Book review

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Rudiger Lohlker, editor, World Wide Warriors: How Jihadis Operate Online, Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2019; $52.00, Hardcover, IBSN, 13: 978-3847109389, 197 pages

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The essays in this volume by four authorities explain how jihadists primarily from the Islamic State (IS), also known as ISIS,and al-Qaeda have been able to successfully exploit social media and other technologies to advance their cause. Rudiger Lohlker discusses how jihadists have developed technical applications that can be utilized at the operational level. The IS has been especially adept at developing and producing its own munitions. One of the primary reasons for the organization's success has been its ability to attract people with technological skills to its cause.

Lohlker focuses on the IS's and al-Qaeda's Arabic language communiqueson an online platform known as *Telegram*. Both organizations have attempted to encourage their social media followers to engage in what is known as lone-wolf terrorism. This means that would-be jihadists don't need to formally join any organization to carry out terrorist operations. Rather, such operations can be carried out individually without anyone else being privy to the jihadists' plans. The fact that no one else will know what is being planned until the operation is carried out increases the chances for success. One jihadist publication observed that "there is no need to travel abroad, coz the frontline has come to you."(p.29) Though not mentioned, one example would be Omar Mateen, who murdered 49 people in a gay nightclub in Florida in 2016. He expressed his loyalty to the IS while carrying out the terrorist operation.

One of the key technologies the IS has been attempting to develop is drone warfare, which has been described as "the industrial revolution of terrorism". (p.18) The IS had a series of tutorials dealing with drones on *Telegram* in 2016. Jihadists also attempt to integrate their discussions of new technologies for warfare with other aspects of jihad. These include the role of women and the use of Arab calligraphy to demonstrate the importance of the Arabic language in the role of jihad. These are part of an attempt to create a holistic approach to jihad that will encompass all areas of life. On the operational level, English language jihadist publications stress the necessity to engage in activities such as hostage-taking, luring targets into traps, acquisition of firearms, planting car bombs and bomb assembly.

Ali Fisher focuses on the electronic ribat, the digital frontiers to be protected by jihadists which are used to promote their ideology. He argues that the Western analysts are overly reliant on Western language sources to evaluate jihadists. This has caused them to focus on the "overexposure of threats to Western States and prioritises [sic] a Western security frame of reference" such as the return to the west of foreign fighters who joined the IS. Consequently, "the research priorities become distorted away from the core of the movement and focus instead on the priorities of the Western state." Such a focus "only touches on the periphery of the movement" instead of the "Arabic core." (pp.53-54) However, this view overlooks the fact that from a security standpoint it is only logical that Western countries would focus on how terrorists threaten them. That is the whole purpose for any country to have a security apparatus. Moreover, the same ideology that threatens the West also threatens the "Arabic core", so that understanding one threat helps to understand the other.

On the other hand, Fisher's wider argument that Western analysts tend to focus more on the operational aspects (the problem-solving approach) of jihad as opposed to ideological influences on jihadists is a valid one. He cites the influence Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328), possibly the most important Muslim exegete to have ever lived, whose writings are cited in many IS and al-Qaeda Arabic language videos. Fisher is highly critical of analysts who claimed that IS electronic communications were steadily

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declining from 2015-2017. He shows that even as the IS was losing territory in Iraq and Syria during this period, its content productions were increasing. (pp. 60-66)

Ali Fisher and Nico Prucha devote nearly half of the book to an IS production entitled "*A Clanging of the Swords*", a four-part series in Arabic which was eventually translated into many different languages. It is noted that the IS "is the first Islamist movement to make highly professional use of the internet for 'missionary purposes' (*da'wa*) related to territory seized from a sovereign state [i.e. Syria and Iraq]." (p.83) The video begins by praising the murder of Dutch film maker Theo van Gough in 2004 because he insulted Islam. Ibn Taymiyya (discussed above) is cited by the IS as the authority for such a killing.(pp.72-76) The video also praises the Paris massacres at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* magazine in 2015 because it insulted Islam's founding prophet Muhammad.

The video stresses the IS's struggle against a vast array of enemies that include Muslim rulers (referred to as tawaghit, tyrants who don't rule in accordance with Islamic law), Western countries, Jews, non-Sunni Muslims in general, and Shiite Muslims. Sunni Muslims who don't adhere to its strict interpretation of Islam are also to be killed unless they repent. However, the repentance must occur before the IS seizes power. This is in accordance with the Quran's Sura 5:34 which states that "they [must] repent before you overpower them- in that case bear in mind that God is forgiving and merciful." (p.80) The excommunication of Muslims who don't share the IS's views is known as takfir. The ability to repent "is not offered to Shiites and high-ranking Sunni officers" who work in the government. (p.106) Islam's founding prophet, Muhammad, is quoted as threatening: "we have come to you with nothing other than slaughter." (p.97) The authors provide useful appendices on the top time zones and internet links for jihadist videos. (pp.154-156)

Clemens Holzgruber's concluding essay stresses the speed with which Al-Qaeda and the IS were able to adapt to technologies which allow them to digitally spread their message. Online social networks "replaced forums and became the central hub for the dissemination of jihadi content." (p.161) These "media mujahidin" (fighters for Islam) created loosely affiliated networks which allowed them to download content that could be republished "through different online channels." (p.162) An IS publication announced that "[t]he media is a jihad in the path of Allah …And the media jihad against the enemy is of no less importance than engaging in fighting the enemy." (p.164) The IS has been attempting to hack social media accounts through groups called the Caliphate Cyber Terrorism Army and United Cyber Caliphate. (p.189)

Overall, the essays in this volume provide the reader with a good overview of the technical and operational aspects engaged in by the media mujahidin and complementary ideological beliefs that motivate the growing threat posed by these groups. These essays should provide a valuable roadmap for the technical and ideological challenges faced by state counter-terrorism units.

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