

Terrorism. After the fall of Kabul: what's next? The threat evolves into "New Insurrectional Terrorism" (NIT)

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Abstract

What we are facing today has already been dubbed "New Insurrectional Terrorism" (NIT), a concept which essentially includes all attempts at disrupting the national and/or international political order through violence. NIT is revolutionary and utopian, and whereas terrorism is functional, insurrectional terrorism continuously evolves.

Keywords: Terrorism, NIT, New Insurrectional Terrorism

The ideological and territorial spread of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has triggered a latent global jihadist violence. The Taliban triumph in Afghanistan has given new vital impetus to international jihadism and it is now presented by jihadist propaganda as the victory of Islam over the West and its corrupt values. This happens in contrast with the Taliban approach to jihad, which is limited to bless their national success: a national liberation war, in opposition to the IS-K and other groups who are looking for a global triumph.

But regardless of this, the victory of the Taliban and the opposition to the post-Islamic state terrorist galaxy it's already having direct effects on the will and on the operational capacity of jihadist terrorist groups and individuals at a global level: from the communicative-propaganda aspect to the tactical and operational one.

Over the past 20 years terror groups, cells and individual jihadi fighters alike have begun to

increasingly display new tactics, which they exported to, and adapted for, the contemporary and the future jihadi war. A first, bitter taste of things to come were the Mumbai attacks of 2008, when a group of ten terrorists divided into smaller groups mounted a siege which lasted for almost three days. Western cities have since occasionally become the set of complex suicide attacks and team-raids, and more often of individual assaults where the perpetrator efficiently exploits techniques learned in Middle Eastern war theaters. "Islamic State" or al-Qaeda militants and sympathizers have proven widely capable of carrying out deadly attacks and to pose a direct threat to the security of citizens and national institutions. As such, contemporary terrorism can be described and must be recognized as a phenomenon with military characteristics or inspiration, particularly since IS with its external operations came onto the stage.

“New Insurrectional Terrorism” (NIT): is revolutionary, subversive and utopian¹

Today, after the fall of Kabul and the success gained by the Taliban, the specter of terrorism hangs over the space of the Afghan, or Syrian, or Libyan, or Sahel battlefields. Can we claim that the significant increase in jihadi-terror-linked violence recorded in the world and in Europe in the last 20 years is consistent with the classical concept of terrorism?

Terrorist attacks occurring between 2015 and 2018 in Europe, United States, as well as in North African or Middle Eastern countries do confirm the effective operational capability of the terror groups, in particular the Islamic state, whose nature shifted over time from a proto-state reality with territorial control, to what we can deem a de-nationalized, borderless phenomenon. “Leaderless jihad”, which anticipates IS, was perfected by the latter, as “aspiring” fighters were prevented from travelling and therefore chose to strike their home countries. What we are facing today has already been dubbed “New Insurrectional Terrorism” (NIT),² a concept which essentially includes all attempts at disrupting the national and/or international political order through violence. NIT is revolutionary and utopian, and whereas terrorism is functional, insurrectional terrorism continuously evolves. The aim of this new “breed” does not consist in instigating the masses with a view to overthrowing governments, rather in

persuading a large number of Muslims all over the world to join the fight against the “infidels” insisting on a narrative supported by the victory of [their interpretation of] Islam in Afghanistan and at the same time presenting that victory as a reason to avoid any compromise with western countries.

This emerging “New Insurrectional Terrorism” has therefore nothing to do with the political terrorism of the ‘70s and ‘80s. It surfaced in the Middle East following the US invasion of Iraq (2003) and developed in the mid-2000s. It attracted world attention in 2014, due to its battlefield victories in Iraq and Syria (and then in Afghanistan). Today, however, IS – which main affiliate group is still fighting in (and possibly from) Afghanistan – has lost most of what it conquered over the past ten years: territories, energy resources, access to trade and finance channels. Its media appeal, though, is still strong and will utilize the Afghan success and the ongoing campaign as a “clear example”, also directed against the Taliban described as corrupted.

The loss of “territory” forced IS to concentrate, on the one hand, on its *franchise* activities abroad, especially in areas of crisis, with a new social approach which includes outsourcing of violence based on the reciprocal recognition between the IS central organization and local groups and opposition movements. Its message tries to turn thousands of radicalized individuals and dozens of young people and armed opposition groups into smart and ready

¹ Bertolotti C., Sulmoni C. (2021), How the Twenty-Year Afghanistan War Paved the Way for New Insurrectional Terrorism, in Carezzi S., Bertolotti C. (2021) “Charting Jihadism Twenty Years After 9/11”, Dossier ISPI, 11 settembre 2021

² Bertolotti C. (2015), *NIT: Il ‘Nuovo Terrorismo Insurrezionale’*. Dalla ‘5+5 Defense Initiative 2015’ il cambio di approccio alla minaccia dello Stato islamico, Analysis ISPI n. 292. In https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/analisi292_bertolotti_16.12.2015.pdf.

"proximity weapons" prepared to "kill and die" in the name of the Caliphate.

In brief, "New Insurrectional Terrorism" consists in the use of violence, or threatened use of intentional, calculated, rational, self-justified violence in order to achieve political, religious and ideological goals. NIT is characterized by characterizing elements. The nature of the terrorist activity consists in using (or threatening to use) violence in order to reach a political objective. It is complex and, above all, unpredictable, revolutionary, subversive and with a view to establish a proto-state aiming to obtain the "monopoly of force" within a geographical area. Furthermore, it contains political, socio-economic and religious aspects (justified on religious and apocalyptic grounds) and can be described as "strategic" because of its strategic nature is being conveyed through tactics which must not necessarily be interconnected. Its nature is "global", transnational, borderless and based on "flexibility and adaptability". Its targets are represented by political, civilian, military, religious and symbolic combatants, as well as non-combatants. It is symbiotic: it "outsources" violence supported by emulative effects, and as a response to the "call to jihad". We can find all these elements in the (re)emerging phenomenon of the *Islamic state* which is finding new energies in the defeat of the United States in Afghanistan. What emerges from this description, is a threat to security represented by a contemporary, new form of terrorism: a phenomenon which adapts and evolves without a temporal or geographically-defined goal. NIT simply wants to impose a new societal model (the Caliphate) by tearing down alternatives and will use the symbolism associated with the Afghan war to exalt the

"victory of Islam" obtained thanks to the sacrifice of "martyrs" and the "divine blessing".

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