Terrorism - The Idea
Elena Botts

Abstract
Research on terrorism has long been criticized for its inability to overcome enduring methodological issues. These include an overreliance on secondary sources and the associated literature review methodology, a scarcity of statistical analyses, a tendency for authors to work alone rather than collaborate with colleagues, and a large number of one-time contributors to the field. This article aims at explicating the theoretical underpinnings of terrorism. This explores how the whole phenomenon develops from campaign to Act of Terrorism. For this ISIL and Al-Qaeda are focused as terrorist organizations. Further, it deliberates on counterterrorism strategies and challenges to it.

Key Words: Terrorism, Terrorist Organizations, Countering Terrorism Strategies

Introduction
Terrorism, as with any sociopolitical phenomenon, arises from an intersection of innumerable factors but in order to counteract its devastating effects, it becomes necessary to delineate discrete causes. Major General Michael K. Nagata stated, “We have not defeated the idea,” he said. “We do not even understand the idea (Michael, 2017).” As Graeme Wood writes in the Atlantic, ‘our failure to appreciate the essential differences between ISIS and al-Qaeda has led to dangerous decisions’. How can the terrorist group be defeated without understanding the causes of its existence? One cause that we will focus on in this paper is the forms of alienation particular to the modern age, there which contribute to the societal destabilization that fuels extremism and violence. We would like to focus on the recent wave of terrorist attacks in America and Europe, and how ISIL recruits from the disenfranchised and vulnerable. In particular, we will examine how psychological and social factors manifest through religious and political ideologies. This is demonstrated through the recruitment process as psychologically and socially alienated individuals adopt extremist religious and political ideologies and then become implicated in and responsible for acts of violence.

Theoretical Underpinnings
There is the theory of structural as well as individual alienation. Terrorism is a sign of societal collapse, ‘when a splinter group is alienated from the larger movement’ which has abandoned its ideology, and the dissenters conduct organized violence as a result of psychological alienation. Throughout, however, jihadists are typically in their late teens and early twenties, are accustomed to Western civilization and spend significant time on the internet. They are exposed to vast amounts of information in a disconnected manner through the internet, are subject to the postmodern paradigms and liberalism of modern Western thought, and are not as anchored by the commitments that root older adults- all factors that might render them more estranged and therefore more open to radical ideas (Hollande, 2016).
Extremism is often most appealing to young males that are somehow alienated from general society and those that are caught between Westernization and their culture of origin and begin to rebel against their own communities as well as broader society. Many are ‘schizophrenically suspended between the presumed “ethnic culture” of their parents’ homeland and the equally presumed “British” way of life.’ Egerton notes that many militants are second generation immigrants or those who have resettled themselves, or socially outcast Westerners who became involved with radicalized populations (Obama, Barack, 2016).

Many suffer from economic exclusion as well as economic deprivation. For instance, according to a quote Egerton included from the book *The Suicide Factory*, many second generation immigrants in the extremist Islamic community in north London’s Finsbury Park mosque ‘felt cheated that their fathers’ hard work had not been amply rewarded since they came to Britain’ and shared ‘a feeling of alienation and anger especially in response to ‘the racist taunt and violence from white gangs who wanted to drive them from their inner-city communities’. ‘They were ashamed that their parents had been too subservient.’ Many had become petty criminals (Juergensmeyer, & Mark, 2000).

It has often been remarked upon that the digital age estranges people from one another as human interactions become lost in translation. Indeed, we are prone to wonder if those who are most vulnerable to ISIL are those who are most likely to spend significant time online because these individuals may be the most socially alienated. This becomes particularly potent; when one considers the power social media has played in the creation and expansion of the extremist group. Although originally, many extremist Islamic groups clashed with technology because their orthodox ideologies disavowed them, now every jihadist ‘is her or her own media outlet, reporting live from the frontline in tweets, offering enticing visions of domestic bliss via short films and images (Scola, 2016).’

There is a significant ISIL community online, with numerous disseminators, sometimes called "the fanboys". ISIL has its own community of web developers, an online manual, Muslimbook, a Facebook spin-off, and a mobile phone app- “Dawn of Glad Tidings” as well as its own video game, Salil al-Sawarem (Clashing of Swords) in which players attack American soldiers as they shout “Allahu Akbar” (God is Great). Twitter and Facebook are also used by the terrorists to cyberstalk ISIL’s enemies for a future ambush. Often, individuals are contacted through direct message or through a friend, acquaintance, or relative, and then the relationship is deepened through instant messaging platforms, many of them unpoliced. These include WhatsApp, Skype, and Kik. ISIL appeals most to people in their late teens or early twenties, so to stay relevant, the terrorist group often uses slang and adopts internet trends, such as the popularized kitten videos and the well-liked snack, Nutella. The online communities also reach conservative Muslim women, who, isolated at home, are susceptible to radicalization and engagement in terrorist campaigns (U.S. Department of State, 2017).

**Terrorist Organizations: Campaign to Act of Terrorism**

The United States defines ISIL as a terrorist entity that has emerged in the wake of al-Qaeda-capitalizing upon sectarian divisions and the Syrian civil war to seize territory along the Iraqi-Syrian border. Though ISIL is related to al-Qaeda it has a distinct mission and principles. ISIL currently controls a region in Iraq, where it imposes its extreme ideology. As a terrorist group, its influence is mighty- its territory is significant and it has a governing structure that includes civil and military bureaucracy. Its leader is Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In order to become the head of the state according to ISIL’s principles, the caliph, Baghdadi had to exhibit integrity, have authority, and be of Quraysh descent. Having authority requires possessing territory in which to enforce Islamic law.

ISIL’s terror campaigns have included the execution of civilians, notably the American journalists Jim Foley and Steven Sotloff, the enslavement and rape of women, and mass killings, for the stated purpose of declaring war against the West and any who do not share their extremist ideology. ISIL is perhaps one of the richest terrorist groups in history due to its looting, gun-running, robberies, ransoming, and slave trading,
through much of its revenue is earned through the seizure of oilfields and refineries. The group also facilitates an active slave trade. These funding sources, as well as its network of supporters, as enabled ISIL, to become one of the most concerning terrorist organizations active today.

ISIL’s terror campaigns require substantive counterterrorism efforts in the name of human rights. However, as noted above, in order to conduct strategic counterterrorism efforts, it becomes useful to analyze the factors by which the group has arisen. The theory we will expound upon in this paper is particular to societal destabilization because we find that determining the psychological and social factors that lead to structural decay within societies addresses the true complexities of the interrelationships upon which society is founded. Terrorism occurs due to the deterioration of these relationships. Understanding its causes requires a rigorous analysis of societies as they are globally interconnected today. The very nature of society has changed as diverse populations become connected and perhaps also disconnected through modern advancements. In particular, the rise of immigration to Europe due to crises in the Middle East has had profound impacts on the very fabric of European societies. Interestingly, acts of terror have spread from the Middle East, where ISIL is based in Syria, to the West (Wood, 2016).

Since January 2015, ISIL has claimed responsibility for the bombings in Paris, the Mosque bombing in Yemen, the beach resort shooting in Tunisia, the peace rally bombing in Turkey, the Russian plane shot down in Egypt, the Paris attacks, the California shooting, and Brussels bombings. ISIL has killed over a thousand people outside of Iraq and Syria. In many cases, Western states have identified Westerner as the perpetrators. The fact that Westerners have become complicit and engaged in ISIL’s ideology represents the universality of its appeal, which transcends culture but rather relies upon the political, religious, psychological and social factors present in any societal setting wherein individuals’ interrelationships become unstable due to alienation.

This is echoed in Obama’s warning of possible attacks in Europe and the United States: “Our Intelligence Community believes that thousands of foreigners — including Europeans and some Americans — have joined them in Syria and Iraq. Trained and battle-hardened, these fighters could try to return to their home countries and carry out deadly attacks.” The U.S. president announced a campaign, which includes air and ground strikes, allied support, and humanitarian aid, to weaken the group and its effects through counterterrorism strategies and refugee aid. Yet Obama noted that the eradication of ISIL was akin to fighting cancer. This is due to the nature of the group as a non-state actor with very different motivations than most political entities.

Though Obama defines ISIL as a group that offers only ‘hate and destruction’ and we do not disagree, it becomes necessary to conduct a deeper analysis in order to determine the underlying factors that enable the terrorist organization to persist so as to ultimately deconstruct it and bring an end to its violent activities. On September 10, 2014, in a presidential address, Obama said, “If you threaten America, you will find no safe haven.” Terrorism reflects the deterioration of the very interrelationships upon which society is founded, so the very existence of the group in America reveals weaknesses in American society.

President François Hollande spoke before parliament on November 13, 2015, regarding the Paris attacks. He described the territorial base, financial resources, and military capabilities of the group and then announced his policy to use force against the group where they are based in Syria. The most interesting part of the French president’s speech, however, was his acknowledgment that the terrorist attacks were ‘organized in Belgium and carried out on our soil with French complicity.’ He believed that the attacks were meant to sow fear and division among the French people so as to weaken counterterrorism efforts in the Middle East.

Hollande ordered action not only against the group in Syria, however, but also called for stronger border controls and police and judicial enforcement as he admitted that ‘it hurts to say it, but we know that these were French people who killed other French people on Friday’. He refers to members of the terrorist organization as “cowardly murderers” and “despicable killers”. He went on to say: ‘Individuals who start out by committing crimes, become radicalized, and go on to become terrorists. Sometimes they leave to fight
in Syria or Iraq. Sometimes they form networks that provide training, in certain cases, or which help one another, with a view to carrying out terrorist acts at a time determined by their sponsors.’ Again, it is important to note that recruits are from all nationalities, as the deterioration of societies such that terrorist groups arise can occur in any nation wherein interrelationships become unstable due to a mixture of different forms of alienation.

After the attacks, 104 people were placed under house arrest and there were 168 police searches. Hollande declared a state of emergency in order to allow for increased police searches and house arrests. He admitted that Article 36 of the French constitution only addressed situations of immediate peril due to foreign infiltration, and therefore did not apply to the terrorist group because evidently ISIL does not exist only the Middle East, but has spread, cancerous into the heart of Europe due to its strategic recruitment of Europeans. When combating ISIL, France, and other European countries are not only combatting a foreign threat but also a domestic one.

Hollande also announced that there would be increased surveillance as well as greater protections to prevent foreigners’ easy access into the country. Additionally, he proposed changing an article in the French constitution in order to strip French ISIL recruits of their citizenship, suggesting that any who participate in terrorist activities are “other” and not worthy of French national values. His rationale is that being a French citizen is contractual, and requires respect for the constitutional agreements ‘for living together’, which means that those who participate in terrorism to undermine that agreement must be expelled. And because terrorism cannot be allowed to destroy France, the nation must destroy it. He concludes with: ‘We will eradicate terrorism because the French want to continue to live together without fearing anything from their neighbours’, the implication being that this is not only a political and religious phenomenon but also a pervasive social and psychological issue.

ISIL recruits span an array of backgrounds, from former security officials and fighters of various causes to economic opportunists less concerned with an ideology to religious fanatics and pragmatic tribespeople. In Frazer Egerton’s book *The Rise of Militant Salafism*, he discusses how the public, through journalists, often seeks to explain the militancy of individuals through negative accounts of their personal history and psychological condition. ‘The suicide attacker’s life story is stitched together, often with painstaking effort to identify the key moments of transition that “caused” the person to wish to die and so to willingly accept a suicide terror mission’.

**Countering Terrorism Strategies of States and Challenges**

In *How Terrorism Ends*, Cronin claims that terrorism requires not only the terrorist group and group targeted by acts of terror, but also an audience to experience the terror. In the case of ISIL, it seems that some of the audience is considered for potential recruitment. Those seeking to migrate can easily contact someone already living in DawlatulIslamiyyah, Islamic State, how to get there. Many migrate across the Turkish border, as it is highly insecure. The global network of extremists has become entrenched over time despite internal factionalism, and it is partially due to these recruitment strategies, which take advantage of the desperate need for belonging in a community that the socially alienated experience.

The term “alienation” is often used to explain militancy but is too vague as it can represent economic deprivation, racism, and the alienation of immigrants. While it is easy to accept that each of these has an effect on susceptibility to ISIL recruitment, it fails to establish the exact nature of alienation that correlates with radicalization, argues Egerton. In my opinion, the problem in presenting this narrative is that it invariably oversimplifies the individual psychological and social factors that come into play in each situation. Indeed, there are many instances in which these individuals are psychologically normal, have optimistic economic prospects, and have sound social networks, whereupon the aforementioned brands of “alienation” are misnomers. A survey by London University found that many British jihadists have no criminal background, are highly educated and earn more than seventy five thousand pounds yearly, while German jihadists typically are poorly educated low-earners with criminal histories.
The lack of continuity in these statistics does not necessarily suggest that these factors are not somewhat important, but rather that the role of these factors depends on a case by case basis. And what of the professed political and religious convictions of these individuals? Might these represent spiritual alienation and political disenfranchisement just as validly as psychological and social disconnection?

Although the religious intentions of the organization are far more than could be encapsulated in this paper, due to the intensity with which ISIL members analyze and interpret early Islamic texts, we will present a brief summary of some of their religious goals, as are tied to their political actions, as well as the possible reasoning for these. The texts include the Quran as well as the prophecies of Mohammad. Most importantly, all of these texts must be interpreted as purely as possible- members must not reimagine these ideas, but consider them literally and adhere to them as closely as possible.

Foreign fighters are called *muhajireen* as according to jihadist ideology, the Prophet Muhammad named fighters who migrated for the purpose of jihad. In Islam, there is the idea of jihad as a struggle to promote Islam, but terrorists groups twist this philosophy by attempting to promote Islam through extreme acts of violence. Further, this investigation is in no way a defense of the actions of radicalized individuals, as this process of radicalization is perpetrated by these individuals in response to environmental conditions, and therefore, their decision-making is implicated. But again, it becomes important to seek some reasons for the causes underlying the creation and propagation of the terrorist group at least in order to combat violence. Obviously, there is the commonality of Islamic fanaticism throughout, and yet the concept of jihad is still interpreted differently by different members and there is a spectrum ranging from the extremely religious to the not so religious. Two British recruits, Yusuf Sarwar and Mohammed Ahmed read *Islam for Dummies* before traveling to Syria. Therefore, the spiritual convictions of jihadists vary greatly based on the individual.

The principal religious and political aims of the group are at the root of its terrorist campaigns. According to the Washington Institute, the jihadist group is using shootings like the one in Orlando to broadcast political aims. Their political aims are tied to their distorted interpretation of Islam. In particular, they are anti-gay, as demonstrated by the Orlando shooting, and their labeling the LGBTQ+ community as "hdonist". The attack on Orlando reflects something of a departure from the campaigns of past terrorist groups as Jacob Olidort notes. This is because the action was intended as a sort of vigilante justice according to the group's view that homosexuality should be punishable by capital punishment.

Acts of terrorism that have very specific religious and political messages are a trend in terms of ISIL's campaigns. These views mirror Islamic law and are demonstrated in many of their attacks. It is demonstrated by their conflict with any who do not share their religious views- any labeled a "polytheist" is susceptible to attack. That is, the group intends to punish acts of "legal deviance from Islam". These include consumption or sale of drugs or alcohol, any sexual acts that are not heteronormative, adultery, blasphemy, and apostasy. It also includes any straying from the literal meaning of the original texts. In accordance with these doctrines, Shites are persecuted, and their practices make them eligible for capital punishment. Political participation and holding office are also criminal, as these require innovating upon the rules made by God. Even shaving one's beard is considered an offense. The intention is to create an Islamic State, a caliphate in which the rules of the Quran and related texts are dogmatically enforced.

Because the Quran states that Christians and Jews must be vanquished until they agree to be taxed, or as the ninth chapter states, "until they pay the jizya with willing submission, and feel subdued." Because the Quran states that crucifixion is one of the few punishments allotted for enemies of Islam, mass executions and individual executions are carried out continuously as ISIL seeks to purge the world of these so-called crimes against God. The ancient tradition of slavery in Islam is something that ISIL spokesman, Adnani, has promoted: "We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women. If we do not reach that time, then our children and grandchildren will reach it, and they will sell your sons as slaves at the slave market."
Scholars of ISIL convened to determine the fate for Yazidis, a subset of Kurds borrow enough from Islamic practices to be considered bad Muslims, or if their traditions are not closely aligned enough with those of Islam, and the pagans. According to the Islamic texts to which the terrorists adamantly adhere, the punishment for practicing Islam in a manner not adherent to the group’s interpretation is death. Paganism, meanwhile, is punishable by enslavement. As the Yazidis came under attack by ISIL, the ISIL scholars determined the following: ‘Yazidi women and children are to be divided according to the Shariah amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations [in northern Iraq] … Enslaving the families of the kuffar [infidels] and taking their women as concubines is a firmly established aspect of the Shariah that if one were to deny or mock, he would be denying or mocking the verses of the Koran and the narrations of the Prophet … and thereby apostatizing from Islam.’ ISIL’s distorted interpretation of Islam has led them to carry out acts with specific religious and political messages.

Part of adhering to ISIL’s doctrine includes pledging allegiance to the state and the ideology it presents through a formal pledge known as a “baya’a”. Those who do not make this pledge die "death of disbelief", also known as to die "jahil". It also requires immigration to the caliph where the Islamic laws are enforced. ISIL believes that the apocalypse is impending and that its members must die ideological pure in order to attain God's reward. There is a common myth that jihadists will reach utopia, and even that seventy-two virgins await them in heaven. In their vision of the impending apocalypse, the anti-Messiah, Dajjal, will advance with his army against the caliphate, but just as his army is about to defeat ISIL in Jerusalem, God will send down the second most revered prophet, Jesus, who will defeat Dajjal and lead ISIL to victory.

In short, ISIL is an intensely ideological organization. Their political views are tied to orthodox interpretations of the texts of early Islam. Often, these from fourteen hundred years ago seem nonsensical when directly applied to the modern world. For instance, ISIL’s threats to destroy crops or stone “infidels” seem unreal to a modern audience, and yet believers in ISIL’s propaganda firmly hold these convictions and strongly advocate for these anachronistic punishments. Most followers have intensely studied these early texts. The confidence that ISIL members have comes from their belief in these prophecies. There is appeal in the sense that people with unfulfilled lives and disenfranchisement with political institutions can come to believe that they are part of a divine apocalyptic struggle. Those most susceptible to the political propaganda of ISIL are those who are alienated from meaningful pursuits, who lack purpose in their working-class lives and so are prone to megalomania.

In the recruitment process, political ideals generally celebrated by Western youth such as liberalism, secularism, and democracy are opposed by the mentality in which jihadism forms a sense of superior ideology apart from Western understandings, fueled often through feelings of estrangement such as due to the prevalence of Islamophobia. In Juergensmeyer’s book, one terrorist described secular people as ‘just moving like dead bodies.’ He suggested that the U.S. government would be improved if it were aligned with any religious doctrine whatsoever, not necessarily Islam, because then ‘at least it would have morals.’ Though the extremist ideology of ISIL is very different from ideas that Westerners are often accustomed to, some of the same values that are heralded by the U.S. and European governments are trumpeted by the terrorist organization. Mothanna Abdulsattar, a media activist for the Free Syria Army, was captured by the jihadists and interrogated. If it were determined that he worked for the Syrian opposition or Saudi media, he would be killed. Abdulsattar was relieved when an older member of the organization interjected and saved him from the questioning, asking instead “Why don’t you pledge allegiance [to ISIL]?” Though it would take further convincing for Abdulsattar to commit, he was fascinated by ISIL’s intellectualism and “the way it spreads religion and fights injustice”.

Abdulsattar’s interest in the way ISIL purportedly fights injustice may sound strange to Western ears as the pursuit of justice has long been a Western ideal, and not one characterized by fanatical rampages, but rather limited war for the establishment of peace. It is the manifestation of these values are markedly different as ISIL, as their terror campaigns are performed for no peaceful aim, while Western governments have rationales behind their violence, such as upholding human rights or seeking to end conflicts. Jihadists
perform actions to attain fantastic religious ideals and out of hatred for the influential West which exists in contradiction to their aims. So although Western governments have propagated terrible violence, it has predominantly been in the service of state or international interests. There is an “ends justify the means” paradigm for warfare, while ISIL is commonly thought to act in absence of logical paradigms. However, as with any organization, its cohesion represents a common purpose, or at least a common attraction to various ideas. Discerning what these are is imperative to combatting its violent aims. The group retains political appeal because its violence is justified by values that the politically disenfranchised or alienated find appealing. Some are less motivated by ISIL’s political motivations so much as its effect on various sectarian conflicts. One Syrian national joined ISIL because he believes that it’s the only actor strong enough to bring down Assad. ISIL has long capitalized upon sectarian rifts as well as the general instability of the region in Iraq and Syria, as the resulting security vacuum has enabled the group to establish a strong influence without obstruction. Therefore, there is significant variation even in terms of political and religious alienation, just as there is in terms of psychological and social alienation. President Obama noted the importance of distinguishing ISIL’s extremist ideology as separate from Islam as a religion that promotes peace unlike the radicalized ideas promoted and violently demonstrated by ISIL. Indeed, ISIL’s ideology is constructed in conditions of psychological and social alienation. As Orwell said, fascism is ‘psychologically far sounder than any hedonistic conception of life … Whereas Socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people “I offer you a good time,” Hitler has said to them, “I offer you struggle, danger, and death,” and as a result, a whole nation flings itself at his feet … We ought not to underrate its emotional appeal’. However, psychological and social disconnects are often manifested in the experience of political and religious alienation, as each of these factors plays a role in ISIL recruitment. Though there is significant variation in the type of impact of each form of alienation, we would argue against Egerton that this does not invalidate the claim that alienation plays a role in forming ISIL. Psychological and social alienation in various forms indisputably contributes to the experience of political and religious alienation inherent to ISIL’s ideology. It is invaluable to understand how psychological and social alienation contributes to violence as the potential for alienation and therefore violence exists in all societies. Understanding these could be useful in deconstructing the terrorist entity specified in the case of ISIL. However, we agree that greater specificity is required to illuminate these underlying causes, and would venture further to suggest that this specificity can only be gained through examination of the case by case situations, as any further generalizations may not be empirically accurate. In *Terror in the Mind of God*, Juergensmeyer suggests that political events have a huge effect on individuals’ feelings of self-assurance, for instance. He also suggests a link between religion and social acceptance, as many religious communities are simultaneously social networks. If applied to the situation with ISIL, this would suggest that these individuals’ feelings of social estrangement are expressed through the adoption of extremist religious ideologies, a claim that has been made many times. In this vein, Juergensmeyer writes that for the perpetrators, terrorism ‘...has been a cry to reclaim their lost selves and their fragile world.’ Throughout, the radicalized religious and political convictions of the jihadists represent these same feelings of psychological estrangement, also in conjunction with associated social alienation. Or as Juergensmeyer states, ‘desperate men have tried to restore what they perceive to be the necessary social conditions. For spiritual wholeness... Moral and spiritual purpose...’ Faisal Devji, in his book *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity*, writes that ‘our traditional notions of humanity are becoming meaningless in a global arena where the humanist subject is being replaced by a statistical aggregate on one hand, and by posthuman politics on the other’. He cites French literary critic Maurice Blanchot’s idea that humanity does not exist until it has disappeared because it is through its disappearance that it is affirmed. That is to say, the determination to end one’s life is a power that Blanchot
writes endows one with the character of the posthuman by dismissing or conquering life itself, and without consideration for state imposition, thus disregarding states’ power and returning the power to the individual.

Devji suggests that in reclaiming the individual’s right to death through an exhibition of values such as courage and fearlessness, and the annihilation of any values in death, the jihadist is in seek of humanness. The search for the human transcends political, religious, psychological, and social categories and in this sense at least we find Devji’s thinking sound- the ability of individuals to commit acts of extraordinary evil lies at the heart of what it means to be human. All of these factors are clearly interrelated as it is the total human being that is intrinsically implicated in the acts he/she commits.

Conclusion
In conclusion, it seems that social and psychological alienation as are manifested through religious and political estrangement contributes to societal destabilization through extremism and violence. However, the form of alienation experienced depends on the specific case, as individuals are vulnerable to being recruited by terrorist groups for uniquely different reasons, as is reflected in the range of intertwined social, psychological, religious, and political motivations.

How might this inform how the terrorist organization is combatted and the consequences of its campaigns addressed? we think in addition to strategies that are already being implemented, such as military intervention in the Middle East, and humanitarian aid for the refugees, combating ISIL requires systemic institutional changes to address the types of alienation that manifest in the modern age. This involves addressing ISIL’s propaganda and the wrongs that their religious and political interpretations of the Quran and related Islamic texts represent. It also involves addressing the social and psychological factors that contribute to members adopting these ideologies. Given the diverse forms of alienation that cause individuals to join in ISIL’s campaigns, this may seem an impossible task. However, some systemic changes may reduce the appeal of the extremist group.

Some strategies for responding to these various forms of alienation include countering ISIL’s political and religious propaganda through many media outlets, particularly on the internet. One possible way of doing this is through legal mechanisms, perhaps through international law, that may monitor the posting of extremist material on social media sites. Though these sites, such as Twitter, are commonly monitored so as to block the proliferation of harmful material, it is clear that not enough is being done. ISIL has a significant online presence. Fighting their message online involves comprehensively outreaching to fewer mainstream sites, including those aforementioned that are poorly monitored. Nonprofits and governments might work together with media, technology, and web corporations to aspire towards the goal of eliminating or at least severely weakening ISIL’s online presence. Although the State Department’s plan for defeating ISIL includes ‘exposing ISIL’s true nature’ which implies the use of media as a countermeasure, this could be further expanded. For instance, the State Department’s Twitter responses have been somewhat perfunctory and there has not been enough cooperation between the State Department and the technology sector. Also, if the U.S. were to preach democratic values to foreign audiences, the West earns little credibility and therefore this response is ineffective in deradicalizing pro-extremist audiences. Rather, as Cronin suggests, it is better to respond to the media generated by terrorist groups such as ISIL by revealing the violence and hatred it espouses. Additionally, it is vital to reassure those that have suffered due to ISIL’s acts of terrorism that the U.S. is intent on aiding them. Engaging in an ideological debate with ISIL is not altogether necessary—regardless of ideology, the violence and hatred that the group propagates are evidenced enough of the harm it causes. It is vital that a well-coordinated media response to ISIL be organized through a strong anti-ISIL media policy implemented through a coalition of countries, companies, and organizations.

This is one facet of public diplomacy, which may also include State Department programming to increase peaceful culture exchange with groups susceptible to terrorism. Another facet of this is how the U.S. negotiates or does not negotiate with terrorist groups. We think it wise that the U.S. does not negotiate with ISIL as it would a state, because it would not be helpful to confer that degree of legitimacy, but we do
not think that there is no room for negotiation. If the U.S. were to communicate at all with the group, however, that communication should include a statement condoning their acts of terror, and communication should be limited only to attaining peace settlements (an altogether unlikely proposition we know, considering the ISIL’s ideology) without any tolerance for ISIL’s aims. Though this is indeed severely limiting and leaves little room for a compromise through which a realistic agreement could be attained, considering ISIL’s staunch ideological views, we would not assert that any form of negotiation is altogether impossible as there may be rare occasions when violence may be minimized through compromise—through ISIL’s acts of terror will always be condoned as such.

In addition to fighting ISIL’s political and religious goals through counter-propaganda, it could be effective to rebuild aspects of societies where there are religious and political vacuums. That is, facilitating institutions of religious tolerance that advocate for healthier modes of spirituality may be useful to counter the spread of radicalism. Further, bridging denominations through interfaith activities is useful in establishing strong religious tolerance. In terms of decreasing political vacuums where societies are more susceptible to destabilizing influences, we propose there be more efforts to establish democratic engagement so that people feel that their voices are heard and do not fall victim to political disenfranchisement. In regions of great political unrest, which ISIL has greatly capitalized upon, in the Middle East, for instance, authoritative intervention is required. After the use of force and humanitarian assistance, however, it could be beneficial to assist in grassroots and official movements to instill stable democracies wherein the citizenry is truly involved in formulating peaceful government policy.

As well as countering ISIL’s political and religious influence, fighting the terrorist organization requires addressing modes of social and psychological alienation that are present in societies around the globe. Though the development of truly comprehensive policies to do so is not always pragmatic, efforts could be made by nonprofits, companies, and governments. This is the policy suggestion most open to interpretation, as it is applicable to nearly every aspect of society that may induce individuals’ social or psychological alienation. However, some concrete examples may include the restructuring of mental health institutions and the development of community programming, particularly for the purpose of increasing inclusivity.

For instance, determining which demographics are most susceptible to recruitment could be useful in anticipating attacks and determining where to heighten both aid and security. However, it is important that highlighting which demographics are most vulnerable to social alienation does not become a form of discriminatory profiling. For example, though it is true that economically disadvantaged immigrants may be more susceptible because in being stranded between two cultures, they can become more easily socially outcast, this does not render any sort of racial or economic class-based prejudice valid. This is because increased susceptibility is a response to particular conditions rather than an embodiment of the conditions themselves, and also because these are generalizations that should not be assumed in all cases. That is to say, an individual’s immigrant status does not render them susceptible. Rather, the social treatment that they receive as a result of that status, and the manner by which they react to that treatment is what governs their susceptibility in each case.

Therefore, highlighting which demographics may be susceptible must be done delicately by identifying the prevalence of concerning reactions that individuals have to certain environments. Also, the response to demographics that are more susceptible to ISIL recruitment requires humanitarian support and assertiveness rather than aggression, as these demographics may be encouraged to adjust towards less extremist or violent pursuits. That is to say, groups that statistically are more likely to become socially alienated require support in reintegrating into communities rather than labeling and further ostracization. This is in addition to preparation for direct action against communities that are militant.

Understanding ISIL is also useful in countering its terror campaigns. For instance, knowing that the organization recruits Westerners reinforces the idea that terrorism constitutes both a foreign and domestic threat. Therefore, a counterterrorism strategy requires integrating law enforcement, military, and
intelligence forces, as is often done in Europe. Knowing that it will likely target those who do not adhere to its ideology is useful in predicting future attacks. Knowledge of what exactly its members’ political and religious convictions are could be very useful in combat situations. For instance, ISIL’s anti-gay stance could be useful in terms of tightening security at Pride parades or in areas popular among the LGBTQ+ community. Or, awareness of ISIL’s attitude towards different groups in the Middle East based on whether these groups are deemed by the group to lapse Muslims or merely pagans could be useful in coordinating humanitarian aid and military intervention in the region to most effectively help groups that are vulnerable to terrorist aggression.

In addition, understanding ISIL’s psychological and social motivations could be useful when taking direct action against their campaigns. For instance, determining that jihadists may exhibit social and psychological characteristics of alienation could be useful in determining their future decisions. For instance, the tight-knit hierarchy of the organization may be a response to the social and psychological alienation that its members are accustomed to and emblematic of their quest for social and psychological structure. Responding to an organization that is constructed in this way requires different military and intelligence strategies than other organizations. That is, when combatting ISIL, the military might want to consider that chain of command and who will be making decisions in order to better formulate counter attacks.

In conclusion, the terrorist organization, despite its anachronistic influences, embodies some of the most potent paradigms of the modern age. It capitalizes upon the various modes of social and psychological alienation that people are susceptible to and manifests these through strict religious and political ideologies. Destroying the pervasive evils that ISIL represents involves comprehensive systemic reforms as well as direct action. That is because acts of terrorism represent a weakness in the political, spiritual, social, and psychological interrelationships upon which society is founded. Terrorism is the deterioration of society itself.
References


