Anatomy of Lone Wolf Terrorism:
Special Emphasis on Countering Violent Extremism

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Contents

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Introduction

The running over of two on-duty soldiers in Canada, the massacre of 77 people in Norway, the mass shooting of 13 soldiers in Texas, a failed attempt to blow up Times Square in New York City, the decapitation of a British soldier in London and many such incidents are portents of an emerging, though not novel, form of terrorism. This phenomenon, also known as '*lone wolf*' terrorism or '*home grown*' terrorism, fuelled by the unhindered capacity of the social media in terms of networking, anonymity and propaganda dissemination, has left law enforcement agencies foxed and policy-makers struggling to identify common linkages, pinpoint causal factors and, thereby, come forth with a strategy to counter the threat.

What exactly is 'lone wolf' terrorism? What are the reasons for its evolution? How are these supposed 'lone wolves' identified? Is lone wolf terrorism really generated by itself, in isolation, as most analysts tend to believe, or is there a need to relook at some of the core societal issues to understand this phenomenon? What is the role of the social media in the proliferation of '*lone wolf*' attacks across the world? How is it that an organisation like the Islamic State (IS) is able to indirectly influence foreigners in their own homeland to conduct attacks on their brethren? With the help of various case studies, the author will attempt an explanation to all the abovementioned questions.

Terror, legally and technically, has numerous meanings and a context has to be provided to bring out its situational relevance. However, for this article, we may define terror as **"*the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property in order to coerce or intimidate a government or the civilian population in furtherance of political or social objectives.*"**[1] This definition, to an extent, limits the cases that may be treated as terror incidents. Since what we have laid out is a contextual definition, we may ask:

why are fratricides, daylight robberies, random stabbings or an extraordinary amount of violence being faced by the common man, not perceived as terrorism and classified as merely criminal/ homicidal acts? These incidents, too, create fear though may be for the person affected and his near family, and through the media, the local community. To classify any incident as terrorism, the intent and perception are important, and the nature of the act should be political. However, most critical is the narrative being spun, that of a third person, an alien, an unknown out to destroy 'us', someone who doesn't like '**us**', our '**freedom**' or '**way of life**'. Seen in this frame of reference, the events mentioned in this paragraph are considered to be mere crimes, localised in nature, often with mal-intent but not an all-encompassing objective of creating a fear psychosis in a broad chunk of the population. The narrative remains local. Terrorism is externalisation in the form of events creating big-bangs, causing huge damage to a multitude of lives and, most importantly, undertaken by '**them**', the terrorists. It becomes relatively simple to blame 'the others' for striking fear, for foreign ideologies. Personalities such as Osama bin Laden, Leila Khaled and organisations like Hamas, Al Qaeda and today's Islamic State (IS) become the figureheads of terror. But what happens when the home nation itself is converted into the new battlefield? The renewed threat of lone wolf terrorism has to be understood in terms of the post 1979 scenario.

The term '**lone wolf**' terrorism was popularised by white supremacists Tom Metzger and Alex Curtis in the 1990s who believed it comprised underground or small cell activities continuously targeting the government in anonymous attacks.[2] A formal definition of lone wolf terrorism is, "***The threat or use of violence by a single perpetrator (or small cell), not acting out of personal material reasons, with the aim of influencing a wider audience, and who acts without any direct support in the planning, preparation and execution of the attack, and whose decision to act is not directed by any group or other individuals (although possibly inspired by others).***"[3] According to Professor Mark Hamm of Indiana State University, an expert on lone wolf attacks, a lone wolf is "***someone who acts alone without the help or encouragement of a government or a terrorist organisation, who acts without the direction or leadership of a hierarchy, someone who designs the plan and the methods by himself without any sort of outside support, and who acts totally alone without***

the support of any second individual or third individual."⁴ Rafaello Pantucci, in fact, goes further and categorises these attackers into four groups: *loner* (acts alone, no connection with any extremist group), *lone wolf* (appears to act alone, some level of contact with extremists), *lone wolf pack* (group of individuals who are self-radicalised, but have not yet established contact with extremist groups) and, finally, the *lone attacker* (individual who acts alone but has clear command and control links with an extremist group).⁵

One of the most important strategic thinkers of the extremist movement Abu Musab al-Suri (real name: Mustafa Setmariam Nasar) evolved the concept of '*leaderless jihad*' whose starting point was his belief that Al Qaeda was more than a group or a terrorist organisation.⁶ It was a methodology, a reference point and a call to arms to all Muslims to attack Western targets in small self-organising, loosely connected cells, without any defined hierarchy. The 9/11 attacks were supposed to be a clarion call for such a mass mobilisation that would force the end of Western support for Middle Eastern dictators, collapsing their regimes, expediting the establishment of *Shariah*-run states, and culminating in the establishment of a Caliphate, bin Laden's ultimate aim. This was termed by al-Suri as *Nizam la Tanzim* or *System not Organisation.*⁷ Lone wolf terrorism has become enmeshed with this ideology.

One of the major differences between lone wolf terrorism (also known by its synonyms: leaderless resistance or *jihad,* individual terrorism or freelance terrorism) and organised group terrorism is that attacks by groups such as Al Qaeda are *primary-level* attacks, in that they are a direct result of the political intention of these groups. This intent may range from targeting the 'far enemy' to the establishment of a Caliphate. Lone wolf attacks are *secondary-level* and *tertiary-level* attacks, conducted by individuals influenced by direct interaction with members of these groups, inside the country or while travelling abroad, and indirectly, through sermons, news, the internet, audio, video or literature respectively. Lone wolves are also different from *sleeper cells* as they are not embedded into the society by an organisation for a particular purpose, to be activated later. They are already a part of the society and have multiple paths to radicalisation, some being self-radicalised through the internet or available literature, some through guidance from abroad or direct contact with a member of the numerous radical organisations. Again, a clear distinction has to be made between individuals who are part of an extremist group but carry out their acts alone

such as the shoe bomber Richard Reid, and individuals who carry out their act alone, influenced by groups or their action or propaganda but are not part of any hierarchical structure of a terrorist organisation. This article specifically focusses on the latter cases.

Lone wolf terrorism has taken on such dark hues that it was classified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) Strategic Plan of 2005-09 as the most significant domestic threat to the US.[8] The United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, in a report, titled **"Violent Islamic Extremism, the Internet and the Homegrown Terrorist Threat"**, has labelled the homegrown extremist attack as one that will remain a threat to the United States and US interests overseas.[9] A total of 198 cases of such attacks were reported in the US, Europe, Canada and Australia combined between 1940 and 2010, with 98 occurring in the United States from 1940 and 2013. Out of these, 38 occurred pre 9/11, while 60 post 9/11.[10] A broad sampling of these cases would be examined and their peculiarities pointed out which could assist law agencies in understanding Islamic terrorism's latest and most potent arsenal.

In order to discern points of commonality amongst the various lone wolf attack cases across the years, it is required to cast as wide a net as possible. The author has studied and analysed 22 cases of lone wolf attacks spanning two decades, ranging from Baruch Goldstein in 1995 to Dylan Roof in 2015. The ideologies that are supposedly the motivations for these attacks are also varied, from white supremacism to *jihad* to Zionism. The maximum number of countries and continents have been represented. After a thorough analysis, a number of apparent causative elements have been culled which have to be subsumed under a number of structural heads, in order to be understood properly, and the relevant courses of action decided. These are listed below:

- **Multi-culturalism vs Assimilation:** The United States is, in a cliched terminology, known as a '*land of migrants*' and a '*melting pot*' of cultures. There is an effort inside the country to integrate all immigrants within an overarching '*American*' culture, with an almost mandatory learning of English and adoption of ambiguous '*American*' values. Also, persecution, based on ethnicity, race and religion has occurred on a not-so-rare basis in the US, starting from the Afro-American agitations and the subsequent violence by the Black Panthers in the 1960s and 1970s, the knee-jerk incarceration of a majority of Muslims in the wake of the September 11

attacks[11] to the recent spate of targeting of black teenagers/ young adults by the police.[12] This perception of undermining of own culture and forceful assimilation has created disillusionment and anger in a few members of the minority communities. This anger is being conditioned and directed against the homeland by various agencies and individuals. On the other hand, Europe is suffering from the liberal notions of multi-culturalism. Burdened by an acute manpower crisis in the wake of the destructive World War II, Europe invited and coerced hordes of workers, especially from North Africa and the Middle East, to rejuvinate its economy. There was an effort to integrate these workers within the working culture of the country, which may or may not have fructified to the extent needed. A case in point is that of Mohd Merah, a second generation French Algerian whose mother was married to Sabri Essid who tried to send fighters to Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).[13] His brother, Abdulkader Merah, was connected with a Belgian-based *jihadist* recruitment network that sent Belgian and French militants to Iraq via Cairo.[14] His sister Souad Merah fled to Syria where her partner joined Islamist forces.[15] Since his childhood, Mohd Merah was fed a steady diet of his distinct identity as a Muslim, rather than a Frenchman by his family.[16] This was reinforced by the time he spent in jail. An idea, a notion that limits the integration of various communities with the native population within a nation-state and promotes cultural isolation, multi-culturalism has resulted in the formation of pseudo '*ghettos*' near major urban centres in most European Union (EU) countries such as Molenbeek near Brussels, the capital of Belgium. Molenbeek acted as a transit point for the perpetrators of the Paris attacks as well as the Brussels suicide bombings in 2016.[17] Merah's neighbourhood, Les Izards has been ignored by the French authorities for long, and is known for its discrimination against Arabs.[18] This has also created opportunities for radicalism to inch its way into the psyche of countless unemployed young men like Merah, thriving on state welfare benefits, as they feel alienated from a government and a people they don't identify with.

- **Perception of Government Policies:** Mohd Merah's attacks in Toulouse and the nearby town of Montauban in March 2012 were to protest against France's recently passed law banning full-face covering in public places and the presence of a French contingent in Afghanistan as

part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).[19] His sister, in fact, stated on record that she was proud of her brother's martyrdom.[20] Faisal Shehzad's reason for parking an SUV filled with explosives in New York's Times Square was in revenge for the drone killings of his people in Pakistan.[21] Arid Uka killed two US servicemen at Frankfurt airport in Germany on March 2, 2011, to prevent more US soldiers going to Afghanistan and raping Muslim women.[22] Most of the attackers have cited Western military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq as reasons for their acts. In fact, when a Jordanian pilot, Moaz al-Kasabeh, was shot down and captured by the IS, the militants connected the Jordanian jet and, hence, the Jordanian regime, with mass casualties of the Syrian Muslim population and proceeded to burn him alive. The IS has justified its attacks on the citizens of Western nations, on the fact that these civilians have voted their respective governments to power. Variants of this belief can be found in the rhetoric of almost all the militant Islamist groups. IS agitprop in the form of an apocalyptic final battle between the armies of Islam and the armies of '*Rome*' in the nondescript town of Dabiq, Syria, has accentuated the perception of all these acts being done in the fulfilment of this prophecy.[23]

• **Financial Distress and Criminal Background:** Anders Breivik lost two million kroner in the stock market when he was 18 years old.[24] Michael Zihaf-Bibeau who attacked the Canadian Parliament building in Ottawa on October 22, 2014, was a habitual offender with an extensive criminal record, who lived in a homeless shelter.[25] Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, younger of the Boston Marathon bombing brother duo, was a cannabis dealer.[26] The Tsarnaev family survived on food stamps and government welfare[27]. Amine el Khalifi, accused of attempted suicide bombing of Capitol Hill in the US was indicted on charges of possession of marijuana, and traffic violations.[28] Faisal Shehzad, a financial analyst in the US, was from a wealthy Pakistani family, his father being a retired Air Vice Marshal in the Pakistan Air Force.[29] However, a collapsing housing market and his inability to pay his mortgage, led to growing desperation and a feeling of loathing towards his adopted country. He began to look for reasons to blame the US and homed on the drone strikes in his native country, to vent his anger.[30] Antonio Martinez *aka* Mohd Hussein was a construction worker who was preemptively arrested by the Joint Terrorism Task

Force (JTTF) for trying to blow up an Armed Forces Recruiting Station in Catonsville, Maryland.[31] Most of these young men had had brushes with the law or were in financial distress or stuck in low paying jobs that led them to blame the government and its policies.

- **Psychological Profile:** A majority, though not all of the cases studied, had suffered abuse at the hands of their parents during their childhood, had breakdowns, were mentally unbalanced, had gone through a tough phase in life or were conditioned through contact with their supposedly devout families. Yonathan Melaku, an Ethiopian-American, who was arrested for firing shots at the National Museum of the Marine Corps and two military recruiting centres in Fall 2010, was diagnosed with schizophrenia.[32] One of the Beltway snipers, John Allen Mohammad was engaged in a bitter custody battle with his wife for the custody of his three children. He had earlier served in the First Gulf War which may have left him traumatised.[33] Philip Michael Ibrahim *aka* Isa Ibrahim, who was arrested by the British police for trying to assemble a home-made bomb in Bristol, was always in the shadow of his successful elder brother who had gone to Oxford, bar school and finally a US firm in London. Isa, on the other hand, was overweight, hopped schools frequently, smoked cannabis from the age of 12, had no sporting ability, and was branded a loser by his classmates. He experimented with expensive drugs such as cocaine and mushrooms, took up body building and injected himself with steroids.[34] Jason Naser Abdo, convicted of plotting to bomb a restaurant popular with soldiers from Fort Hood, Texas, had a traumatic childhood. His parents divorced when he was three. His father, a Jordanian immigrant, was convicted of soliciting a minor on the internet, served three years in jail and was deported back to Jordan.[35] Jose Pimentel, arrested for attempting to build pipe bombs to target the police and troops returning from Afghanistan was considered mentally unstable by the police department.[36] Mohd Merah tried to commit suicide by hanging and was diagnosed with polar narcissistic disorder.[37] Maj Nidal Hasan's father died in 1998. This loss was hard on him and he dedicated himself to Islam and frequented the Dar al Hijrah Islamic Centre in Falls Church, Virginia, where he came into contact with Anwar al-Awlaki.[38] Personal crisis and faith are seen to be two very important factors in egging on potential lone wolf attackers. They are at a crisis moment in their lives

and embrace a radical ideology that resonates with them. Due to a probable absence of an emotional support structure, these people latch on to a community of perceived supporters. Study of these individuals also suggests that there is a inclination among psychologically imbalanced or substance abuse cases to believe the propaganda being spewed by different groups, in the form of the internet or audio or video clippings, due to their disassociation from logical reasoning and in sync with their distorted view of world events.

- **Travel Abroad:** The claim that the internet is the major reason for the self-radicalisation of lone wolf attackers is giving the internet too much credit. The role of the internet, especially the social media, has been prominent in the recent years, but it cannot equal the exhilaration felt on physical contact with the supposed mentors. Radicalisation cannot take place inside a vacuum. Travelling abroad and making contact with the representatives of groups fighting for the *umma,* against the *kuffars* creates a perspective that no online lesson can match. Mohd Merah was placed under surveillance after a visit to Egypt in 2009, made two trips to Pakistan and Afghanistan, and was arrested in Kandahar in 2010.[39] Andrew Ibrahim tried to be a scholar in Yemen but failed. Abdelhakim Mujahid Mohd, convicted of killing one soldier and injuring another at the Armed Forces Recruiting Centre in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 2009, visited Yemen in 2007 and stayed in the country for 16 months, even marrying a local schoolteacher, Reena Abdullah Ahmed Faraz.[40] During his incarceration, he claimed to have known people who showed him around in Yemen and helped him to get started. He even tried to go to Somalia for explosives training.[41] Khalid Ali Al-Dowsri, convicted for attempting to construct an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), was a Saudi national who had come to the US for his studies.[42] He had planned to carry out attacks against the US long before he came to the country, indicating the inception of a psychosis in his home country, possibly within his family or peers. Faisal Shehzad made multiple trips to Pakistan and claimed to have been trained on explosives and weapons in Waziristan between July 7 and 22, 2009.[43] One of the duo of the San Bernardino shootout, a Pakistani permanent resident of the US, Tashfeen Malik, attended the al-Huda International Seminary in Pakistan, known for its teaching of Wahhabi Sunni Islam and propagation of hardline anti-Western views.[44] The elder

of the Tsarnaev brothers, Tamerlan travelled to Russia, spent time in Chechnya (Dagestan) and may have been radicalised there, though this fact remains uncorroborated.[45] Taimur Abdelwahab al Abdaly, who blew himself up during bombing attempts in Stockholm in 2010, went to Syria in 2008 to train in explosives.[46] He also spent time as a student in Luton, England, which is home to a large number of Islamic extremists. This is the same place where the perpetrators of the 7/7 attacks assembled before going to London.[47] With a huge influx of refugees into Turkey and the countries of the EU, and individuals returning from Iraq and Syria to their home nations, the increasing probability of lone wolf attacks cannot be ruled out.

- **Immigrants and Age Profile:** Even a perfunctory look at the case studies will reveal that almost all the lone wolf attackers were either young men (between the ages of 20 and 30), first or second generation immigrants or a mix of both. Baruch Goldstein, the Israeli reserve Major who massacred 29 Palestinian Arabs in February 1994, had migrated to the country from the US.[48] Maj Nidal Hasan was the son of Palestinian immigrants who had migrated to the US from the West Bank.[49] Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev were of Krygyzstani descent. They were 20 and 27 years old respectively.[50] Michael Zihaf-Bibeau's father was Bulgasem Zihaf, a Libyan national who fought in 2011 in Libya against the Qaddafi regime.[51] Syed Rizwan Farook, of the notorious San Bernardino terror couple, was an American citizen of Pakistani origin while his wife was a permanent resident of Pakistani origin, who spent most of her life in Saudi Arabia, and their age profiles hovered in the late 20s and early 30s.[52] Amine el Khalifi was a 23-year-old Moroccan citizen who had come to the US on a visitor's visa at the age of 16 and had settled in Virginia as an illegal immigrant after the expiry of his visa in 1999.[53] Faisal Shehzad was a 31-year-old naturalised citizen of Pakistani origin. Taimur Abdelwahab al Abdaly was an Iraqi born Swedish citizen.[54] Jose Pimentel aka Mohd Yusuf was a naturalised American citizen from the Dominican Republic.[55] Arid Uka was a 21-year-old Albanian born German citizen.[56] Though there have been native lone wolf attackers also, such as Timothy McVeigh and Dylann Roof, among many others, an overwhelming majority are either religious converts or first or second generation immigrants. Virtually all are in the age group of 20 to 30. According to

the late Prof Ernest Gellner,[57] an expert on nationalism, modernisation is a phenomenon that is characterised by a break in family ties and a distancing from roots, the major support structures of humans, followed by an insertion into an industrial culture that favours such a *zeitgeist* to enable it to condition the workers according to its needs. When these support structures break, whether in the face of a real or perceived cultural assault by a '*foreign*' power, human beings tend to turn towards whatever comforts them. With the West's emphasis on individualism, and a very different familial structure (based on either tribes or extended or joint families) for the immigrants, most of these individuals turn to the nearest thing to a community. This can be either the family in the case of n-order immigrants or a motley of local clerics, mosque sermons, online friends, audio clippings, videos and online literature. This is a handy tool for instigation.

- **Role of the Media:** Media, in its various manifestations of the written word, spoken word, images or a treasure trove of online material has made '*radicalisation*' accessible to an audience, which, a few years earlier had to either attend gatherings of local clerics, mosque sermons or forage for literature from the local markets. Satellite channels beaming 24 hours of non-stop '*infotainment*' have, in collusion with the high speed internet, changed forever the way people interact with each other. Groups like Al Qaeda (AQ) realised the potential of the internet long ago. After the diversification and expansion of AQ through its various affiliates, the AQ High Command (AQHC) used As-Sahab, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) used the Media Commission, while Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) used the Sawt-al-Jihad regional production centres.[58] These were responsible for producing relevant propaganda material which was then sent to a clearing house, the Al Fajr Media Centre, in this case, responsible for sorting out the data and maintaining its veracity and stamping the data with its icon/logo to distinguish it from others and possible fakers.[59] This material was then posted to specific forums such as al Ekhlaas, al Buraq and al Firdauss.[60] Despite all these efforts, the major drawback of AQ was its elitist approach towards the distribution of propaganda using specialised forums and chatrooms. By the time it had grasped the power of the social media (*Inspire* online magazine by AQAP and extensive use of Twitter by al Shabaab), the

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) had exploded on the scene. Online behavioural change mechanics can be explained by the following

The inherent dichotomy between individuals' interactions with the physical world and the digital domain leads to a rupture in their psyche, the intensity differing from person to person. For some, suffering from an identity void, personal loss, professional dissatisfaction or any of a plethora of factors that induce disorientation, a hook-on mechanism is activated that forces them to look for social synonyms either in the physical vicinity or their digital personal space. Since social media platforms are digital manifestations of peer groups, the individuals start associating with like-minded people who share in their grief, add to their paranoia of the '**Big Brother**' and condition them towards a comity of supporters, a team, a digitally well defined support structure. This commonality, when stoked in favour of a particular ideology, transforms a man into a believer, who considers himself part of an organisation that backs him up in all circumstances.

Initially based on discussion forums, the ISIS progressed to posting links of chatrooms on Facebook and Twitter at a dizzying speed. The ISIS also harnessed the power of the '**Dark Net**' using passwords, authentication and membership numbers to verify its members.[61] Its longest shadow, however, fell on Twitter where its members started using '*Twitter bombs'* such as **#AllEyesOnISIS** and **#CalamityWillBefallUS** and hijacking trending topics like **#Brazil_2014** to grab eyeballs.[62] By the fall of 2014, there were 45,000 verifiable ISIS Twitter accounts, of which 73 per cent had more than 500 followers, while others had upto 50,000.[63] ISIS technicians also developed fairly complex coding techniques, coming out with an App on Google Play Store called '**Dawn of Glad Tidings**'.[64] The most interesting and appealing part of its internet blitzkrieg was the use of live 'tweeting' during the fighting when the location, photos, names of martyrs and active fighters, and the status of the clashes enabled its technicians to announce the steady progress of the ISIS war machine.[65] The ISIS used aerial drone photography and 360 degree Go Pro cameras in collaboration with High Definition (HD) video recording and a raconteur-like narrative to increase its appeal to all kinds of people.[66] Though the major attraction of videos such as '**Clanging of Swords IV**' was brutality, the other themes also visible in the various videos were mercy, victimhood, war, belonging and utopianism.[67] A detailed study

of the videos shows that there is no '*one size fits all*' propaganda by the ISIS which carefully constructs multiple narratives for potential opponents, the international public, active members, potential recruits, disseminators and proselytisers. In order to attract women to its fold, the ISIS has also founded the Zora Foundation which is a media wing for luring women, and currently has around 32,000 followers.[68] Apart from the social media onslaught, the ISIS has five centralised propaganda units, which are:

- **Al Furqan Foundation:** Delivers official statements and concentrates on   military warfare.
- **Al Itisan Foundation:** Social and religious activities.
- **Al Hayat Media Centre**.
- **Al Bayan Radio**.
- **Amaq News Agency**.[69]

Through its effective mix of political propaganda, *nasheeds,* video game type shooting videos, streamlined narrative, storyteller format, HD graphics and revocations to the Koran, the ISIS has constructed an image of the counter-cultural '*jihadi-cool'*, which is difficult to combat by conventional government narratives.

Structural Analysis

All the above mentioned factors have been culled retrospectively from studying the aftermath of the events. No amount of computer-based modelling or academic intuiting has been able to pin-point the exact reasons for these acts of lone-wolf terrorism or helped to prevent it. The onus for securing soft targets in a country cannot be on the security forces/ agencies only, as the sheer number of people and places to be protected is massive and beyond the purview of the armed forces, which are generally responsible for external security and are, therefore, extra-enemy focussed and area specific, or of the local security agencies which are more information dependent and rarely act preemptively. It is, therefore, necessary to go beyond what is visible and look at structural factors to focus on, and target, the root causes and not the persons responsible, as focussing on the latter is not possible, and neglecting the former will ensure that the plague of lone wolf terrorism will remain the bane of civilised societies. The following are the structural factors responsible:

- **Structural Violence:** This term was used by Johann Galtung when he referred to it as "*some social or structural/ institution that may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs*". Structural violence differs from direct violence in that the presence of physical causality is not a prerequisite in structural violence. In the context of lone wolf terrorism, direct violence is manifested in the terrorist act itself. In defining structural violence, the basic needs are those urges whose satisfaction is necessary for human survival. While food, money and physical security may seem to be the obvious needs, social identity or affiliation or a '*place in the society*' is an oft-ignored basic need that ranks on the lower rung but is among the paramount causes which give rise to structural violence. Ambiguity in identity of the self is a specific product of the modern industrial society. At the inception of the capitalist industrial society, this floating-identity syndrome was put to good use for the generation of labour power. But with the saturation of the world markets in the post-classical imperialism era, this led to trained manpower employed wastefully or redundantly in various 'sectors'. An identity crisis coupled with an economic crisis was the logical conclusion. The turnover year was 1979. In terms of precedence, we will start with two sub-structural factors responsible for a dissonance in identity in the Middle East, particularly, and the Muslim world, in general.

    - *The Ascendance of Saudi Arabia and the Epoch of 1979:* 1979 was a watershed year in world history. Two events changed forever the way the Middle East would be viewed. The Iranian revolution of 1979 brought to power a Shia dominated theocracy in a Sunni dominated region, while the invasion of Afghanistan by the erstwhile Soviet Union in December 1979, ostensibly to support an ailing Communist regime, was used by the US to enlist the help of Islamist regimes to counter Communism.[70] The Saudis, the main sponsors of the Islamist extremist ideology, *Wahhabism*, across the world, and anxious about a similar uprising in their repressed Shia minority regions, pumped in millions of dollars into the region, while foreign fighters from all over the world joined what was being advertised as a global *jihad*.[71] An Islamist counterweight to Communism enabled the US to push the Soviets out of Afghanistan in 1989, however, the country was soon forgotten, the countless men trained in irregular warfare, with

no place to go and no more infidel enemy to fight, and now divided into rigid and impermeable ideological factions.[72] One of these factions became the core of Al Qaeda under Osama bin Laden who, encouraged by the success of the *Mujahideen,* instituted the concept of a global Caliphate, to be later harped on by Al-Baghdadi of ISIS notoriety. Infused and enthused with *Wahhabi* ideology which was given a fillip and a wider audience by the Saudis post the Afghan War through media outreach and publishing, construction of mosques that preached *Wahhabism*, distribution of *Wahhabi* textbooks and endowments to universities and cultural centres, countless youth from the developing and developed countries took part in varied conflicts such as in Yugoslavia, Chechnya, Somalia, Sudan and Kashmir, all of which were now perceived to be connected to the global *ummah.*[73] 1979 became the excuse that Saudi Arabia needed to promote its theo-fascist version of Islam.

• *Poverty and Underdevelopment:* There are two parallel strands that explain why most of the recent terror attacks have been carried out by immigrants and the sense of discrimination felt by most first or second generation immigrants across most of the developed world. It has to be understood that there is a large scale programme of radicalisation being funded by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in terms of millions of dollars invested in the construction of mosques. The most recent example is the Saudi offer to build more than 200 mosques for immigrants in Germany, instead of offering refuge.[74] However, most of the radicalisation has been funded covertly through 'missionary' and 'Islamic charity organisations', with the ostensible support of the Sunni Gulf monarchies.[75] A substantial part of it has been targeted towards poor countries in the form of extremist *madrassas*, approved by local politicians who receive kickbacks for a positive nod.[76] Most of the Third World countries are suffering from underdevelopment, a condition of siphoning of resources and finances through '*free-market*' procedures such as lowering of tariff barriers for imports, reducing subsidies for exports, intellectual property rights and patents being a few of them.[77] This has resulted in a large imbalance, between the '*haves*' and '*have-nots*', resulting in poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition. In many places in poor Muslim

countries, there is no alternative to a *madrassa* option. Poverty is exploited to the hilt to promote extremism. The second is the process of underdevelopment perpetrated by the core i.e. the developed countries against the periphery or the Third World countries, and between the developed and prosperous and the undeveloped and impoverished areas within the same country. Most of the Third World countries are trying to ape the industrial development of the First World, without realising the unique inhibitions that they have to counter in terms of trade, technology and trained manpower bias. The processes that they are undergoing were never encountered by the developed countries on account of their being the colonisers and, therefore, the residual colonialism in the form of a huge income gap between the rich and the poor and a non-inclusive and lopsided development has stirred up a latent anger within a huge section of the population. Coupled with a parasitic and ever encroaching social media network, fiery preachers, and a distorted view of government policies, the stage is set for more violent manifestations of this latent anger, now under the facade of religion. An apt example for the second point is the case of Southern France which is an immigrant heavy area of the country, and where immigrants, especially from Morocco and Algeria, have been discriminated against for long. Cities such as Marseilles have been marked as being the most violent in Europe due to the preponderance of unemployed, discriminated against, and proselytised, immigrants.[78]

- **Media Morality and Perception:** The media has become the moralist of today's age. In its various *avatars* such as print, television, cable, magazines, social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter *et al* and massive online video directories, it has bombarded the senses of human beings with an incessant flow of information and data that could never be accessed by a single person even in his/ her entire lifetime. Along with information comes opinion, biased and not necessarily backed by relevant facts, and heavily dependent on rhetoric. Unfortunately, preconceived notions of the objectivity of the media have enabled media powerhouses to transmit an array of opinions purporting to be facts and reportage, thereby diluting and disrupting the decision-making processes of the audience. Through a host of talk shows, documentaries, photographs,

monographs, articles, essays, hate propaganda, audio clippings and songs, the media has twisted reality, shaped views of the past and sometimes the past itself, and has declared itself to be the moral minder of the whole world. Region-specific media agencies have built up their local narratives, focussing on their particular geographical area, however, when coalesced, two contradictory pictures have come to the fore. For the West, whole religions have been equated to being terrorist breeders, while the hypocrisy of their own invasions is sidelined. Though lone wolf attacks have occurred on Western soil besides the ones mentioned above that involved various ideologies such as white supremacism, Semite militarism and the likes, most of those perpetrators have been painted as mentally unstable so as to delink the man and his ideology from his act.[79] The same courtesy has not been extended to other communities. On the other hand, generally for the rest of the world, and for some communities in particular, a narrative is being spun, that of the victimisation of a religious group. All Islamist extremist groups, with the assistance of the media, are weaving narratives of Western imperialism in the case of '*white skinned foreigners'* or Western-backed dictators in case the regime/ government heads are from their own skin colour, trying to drown out an Islamic culture, by painting a war of civilisations: the West v/s Islam. Media propaganda, by flashing pictures of killed children, severed limbs, decapitated heads and superimposing the greed and callousness of the West over the tragedy, has created a powerful culture of centrality and unity for the victimised '*ummah'* and elevated the importance of religion in their eyes. A vicious cycle has emerged. Anti-terror agencies are using all their power to eliminate terror by targeting extremists, resulting in violence; this violence is then being used as a counter propaganda by the same extremists to showcase the devious nature of the '*white man',* resulting in more followers.

- **Globalisation:** The New World Order, marked by the end of the Cold War era, has witnessed major upheavals in large parts of the world. Dichotomies have ruled the roost. While on the one hand, nationalist-identity linked movements have ripped apart fabrics of pre-existing states such as the demand for Kurdistan from parts of Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq, Uighur separation from China, and South Sudan from Sudan, on the other, religious-identity linked movements such as the Al

Qaeda and the ISIS have tried to merge together existing states in their dream of a global Caliphate. Divergence and convergence are occurring simultaneously. In conjunction with the rhetoric about a global culture that is increasingly seen as Western and threatening to inundate the traditional mores of different societies, ease of movement of people between countries, perceived usurpation of jobs and livelihood by other nationalities, people have sought the protective comfort of their own affiliated groups, all imagined but some manifested physically in forms of ethnic, religious, social or gender-based groups and others in the forms of digital relations. These digital relations have been amplified by globalisation. Globalisation has led to an increasingly connected world, which has brought common opinions across the world onto a single platform, linking people to a common cause for the good of society such as *Avaaz*[80] and *#Bringbackourgirls,*[81] or on the downside enabling al-Awlaki to widen his *madrassa*-limited audience to anyone who would listen in the entire world. It has also enabled extremist groups to propagate Do it Tourself (DIY) bomb-making procedures such as AQAP's online magazine *Inspire,* one issue of which had the headline 'HOW TO MAKE A BOMB IN YOUR MOTHER'S KITCHEN?[82]' Online recruiters have played on these culture-threatening vulnerabilities by highlighting the injustice done to these communities by the supposedly democratic governments, thereby deepening the chasm of doubt and suspicion. Virtual trust has weaponised the angst and frustration of a number of educated youth who view globalisation as having been unequal and impoverishing rather than the miracle it claims to be.

Solutions

Short-term solutions to counter lone wolf terrorism is what anti-terror agencies are currently following, which is a two-pronged approach. The first prong involves targeting prospective and suspected lone wolf terrorists by way of 'profiling' and masquerading as terrorists themselves to win the trust of the would-be lone wolf, and enticing him to divulge information regarding his plans. These actions have had limited yet effective success in avoiding major attacks on important landmarks and cities, examples of which have been discussed earlier. The second prong has been an effort by various governments and heads of states to dissuade the youth from joining the ranks

of extremist organisations, and not to indulge in acts of terror, through use of the social media such as Twitter handles and Facebook pages such as @ ThinkAgain_DOS run by the US government's Global Engagement Centre (GEC).[83] These efforts, however, have proved quite ineffective in dealing with the torrent of propaganda dumped by the ISIS everyday on the internet and lapped up by thousands, if not millions. With the ISIS' real estate shrinking every day, an increased focus on social media platforms is likely--one which would focus on creating more lone wolf terrorists. In view of the various causative and structural factors discussed, the following long-term solutions can be particularised and adapted to local conditions in order to reduce the probability of lone wolf terrorism.

- **Countering of Narrative:** Surprisingly, against the tirades of figures such as Anwar al Awlaki and Jihadi John, the voices of reason have been generally silent, in the physical as well as the digital world. The '*jihadi cool*' attitude fostered and tempered by the ISIS through its videos and stills, as well as the victimisation narrative has to be countered effectively. This can be done only by the local preachers and community leaders who, by way of their standing in the community and consequent moral high ground, can wean the youth away from proselytisers and extremist ideas. Similarly, the online battle of the social media has to be fought using the Twitter profiles and *gravatars* of local leaders and influential personalities of a particular community whose links with the West or the supposedly imperialist countries of the extremist propaganda, have to be shown as being non-existent. The language and semantics of the narrative have to be local. The resistance against the extremist, especially the ISIS, propaganda, and the spinning of a counter-narrative has to delink itself from any governmental or external, especially Western backed, effort, in any form.

- **Inclusive and Integrative Policies:** There is a need for governments to have a relook at their economic and social policies. A conscious effort has to be put in to ensure a more equitable, integrative and inclusive development process. The idea of '*separateness*' grows stronger when distinguishing factors such as race, ethnicity, religion are supplemented by unequal development, which can be exploited by a number of agencies to promote numerous agendas. Directives, aimed at a perceived cultural more of a particular community, need to be endorsed by the relevant

community leaders publicly and not applied or declared unilaterally in the name of secularism. The ban on the wearing of *hijab* in France, though ostensibly to promote gender equality and inhibit an evil practice of discrimination against women, was viewed as an assault on the religious sentiments of the huge Muslim population in the country. Mohd Merah's lone wolf attack was ostensibly against this policy. Globalisation, in terms of a prevailing pop and American dominated culture has been seen as promoting a culture that promotes inequality and accumulation of wealth, all the while assaulting and invading other communities whose point of view and way of living may be at odds with it.

- **Cultural Sensitisation of the Media:** Western media tends to portray stereotypical versions of members of particular communities and all incidents and news tend to be filtered through a '*racial profiling*' lens. This is true not just for the television news media but the more freelance social media. Pre-conceived notions of the Middle East being a violent region, or killings being frequent, is one of the main reasons why the latest suicide car-bomb attack in Baghdad which killed more than 200 people went relatively unnoticed as against the Istanbul airport bombing or the Paris terror attacks last year.[84] Cultural insensitivity or rather over-sensitivity against a particular religion or race may result in a feeling of being singled out each and every time a terror attack occurs anywhere. This leads to segregation and further anger which may be directed by online videos and religious figures into action. There have to be discussions with the media, both on and off the air, to help learn about the sensitivities of other cultures. Portrayal by the media, whether good or bad, aids in forming opinions about groups based on the actions of a few individuals. Hate crimes against a particular community need to be labelled as terror attacks, notwithstanding the racial, ethnic or religious make-up of the perpetrator. Dylan Roof's attacks were passed off as the acts of a psychotic individual,[85] while similar leeway was not given to Jose Pimentel who was classified as a lone wolf, despite suffering from a mental disorder. Not correctly labelling an attack is as grievous a crime as the act itself and the media needs to be held responsible.

- **Foreign Policies of Western Countries:** Introspection has to be carried out by the leadership of countries such as the US, France, UK about their hypocritical actions. While the leaders at various echelons

of the countries are adept at the rhetoric of democracy, free will, *laissez faire* and upholding of human rights, this is not matched by their actions on the ground such as unilaterally and wilfully ignoring the sovereign borders of countries such as Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq and Syria, to name a few, conducting drone strikes resulting in massive collateral damage (euphemism for civilian deaths), conducting covert operations on foreign soil, including assassinations and sabotage.[86] Targeting and killing terrorists on foreign soil has, on the one hand decimated the leadership of extremist organisations such as Al Qaeda, but, on the other, given an excuse to these very organisations to recruit an ever growing number of potential cadres, thereby sustaining a vicious cycle of annihilation and regeneration. Videos and news articles about these almost regular killings and assassinations have been used by various organisations to recruit individuals to these causes, and not just illiterate or unemployed individuals as shown by the conventional media narrative, but successful and educated young men, aggrieved by these atrocities. These countries have also maintained more-than-cordial relations with Saudi Arabia, a known promoter of *Wahhabi* extremism around the world. In spite of its dismal record on human rights such as its continuing barbaric practice of beheading and limb-amputation, its representative has recently been made head of the Human Rights Council of the UN.[87] There needs to be sea change in the foreign policies of these countries that have to realise that they cannot bomb, maim, torture or kill their way to a solution. An intra-politico-religious struggle for one upmanship in the Middle East, manifested as a struggle between the Saudi led monarchies and the Shia dominated Iranian bloc, has seen the major Western powers lining up behind the Sunni faction, spurred by the 1979 break between the Iranian theocracy and the Americans. An unfortunate blowback of the meddlesome and double-dealing policies of the US, UK and France has been the disintegration of states like Iraq, Syria and Libya, and the infestation of various extremist groups, some under the facade of 'moderate' rebels, supported by these Western powers while others as extremists such as the ISIS or Daesh, Nusra Front, Ahrar al Sham and the like.[88] The Western countries need to reconsider their interventionist policies in the Middle East and disengage from the region as subtly as possible. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, needs to be ostracised for its

behaviour and not rewarded with ironic nominations in the world body polity.

- **Shifting of Affiliations:** As mentioned earlier, the two simultaneous processes of convergence in the form of religious movements and divergence in the form of ethno-nationalism are the result of the globalisation process in the wake of the New World Order in the post Cold War world. Both promote divisiveness, one reinforcing commonality, and the other, differentiation. However, in the present times, it has become critical to choose between the lesser of these two evils. States, despite the critique of the neo-liberals or the anarchists or any of their mid-variants, are here to stay. The structure of the state has become so enmeshed with the lives of human beings that the coerciveness of its institutions has been almost taken for granted. Nationalisms, especially ethno-nationalisms are structure-focussed and though many have involved bitter protracted struggles, with colossal loss of lives, still have a concrete end game in sight which is temporal in nature. The conflict over land, political autonomy between the parent-state and the emergent state-to-be can be resolved by various conflict-resolution mechanisms. Religious movements, on the other hand, by purporting to be all encompassing and spiritual in nature, do not allow such discretions to come into play. It is either a case of all or nothing. Religious fervour, for establishing a Kingdom of God, whether a Caliphate or various unsuccessful preacher-led militant commercial religions of the US, has usually ended in mass casualties due to the refusal of the adherents to accommodate or even consider an alternative. It is also comparatively easier to incite an individual by appealing to his/her sense of spiritual righteousness by pointing out alien attempts at desecration of his/her god. Therefore, it is pertinent that any attempt at a religious incitement be diverted towards a nationalist based one, if not thwarted completely. Counter-narratives, especially in the form of nationalist sentiments, have to be promoted as against religion based ones in order to subsume sentiments under a political organisation rather than a proselytising one.

Conclusion

At the end, it would suffice to say that the phenomenon of lone wolf terrorism is not a new one. Post Cold War, it can be said to have started from the Oklahoma City bombing in 1993 and has continued with the recent

Orlando Club shooting of 2016. From Timothy McVeigh to Omar Mateen[89], the scale, intensity and frequency of attacks have changed, varied with time and location, with the acts becoming more bold with time, resulting in more casualties. However, the post 9/11 lone wolf attacks cannot be said to have occurred in a vacuum. The structural factors mentioned above have slowly shaped the landscape where lone wolf attacks were a given. The recent Bangladesh attacks[90] and the truck related killings of 84 people in Nice on Bastille Day in France[91] just drive home the fact that the frequency of lone wolf attacks has increased exponentially and will continue to do so unless a long-term plan to counter them is evolved. These attacks increased in frequency due to the surprising growth of the internet, especially the social media. However, their counter has to simultaneously focus on a number of fields, social media rebuttal being one of them. This has to be supplemented by community leadership and mentoring, change in the foreign policies of the Western countries, inclusive and equitable development by own governments and, most importantly, a rehabilitation programme for anyone returning from Iraq or Syria so as to ease his entry back into the normal world.

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