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COVID19 PANDEMIA: DID JIHADI TERROR MOVEMENTS REDEFINED THEIR MODUS OPERANDUM OR IS IT AN IMPLEMENTATION OF A CALCULATED RATIONALE DESIGNATED TO REGAIN TERRITORIES & ASSETS?

Abstract: Religious terror movements have long since been associated with violent Jihad and suicide bombings. As such, associated Jihadist perpetrators operate according to specific Muslim Fatwas (Clerical permissions), in order to carry out suicide attacks against their chosen targets. These perpetrators proclaim their willingness to die for a definitive cause, regardless of any danger, as they expect an affluent after life in heaven. As COVID 19 erupted, the world came to a standstill and closure. The new situation affected terror movements globally. While previously Jihadists used to be regarded as fearless towards any death threat, COVID 19 is changing such former thoughts. Radical clerics issued new warnings for these Jihadists, to be aware of infected areas, temporarily making Europe practically a non-target for terror operations. This new significant modus operandum is an important topic for research. For the first time suicide bombers and Jihadists implement self-preservation techniques, while death itself is being considered as a threat rather than an achievement. This study finds that these perpetrators implement rational, calculated tactics, as religion is considered to be a part of this tactic, yet, they are not monolithic. They operate differently from one country to another, while having to review constantly the effectiveness of their operation vis-à-vis the support of the local population.

Keywords: COVID19, Religious Terror, ISIS, Suicide Attacks.

1. Introduction

ISIS had issued recently an interesting proclamation through their formal newsletter “Al-Naba”, to its Jihadists. According to this new modus operandum, ISIS insurgents should steer clear of corona virus-stricken Europe (Hernandez-Morales, 2020). Allegedly, it seems that suicide Jihadists adopted a new rationale, promoting the sanctity of life, while emphasizing the importance of implementing hygienic techniques protecting the individual from COVID19. Yet, the question arises whether this is a new code of conduct or a pre-planned rational adaptation of ISIS’ code of terror into a new era.

This study will address the noted topic, through the following research question:

Did ISIS adopt a new code of conduct due to the effects of COVID19 on the global population, or implement a new calculated rational tactic, equitable to recent global changes due to the pandemic, designated to regain territories and assets?

Some key hypotheses arise from the noted question:

- A. Jihadi terror movements are rational. Hence, their use of a tactical logic in order to perpetrate attacks, culminating in suicide attacks.
- B. These movements are constantly reviewing the efficiency of their attacks, in order to maximize their effect. Hence, the ban on perpetrating terror attacks in virus-stricken Europe, is a pre-planned tactic, designated to adapt to a new global threat.

2. The Modus Operandum of Religious Terror:

In order for us to encrypt the noted new enigma, one has to review some relevant studies which may be divided into the personal aspect of a perpetrator vis-à-vis, the group level.

Scholars related to a perpetrator’s personal level through key psychological aspects of perpetrating terror attacks, as vulnerability and fears of death. In cases of religious terror, a religious figure provides the perpetrator with solace, while legitimizing a use of violence culminating in suicide terror, as the perpetrator becomes a martyr (Greenberg et al., 2014: 86, 89, 120-121; Vail III et al., 2010; 86-87; Vess et al., 2012: 334-338). This terror act itself serves as a mechanism of cleansing ones soul, through a use of symbols and ceremonies (as religious burials on which Martyrdom is considered to be an award). The religious leadership provides justification for suicide terror based on references from middle-aged

texts (e.g., Muslim suicide terror is justified by an interpretation of the story of a battle between the cousin of Muhammad the Prophet and his daughter and the Sunnis, on which they were outnumbered and thus knew they were going to die for their cause) (Jeurgensmeyer, 2000: 12, 122-125, 139-144, 155-159; Hassner, 2009: 688-692, 702-704; Hassner, 2016; Hoffman, 1995, 272-273, 280-281; Hoffman, 2009; Kimhi & Even, 2004: 23-25).

Religious terror movements make use of the group aspect of a perpetrator to the level of violence they generate: Henne (2012: 46-47, 52), found that attacks perpetrated by movements based on religious ideology, are more violent than non-religious terror movements. Moghadam (2017: 20-24, 33, 262, 266, 268-269; 2008-2009: 47, 49-50, 53, 70-72, 76-78), differentiated radical movements from moderate ones in their use of violence, culminating in suicide attacks. The motive for an extremist violent ideology may be found in a governmental denial of religious freedom, hence, the root cause for launching anti governmental campaigns (Saiya & Scime, 2014: 15-16, 19). Extremist factions of radical minority that support violence, make use of religion, if they are not a part of the ruling government (Satana, Inman & Birnir, 2013: 29, 35-39). This violence serves as a tool for gaining political change in a country on which the movement operates (Asal & Pate, 2014: 1, 10-11, 14-15).

As ISIS and its affiliates can be found in various countries throughout the globe (e.g., North and Central Africa or the far East), one should review relevant test cases of specific Jihadist movements, perpetrating terror attacks in countries that have a low number of confirmed COVID19 cases, vis-à-vis countries that have a high number of confirmed COVID19 cases, prior to arriving at a concrete conclusion.

3. Relevant Statistics from WHO (World Health Organization) Relevant to Key European Countries versus Countries where ISIS and its Affiliates Operate:

Initially, recent reports had indicated an increase of activity in various COVID19 terror-stricken countries on which ISIS' affiliate movements operate: Nigeria, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, India, Indonesia, Algiers, Afghanistan, Somalia or Mozambique. Abu-Sayyaf (which will be discussed as a mixed movement), is operative in the south of The Philippines.

Table & Figure 1 + 2 provide relevant statistics from WHO (World Health Organization) of a symbolic day (May 10th 2020). This data indicate the number of COVID 19 cases throughout these countries.

Table & Figure 1:

WHO Data of COVID 19 Status in Countries of ISIS' Operation

World Health Organization COVID 19 Situation Report 111 May 10th 2020					
Country	Total Confirmed Cases	Total Confirmed New Cases	Total Deaths	Total New Deaths	Days Since Last Reported Case
Nigeria	4151	239	128	11	0
Egypt	8964	488	514	11	0
Syria	47	0	3	0	1
Iraq	2679	76	107	3	0
Yemen	36	0	8	0	1
Libya	64	0	3	0	3
India	62939	3277	2109	128	0
Pakistan	29465	1991	639	21	0
Indonesia	13645	533	959	16	0
Algeria	5558	189	494	6	0
Afghanistan	4402	839	119	14	0
Somalia	997	69	48	4	0
The Philippines	10610	147	704	8	0
Mozambique	87	5	0	0	0

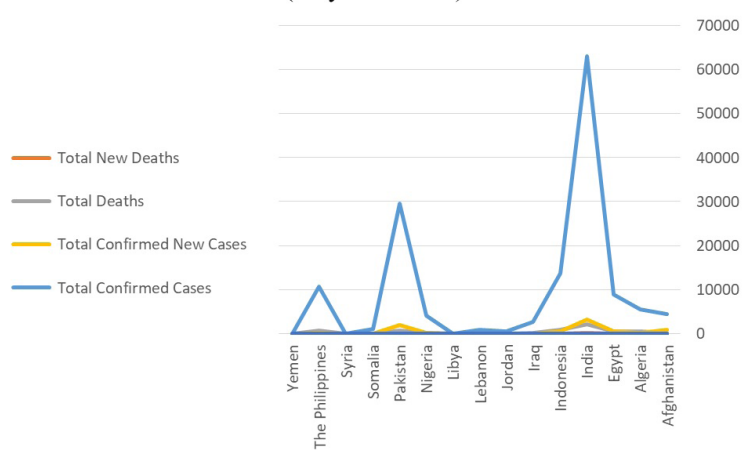
WHO COVID19 Situation Report No. 111
(May 10th 2020)

Table & Figure 2:

WHO Data of COVID 19 Status in Virus Infected European Countries

World Health Organization COVID 19 Situation Report 111 May 10th 2020					
Country	Total Confirmed Cases	Total Confirmed New Cases	Total Deaths	Total New Deaths	Days Since Last Reported Case
Italy	218268	1083	30395	194	0
UK	215264	3896	31587	346	0
Germany	169218	667	7395	26	0
France	137008	430	26268	80	0
Spain	223578	721	26478	227	0
Russian Federation	209688	11012	1915	88	0
Turkey	137115	1546	3739	50	0

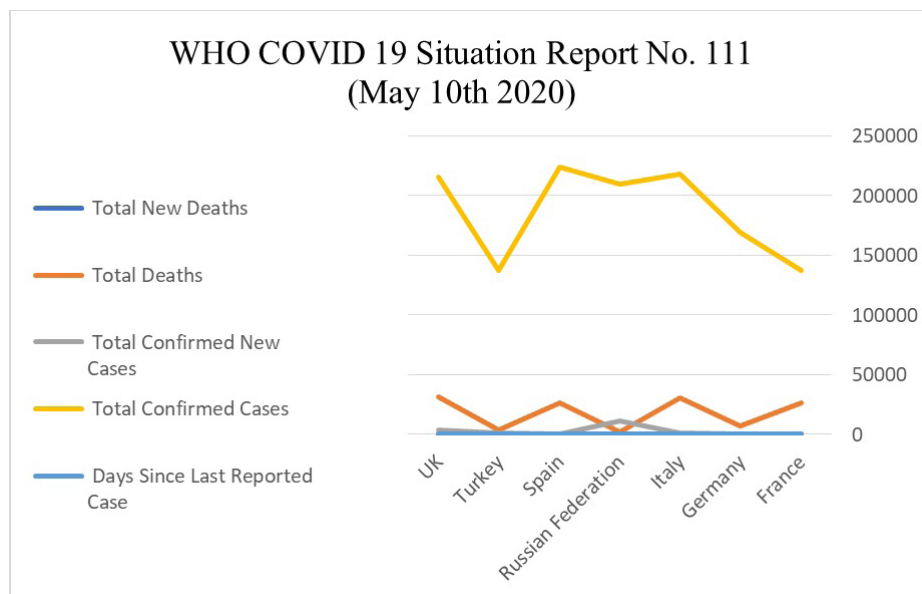


Table & Figure 1 indicate the statistics of COVID 19 in specific countries on which ISIS or its affiliates operate, as a comparison to some neighboring countries

as India. We can notice that the numbers in most of the countries, on which these groups operate, are not as high as presented in Table & Figure 2 of virus-stricken European countries: E.g., Italy 218,268 cases from which 30,395 deceased or Germany 169,218 cases from which 7,395 deceased (WHO, 2020). Yet, there are countries as The Philippines, on which ISIS affiliate Abu-Sayyaf operates, which has a significant number of 10,610 cases from which 704 deceased.

4. ISIS and Its Affiliates as a Test Case:

ISIS, had published religious proclamations issued by its leaders, urging members to be careful as COVID19 spreads, quoting a Hadith of the Prophet Mohamad noting that should a plague of “leprosy erupt”, one who is a believer ought to be aware as if it was “a dangerous lion” (Schweitzer & Mendelbaum, 2020: 1). ISIS and Al-Qaeda which are both Jihadi terror movements, called their followers to repent as COVID19 pandemic is a punishment from God, and thus, the believer should use the closure for self-reflection on his possible sins. Al-Qaeda, urged Non-Muslims to use their time under lockdowns for studying the pillars of Islam (DW, 2020).

ISIS, and other Salafi movements are using COVID19 in order to regroup. In Iraq it is capitalizing a combination of a chaotic COVID19 civilian status of 2,679 cases from which 76 deceased (according to Figure & Table 1), as equivalently, the US army is implementing a decision to withdraw its forces from the country. ISIS made use of this crisis in order to re-launch new organized suicide attacks. The West is considered to be fatigued from combating this movement, notwithstanding combating COVID19 globally. The period of April-May resembles events from 2013-2014, when ISIS seized significant territory in Iraq and Syria. ISIS identified strategically territorial disputes between Kurdish northern Iraq's local forces and the federal government culminating in three ungoverned districts. In addition, Iraqi military officials acknowledge that COVID19 reduced by 50% the active military manpower. ISIS operates also central & eastern Syria (its former territory), in order to relaunch a new offensive of terror attacks in areas uncontrolled by the central government effectively. Note that ISIS makes use of support from the local population (relating to Kurdistan), addressing local grievances of citizens to their governments, in order to gain information and tactical support (Shelter, supplies, food and transportation) (Guttmann, 2020; Schweitzer & Mendelbaum, 2020: 1; Walla News & AP, 2020).

A similar case may be found in Nigeria, as the number of COVID19 cases (May 10th 2020) is lower than Europe, yet, has a significant effect as will be noted (total confirmed cases are 4,151 from which 128 deceased) (WHO, 2020). Jihadi

movements as Boko Haram, operating in West Africa, culminating in Nigeria & Lake Chad (and thus promoted as alliance between Nigeria, Chad & Niger as a Multinational Task Force MNJTF), defined COVID19 as God's punishment due to the sins of their country's population. Boko Haram denounced Social distancing while defining counter virus measures as a "War on Islam by evil forces", culminating in governmental restrictions as a ban on the travel Hajj (A pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca), or closing the Mosques (Bukarti & Crone 2020; Campbell, 2020).

Throughout April, Boko Haram capitalized the chaos caused by COVID 19, in order to perpetrate new terror attacks. Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, proclaimed a new offensive in a recording he released recently, and thus, terminated the accomplishments of a Chadian counter terror large scale retaliatory operations, taking place throughout March-April. The ratio of killings in these operations was more than 1,000 Boko Haram fighters as a comparison to 70 Chadian soldiers, while destroying 5 bases. Nigeria also took part in these retaliations against Boko Haram attacks by launching an equivalent offensive. Although African official numbers are not high as Europe, there were reports higher than the noted WHO, indicating an increase from 1,000 confirmed cases throughout the last week of March, up to 8,000 cases in the first week of April. Boko Haram capitalized a situation of a strict lockdown in Nigeria in order to launch attacks both in Nigeria and Chad on the same day, causing the death of 100 soldiers. In addition, The Nigerian Chief of Army Staff has relocated to the country's north east, while its troops are occupied in enforcing the noted lockdown, and thus, allocating resources designated to combating terror in favor of providing civilian COVID19 necessities (Bukarti & Crone, 2020 ; Campbell, 2020; DW, 2020; Zenn, 2020: 7-9).

Some cases as The Taliban in Afghanistan, took part in assisting state efforts to limit the spread of the virus in areas under its control, in a country which according to the noted Table & Figure 1, had 4,402 total new cases 119 total deaths. Among these efforts it conducted awareness workshops to educate people of the use of hygienic equipment (e.g., gloves & masks), culminating in a use of whatApp images of formal health officials issuing a series of hygienic instructions while distributing surgical masks to local residents, establishing social distancing and quarantine centers, and instructing Muslims to pray at home (as public events were cancelled). Most significantly, The Taliban lifted a ban on WHO and the Red Cross from operating in its territories (Kapur & Chayanika, 2020). This pattern of behavior can be viewed in other cases of Islamic Non-Jihadi terror movements, as Hizballah in Lebanon, which allocated, doctors, nurses, facilities and medical equipment (originally designated to support its terror activities),

to the Lebanese Ministry of Health due to COVID19 effect on the population (Panet & Panorama, 2020).

A different case may be found in The Philippines based Abu Sayyaf movement. According to WHO, there are 10,620 total confirmed cases of COVID19 and 704 total deaths (May 10th, 2020). This is a significantly higher number than other countries where ISIS or its affiliates operate. Albeit implementing a Jihadi ideology, there are split factions of this movement, disputing over an alignment with ISIS, as some factions focus in Non-Jihadi terror as piracy (exploiting the seas between The Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia for armed robbery). As COVID19 caused an economic depression in marine commerce, terror activities on this basis were increased.

These main factions are Shiron ASG pursuing mostly criminal activities while refusing to align with ISIS, unlike Sawadjaan faction which is mostly Jihadi (as its leader used to be operating under Shiron's command prior to this split). Due to COVID19 outbreak, talks of unification albeit these differences were inaugurated, in order to raise arms against the authorities. Abu Sayyaf launched a significant attack on April 17, causing the killing of 11 Armed Forces of Philippines (AFP) as 14 were wounded. The attack was characterized as a fierce gun battle with dozens of Abu-Sayyaf fighters in the southern island of Mindanao. This may be defined as the biggest reported attack within recent months, taking place as AFP pursued the trail of the leader of the Islamic State in the Philippines. A spokesman on behalf of AFP noted the importance of continuing the operation, even of the country grapples with COVID19 (Gutierrez, 2020; Long, 2020; Yeo, 2020).

5. Conclusions

Jihadi Terror movements are calculated and logical. The use of religious symbols is a tool designated to promote these movements' agenda. They are very attentive to global changes and thus, implement various adaptation techniques, aimed at maximizing any potential gain from the new circumstances. These movements are influenced from the local arena on which they operate, while having to consider the necessities of the local population to be found in their territories of operation, in order to gain support.

This may be the reason for the noted diversity in the activity profile of ISIS (calling for Muslims to use the lockdown to reflect on one's sins, as Non-Muslims are called to learn of Islam throughout the closure), The Taliban (aiding local population as a formal government, similarly to pro-Iranian Hizballah in Lebanon), Boko Haram (re launching counter attacks aimed at the local governmental coalition), or Abu Sayyaf movement which is fractioned between

being affiliated with ISIS or focusing in secular maritime piracy (it may explain their operation in a country on which COVID19 is relatively widespread, despite ISIS' religious clerics warnings based on an Islamic Hadith not to operate in countries where COVID19 exists).

Based on the discussion: Hypothesis A is accepted. Jihadi terror movements are rational. Hence, their use of tactical logic in order to perpetrate attacks, is culminating in suicide attacks. Yet, one has to note that not all of the movement operate similarly, as some indeed began to assist the local population in their country of operation (having to rely on their support).

Hypothesis B is accepted, according to which Jihadi terror movements are constantly reviewing the efficiency of their attacks (culminating in suicide attacks), in order to maximize their effect. The notion that the ban on perpetrating terror attacks in virus-stricken Europe is a pre-planned tactic is accepted, yet, Abu-Sayyaf movement had proven that virus-stricken areas may serve as a territory for launching attacks albeit COVID19. A dispute between two factions: a religious faction and a secular faction may explain partially this bias from hypothesis B.

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**PANDEMIJA COVID19: DA LI SU TERORISTIČKI POKRETI
DŽIHADA REDEFINISALI SVOJ MODUS OPERANDI ILI
JE TO PRIMENA PRORAČUNATOG OBRAZLOŽENJA
PREDVIĐENOG DA POVRATI TERITORIJE I IMOVINU?**

Rezime

Religijski teroristički pokreti odavno su povezani sa nasilnim džihadom i samoubilačkim bombaškim napadima. Kao takvi, pridruženi džihadistički počinioци deluju u skladu sa specifičnim muslimanskim Fatvasima (sveštenim dozvolama), u cilju sprovođenja samoubilačkih napada na izabrane ciljeve. Ovi počinioци proglašavaju spremnim da umru iz konačnog razloga, bez obzira na bilo kakvu opasnost, jer očekuju bogataše posle nebeskog života. Kako je COVID 19 eruptirao, svet se zaustavio i zatvorio. Nova situacija je uticala na teroristička kretanja širom sveta. Dok su se prethodno džihadisti smatrali neustrašivim pred bilo kakvom pretnjom smrću, COVID 19 menja takve ranije misli. Radikalni sveštenici izdali su nova upozorenja ovim džihadistima, da bi bili svesni zaraženih područja, što Evropu privremeno čini praktično neciljanim terorističkim operacijama. Ovaj novi značajni operativni modus je važna tema za istraživanje. Po prvi put bombaši samoubice i džihadisti sprovode tehnike samoodržanja, dok se sama smrt smatra prijetnjom, a ne postignućem. Ova studija otkriva da ovi počinioци sprovode racionalnu, proračunatu taktiku, jer religije smatraju delom ove taktike, ali ipak nisu monolitne. Oni deluju drugačije od zemlje do zemlje, a stalno moraju da preispituju efikasnost svog delovanja u odnosu na - u odnosu na podršku lokalnog stanovništva.

Ključne reči: COVID19, religijski teror, ISIS, napadi samoubistava.