

A MUTATING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN TIME OF THE PANDEMIC 8 POINT TRACKER

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The pandemic overwhelms the conversations in the streets and inside townhalls, and somehow, resting the conversations about the world threats of violence and wars. Violent extremism and terrorism seem to be no longer high in the agenda, or at least in the world news as much as it used to be. What is the correlation between the pandemic and violent extremism today?

The following eight points are some of the observations we have made:

1. ISIL always uses vacuums to propagate their ideologies and expand their recruitment. They have been using security vacuums, but recently they have been exploiting more the media vacuum since all media have been essentially focusing on COVID 19. Analysts also observed that terrorist groups use media vacuum to become or move to something else.

It is currently the case with the return of foreign fighters from the South of Libya and the conflict dynamics in several countries in the Sahel, Mozambique and most recently Chad. It was the case also after the war in Afghanistan, the setback of AlQaeda and when the focus of the media was on other matters than terrorism, ISIL was created. ISIL has been mobilizing in using the current media vacuum.



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2. There are hesitations from several countries to concretely repatriate their citizens from Iraq and Syria, leaving ISIL continue to run “humanitarian” campaigns for women and children (their followers) in prisons in Syria and Iraq. The campaigns pinpoint to the inability of states to take care of their citizens who are prisoners, and women and children in particular. The campaigns diffuse the idea that these states as failed states. ISIL continues to position themselves as the “alternative state”.

3. ISIL is adjusting their messages to fit COVID 19 and present their religious and political explanations and discourses about the failure of states in dealing with the crisis, unemployment... ISIL uses a discourse of “care for the people” that allows them to fit within the locals’ dissatisfaction about the failure of state in providing key services.

4. There is a risk that is provided by the multiplication of online media platforms that focus on COVID 19. Terrorist groups explored numerous online platforms to diffuse their discourses and ideologies. It is believed that the counterterrorism institutions and units are to be overwhelmed and unable to track these groups and yet act in a timely and effective manner. This means that there is no indication that a new generation of violent extremists can be prevented from a counterterrorism standpoint only.

5. There are indications of an increasing role of women in recruitment to violent extremism. The role of women in recruiting men into violent extremism will be led by mothers as it was the case before in Balkans. Mothers are more respected among terrorist vulnerable communities than ..

single women who are normally pushed to serve as wives and in the household.

The distinction between engaged violent extremist women and those who serve in the household need to be made during the process of repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration.



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6. Terrorist groups are now prioritizing certain geographic areas. Europe is no longer high in the agenda now but Africa is. The wider Sahel, becoming a new center of coordination, is one of their main focus to expand in other African regions such as in the southern and eastern part and the continent, in addition to sustaining a solid presence in South Asia and Afghanistan.

7. The battle field has never been the main field for recruitment. This is the case for recruitments to violent extremism and terrorism. We expect that violent extremist and ..

terrorist groups will increase their mobilization to recruit from sporadic armed groups in Africa, foreign fighters in Libya and the wider Sahel specifically, and much more than from the middle east: Iraq and Syria. There is a high risk in countries in north Africa that imposed a strict lockdown. These pandemic contexts and related measures present an opportunity for people to be more connected to online platforms, including violent extremist platforms that have been diversified and multiplied. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has warned on this specific point.

8. The “Marriage of convenience” between violent extremist groups and local insurgents is the current modus operandi that we observed to be used by violent extremist groups. Local insurgents will use violent extremist groups to support their pressure on governments, and violent extremist groups use the local grievances to find new grounds to expand their ideologies and extremist interests.

This marriage of convenience feeds into the extremist discourse of opportunity, especially in countries with important natural resources ..

and larger disconnect between the state and the people. ISIL is using a discourse of opportunity that is adjustable to specific contexts to influence their support networks worldwide. Such networks are decentralized in structures and commands.

The Nordic Center for Conflict Transformation, based in Stockholm is an independent non-profit organization that works globally to contribute to normalizing a lasting positive peace. The Nordic Center brings a model of conflict transformation that focuses on everyday peacebuilding by working with individuals, groups, communities, civil society and governmental institutions, to develop a culture of peace that is embedded in justice, full respect of human rights and non-violence as the norm and a way of life. The Nordic Center offers a respected platform for information-sharing and dialogue.

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