ”German Abaaoud”, an architect or a leader of an Isis terrorist cell, who have received training in Syria or Iraq? At least so far in the early summer of 2017 it seemed that nothing comparing to Paris/Brussels cell exist in Germany. Also, there are no evidence that the Paris/Brussels cell had any organizational links to German jihadi scene. Even though there are no reasons to belittle the attacks conducted in German soil, it seems that Isis has not been so successful in Germany than they have been France, Belgium and Britain.

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<sup>19</sup> "How a Secretive Branch of ISIS Built a Global Network of Killers" <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/04/world/middleeast/isis-german-recruit-interview.html>

## 6 Conclusions: Ten Theses on Terrorism and Media

In this paper I have overviewed the strategic thinking of two main global jihadi groups, al-Qaida and Isis. I put special emphasis on media strategies of the two most important thinkers of the global jihadi movement, Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu Bakr Naji. In my overview I tried to understand how the global jihadis see the role of media in their battle. After that I took a look on how Isis has turned some ideas of al-Suri and Naji into praxis. I continued by reviewing the history of jihadi movement inside Germany and showing that it all started as a propaganda/media operation on internet as German jihadis with connections jihadi groups in the Middle East started to translate jihadi propaganda from Arabic to German.

The main point of this paper however is not just to review the history of global jihadi movements and the development of their media practices. I also want to provoke some discussion among journalists about the role of media in terroristic political violence and psychological warfare. From my overview it becomes clear, that global jihadis have put a lot of effort on creating their own media, where they can spread their own messages to their own audiences without the filtering role of the mainstream media. This doesn't however mean that mainstream media does not anymore have any role. Jihadis still at least partly rely on mainstream media, because through mainstream media they will reach the mainstream publicity. I think it is very important that journalists who are covering terrorism are aware enough of all dimensions of the conflict, especially if media has deliberately been drawn into it and being exploited by the terrorists. I wish we could ask ourselves, are we doing our job well and critically enough, and are we aware enough about all the realities of this conflict.

During the first half of 2017, as Isis-related terrorist attacks took place in Paris, Stockholm, St. Petersburg, London and Manchester, there started to be more discussion on European media on the troublesome symbiosis between terrorism and the media. For example, just after the London Westminster attack (22th of March) British columnist Simon Jenkins said in BBC's Newsnight program that media is giving too much weight to terrorist crimes and by doing this actually "ai-

ding terrorism”<sup>21</sup>. After the suicide bombing in Manchester Arena (22th of May) Swiss public channel SRF-1 decided not to produce any additional or special broadcasts on the attacks. They would just go with normal reporting with analyses. SRF-1 explained the decision as following:

”Der Terror braucht den medialen Ausnahmezustand, um seine volle Wirkung zu entfalten. Erst dieser sorgt dafür, dass sich Angst und Schrecken weit über den Anschlagort hinaus verbreiten und in den Köpfen von uns allen einnisten. Darum: keine zusätzliche Sendung, kein noch greller Scheinwerferlicht auf den Ort des Schreckens. Es wird grell genug sein in unseren regulären Sendungen, in der «Tagesschau am Mittag», in der Hauptausgabe am Abend, in «10vor10». Dort werden wir versuchen, das Geschehene zu analysieren und zu ergründen, welche Konsequenzen der Selbstmordanschlag von Manchester hat.“<sup>22</sup>

As I mentioned in chapter 2, the problematic relation between media and terrorism is not a new idea. From since 1970’s terrorism experts have understood that for modern terrorist the mass media serves as a powerful tool to spread messages and as a weapon of psychological warfare. Global jihadi movements like Isis and al-Qaida are well aware that media can be used as a powerful weapon against their enemies. They understand that their enemy has a military over-power and that it is very difficult for them to beat their enemy in a conventional warfare. That’s why they have chosen terrorism as their military tactic and that’s why they are using means of psychological warfare to slowly weaken their enemy and to create conditions for themselves to simply survive. Media seems to stand at the center in this battle.

As a conclusion to this paper, I have formulated ten theses on the relationship between terrorism and media and the challenges we are currently facing in Europe. Theses are based on my reading on jihadi manifests and the academic literature on subject and especially on interviews with five prominent researchers or journalists who are competent with the topic. The experts are: Claudia Dantschke, journalist and director of Hayat, center for Deradicalisation in Berlin, Florian Peil, Security Analyst & Consultant focusing in the Middle East, Jan Raudszus, PhD candida-

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<sup>21</sup> BBC’s News Night 22th March 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqs4h4xVRoY>

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.srf.ch/sendungen/hallosrf/warum-gab-es-keine-sondersendung-zum-anschlag-in-manchester?ns\\_source=web&srg\\_sm\\_medium=fb?ns\\_source=web&srg\\_sm\\_medium=fb](https://www.srf.ch/sendungen/hallosrf/warum-gab-es-keine-sondersendung-zum-anschlag-in-manchester?ns_source=web&srg_sm_medium=fb?ns_source=web&srg_sm_medium=fb)

te in KCL and the expert of jihadism in Germany, Juha Saarinen, expert on jihadism in Finland and Florian Flade, chief reporter at Die Welt.<sup>23</sup>

The following theses or arguments are not supposed to be a word of god but a word of human being (and a journalist). They are meant to provoke further discussion among journalists who are reporting on terrorism and the jihadi scene. My hope is that they could help journalists to raise self-awareness of their own role in this complicated conflict. After every thesis I have chosen some quotes from the experts. Quotes are meant to further explain or justify each thesis.

### **Thesis 1: Isis and al-Qaida have deliberately weaponized the media and journalists should be aware of this**

As Charlie Winter wrote in his overview on Isis handbook "Media Operative, You Are a Mujahid, Too": "[T]he mainstream news industry must recognize that the Islamic State deliberately weaponizes media coverage." (Chapter 4 of this paper). Since at least from the Afghanistan war (1979-1989) the global jihadis have understood the importance of media battles. Since then they have struggled to create their own independent media channels to communicate with their own supporters and to create a global jihadi identity. At the same time they are trying to play around with mainstream media, turning it to a weapon against the audience. They use asymmetric military tactics in order to create worldwide attention and to spread terror. They understand, that "confusing the enemy" is an important tactic in their struggle . The instigation through media serves also as a recruiting tool for them.

#### **FLORIAN PEIL:**

"Terrorist attack is an act of communication. It is always about the message. Terrorists want to spread their message. Today, with social media it is easier than ever to spread your message quickly and unfiltered, because you need traditional media only partly. So, at least in sophisticated terrorist attacks this whole media response is already kept in mind during the early stages of the planning process of an attack."

#### **CLAUDIA DANTSCHKE:**

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<sup>23</sup> Interviews were conducted in Germany during the first half of 2017. Juha Saarinen and Jan Raudszus were interviewed by phone and Skype, other interviews were conducted face-to-face in Berlin.

”Sie wissen, wie die moderne Mediengesellschaft funktioniert, deshalb bedienen sie sich auch verschiedener Medien. Da die offiziellen Medien – Presse, Funk und TV - von ihnen als ‚Lügenpresse‘ diffamiert werden, schaffen sie über die sozialen Medien ihre eigene Presse als Alternative dazu. Und je mehr sie dann in den offiziellen Medien kriminalisiert und als Monster dargestellt werden, desto mehr fühlen sie sich einerseits in ihrer antiwestlichen und antidemokratischen Ideologie bestätigt und gleichzeitig auch in ihrer eigenen Bedeutung aufgewertet. Sie haben das Gefühl, sie können mit den westlichen Medien spielen.“

## **Thesis 2: Media is at the center of the struggle for the global jihadis. The media success may be even more important to them as the military success.**

As William McCants put it in his analysis on three jihadi thinkers (Chapter 3.3 of this paper):

”They believe that military success matters less than the perception of it in the media.” In the media handbook of Isis it was formulated a bit different way, ”[T]he media jihad against the enemy is no less important than the material fight against it” (Chapter 4 of this paper). In any case media success is very important to jihadis especially in a situation where the group is losing its organizational structure but they need to keep their ideology alive and spreading. This is exactly the situation Isis is standing after the collapse of the Caliphate. As Isis has stated in their handbook for ”media jihadis” (Chapter 4.1):

-“[T]he media jihad against the enemy is no less important than the material fight against it”

-“[T]he media is a jihad in the way of Allah [and that] you, with your media work, are therefore a mujahid in the way of Allah”.

-“Inciting others to join the jihad is tantamount to engaging in the jihad oneself.”

## **Thesis 3: Social Media made Isis big, but the mainstream media is still the highway to the mainstream publicity.**

Efficient propaganda through online social media services like Facebook and Twitter helped Isis to make a world record on jihadi recruiting. But this doesn't mean that the mainstream media doesn't matter anymore. Mainstream media is still the most efficient way to mediate messages to the mainstream publicity. According to Claudia Dantschke, the general attitude among the Jihadis towards mainstream media is disdain. For them the Western media is ”Lügenpresse” (lying press), and an enemy of Islam. At the same time the jihadis are following carefully Western me-

dia and its coverage on jihadis and terrorist attacks: they don't follow only the big media companies but also small local newspapers and their coverage. One anecdote told me by Dantschke is telling: When The New York Times wrote an article about German Jihadi Dennis Cuspert, he was very keen to share the article on his social media accounts to his followers as an evidence that he is famous. Even though the jihadis think the mainstream media is a liar, they understand the power of it. Also, they are keen to use footages from mainstream media in their own propaganda. Consequently this means that professional journalists should still have a role as a filter or a gatekeeper in order to put extremist propaganda into context and not take extremist propaganda as face value.

**FLORIAN FLADE (DIE WELT):**

"Of course they need mainstream media and of course mainstream media has a role. They are desperately seeking attention of mainstream media. That is the main reason that they killed James Foley [kidnapped American journalist] in that video. That is the main reason they burned the Jordanian pilot in the cage."

**CLAUDIA DANTSCHKE:**

"Wenn alle großen Medien über sie berichten, dann wertet das sie auf. Dadurch erreichen sie den Mainstream, was ihnen dann auch eine andere, nämlich eine größere, Bedeutung zuschreibt."

#### **Thesis 4: Terrorist threat in Europe is not over, but may even increase in the near future**

All the experts I interviewed estimated that the threat of jihadi-linked terrorism and other security related issues regarding jihadis is not over, but may increase in the near future. Of course, this is still speculation. How things will turn out, will depend on what happens to the organization and brand of Isis after the destruction of the Caliphate - and how the security officials of Europe manage their counter-terrorism operations. If thesis number 4 turns to be right, journalists in Europe will have to engage with terrorism reporting more than they previously did. The main reason for the growing terrorist threat is the return of the European Jihadi veterans from Syria and Iraq. They may, when back in Europe, get involved in terrorism acts by themselves, or keep on spreading the jihadi ideology (as the jihadi veterans of previous wars have done). Also, while in the previous years the main goal of Isis was to create a territorial state and lure Muslims to travel

there, and while the "Islamic State" as a territorial entity is currently perishing, they may try to show their power by increasing terrorist attacks worldwide and especially in Europe. This is due to fact that Isis has lot of connections in Europe (It is estimated that 1/5 of the foreign fighters of Isis have European background). Also, terrorist attacks conducted in Europe more easily generates worldwide attention, which is exactly what Isis is looking for.

**FLORIAN FLADE:**

"This topic will be one of the top topics covered by journalist for the coming next ten years at least."

**FLORIAN PEIL:**

"[The threat is rising] due the foreign fighters coming back. There are more to come, and I just have a feeling that we'll see more things happening in summer this year [2017], and then it should be less. Of course not all the fighters coming back are potential attackers. It only means we will have more potentially dangerous people in the country. (...) What is more threatening in my opinion is that now we have this international networks of veterans. They are all connected now, and of course you have to keep an eye on all these people."

**JUHA SAARINEN:**

"The threat of terrorism may increase and last long. We can say that the current Jihadi wave may endure for many years. The war in Iraq and Syria brought up a new Jihadi generation in Europe. We will not get rid of it for a long time."

**Thesis 5: The collapse of Isis as territorial entity may force the group to change its strategy from establishing the Caliphate back to al-Suri's idea of globalized "individual jihad".**

If Isis loses its strongholds in Syria/Iraq, what other choices the group has than going back to globalized "individual jihad" or small cell units without an organizational structure (or maybe some sort of mixture between those two strategies)? It should be noted also that the main still existing (summer 2017) propaganda magazine of Isis targeted to Western supporters is called Rumiya, or "Rome". The articles of Rumiya, which are translated to many languages, even in Finnish, focuses mainly on practical advices how to terrorize Western countries. Also, the wave of small scale terrorist attacks in Europe during 2016-2017 may give a hint how Isis is trying to act in the near future. To remind the readers what al-Suri meant by globalized "individual jihad",

here is a quote from his book "The Call for Global Islamic Resistance", that crystallizes it (For more, read chapter 3.2 of this paper):

**ABU MUSAB AL-SURI:**

"The goal of the operations of the Resistance and the Individual Terrorism Jihad is to inflict as many human and material losses as possible and to *make them feel* that the Resistance has transformed into a *phenomenon of popular uprising* against them." (Italics by Jukka Huusko)

**CLAUDIA DANTSCHKE:**

"Die Bedrohung ist nicht vorbei. Wir müssen sehr wachsam sein, weil die Propaganda gerade von Daesh [Isis/IS] dahin geht, nicht mehr nach Syrien oder in den Irak zu kommen, ins Kalifat, was sowieso nur noch schwer möglich ist, sondern in den westeuropäischen Ländern zu bleiben und dort Terroranschläge zu begehen, auch kleine nicht sehr aufwendige Mordanschläge, um die Gesellschaft zu destabilisieren. Und wir dürfen nicht vergessen, dass al-Qaida auch noch da und aktiv ist, auch durch Terror in Westeuropa."

**Thesis 6: Isis is well aware about the political and cultural fractions inside Europe and is trying to exploit them in order to destabilize Europe.**

According to Europol there are around 5 000 Europeans that have traveled to Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters and probably joined Isis. This already proves that inside Isis must be people who have good understanding of political situations in each European country. The experts expect that Isis is trying to benefit from the knowledge of European fighters both in their propaganda and in the actual planning of attacks.

**CLAUDIA DANTSCHKE:**

"Sie wissen ganz genau, was in West-Europa läuft, wie die Stimmung hier ist, was berichtet wird, welche Maßnahmen ergriffen werden. Und wenn sie eine Chance erkennen, die Situation weiter anzustacheln, die Situation weiter zu destabilisieren und Angst zu schüren, dann ergreifen sie sie. Vor Wahlen, wie jetzt der Bundestagswahl, werden sie versuchen, Angst zu schüren durch Anschläge, damit die Menschen nach rechts abdriften und entsprechend wählen, was ihnen dann wieder nutzen kann, wenn sich die Stimmung dadurch gegen die Muslime insgesamt verschlechtert."

**FLORIAN PEIL:**



"It's all about destabilization. In the end it is all about the world domination and of course they want the destabilization of European countries. They know exactly where the fractions are and they are very good in exploiting them."

**JUHA SAARINEN:**

"What is exceptional with Isis, is that they have so much foreign fighters from Europe. They have added their knowledge of their societies and cultures. Isis has used this in their propaganda and in terrorist attacks. Isis has more knowledge about European societies as al-Qaida had let's say ten years ago."

**Thesis 7: The goal of Isis in Europe is to polarize the relations between Muslims and the rest.**

Isis has used the tactic of polarizing and destabilizing successfully in Iraq and Syria to takeover territories (polarizing the relationships between Sunnis and Shias). While it is not a realistic vision that Isis could by this tactic take over territories in Europe, attacking Europe may still go in line with old ideas of "vexation and exhausting" the enemy, as the preventing of all terrorist attack against soft targets is very difficult and expensive for European states. By polarizing the relations between Muslims and the rest they seek to force European Muslims to choose their side and turn the non-Muslims against all the Muslims. This deliberate polarization would lead to an ever escalating civilian conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims. (For more about the polarization, read chapter 3.3 of this paper.)

**JAN RAUDSZUS:**

"They have written and said that they want to get rid of the grey-area of politics. Basically, they want to politicize and polarize the atmosphere between Muslims and everyone else. Either you are with them or - in their view - you are not a Muslim."

**CLAUDIA DANTSCHKE:**

"Nach jedem Anschlag, so die Hoffnung des IS, werden die Sicherheitsvorkehrungen repressiver und pauschal alle Muslime geraten immer mehr in Verdacht und die politische Stimmung wendet sich pauschal gegen alle Muslime. So würde die Gesellschaft in Muslime und Nichtmuslime gespalten und die Muslime würden immer mehr signalisiert bekommen, dass sie nicht Teil der westlichen Gesellschaften mehr seien."

**Thesis 8: Isis has deliberately exploited the refugee crisis in Europe. They may try to scapegoat the refugees in order to create polarization.**

When Isis was building and extending its Caliphate during 2014-2015, its main message to the Muslims all over the world was to invite them to join the fight or just to live in their "Islamic State". Isis didn't want Muslims to leave its territory to Europe, vice versa: it regarded refugees as traitors. At the same time Isis was exploiting the refugee streams and hiding their foreign operation terrorists (Paris/Brussels cell) in the refugee streams, taking advantage of the weak EU-border. According to reports, the "architect" of Paris and Brussels attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, had told his cousin and the friend of his cousin that there are around 90 Isis terrorist who had managed to get inside Europe. After the heated political debate during the 2015 refugee crisis Isis possibly started to "weaponize" the asylum seekers further, so that all the asylum seekers could be stigmatized as potential terrorists, which would help them polarizing the atmosphere.

**JUHA SAARINEN:**

"If a terrorist attack takes place for example in Germany, the public discourse will change according to who the perpetrator is: an asylum seeker, a German convert. In Germany the refugee situation is exceptionally acute. There are a lot of refugees, and important elections coming by. It is possible that they try to affect the situation. If they manage to get an asylum seeker to attack, or someone who has arrived with the refugees, it will have consequences. They have taken into account how it will affect. They have instrumentalized the refugees."

**FLORIAN FLADE (DIE WELT):**

"They know that the refugee topic is very sensitive and one of the major topics in Europe. You can see it when you look at their propaganda, how they are using the topic and trying to spin it around. I think they did 10-12 videos just on the topic of refugees saying... they are traitors. [...] The message number two is: look at the Muslim situation in Europe. Look at how Europe is treating Muslims, how they are discriminating Muslims, banning the burka or the veil. [...] I truly believe that there is a potential that some of them [refugees] are being recruited, some of them ending up in Salafist mosques or becoming followers of very radical preachers [...] And I believe that as long as IS exists as an organization in Syria/Iraq, they will try to get a connection to them [refugees], they will try to recruit Muslim refugees in Europe, they will try to turn them into terrorists. I believe IS is trying to do this on purpose. [...] Isis is doing everything they can to make refugees to carry out attacks."

**Thesis 9: Global jihadis are benefitting from the rise of political ultra right - and vice versa.**

This was something, that all the experts I interviewed seemed to agree. The extremists are profiting from each other. Isis and the ultra right have at least one common goal: they want to add pressure to the mainstream Muslims and force them to take sides. The rising ultra right, if it does not make any difference between jihadi extremists and mainstream muslims but accuse them all terrorists or potential terrorists, can help Isis to make European Muslims feel outsiders who don't belong to Europe. At the same time, the more we experience terrorism in Europe, the more the politicians will use the fear of terrorism as a political resource. This can lead to an ever escalating vicious circle of so called 'politics of fear', which actually may go according to the jihadi doctrines of polarization.

**FLORIAN FLADE:**

"Isis wants the political situation to escalate. They want right wing parties to become in power. They want a situation where Muslims feel full of anger, full of hate and revenge. That is what the Islamic State really wants."

**FLORIAN PEIL:**

"Extremist on both side are the winners. [...] They [ultraright] behave in a way that Isis has anticipated. And the more extreme they behave or the more xenophobic they became, the more it plays into Isis hands."

**Thesis 10: Political correctness of the "liberal left" or "the liberal media" can also play into terrorist hands, if it prevents societies to face up the challenge of Islamic extremism in Europe.**

Journalists should not be naive or too careful when reporting on Islamic extremism in Europe, because the truth is that Europe has a problem with Islamic extremism. Journalists should be careful with all extremist propaganda and they should not magnify the fear that terrorism provokes, but that doesn't mean we should keep quiet on Islamic extremism. Also, we should be aware that the global jihadis are using the narrative of victimized Muslims in their own propaganda. Abu Musab al-Suri, the architect of global jihadi terrorism, has himself noticed that this narrative of suffering Muslims should be emphasized in order to win hearts (chapter 3.2 in this paper). This means that journalists should be also critical towards the "soft propaganda" the jihadis are spreading and not taking them as a face value.

**FLORIAN FLADE:**

”It is not only about terrorism, it’s about extremism, about very radical thinking being spread by some people. We have a freedom of speech, it is highly regarded in this country. You can say almost anything you want. And that’s why the Salafist networks were so successful in recruiting people. They don’t only have Mosques, they have charities, lawyers, doctors, they can provide you anything they want. It is a huge problem and it can be even a bigger problem if society is not facing up to this challenge.”

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In this paper I will not go deeper to the practical instructions on what journalists should take into account when reporting on terrorism or jihadism. If there is a need for specific instructions, I think a wider community of international journalists should take a responsibility to formulate them. Definitely there are no reasons in any way to censor terrorism related news event, or to keep quiet on Islamic extremism. Baseline for all good reporting on terrorism could be the thesis number one, which emphasizes the awareness - that the jihadis have deliberately weaponized media and the media coverage, and journalists should be aware of this.

When journalists are aware and when they do their job well and critically enough, I believe that professional journalism could actually work as an efficient antidote against any extremist propaganda. Mainstream media should remember its role as a filter and gatekeeper no matter what is going on on social media. Mainstream media without a filtering, without critical gatekeeper-attitude to propaganda, can be an excellent weapon to any extremist propagandist.

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