

Social Media and the Globalization of the Sicarii

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Abstract

Throughout most of their history, al Qaeda and its affiliates have focused on carrying out spectacular mass-casualty attacks. However these groups have not achieved this goal in the West since the 7/7 London Bombing. Alternatively, ISIS has emerged from the chaos of the Syrian civil war and successfully have carried out spectacular mass-casualty attacks while also adopting a regressive style of terrorist tactics similar to those carried out by the Sicarii in first-century Judea. The rise of ISIS also has coincided with the proliferation of social media as a global means of communication. The result is ISIS's exploitation of social media to turn unsophisticated attacks into spectacular attacks, not just to spread fear, but also to gain recruits. This approach has proven so successful that al Qaeda and its affiliates have adapted this strategy, but without abandoning the desire to carry out much larger, mass-casualty attacks. This has created a global environment in which the threat from jihadist terrorism and violence never has been greater.

Key Words: Terrorism, social media, ISIS, al Qaeda, Sicarii

Introduction

The last two months of 2015 saw a series of mass-casualty terrorist attacks carried out on four continents in the name of a Salafi Jihadist ideology: the bombing of Metrojet Flight 9268, the Bourj el-Barajneh bombings in Beirut, the November 13 Paris attacks, and the San Bernardino attack. The aftermath of these attacks were broadcast around the world, creating fear and calling attention to the ideology and agenda of those responsible. The first week of 2016 included the attempted attack on a police station in Paris on the first anniversary of the Charlie Hebdo massacre, the shooting of a Philadelphia police officer, and multiple knife attacks on Israeli forces in the West Bank. Though smaller in scale and with less casualties, the media coverage of these events sensationalized these attacks and showed that the events do not need to be sophisticated to spread fear and call attention to one's cause.

This tactic of individuals using small weapons against members of a specific group is one that traces back to the first century, A.D. With the advent of cell phone cameras, an explosion of video recording devices in public spaces, and the increasing popularity and influence of social media, this is a regressive form of terrorism that is employed the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and those individuals who sympathize with their ideologies and causes.

The May 22, 2013 attack on Lee Rigby in the town of Woolwich in the United Kingdom perhaps best demonstrates the effectiveness of this regressive form of terrorism in spreading both fear and the terrorists' message. On that date, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale drove their car into Rigby, an off-duty British army soldier, knocking him to the pavement. Then,

jumping from the car, they used knives and a cleaver to stab and hack Rigby to death while they shouted, “Allahu Akbar!”

In the immediate minutes after the attack, Adebolajo approach a bystander who was recording the aftermath on a cell phone. He explained his reason for carrying out the attack, stating: “The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers and this British soldier is one. By Allah, we swear by the almighty Allah we will never stop fighting you until you leave us alone. So what if we want to live by the Sharia in Muslim lands” (Martin, 2013). Adebolajo and Adebowa remained at the scene and asked bystanders to call the police. When armed police arrived, the two men, one brandishing a cleaver and the other a revolver, charged at the police, who fired eight times, wounding both men(Caulfield and Siemaszko, 2013).

When Adebolajo and Adebowa attacked Lee Rigby, they were utilizing tactics with roots in the first century, A.D., when Zealots-Sicarii used short daggers to kill people in crowded places in order to instill anxiety and terror in those who witnessed the event. However, in the case of the Woolwich attack, hours after Rigby’s killing, the cell phone video taken in the immediate aftermath of a blood-covered Adebolajo delivering his justification for the killing was broadcast by media outlets around the globe and linked on social media sites for the world to witness the event. In a way, the Woolwich attack represented a globalization of the Sicarii. The value of this regressive form of terrorism and the ability to now be witnessed around the world is not lost on the leaders of ISIS, al Qaeda, their affiliates, sympathizers, and others who adhere to a Salafi Jihadist ideology.

Zealots-Sicarii

The Zealots and Sicarii actually were two different groups operating in Judea in the first century, A.D.; the Zealots targeted Romans and the Sicarii targeted the Jews they viewed as collaborators. The groups’ tactics and goals were very much the same: to use fear and anxiety to create a mass uprising against Roman occupation. The Sicarii and Zealots attacked in broad daylight in the heart of Jerusalem, and often chose holy days when crowds were the largest in order to exploit the potential for publicity and demonstrate that not even the most sacred occasions could provide immunity. They would mingle with the crowd, carrying short daggers concealed under their clothing that they then would use to stab their enemies. After the attack, they would try slip back into the crowd to escape (Rapoport, 1983).

The goal of Sicarii and Zealot attacks was to have a direct impact on an audience well beyond the target of their attack. As Hoffmann explains, In an era long before CNN television and the transmission of instantaneous live satellite images, the Zealots’ dramatic public acts of violence-precisely like those of terrorists today-were designed to have a psychological repercussions far beyond the immediate victim(s) of the terrorist attack and thereby to send a powerful message to a wider, watching audience-namely, the Roman occupation administration and the Jews who collaborated with the invaders. (2006, p. 83)

This need to call attention to your cause and actions is not lost on modern terrorists. Unlike the Sicarii, they have the benefit of CNN, live satellite images, and the advent of the global media, giving birth to spectacular attacks.

Spectacular Attacks

Many terrorists and terrorist organizations seek a spectacle like the attacks carried out in the last two months of 2015. They want it to be broadcast around the world, and view the media as an essential means of furthering their agenda and spreading their message. The media covers sensational events regardless of the cause or origin, and while people have the right to know what is going on around them, media coverage does amplify terrorist attacks.

A watershed event in the relationship between the media and terrorists was the 1972 Black September attack on the Munich Olympic games. Media outlets from around the world were in Munich to cover the games, and the hostage crisis that followed the initial attack was filmed and broadcast on live television. An estimated 500 million people watched the events unfold. While all the terrorists were killed or captured, the attack was considered a success by Black September for the publicity it generated for the Palestinian cause (Banks, De Nevers, and Wallerstein, 2007).

Over two decades later, the value of the spectacular attacks was not lost on al Qaeda. The group literally exploded onto the world stage with the East African embassy bombings in 1998. The attacks occurred nearly simultaneously, one in Dar e Salaam, Tanzania and another in Nairobi, Kenya. The images of the carnage were broadcast around the world. The attacks also highlighted the capability of al Qaeda, as it was able to coordinate sophisticated attacks simultaneously in different locations. This ability to coordinate attacks became a hallmark of al Qaeda and its affiliates, and served to add to the spectacle, as demonstrated by the 9/11 attacks on the United States, the 3/11 Madrid bombings, and the 7/7 London Bombings. These attacks also showed focus on new targets that would add to the spectacle: transportation systems with not only a large number of people concentrated in a small area, but that would have a debilitating effect beyond the primary target such as those people who relied on the system to go about their daily lives.

While al Qaeda, its affiliates, ISIS, and other Salafi Jihadist groups continue to operate in areas of control within the Islamic world, failed efforts, such as the 2006 Liquid Bombing Plot, 2009 New York City subway-bombing plot, and 2013 Canadian Rail Plot, showed that counterterrorism efforts appear to diminish these groups' ability to successfully carry out sophisticated attacks on critical infrastructure. With the exception of the Metrojet bombing, the result has been a renewed focus on soft targets with smaller bombs, armed assaults, and even knives, like in Woolwich. These attacks, even those with mass casualties, appear to have more in common with the Sicarii than a sophisticated attack such as 9/11. This regression of tactics has occurred in a time in which smart phones have become available to all but the world's poorest, and events such as the Arab Spring have shown the power of social media. The result is that unsophisticated attacks can quickly become global events that are no less spectacular.

Terrorism and Social Media

The use of images and video by Islamic extremists to get their message out is not a new tactic. What has changed is that in the past, these groups were reliant on the news media to get their message out, or "religious bookstores" in predominately Muslim neighborhoods to spread their propaganda. As the Internet became available to more people, images and video of beheadings, other gruesome attacks, and even martyrdom videos were posted by terrorists in an attempt to reach a broader audience. Still, these images and messages were not necessarily easy

to find. One would have to know the IP addresses of specific websites or troll through the deep recesses of the dark web. The result was that these images and messages tended to find a wider audience only when broadcast by the media, and usually significantly were edited down to meet content standards and programming time constraints. It also was up to the individual media outlets to decide how these images and messages were framed, often simply adding editorial comments. This all changed with the emergence of social media and other user-built content sites.

Jihadist groups have used the opportunity created by the proliferation of social media platforms to blend audiovisual and written content that not only sanctions and explains specific ideological dimensions of jihadist activity, but also attract fighters and fundraisers to their cause (Fisher, 2015). The birth of social media in the mid-2000s coincided with large numbers of people obtaining cheap and easy access to the Internet, and the rise of Anwar al-Awlaki as a prominent face in the global jihadist movement (Conway, 2012).

Al-Awlaki, an American citizen, was the ideological leader of al Qaeda in the Arabia Peninsula (AQAP); he held particular appeal in the West because of his ability to communicate and his understanding of Western society. Al-Awlaki, who has been called the, “bin Laden of the Internet,” had a Facebook page that contributed to the radicalization of such high-profile individuals as the Fort Hood shooter Nidal Hassan, underwear bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (Ramakrishna, 2010), and Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad (Calabres, 2010).

Al-Awlaki’s organization, AQAP, is behind *Inspire Magazine*, whose first issue was published online in the summer of 2010, and with social media as a catalyst, is easily accessible online. The magazine targets an English-speaking readership and emphasizes a do-it-yourself approach to terrorism, with such topics as directions on building a homemade bomb or cleaning a Kalashnikov rifle. Issues of *Inspire* have been viewed and downloaded thousands of times, and authorities in the United States, Britain, and Australia have found it in the possession of more than a dozen terrorism suspects. The role of *Inspire Magazine* series has been cited in a series of terrorism plots around the globe and at least one successful attack, the Boston Marathon Bombing (Lemieux, et al., 2014).

AQAP released the fourteenth issue of *Inspire* on September 9, 2015 in both English and Arabic. The magazine’s focus was, “Assassination Operations,” and many of the articles in the issue touted the Charlie Hebdo attack for which the AQAP claimed responsibility. The issue serves as, “inspiration and a practical resource for lone wolves or cells that might want to commit attacks” (SITE, 2015). News of the release of the issue quickly was announced across various social media platforms.

While AQAP understands the value of social media to their cause, it is the ISIS that stands apart in its mastery of twenty-first-century technology and social media to recruit followers and disseminate its slick online videos to produce jihadist propaganda, much of it translated into English and other languages (Talbot, 2015). Currently, ISIS broadcasts on Twitter in order to get people to follow them, and then moves to Twitter’s direct messaging in order to evaluate whether people are potential recruits either to travel for training or to plan killings where they are. They have attracted more than 20,000 English-language followers on Twitter alone, where there are an estimated 200,000 pro-ISIS messages posted every day (Committee on Homeland Security, September 2015, p. 6). Through their efforts on social media, ISIS has attracted 25,000 foreigners to fight in Syria and Iraq from 80 or 90 countries, including 4,500 from Europe and North America (Talbot, 2015).

In September 2015, ISIS released the eleventh issue of its English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, that like AQAP's *Inspire*, targets Western audiences. They pushed out more than 1,700 "products," including videos, photographic reports, and magazines over social media in just in the first five months of 2015. Compounding this problem are the ISIS affiliates, groups pledging support in at least 18 countries or territories (Committee on Homeland Security, September 2015, p 4).

The growing threat from ISIS is not just measured in terms of an increase in Twitter followers and foreign fighters. There were a total of 1,086 ISIS attacks worldwide between July 1 and September 30 2015, a 42 percent increase over the previous three-month period. These attacks led to 2,978 non-militant fatalities, a 65 percent increase from the previous quarter, and just one less than the total number of victims in the September 11 attacks. Despite these numbers, many security officials believe that it is AQAP or the al Qaeda-linked Khorasan Group—taking advantage of the chaos in Yemen and Syria—that are more capable of carrying out larger-scale, sophisticated, and catastrophic attacks, including bringing down airliners carrying hundreds of passengers (Schmitt, 2015).

While ISIS is engaged in traditional, open warfare and high-profile asymmetrical attacks within Iraq and Syria, it also engages in less sophisticated but no less horrifying attacks meant to instill fear in those who oppose their movement while simultaneously drawing recruits to their cause. These attacks, such as beheadings, armed assaults with both bladed weapons and firearms, and mass executions have more in common with the tactics of the Zealots and Sicarii of the first century, A.D. Like the Zealots and Sicarii, the targets of these types of ISIS attacks are not the victims themselves, but those who bear witness to the attack. While the witnesses to Zealots and Sicarii attacks were limited to the locations of the attack and those who heard of it by word of mouth, thanks to global media and perhaps more specifically social media, the witnesses to the Sicarii-style attacks sit in front of their televisions or computer screens around the world. In the case of social media, ISIS gets to control the message associated with these attacks in order to strike fear or gain recruits.

ISIS's Sicarii

In the West, the beheading of prisoners is a tactic for which ISIS is best known, in no small part because many of the victims are Westerners. While it may lack the surprise element of a Sicarii attack, it is not more sophisticated, and has a similar profound psychological effect on those that witness it. Beheadings is a tactic that traces its roots back over a decade to May 2004, when Abu Musab al-Zarqaw, the leader of al Qaeda of Iraq and predecessor to ISIS, beheaded Nicholas Berg, a U.S. contractor working in Iraq, and posted the video of the execution on the Internet. At the time of the killing, there was no YouTube or Twitter to allow for the instant sharing of videos or links to them; rather, it was buried on jihadist sites in the murk of the dark web and reliant on the global media to broadcast portions of the video (Talbot, 2015).

The resurgence of ISIS from the remnants of al Qaeda in Iraq was facilitated by the chaos in Syria and Iraq and coincided with social media becoming part of everyday life; with it came the return of beheading. Gone were the days of posting grainy videos on the dark web; rather, with the aid of sophisticated but affordable video editing software, videos could be posted to accessible sites and easily shared with millions of followers. Thanks to social media, the witness became the world, and ISIS began using this to their advantage; its target was clearly the West.

In August 2014, U.S. journalist James Foley was beheaded, and video of the incident quickly made the rounds of social media.

It became clear immediately that the video was aimed at Western audiences, as the dialogue was in English and blames the United States for the killing. The individual speaking in the video later was identified as Mohammed Emwazi, a Kuwait-born British citizen whom the media later nicknamed Jihadi John. Emwazi subsequently appeared in the beheading videos of U.S. journalist Steve Sotloff, British aid workers David Haines and Alan Henning, and Japanese hostage Kenji Goto (Casciani, 2015). Like the Sicarii attacks in Judea, these attacks were meant to strike fear and horror in those who witnessed the images, but also served to appeal to those Westerners who sympathized with ISIS's cause to join the movement.

This tactic was not limited just to the areas ISIS controlled in the Middle East, as even before the November 2015 Paris attacks, they sought to launch their Sicarii-style attacks directly on the Western world, either by directing the plot themselves or calling on their followers living in the West to attack on their own. In September 2014, Australian police thwarted an alleged attempt to launch a terror attack in Sydney and Brisbane after a phone call between high-level members of ISIS was intercepted. The goal of the plot was to behead random members of the public and post the images on social media. Prosecutors said this would demonstrate an, "unusual level of fanaticism," that was, "clearly designed to shock and horrify." The attack itself was believed to be directed by Mohammad Ali Baryalei, who has been described by Australian officials as the country's, "most senior member of ISIS" (Culzac, 2014). The following April, Australian police thwarted an ISIS-inspired plot when they arrested five individuals between the ages of 18-19 planning to use edged weapons to attack police officers during a World War One memorial event (Wellman & McCall, 2015).

Much like the Sicarii of the first century targeted Romans and their collaborators to be killed, ISIS has singled out military and law enforcement personnel. In early October 2014, the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the Department of Homeland Security sent out a joint intelligence bulletin to U.S. law enforcement officials warning that ISIS-inspired terrorists may be weighing "lone wolf" attacks against targets in the United States. The reason for this warning was an audio message attributed to ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, posted on a jihadi forum in late September 2014 and shared on social media, urging sympathizers in Western countries to attack, "soldiers, patrons, and troops...their police, security and intelligence members." Attackers did not need to, "ask for anyone's advice," prior to striking, said the message, because such actions are legitimate (*NBCNEWS, 2014*).

If a would-be recruit could not come to Syria or Iraq, he was urged to take action on his own on behalf of ISIS. In the two weeks following the warning, a Canadian man who recently had adopted radical Islam ran over two soldiers near Montreal, and an Islamic convert shot and killed a soldier who was guarding the National War Memorial in Ottawa, stormed Canada's parliament, and fired multiple times before being shot and killed. A hatchet-wielding man charged at four police officers in Queens, New York before being killed. In the Queens case, the attacker's online history showed he had recently visited websites related to ISIS and viewed videos of beheadings (Schwartz & Rashbaum, 2014).

These attacks on law enforcement and military personnel were not limited to North America. A gunman in Copenhagen killed two strangers and wounded five police officers in February 2015. Prior to the attack, the gunman wrote on his Facebook page that ISIS inspired him (Higgins, 2015). In January 2015, Belgian police conducted a dozen raids across the country to prevent "imminent" attacks, and killed two men they said were part of an ISIS cell after

coming under fire. The plot was believed to be specifically targeting Belgian police, but was different than others, because the raids took aim at people who had joined extremist groups in Syria or other battle zones and then returned to Europe (Kanter, 2015).

The FBI issued similar warnings in December 2014 and for the 2015 Fourth of July holiday amid continued plots such as Usaamah Rahim, who was fatally shot by police earlier in June 2015 after wielding a military knife at police officers investigating an alleged plot to launch attacks against police officers. In a plot eerily similar to Lee Rigby, a 24-year old was charged in a July 2015 in a plot to run over an American serviceman stationed in Britain and then kill him with a knife. Unfortunately, not all plots can be prevented; among those not stopped were the July 2015 attack on a recruiting center and Navy operations support center in Chattanooga, Tennessee that left five servicemen dead, and the shooting of Philadelphia Police Officer Jesse Hartnett by Edward Archer in January 2016. Archer later would tell police that he attacked in support of ISIS. (Brumfield, Prokupecz and Sanchez, 2016).

From early 2014 until September 2015, there were 66 planned or executed ISIS-linked attack plots against Western targets, including 19 inside in the United States (Committee on Homeland Security, December 2015, p. 4), many of which specifically targeted law enforcement and military personnel. These Sicarii-style attacks were not just called for but also facilitated by ISIS. In August 2015, ISIS hacked and compiled the personal information of 1,400 military, political, and diplomatic personnel from countries around the world, and released it as a chilling hit list on social media (Beers, 2015). This was on the heels of the March 2015 ISIS “kill list” published online containing the names, photos, and addresses of 100 U.S. military members; ISIS called upon its, “brothers residing in America,” to kill them (Bleier, 2015).

Through most of its history, al Qaeda and its affiliates have focused attention on conducting sophisticated, spectacular attacks. While numerous attacks have been thwarted or failed, al Qaeda and its affiliates have not launched a successful attack directly in the West since the 7/7 London Bombings. On the other hand, it was believed that ISIS had not made a priority of organizing strikes on the West. Instead, the Islamic State has encouraged individual Westerners to carry out such attacks on their own (Schmitt, 2015).

Obviously, this assessment was shattered by the November 2015 Paris attacks and the foiled plots in the wake of these attacks; however, Sicarii-type attacks still have value in that they are unsophisticated and harder to detect and continue to occur. Because of social media and our wired world, images of these types of attacks quickly can spread around the globe. With CCTV cameras covering much of the public domain, and people carrying video-enabled smart phones, there is a high likelihood that even an unsophisticated attack will be captured on video. This was the case with the Ottawa shooter, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris, and the shooting of Officer Hartnett in Philadelphia. That video then can be manipulated with a group’s own message and spread to a target audience through social media, and ISIS has gone as far as developing an app for Android devices that allows supporters to receive the latest news and videos from the terrorist group. They also have their own social networking site to ensure their images, news, and messages are disseminated as widely as possible (Cuthbertson, 2015).

Sicarii beyond ISIS

The effectiveness of ISIS combining social media with the tactics used by the Sicarii 2,000 years ago is not lost on other terrorist groups with radical Islam at the core of their

ideology. In August 2015, AQAP's master bomb-maker Ibrahim al-Asiri released a letter praising recent ISIS-inspired lone-wolf style attacks against the West and urging the group's followers, "to strike America in its own home and beyond," and this was followed up by a video featuring senior AQAP leader Khaled Batarfi making similar statements (McConnell & Todd, 2015). The following month, al Qaeda Central Leader Ayman al-Zawahr posted an audio recording online, calling on young Muslim men in the United States and other Western countries to carry out lone-wolf style attacks inside their own countries, stating, "We must now focus on moving the war to the heart of the homes and cities of the crusader West and specifically America" (Frizell, 2015).

The tactics of the Sicarii even have returned to the land where the tactic was first used nearly 2,000 years ago. In October 2015, scores of random, unpredictable knife attacks began to occur in Jerusalem and West Bank settlements where primarily young Palestinians targeted Israeli soldiers, police, and Jewish civilians. Pro-Palestinian website and social media posts have dubbed these attacks, "Knife Intifada," and even have given instructions on how to stab victims (Avishai, 2015). Between October 1 and December 31, 2015, 22 Israelis, an American, and an Eritrean were killed in Sicarii-style attacks, including stabbings, car rammings, and gunfire targeting security forces and civilians, prompting the Israel Defense Force to begin distributing a new piece of protective gear to guard soldiers' necks from attempted stabbing attacks (*I24News*, 2016).

Those knife attacks, in addition to instilling fear, have called attention to the Palestinian cause by including the strategy of atrocities and counter-atrocities, in which the response to the initial attacks paints the attackers in a sympathetic light, as they are perceived to be weak and without alternatives (Rapoport, 2001). This response can be seen in the number of media outlets around the world that have focused on the number of Palestinians who have died in the unrest since October 2015, rather than the number of attacks and resulting casualties. It is hard not to see the irony in the fact that the tactic used by the Sicarii against the Romans in Judea is now being used by the Palestinians to target Israelis that they view as occupiers.

Conclusion

Since the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings, al Qaeda and its affiliates have aimed to carry out sophisticated, spectacular attacks against the United States and Western targets. In reality, prior to the November 2015 Paris attacks, the last successful sophisticated terrorist attack directly against targets in the West was the 7/7 London Bombings. Despite the fact that it was over a decade between the 7/7 London Bombings and the Paris attacks, the threat from terrorism carried out in the name of Islam currently may be at its greatest since September 11 2001. One of the reasons for this is the regression of terrorist tactics to include not only sophisticated plots aimed at massive destruction and loss of life, but also more simplistic attacks that, thanks to the global media and perhaps more importantly social media, are no less spectacular. Just as an attack by the Sicarii in first-century Judea would spread fear and panic around the city, these same types of attacks now spread fear around the globe while also bringing attention and new recruits to an organization. Perhaps no single group understands and has utilized this more than ISIS.

Rising from the chaos of the Syrian civil war, the group emerged and drew inspiration from its former leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi that the killing of one when viewed by many can have profound effect on one's cause. However, ISIS had one tool that al-Zarqawi did not: social

media. Social media has allowed ISIS not just to spread images and videos directly to their audience, but also to frame the event and establish the accompanying narrative in line with its ideology and goals. ISIS has globalized the Sicarii methods on three fronts: within the areas they control to spread fear among the population, directing Sicarii-style attacks in the West, and calling on those who sympathize with their cause to carry out similar attacks. The result of this strategy is ISIS rising to the forefront of the global jihadist movement. This has not been lost on other groups in the movement, such as al Qaeda, its affiliates, and even the Palestinian groups who have adopted this strategy.

Despite the success of ISIS in globalizing the Sicarii's tactics, the threat of sophisticated, mass-destruction, mass-casualty terrorist attacks have not diminished. The same chaos in Syria that gave rise to ISIS also has provided a safe haven for al Qaeda affiliates to plot attacks against the West, like the Khorasan Group planned attacks against Western targets to include the United States that was disrupted by U.S. airstrikes on the plotters inside Syria in September 2014 (Levs, 2015). There is also growing concern over a resurgence of al Qaeda bases and camps within Afghanistan that will be used to rebuild its support networks and planning capabilities to reconstitute its strike capabilities against the U.S. homeland and Western interests (Schmitt & Sanger, 2015). Similarly, the AQAP has found increased room to maneuver in Southern and Eastern Yemen during the ongoing conflict in that country, and continues to be capable of carrying out larger-scale attacks against the United States. (Schmitt, 2015) Add to this equation the approximately forty American fighters who traveled to Syria have returned to the United States as of March 2015 (Stapleton, 2015), and the outlook for another attack like San Bernardino or worse appears grim.

The result is that the West now faces an attack on two fronts: ISIS, al Qaeda, and its affiliates like AQAP plot and inspire Sicarii-type attacks on soft-targets while simultaneously plotting much larger mass casualty attacks. As these organizations struggle for influence and control of the global jihad movement, the victims of this battle, which will be broadcast and followed through social media, will not be the members of the organizations; rather, those targeted by their attacks. This has created a global environment in which the threat from jihadist terrorism and violence never has been greater.

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