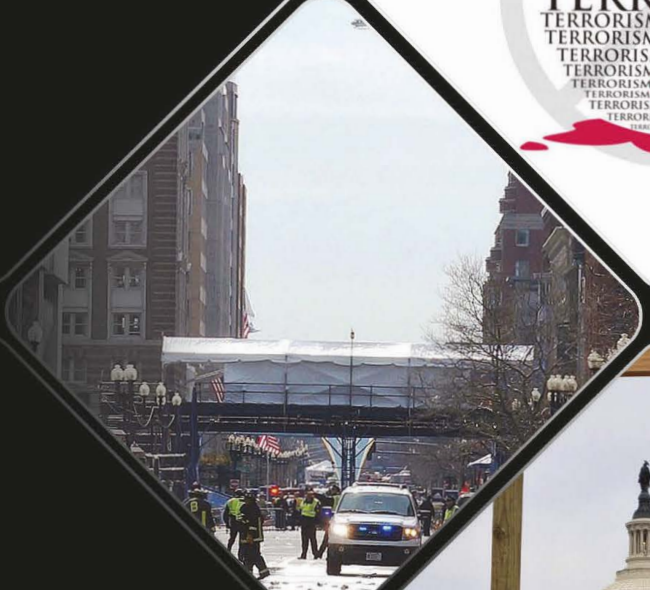# Defence Against Terrorism Analysis Quarterly (DATA-Q)

Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is the most asymmetric threat to the security of all citizens and to international peace and prosperity.

NO

TERRORISM

"Terrorism is an acute and global threat"

WELCOME REMARK

Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Academicians, and any people struggling with terrorism,

COE-DAT proudly presents the first volume of our analysis magazine, "Defense Against Terrorism Analysis Quarterly (DATA-Q)". The world is changing very quickly, as one of the famous sociologists Zygmunt Baumann stated that we live in the age of "liquid modernity". While history is a witness that Print Media had been the most effective and trustworthy factor for fetching everyday news and other relevant details, digital publishing is of growing importance for magazines. Whereas, in 2020 the pandemic that is Novel Corona Virus hit the whole world and people started imparting away from the print media and instead switched to online platforms. Especially Generation Z has been using short and informative social media platforms, instead of hard-copy, large-volume products. In this publication, we aim to reach wider readers and address, especially the younger generation with daily jargon and easy accessibility.

In this volume, you will have a chance to scrutinize three different aspects of counter-terrorism. The first analysis, written by Mr. Max Abrahms, is about the perils of overreacting to far-right extremism in America. He declared his anxieties, especially for the authoritarian regimes' policy of countering "extremists" as opposed to "terrorists." In sum, he highlighted the importance of establishing a narrative as the optimal approach for reducing domestic terrorism. The second analysis belongs to the precious staff of COE-DAT, Assoc. Prof. Osman ŞEN. He underlined the child abuse of the PKK/KCK terrorist organization and emphasized the vulnerability of children when compared with adults in the process of radicalization and organizational social identity. The author of the last analysis is Mr. Stephen Harley. He articulated that even though terrorist groups always have the initiative since they choose where, when and what constitutes the attack, government institutions have the capability to change the weakening perception of the community with the help of proper crisis communication. In light of Somalia's experience, he enumerated his suggestions for developing crisis communications in the context of counterterrorism.

Last but not least, I owe special thanks to the staff of COE-DAT and members of the Knowledge Department for their tireless efforts, patience, and critical reviews. Furthermore, I hope you will have pleasure while reading it in one swoop, and wait impatiently for the second volume. As COE-DAT we believe that we will win the struggle against terrorism with collective cooperation and common sense.

Regards.

Oğuzhan PEHLİVAN (PhD)
Colonel (OF-5), TUR-A
Director, COE-DAT

PROF. DR. MAX ABRAHMS

Prof. Dr. Max Abrahms is a leading expert on the subject of terrorism and counterterrorism. He is a professor of political science and public policy at Northeastern University and the author of seminal studies on terrorism and international security assigned at universities around the world. His new book with Oxford University Press entitled Rules for Rebels: The Science of Victory in Militant History proposes and tests an original theory to explain why some militant groups succeed while others fail. Abrahms frequently fields interviews about terrorism and counterterrorism with the Atlantic, Associated Press, BBC, Bloomberg, CNN, CNN International, Newsweek, New York Times, Voice of America, Washington Post, and many other media outlets. He has held fellowships and other affiliations with the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University, the Empirical Studies of Conflict project at Princeton University, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point Military Academy, the Center for Cyber and Homeland Security at George Washington University, the Center for the Study of Terrorism in Rome, the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi, the economics department at Bar Ilan University, the political science department at Johns Hopkins University, and the Belfer Center at Harvard University. Abrahms frequently advises government intel agencies such as the CIA on the contemporary terrorism landscape.

STEPHEN HARLEY

Stephen Harley is a specialist in CT, P/CVE, Stabilisation. Strategic Communications & Somalia, an experienced strategic communications management professional. He is a former soldier (British Army infantry, media and psychological operations officer including two operational tours of Iraq) and, in a brief sojourn from soldiering, taught English & Drama to the academically challenged children of financially gifted parents. For the last 10 years he has worked continuously on counter insurgency/counter terrorism strategic communications campaigns. A worrying artistic streak runs through his work (and occasionally even in synch with it) and, like Harry in Hemingway's 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro', he worries that he has spent too much timing doing it and has forgotten to write about it. After his second operational tour of Iraq, Harley joined a leading British communications company, Bell Pottinger, exploiting his recent experience of operational media and psychological operations. He led IO/Psyops projects in Baghdad, Iraq (2006-2007) and across the pan-Arab region (2008) on behalf the US government: in Afghanistan (2009) he embedded with a local media group in a capacity building role; led a UN project to provide support to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), based in Nairobi and Mogadishu; worked as a consultant with an East African security provider, Halliday Finch, countering piracy off the Somali coast, and as an communications advisor to the British Army Training Unit in Kenya; and most recently was a NATO civilian in Afghanistan, firstly embedded with the British Task Force in Helmand province and latterly in Kabul. He is currently the Communications Advisor to the President of Somalia under the auspices of the UK FCO.

ASSOC. PROF. DR. OSMAN ŞEN

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Osman ŞEN, is a 3rd Degree Chief Superintendent in the Turkish National Police. He is currently the Director of Civil Law Enforcement Policy in Center of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism (COE-DAT). He served as the Chief of the Fight Against Terrorist Organizations that abuse religion in the Counter-Terrorism Department between 2017-2021. He attended national and international meetings as a speaker on Türkiye's fight against DAESH.

 He completed International Relations master and Phd programmes at Gazi University (Ankara/Türkiye). He wrote the thesis titled "Al-Qaeda's Place within the Context of the Religious Terrorism and Assessment of its Incidents" for his master's degree. He wrote the thesis titled "The Effects of Changing Security Paradigms of 21th Century on Counterterrorism Strategies" for his PhD's degree. He gave the International Security undergraduate course at the National Defense University and the GUC 505 Terrorism, Organizational Psychology and Radicalization Process master's course at TOBB University.

The titles of the author's articles published on various dates are: "The Review of Al-Shebab Organization Within the Context of Changing Paradigms in 21st Century", "Terrorist Use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles: Turkey's Example", "Miscalculation in Proxy War: The United States and Russia in Syrian Civil War from the Neoclassical Realist Perspective", "The Ideological and Practical Comparison of Hezbollah in Lebanon and HAMAS", "Use of Blockchain Technology in the Financing of DEASH", "A Realist Appraisal to the Foreign Policy of Iran: The Case of Syria", "The Impact of Civil Wars on Women: Somalia Sample". In addition, he has published books on terrorism, presented papers and taught courses.

THE PERILS OF OVERREACTING TO FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM IN AMERICA

Max Abrahms

America is not new to domestic extremism. The Eisenhower Commission warned in 1968 about the extreme divisions in the nation riven over race, culture, and the controversial Vietnam War: "Violence in America has risen to alarmingly high levels…This high level of violence is dangerous to our society. It is dividing our people into armed camps…jeopardizing our most precious institutions…poisoning the spirit of trust and cooperation essential to their functioning…corroding the central political processes of our democratic society…substituting force and fear for argument and accommodation." Indeed, political divisions, extremism, and violence have been a recurrent aspect of American history from the Whiskey Rebellion of the late 18th century to the Civil War, Ku Klux Klan afterward and its reincarnation during the civil rights movement in the 1960s, radical left-wing groups in the 1970s such as the Symbionese Liberation Army and Weather Underground, Patriot Movement in the 1990s, as well as the tragic American experiences with "lone wolf" terrorists from the Unabomber to Timothy McVeigh.

And yet, U.S. counter-terrorism has focused on international terrorism—not the domestic variety. The post-9/11 "War on Terrorism" only strengthened the American commitment to protecting the homeland from external threats rather than internal ones. This has begun to change. The fight against domestic extremism has become the main American counterterrorism priority following the more recent mass shootings at the El Paso, Texas Walmart; Charleston, South Carolina Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Tree of Life synagogue; the vehicular attacks at the "Unite the Right" march in Charlottesville, Virginia and Christmas parade in Waukesha, Wisconsin; the threats and attacks against both Republican and Democrat Congress members; as well as the January 6, 2021 attack at the U.S. Capitol.

In response to this controversial event, President Biden initiated in his first day in office an unprecedented review of U.S. government efforts to combat domestic terrorism, which resulted in the first-ever national strategy to combat counterterrorism. The National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism notes that "domestic terrorism can take many forms, inspired by a wide range of violent ideologies." It stresses that "the definition of domestic terrorism in our law makes no distinction based on political views—left, right, or center—and neither should we." The document thus pledges "to confront domestic terrorism regardless of the particular ideology that motivates individuals to violence." Despite these assurances, President Biden and other Democratic leaders repeatedly finger right-wing extremism as the foremost threat to the United States—specifically, former President Donald Trump, his supporters, and the Make America Great Again (MAGA) agenda.

Even before the January 6 attack on the Capitol, leading opinion-makers across academe, media, and government agencies began calling for crackdowns against right-wing extremism akin to the post-9/11 response. Stanford political science professor Michael McFaul recommended for America to "start a war on terrorism at home" against the far-right. *The Atlantic* staff writer and *Washington Post* columnist Anne Applebaum agreed that the U.S. government should employ a "similar response" to "domestic white supremacist terrorism" as "foreign jihadi terrorism." *The Daily Beast* echoed, "Now, before it grows any stronger, should be the time to move against it with the same kind of concerted international focus of attention and resources that were trained on Osama bin Laden. Now is the time for a global war on white nationalist terrorism." Secretary of Transportation and veteran Pete Buttigieg also told audiences that he "learned a lot [in Afghanistan] that sadly will be applicable here at home.»

Former CIA and FBI practitioners have prescribed how the post-9/11 global war on terrorism can be applied to fighting right-wing extremists at home, from tracing their networks "just like we did against other terrorist groups" after 9/11 to changing our laws for us to "fight domestic terror groups…the way we treat foreign ones." Six former senior directors for counter-terrorism at the White House's National Security Council released a joint statement calling on the government to go after the Timothy McVeighs as ferociously as the Osama bin Ladens.

The January 6 attack on the Capitol convinced many Americans that the far-right in America is at least as dangerous as the international terrorism threat. Some Trump critics claimed the attack on the Capitol was even worse than 9/11. Elizabeth Neumann, a leading Trump critic from the Department of Homeland Security, has said that «We have to go after [the far-right]…with the same intensity that we did with Al Qaeda." And we must treat Trump like Osama bin Laden for inciting the violence, as he was the "spokesperson that rallied the troops." Gen. Stanley McChrystal claimed that right-wing extremists are following «the evolution of al-Qaida in Iraq,» which led to ISIS. Alex Stamos of the Stanford Internet Observatory has recommended that we treat white nationalists at home like ISIS by monitoring and restricting their social media.

Notably, this animus is frequently directed against not only violent offenders, but the Republican party more broadly. President Biden has walked back some of his rhetoric to reassure Americans that he does not view the entire GOP as an enemy. But as an MSNBC host recently acknowledged, "We don't separate right-wing extremists from the Republican Party any more." Reflecting a common view among elite American opinion-makers, Charles M. Blow of the *New York Times* likewise says that the entire Republican party is guilty of "fascist" thought for inadequately opposing Trump. Clearly, the establishment view in U.S. politics is to escalate countermeasures against right-wing "extremism," broadly defined.

But those views on countering the far-right worry me as a political scientist and terrorism expert. Unless acted upon intelligently, they risk exacerbating the terrorism threat and compromising American values for six reasons.

First, a hallmark of authoritarian regimes is their declared policy of countering "extremists" as opposed to "terrorists." These two terms are frequently used interchangeably, but carry very different meanings with critically important implications. Terrorists, by definition, are guilty of an extremism of means—not ends. Terrorists engage in radical tactics (against civilians) whereas an "extremist" may be guilty only of harboring unwelcome or aberrant political preferences from the vantage of the establishment. As White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre has acknowledged, "When you are not with what majority of Americans are, then you know, that is extreme. That is an extreme way of thinking." Governments that identify extremists rather than terrorists as the enemy risk becoming the thought police and criminalizing even nonviolent dissent.

Second, such overreactions are not only un-Constitutional and prone to abuse, but actually increase the number of terrorists. A large body of political science research suggests that government overreaction strengthens terrorists relative to the government. The overreaction convinces those on the sidelines that the government is as radical as the terrorists allege, growing their supporters and ultimately membership rosters. And the harming of innocents can convince them that the government will target them regardless of whether they commit terrorism,

strengthening the strategic logic of engaging in this violent behavior. For these and other reasons, my research demonstrates that authoritarian regimes make inferior counter-terrorists. Unsurprisingly, terrorists thrive in the most illiberal countries, where governments fail to distinguish between terrorists and political dissidents.

Third, terrorists thrive on grievances. And the far right in particular has historically been fueled by perceived injustices. Most notoriously, Timothy McVeigh attacked on April 19, 1995 the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City to avenge perceived government abuses at Ruby Ridge and Waco.

Fourth, terrorism researchers have long noted that terrorists often aim to provoke government overreaction. As David Rapoport remarked decades ago, terrorists have historically used the "politics of atrocity" to "produce counter-atrocities rebounding to the advantage of the original assailant." For example, Russian anarchists and the Algerian National Liberation Front tried to elicit heavy-handed counter-terrorism measures in order to erode the target government's popular support and attract more terrorists. The main constraint of terrorists is their weakness compared to the government. Terrorist leaders may not have a sophisticated understanding of the causal logic, but often realize that eliciting an overreaction can help them out organizationally at the expense of the government.

Fifth, my research indicates that whereas government excesses help terrorists, terrorist excesses help the government. Although a vast theoretical literature in political science purports to show the strategic utility of terrorism, empirical work demonstrates that the non-state attacks on civilians tend to backfire by strengthening the resolve of the target country, lowering the odds of government concessions, eroding popular support, and expediting organizational demise. A common narrative after the Capitol attack was that it would spur recruitment for the far-right. *The New York Times*, for example, ran a piece titled «Capitol Attack Could Fuel Extremist Recruitment for Years, Experts Warn.» And yet far-right violence has historically eroded support for far-right movements, whereas government abuses have increased it. Terrorism is self-regulating behavior with inherent limits that can reduce the need for a kinetic counter-terrorism response. The biggest counter-terrorism successes—from the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria to the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya to the Islamic State—are often due to the excesses of the terrorists themselves.

Sixth, the War on Terrorism demonstrates how large counterterrorism investments can yield disappointing returns and even exacerbate conflicts. The post-9/11 treatment is hardly worth emulating. Other scholars have documented the tremendous human, material, and normative costs. The war on terror has cost $6.4 trillion and 801,000 lives according to one estimate, created a massively expanded security state, and actually helped Al Qaeda to grow in Iraq, Libya, and Syria by generating the sorts of power vacuums that are ideal for terrorists to thrive. Currently, Afghanistan is on the brink of mass starvation, the Taliban has returned to power, women are again imprisoned under Sharia law, and Iraq is ripe for another civil war. In Somalia, the Sahel, Mozambique and other areas of Africa, jihadis are actually on the rise.

In sum, political science research indicates that governments pay a heavy price when their declared policy is to counter extremists rather than terrorists. In fact, government overreaction is often sought by terrorists and helps them, especially on the far-right. The biggest counterterrorism successes are seldom due to government expenditure and sacrifice, but due to the terrorism itself, which is self-regulating due to its unpopularity. These observations in the counter-terrorism literature are not new. But contrary to the establishment narrative since the January 6th attack, they point to government restraint as the optimal approach for reducing domestic terrorism, safeguarding law-abiding Americans, and preserving liberal values along with the proper role of government. The counter-terrorism research landscape thus suggests an important corrective to the establishment narrative.

Max Abrahms is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Northeastern University and author of *Rules for Rebels: The Science of Victory in Militant History*.

CHILD ABUSE BY PKK/KCK TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

By COE-DAT, Director of Civil Law Enforcement Policy: 3rd Degree Police Chief Assoc. Prof. Dr. Osman ŞEN

Abusing children throughout history has been a tool in conflict, where different paramilitary or terrorist organizations used them in the most violent ways. The PKK/KCK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan/Koma Civakên Kurdistan-The Kurdistan Workers' Party/The Union of Kurdish Communities) is no exception, since it is seen that this terrorist organization murders children in both selective and blind terrorist actions. This has been witnessed in a bombing attack in Istiklal, one of thoroughfares of Istanbul, where 9-year-old Ecrin Meydan and 15-year-old Yağmur Uçar lost their lives last November and in Gaziantep, where five-year-old Hasan Karataş lost his life, rocket and mortar attacks targeting schools and houses. The organization does not only harm children with its actions, but also abuses them by forcing or deceiving them to join their cadres.[1]
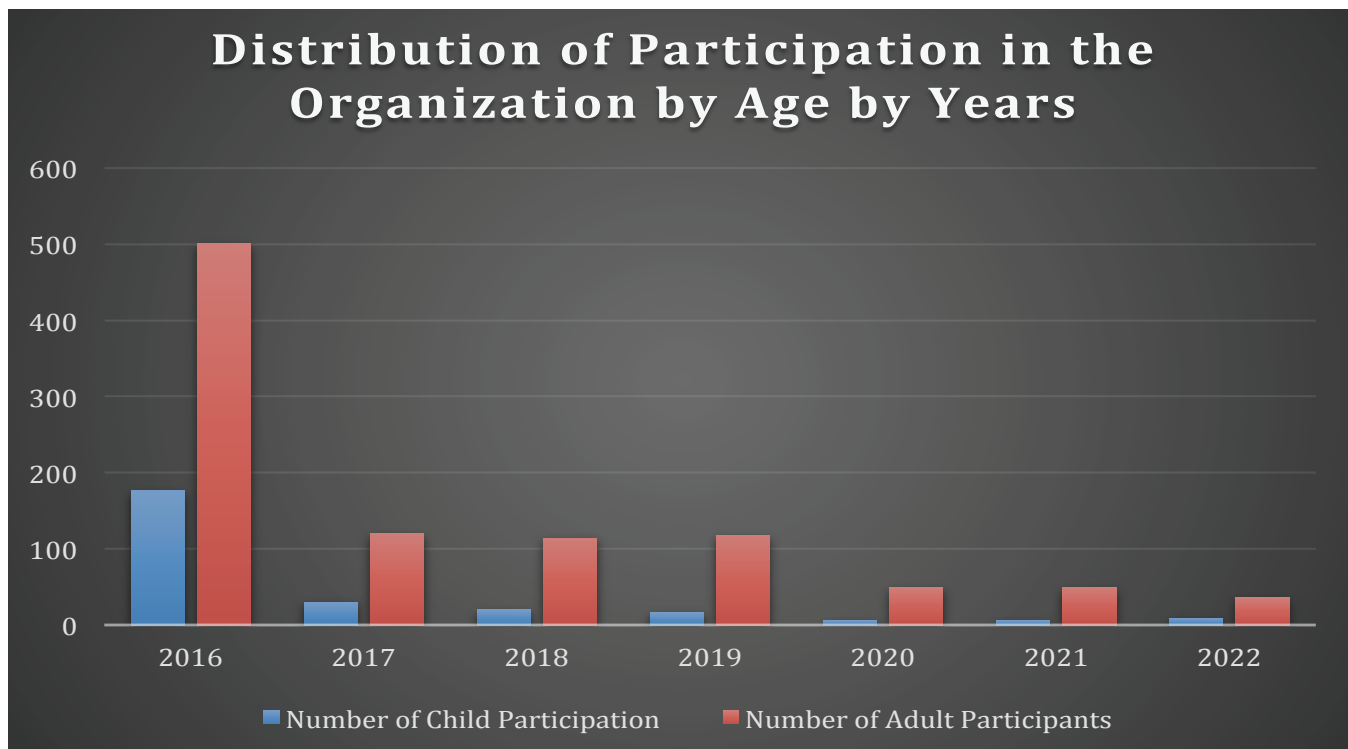
The organization took the decision of "Compulsory Military Service" in its 3rd Congress held in 1987. Within the scope of this decision, the members of the organization have started to work on the participation of at least one child from each family, from the target group of the organization, to the mountain cadres. Since the 1990`s, a significant number of children have been forced to join the organization. The organization has begun to abuse children who were forcibly recruited, in various actions, including suicide attacks. For example, 17-year-old Leyla Kaplan organized a suicide attack in Adana on October 25, 1996[2], in which three police officers and one citizen lost their lives and eleven people, seven of whom were police officers, were injured.

The movement of the organization towards the abuse children in its actions and their participation in its cadres in the 1990s, continued in the 2000s as well. The study titled "Who's on This Mountain?", written by Nihat Ali Özcan and H. Erdem Gürkaynak on behalf of the Turkish Economic Policy Foundation focused on 1,362 organization members who lost their lives between 2001-2011. It is states in the study that 43.68% of the members of this organization who lost their lives were under the age of 18. According to the data in the Ministry of Interior's publication named "PKK/KCK Terrorist Organization's Abuse of Children and Women", a total of 1,949 members of the organization surrendered between 2013 and 2016 and 11,133 people newly joined the organization. In addition, those from 418 who surrendered from the organization that were under the age of 18 constituted 29.7%. One of them joined at the age of 10.

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1 U.S. Department of State, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, July 2022, pp.296-297. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221020-2022-TIP-Report.pdf

2 Counter Extremism Project, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) Report, p.4. https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/kurdistan-workers-party-pkk/report, https://www.sabah.com.tr/adana/2020/12/09/teror-babasini-korona-annesini-aldi

According to the data of the Counter-Terrorism Department of the Turkish National Police, 176 children joined the organization in 2016, 30 in 2017, 20 in 2018, 16 in 2019, 6 in 2020, 6 in 2021, and 9 in 2022.

Distribution of Participation in the Organization by Age by Years

■ Number of Child Participation   ■ Number of Adult Participants

These studies indicate that the organization continuously abuses children in order to use them in its activities. The organization founded also a children's battalion called "Tabura Zaroken" in the Gara region of Northern Iraq, where the organization provides armed and ideological training for children. The most important factor in the organization's inclusion of children in its cadres is that children are more vulnerable than adults are to the radicalization processes carried out by professional organization members, and the construction of a terrorist identity takes place faster. Although it is obvious that this situation violates human rights and international conventions, it is considered that it is futile to expect a terrorist organization to comply with moral values and rules. "Geneva Call", the non-governmental organization headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, which carries out activities to prevent the use of children in conflict areas, and the armed wing of the PKK/KCK terrorist

organization HPG (People's Defense Forces/Hêzên Parastina Gel/the People's Defense Center/People's Defense Forces (HPG)) signed an agreement called "Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict"[3] in 2013 with the aim of not using children in conflicts. Although it is controversial to address the terrorist organization, it is understood from the above data that the organization has not complied with this agreement.

PKK/KCK terrorist organization member signing an agreement with Geneva Call [4]

Analysing the recruiting process, the organization obviously tries to weaken children`s ties with their family with slogans such as "The word family is forbidden" and "Comradeliness is superior to family". Within this process the terrorist organization tries to transform children from the ecology of normal life to the ecology of the terrorist organization where they can be radicalized. With this transformation, the organization aims to get rid of family ties, which are the most important obstacle in the abuse of children. Within the scope of the fight against the abuse of children and this tactic of the organization, as a result of persuasion efforts of the security forces and the sit-ins of Diyarbakir mothers in front of the HDP (People's Democracy Party) Diyarbakır provincial building, in 2019, 273 members of the organization, 243 in 2020, 199 in 2021 and 113 members of the organization in the 11-month period of 2022 escaped from the organization and surrendered. The support and importance of families in these activities is indisputable. Currently, 39 families continue their sit-ins in order to save their children from the organization. As more families participate and support these activities and resist their children being recruited by the organization, it is predicted that the organization will have increasing difficulties in recruiting staff for activities where children are abused.

Diyarbakir Mothers on Duty[5]

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3 For detailed information see: https://genevacall.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2013/12/DoC-Protecting-children-in-armed-conflict.pdf
4 https://www.genevacall.org/major-kurdish-armed-movement-commits-protection-children-armed-conflict/
5   https://www.aa.com.tr/en/diyarbakir-mothers-on-children-watch

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS DURING TERRORIST INCIDENT: THE SOMALI EXPERIENCE.

Mr. Stephen HARLEY

"Al-Qa'ida is in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. Al-Qa'ida is in a media battle for the hearts and minds of the ummah"

Ayman al-Zawahiri

"Al-Qa'ida is 10% operations and 100% communication."

Osama Bin Ladin

That the two leaders of al-Qa'ida both emphasise the importance of communication to a terrorist campaign should be no longer be any surprise. If anything, the latter quotation would now probably be rendered, "Al-Qa'ida is 1% operations and 99% communication" were Bin Ladin still with us. As the information environment continues to develop at pace and more and more individuals find themselves able to communicate instantaneously and with virtually anyone, anywhere in the world via something as innocuous as a smart phone, communication remains a fundamental weapon in the terrorist arsenal, as much as the more traditional AK47 assault rifle or the Improvised Explosive Device (IED).

In spite of this, government responses during terrorist attacks remain patchy. This is inevitable, though: the terrorist group will always have the initiative since they choose where, when and what constitutes the attack. In many ways the lesson that has been identified is how quickly government institutions can regain the initiative and dominate the narrative around the incident.

By way of a working definition, a High Profile Attack (HPA) could be an attack on a notable individual or group of people (politicians, senior members of the security forces, celebrities or other high profile individuals or groups such as journalists, dignitaries, minorities or marginalised groups); on an institution or a significant or symbolic structure; or a specific event or activity.

As UK's MI6 Head of Counter-Terrorism during 9/11, Richard Barrett (who went on to set up the UN's Counter-Terrorism Executive Department or UN CTED), recently noted, our understanding of how terrorist groups use HPAs as a tactic has evolved. It is certainly no longer just about numbers: it is unlikely that any group will surpass the death toll of the 9/11 al-Qa'ida attacks in 2001 any time soon. It was also telling that the third largest terrorist attack in history and the largest on the African continent, the October 14th 2017 truck bombing of a busy area of Mogadishu by the al-Qa'ida linked Somali terror group, al-Shabaab, garnered only minimal coverage in the international news media. It is not just about the broader media splash either, although this remains important. It is the response that the HPA draws out, suggests Barrett, which is often ill-conceived, disproportionate, or hijacked by partisan actors.

The overall effect then is the weakening of perceptions of government institutions, enhancing perceptions of terrorist capabilities and, in the longer term, negatively affecting the day-to-day lives of the population. The HPA is a judo move designed to off-foot the institutions of government.

This means the immediate response to an HPA is critical.

For nearly a decade the British Embassy Mogadishu has worked closely with the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) to enhance the effectiveness of the response to HPAs in the country's capital and elsewhere. This has been supplemented by parallel training delivered in neighbouring countries, notably in Kenya through the British High Commission in Nairobi, where al-Shabaab launched attacks on the Westgate shopping mall in September 2013 and the Dusit Hotel complex in January 2019.

Sadly, the training often becomes 'live', such is the frequency of attacks in Mogadishu in particular. This article outlines the more recent Somali experience and also explores the training programme that has continued to develop to reflect the evolving information environment and terrorist tactics (which include their own activities in the media space).

The Recent Somali Experience

In the aftermath of the Hayat Hotel attack in Mogadishu which ran from the 19th-21st August 2022 it became very apparent that, despite having borne the brunt of al-Shabaab HPAs for over a decade, the transition of government between the Farmajo and Hassan Sheikh Mohamud administrations in May 2022 had resulted in a loss of institutional knowledge, which al-Shabaab ruthlessly exploited. This is no slur on the government of Somalia – every government in transition inevitably loses some of its institutional capacity in that transition, but in this case a civil service which is still in gestation meant that the Somali government and security forces were found to be left lacking both tactically and in terms of messaging.

As a result British Embassy Mogadishu offered Crisis Communications training to Communications personnel across the security apparatus: the Offices of the Prime Minister & the National Security Advisor; the Ministry of Internal Security (including the Somali Police Force), the Ministry of Defence (including the Somali National Army) and the Ministry of Information (including the state news agency, SONNA, and the Somali state broadcasters, Somali National TV and Radio Mogadishu (which broadcasts directly and indirectly across the country).

All training provided to the Somali government by British Embassy Mogadishu in Crisis Communications is based on real examples, emphasises the importance of social media and is delivered simultaneously in English & Somali

As a result, 15 personnel were trained in Crisis Communications, went through a simulated incident based on real events over the past 13 years and finally prepared and delivered a press briefing on the simulated incident. Ongoing mentoring will be offered to ensure security institution communications capacity is able to effectively challenge and then overcome the al-Shabaab narrative around HPAs.

Sadly, it was not long until the training was put to the test with al-Shabaab's detonation of twin car bombs outside the Ministry of Education in Mogadishu which is estimated to have killed over 100 people. But the response was considerably better than during the Hayat Hotel attack in August. Notably, the messaging was responsive and authoritative and effectively shaped the narrative around the attack. British Embassy Mogadishu can claim some of the credit for this: as one of the course attendees who worked in the Somali Ministry of Information noted, 'we simply went through everything in the Aide Memoire and did everything it told us to.' Similarly, al-Shabaaab's attack on the Villa Rosa Hotel on November 30th, while shocking in its proximity to the seat of government in Mogadishu, was also well handled in terms of control of responsiveness and control of the narrative.

A good example of a holding message, issued by the Somali Police Force Spokesperson, Major Sadik Dodishe in the aftermath of the November 2022 al-Shabaab attack on the Villa Rosa Hotel in Mogadishu. Major Sadik and his colleagues were trained by British Embassy Mogadishu in Crisis Communications

Lessons Identified

This article is not, however, suggesting that the battle against al-Shabaab in Somalia is near its end, as periodic HPAs in Mogadishu and elsewhere, and ongoing wide-scale operations against the terror group in the rural hinterland, indicate. Nor is it suggesting that High Profile Attacks no longer present a viable way for terror groups to achieve their objectives.

What this article does suggest, though, is that crisis communications in the context of counter-terrorism is something that can be developed through the selection of the right individuals, who, with regular training and

mentoring and through a constant process of reviews of performance in the aftermath of an incident, can be a prepared as possible for a High Profile Attack.

Aide Memoire: Handling a Crisis Communications Situation.

Preparing for a High Profile Attack

- Establish your media network
- Build positive relationships with the media
- Identify what tools you will use to communicate with the media:
  - Twitter/Facebook/E-mail/Phone/In person
  - Make sure it is complete, up to date, recorded & shared
- Establish who can speak to the media (and have more than one)
- Train communicators realistically and provide refresher training regularly
- Establish an agreed code of conduct with the media that limits the use of disturbing imagery or reckless reporting (emphasise the element of 'doing the terrorists' PR job for them')
- Do not threaten, abuse or detain the media unless they are engaging in criminal behaviour, in which case treat them in the same way as any criminal, complete with recognition of their rights
- Research what makes the population feel safe and what frightens them: use this knowledge
- Identify what information you will need to know when an incident occurs and how you will get that information:
  - Security services, the police, the army, the emergency services
  - Open Source Intelligence (social media, the news media)
- Identify coordination points across the area you operate in as likely control points and locations for press statements

During the High Profile Attack: Immediate Actions (0-60 minutes)

Once the HPA begins it is important to gain understanding of the situation and to message with authority as soon as possible.

THE FACTS:
- Who, what, where, when & why
- And what is being done about it by whom
- The aim of any attack is to spread fear using the media for amplification: don't do the terrorists' job for them!
- Use neutral, un-emotional language:
  - Do not sensationalise
  - Do not speculate
  - Do not form linkages to other incidents in-country or further afield
- Issue a FACTUAL Holding Line as soon as possible in multiple formats (in person, written, audio, video, on social media)
- Highlight what you know the Security & Emergency Services are doing

- Try to coordinate with anyone else who is messaging:
  - AVOID MESSAGING FRATRICIDE – establish beforehand who is the lead messenger and shut down rogue messengers (who may well be from other government institutions)

During the High Profile Attack: Medium Term (60 minutes and beyond)

- Contact the media once the incident has concluded or during a lull
- Do not make rash promises: neither actions ('we will catch them', 'we will kill them') nor a policy change
- Monitor the media response (particularly Twitter and known credible news sources to assess how they are covering the incident)
- Identify any factual errors and correct them immediately
- Reinforce the successes of the Emergency Services response in a factual way, emphasizing numbers
- As quickly as possible, try to return the scene and its environs to normal business
- Thank and highlight the resilience (and restraint, if appropriate) of population to acts of violence
- There will be an investigation: request help from people on behalf of security services ('somebody might have seen something important'), make the population feel they are part of the whole security picture
- Condolences where appropriate (although at this point this may still be too soon)

After the High Profile Attack: the Longer Term Response

- Reinforce the effectiveness of the government response again and again
  - And, by contrast, highlight failures/'luck' on the part of the terrorists
- Repeat the need for ongoing support for the security effort from the population (reporting information, tip lines)
- Create 'heroes of the day' – humanise the security and emergency services and individual citizens
- Look after the victims and their families: visits to hospitals, financial compensation, honours
- Highlight the resilience of 'the people' against threat and the ineffectiveness of terrorists in achieving their goals
- Highlight the illegitimacy of targets: rebuild as quickly as possible
- Reminder: differentiate between individuals within the terrorist group, noting that there is a 'way out', particularly those who are appalled by the actions of 'the hard core'

Coverage of Recent HPAs in Mogadishu

21AUG22 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-62621205
30OCT22 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63445415
27NOV22 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63773425