BY ORDER OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

The influence of terrorist parent organisations on the modus operandi of remote operating Jihadist terrorists in Western Europe.

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the role of Jihadist terrorist organisations and how they inspire, enable and support affiliated terrorism in Western Europe. It argues that the relation between the terrorist network (Islamic State) and remote operating terrorists affects the operational preferences and success ratio of the attack. Quantitative analysis based on a dataset of Islamic State related plots in Western Europe show that closer interaction between the perpetrators of a terrorist plot and the Islamic State did increase the preferred complexity for an attack. However, a higher level of interaction also resulted in the targeting choices being less optimal and a lower success rate which contradicts the expectations of existing theory. This thesis hence concludes that it is necessary to develop new theoretical models to understand the impact of terrorist organisations on affiliated terrorist plots.

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1. Introduction

In the last few years, remote controlled Jihadist terrorism has been on the rise in Western Europe and North America. Terrorist organisations have found ways to inspire and nurture sympathisers to commit attacks on their behalf. A result of this has been a high number of seemingly random terrorist attacks against civilian targets. However, from a strategic perspective, a terrorist attack never occurs at random. There is an increasing consensus among researchers that most directed terrorist attacks are well thought-out campaigns within a broader strategic plan.[1] Like a military organisation, the terrorist and terrorist leadership have strategic objectives, and they use tailored forms of terrorism as an instrument to get to their preferred outcome. However, the tactics used by affiliated terrorists and cells often differ significantly from those used by the parent terrorist organisation.

Research has been done on the on the differentiation between tactics and targets used by different groups based on the type of terrorist organisation and their ideological and practical goals, but less research focuses on the more recent development of affiliated terrorism (Abrahms, Ward, & Kennedy, 2018). Within the context of jihadist terrorist organisations like the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaida (AQ), there is a lack of knowledge to explain why affiliates make certain strategic decisions differently than their parent group. Al-Qaida and IS have reorganized themselves over the last fifteen years into organisations within an extensive network of affiliated jihadist groups with the purpose to inspire and direct attacks around the world on their behalf (Callimachi, 2016), but currently only a limited body of knowledge exists to understand the impact of this affiliation and the active roles taken by these organizations. In this thesis, it is argued that the relationship between the parent terrorist organisation

[1] See for instance Badey (1998), Victoroff (2005) and Abrahms & Conrad (2017).

and the perpetrators contributes to this suboptimal decision-making because of the strategic options, preferences and a difference in individual goals of the perpetrators. Moreover, this thesis concludes that the current theoretical models, which focus on terrorists making logical decisions, are insufficient to explain the decisions made by terrorist perpetrators or the target preferences.

1.1. Research Problem

Network-level analysis has been done before on the Islamic State and Al-Qaida but limited to no research has been done to understand whether and how the strategic preferences of these organisations translate when applied to remote perpetrators who act on behalf of these organisations. The strategic preferences and operational considerations of the centralised network must compete with the preferences and motivation of the isolated terrorist (-cell). Recent quantitative work by Abrahms, ward, & kennedy (2018) shows the principal-actor problem to play a significant role in the choice to target civilians by affiliate groups over their parent organisation because of reduced political-risk towards the affiliate and the relatively high chances of success against civilian targets. In the case of Jihadist terrorism inspired or directed by IS and Al-Qaida in Western Europe, the centralised strategy of the primary organization and the implementation of the strategy through attacks seems less coherent. Due to the distance, lack of centralised control and loose association, the principal-agent dynamic can play a significant role resulting in sub-optimal strategies by the jihadist terrorists operating in Europe (Abrahms, Ward, & Kennedy, 2018, p. 40). These sub-optimal strategies result in a shift away from the strategy and the preferred tactics of the central leadership. And allow for a modus operandi more in line with the ambitions of the perpetrators when the perpetrators have more limited interaction with the primary network.

1.2. Research Questions

For this research, the following Main research question is:

What is the effect of remote interaction between the terrorist organization and perpetrator on the attack preferences and success rate of jihadist terrorists in Western Europe?

Due to the limitations of the data and the usability of indicators, the quantitative part of this research focuses on three specific sub-questions relating to 1) the choice for targets. 2) The usage of simple or complex plans for attack(s). And 3) the overall success rate of plots based on the network distance.

The sub-questions are therefore as follows:

Sub-question 1: ***Is there a difference in the preference of single-actor and small-cells' choice for targets, based on their level of interaction to the principal terrorist network?***

Sub-question 2: ***Is there a difference in the complexity of single-actor and small-cell' attacks based on their level of interaction to the principal terrorist network?***

Sub-question 3: ***Is there a difference in the success of single-actor and small-cell' attacks based on their level of interaction to the principal terrorist network?***

1.3. Reading Guide

This thesis is structured in a manner that develops the arguments and conclusions. First, the theoretical framework explains the context and organisation of Jihadist terrorism. Second, the concept of engagement by terrorist networks and how these impact the various indicators are discussed to draw sub-conclusions. Third, the methodological framework chapter the theoretical framework to explain how this theory is applied and how the results acquired. Fourth, a chapter is presented which further

explains the case of the Islamic State and a chapter which presents the results and analyses them to draw a conclusion to the sub-questions. The final chapter provides the conclusion to the central question. This conclusion is based on the analysis and puts the results into the broader context of terrorism studies and provides an answer as to whether these results are applicable to other terrorist organisations.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Terrorism

Terrorism is a 'contested term' without a standard definition nor academic consensus (Schmid 2012 and Rosenthal and Bergema 2017). This issue of not having a general definition of (Jihadi) terrorism has been a reason for multiple studies over the past decade.[2] The definition of terrorism itself is contested and primarily a political debate, and there is no likely end to the debate on what is and what is not terrorism. As the vantage point of the onlooker is profoundly influenced by the definition of terrorism, which makes defining terrorism not only a question of general features but also a normative statement (Schmid, 2012).

One of the attempts to create a general academic consensus on the definition of terrorism is made by Schmid (2012), who assembled over two hundred different definitions and compiled a list of twelve traits on what he agrees are the main factors which define terrorism. The most important of which focuses on the process, aims and context in which terrorism happens. He defines Terrorism as a "*…tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, ... performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects...'* (Schmid, 2012, p. 1). Schmid also includes that the violence and threats of violence are part of terrorism and that the victims of terrorism

[2] See for instance the works of Schmid (2012), Jackson (2008) or Badey (1998).

are usually not the intended targets of the terror. They are instead used as a tool to send out a further message towards their often-political cause, underlying their use and threat of violence.

In more general terms, there are two simplified characteristics defining terrorism. First, terrorism involves aggression or a threat of violence against non-combatants. Secondly, the violence of a terrorist is not aimed to bring about a political shift or societal change but instead tries to motivate a specific audience to change their behaviour and to take a specific course of action (Badey, 1998). Such a broad definition works as it allows the inclusion of a wide range of activities to be called terrorism from religiously inspired terrorism to political and ethnic terrorism. All of whom use a form of violence and the threats thereof in pursuit of their goals.

2.2. The Organization of Jihadist Terrorism as a multilevel model

Many authors consider organised terrorism to be a process of interaction between various actors and organisations within an ideological framework (Badey 1998; Abrahms, Ward and Kennedy 2018). It is necessary to comprehend the hierarchical influences that affect the outcomes and process involved in such terrorism to better understand the interactions between a terrorist organisation and a remote group or single actor terrorist.

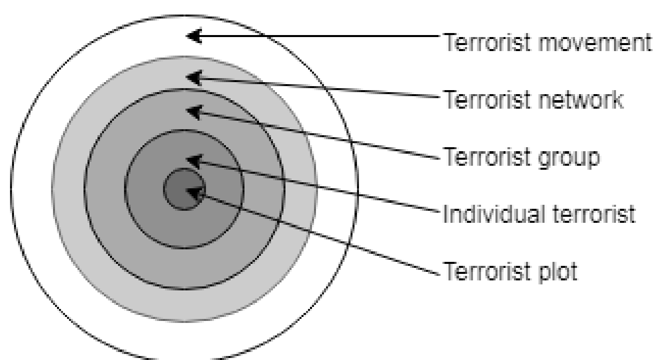

Figure 1 - Multilevel Model of Terrorism (Johnson 2017)

Multilevel models have been introduced in terrorism studies from criminology, and their use can help to understand the influences of the various levels of interaction within a terrorist framework when looking at more than one unit of analysis (Johnson, 2017, pp. 245-246). Using a conceptual multilevel model provides some advantages to understanding the social, political, organisational, and situational context of terrorism versus more traditional single-level regression models used in terrorist studies (Johnson, 2017, p. 245). Social and organisational relationships are widespread within and between terrorist actors and involve complex relations. In the context of global terrorism, it is an operation which is affected by a national and international context which needs to be taken into account as they can create significant differences in strategic and operational outcomes (LaFree, Morris, & Dugan, 2010). Given the complex nature of political extremism, it is challenging to find situations where a multilevel approach is not needed. There are always broader political or societal influences which are relevant, and even single-actor terrorists need to be viewed in the context of the factors influencing their actions (Spaaij, 2012).

Among various types of terrorism, at least five layers of influence can be identified and analysed in the multilevel terrorist model. These are 1) the terrorist movement which the religious, political, or social extremism legitimises. 2) The Terrorist network in which the terrorist activity takes place. 3) The (local) terrorist group which organises the plot. 4) The individual terrorist who has personal motivation and circumstances which need to be understood. And 5) the plot or terrorist attack itself, which is a result of all the other levels interacting with each other (Johnson, 2017, p. 246). The following sub-chapters will look further into in which way(s) these levels interact and affect a terrorist plot.

2.2.1. The Jihadist movement

Jihadist or Islamic terrorism is a distinct variety of terrorism linked to the extremist interpretation of the Islam and the willingness of violent supporters to target society at large through the random of civilians (Perry and Negrin 2008, 1;Habeck 2008, 65-66). A Jihadist radical identifies with the Islamic 'religious war against non-Muslims'[3], in contrast to other forms of extremism such as right- and left-wing political extremism or separatist movements (De Wijk & Kon, 2017, p. 103). Jihadist terrorism has existed for a long time and has since spread around the world in different forms (Law, 2016). The function and organisation of Jihadist (inspired) networks vary, but they all have traditionally focused on a variety of similar grievances. Some of these, like the networks in Egypt and Algeria of the 80's and 90's focused on replacing the non-Islamic regime with sharia rule while others have focused on regional identities or sectarian violence as main drivers (Piazza, 2009).

Kydd and Walter (2006, p. 52) recognise five primary objectives of terrorism; 1) As a reaction to a regime. 2) To control a territory. 3) To force a change in policy. 4) As a tool to control a population. And, 5) to maintain the balance of power. Hoffman (2002) similarly recognises four grievances which play a central role in the radicalisation process and motivation to undertake terrorist actions. He analysed five reasons for terrorism; 1) Claiming attention for a specific case. 2) To mobilise public support for a cause. 3) Recognition of justice or a cause. 4) To claim legitimacy for a cause. And 4) forcing a state or population to adhere to their rules (Hoffman, 2002, p. 93). Jihadist organisations have

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[3] The word Jihad or djihād (Arabic: جهاد) is highly contested as it has multiple meanings in the Islamic religious context and between different parts of the Islam. In general, it can both be seen as non-violent religious rituals and practices. But there is also an extremist trend of Salafist and Wahhabi followers who see the Jihad as a war against specific groups of people (e.g. non-believers, those attacking and threatening the Islam and idolaters) and as a sacred duty to pick up arms to fight in this conflict (Rabasa & Benard, 2015, pp. 27-28).

similar motivations for their existence, and the Jihadist identity can take various forms. Jihadist movements can focus on the Jihad as being the principal motivator of their actions. However, the Islamic identity also can be a secondary identity of a group when the group focuses on a general 'strategic objective', like removing a regime, in which case the organisation can compare to a secular organisation with a similar goal (Piazza, 2009, pp. 64-65).

Motivation to join the Jihadist movement

There are various reasons for Jihadist extremists to join a more extensive network as part of their radicalisation process. For many of the individuals involved in terrorist activities; they get involved based on 1) individual motivation, 2) cultural and ideological narratives surrounding the individual and 3) an interplay of group pressure and social circumstances (Webber & Kruglanski, 2017). Moreover, association with a (violent) extremist movement can be a response to individual, group and societal circumstances, such as problems at home, experiences of racism or associated victimisation of injustice in the world (Schmid, Doosje, & Feddes, 2017, pp. 157-158). At the same time, radicalisation is sometimes a response to one of four different personal triggers (Schmid, Doosje, & Feddes, 2017, p. 159). 1) Some individuals are seeking a positive identity or group association for protection, which makes them vulnerable for groups with a strong cohesion, ideological basis and group identity. 2) Others seek political justice for the for the group with whom they associate themselves. 3) Some are looking for a purpose in life. And 4) significant numbers of extremists are 'just' looking for an adventure or thrill. As such, there are a lot of different motivations which can make an individual join or self-identify with an extremist movement. The question is to how far these motivations influence the strategic goals and preferences of individual members.

2.2.2. The Terrorist Network and Organisation

In recent years, there have been two dominant Jihadist terrorist organisations in the world who have taken a central role in the global Jihad against the West and non-Muslim influences in the Middle East. These are Al-Qaida and the Islamic State. Both organisations started with a focus on regional Jihad but expanded to have global ambitions and took on a network role to actively facilitate other terrorist groups and affiliated movements (Nesser 2016 and Law 2016). Within the Jihadist framework, the distinction between what counts as the network and what counts as the organisation has been diffused. Therefore, this subchapter will look both at the network as well as the organisation behind the terrorist network.

From organisation to global network.

The form of global Jihadism has changed dramatically following the global crack-down and increased international cooperation against terrorist organisations (Law, 2016, pp. 237-230). Al Qaida lost a third of its senior leadership, lost all of its training facilities in Afghanistan, and those who survived had to go into hiding in remote areas as a result of the U.S. led '*War on terror*' (Law, 2016, pp. 235-237). Meanwhile, a new generation of Jihadist terrorist organisations has emerged around the world. In particular in South East Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Facilitating this change, Al-Qaida moved its focus from being the training organisation which organised terrorist attacks, to become an international network through which local affiliates could engage in the global Jihad (Law, 2016, pp. 330-333). This model of global Jihad through affiliate groups has been copied by the Islamic State, itself being a partial off-spring Al-Qaida then called *Al-Qaida in Iraq*, and to whom some former Al-Qaida loyal groups switched affiliation (U.S. Department of State, 2018).

Al-Qaida and IS Affiliate Organizations	Year of affiliation	Affiliated to:	Location
Egyptian Islamic Jihad	2001	Al-Qaida	Egypt
Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)	2004	Al-Qaida	Iraq
Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	2007	Al-Qaida	North Africa
Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	2009	Al-Qaida	Yemen
Al Shabaab	2011	Al-Qaida	Somalia
Jabhat al-Nusra	2011	Al-Qaida	Syria
Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent	2014	Al-Qaida	India
ISIS-West Africa and Abu Musab al-Barnawi	2014	Islamic State	Nigeria
ISIS-Bangladesh	2014	Islamic State	Bangladesh
Jund al-Khilafah-Tunisia	2014	Islamic State	Tunisia
ISIS-Sinaï	2014	Islamic State	Egypt
ISIS-Somalia and Mahad Moalim	2015	Islamic State	Somalia
ISIS-Philippines and the Maute Group	2016	Islamic State	Philipines
ISIS-Egypt	2017	Islamic State	Egypt

Table 1 Al-Qaida and IS Affiliate Organizations (Based on U.S. Department of State 2018 and Thomas 2018)

A terrorist organisation as a dark network

It is difficult to outline the exact functions of a terrorist network, its role division, and organisational structure because of a number of reasons. First, it is a network structure, which involves multiple (sub)organisations and individuals that interact with each other along more lines of interaction than those outlined in the hierarchy of the network (O'Toole, 1997). Those involved in terrorist activities, including lone actors, can rely on and are in contact with others through the Internet, social relations or other forms of networks, even if their terrorist actions are organised in solitude. Secondly, like most *dark networks* the networks operate in secrecy to ensure their survival (Raab & Milward, 2003, pp. 429-430). Moreover, the networks and social networks involved in terrorism have three problems which undermine any attempts to use network analysis (Sparrow, 1991). It is almost impossible to gain a complete picture of a terrorist network through research; there will almost always be missing nodes and undetected links by the researcher. The boundaries of the network are undefined with persons on the periphery whose role is unclear and whose role can change depending on the situation. And finally,

networks change over time, the ties and nodes continuously vary in depending on the specific time and purpose. Making it difficult to outline a network outside of a specific time and context.

In practice, a terrorist network can take different forms and roles. A network can be a bunch of well-connected individuals, a network of separate social groups with similar radical ideologies or a group of people communicating through individuals acting as hubs between semi-independent groups and individuals (Whelan, 2012, pp. 13-14). Terrorist groups can exist based on a strictly hierarchical structure or a semi-loose affiliation on the basis of ideologic links. In many places, these networks are defined as a terrorist organization due to a specific part of their activities falling into the category of terrorism, while having non-terrorist or criminal activities at the same time (Arias & Hussain, 2017) in a similar way many Latin American armed groups are involved in narcotics to finance themselves. As a result, there is no 'one size fits all' type of terrorist group. Every terrorist organisation and the network has a different history and organisational structure and members which needs to be taken into account when analysing their (strategic) operations and preferences.

The revival of the global Jihad

For Al-Qaida, the most crucial period has been from the late 90's until the decimation and rise of IS. Following a number of initial successes, such as establishing training camps in Afghanistan and bombing of the USS Cole in 2000, the organisation achieved its most significant attack on September 9TH 2001. With the simultaneous hijackings of many aeroplanes, the organization was able to hit targets in New York and Washington D.C. (Law, 2016, pp. 323-326). However, following the 9/11 attacks the U.S. launched its 'War on Terror', which included the invasion of Afghan, targeted killing of the Al-Qaida leadership, and the implementation of significant anti-terrorism measures around the world (Law, 2016, 235-327). This made attacking the West significantly more difficult for Al-Qaida (Saltman and Winter 2014, 27). The counter-terrorism measures included increased suspicion and attention of governments on radical extremist groups, extended trailing of financial flows, tighter

controls on substances used for manufacturing explosives and more.[4] The increasing difficulty to operate in the West due to the increased attention to counter-terrorism and the availability of targets of terrorism in Muslim countries created a shift from offensive global Jihad in the West to a defensive Jihad against western and non-Islamic targets in Muslim countries since the early 2000 ’s (Saltman & Winter, 2014, p. 27).

The revival of the offensive global Jihad came from the Iraq affiliate of Al-Qaida, later known as the Islamic State when they conquered Mosul, a city with over 2 two million inhabitants in Northern Iraq, without much warning (Saltman & Winter, 2014, p. 27). The Islamic State, formerly known as ‘Tawhid w-al-Jihad’, ‘Al-Qaeda in Iraq’, and ‘Majilis Shura al-Mujahedin’, can be described as an even more extreme version of Al-Qaida (Zelin, 2014). The predecessor of the Islamic State received financial support from Al-Qaida under the agreement to become an affiliate. However, disagreements over influence, the methods and strategies of creating complete chaos and terror under the Muslim population were too extreme for the Al-Qaida leadership and made the two organisations clash and break off ties [5] (Zelin, 2014).

While IS and Al-Qaida came into conflict, IS emerged as the dominant leader of the Global Jihad. Creating a caliphate was also among the ultimate goals of the Al-Qaida leadership, but it was not deemed realistic in the short term by most of its senior leaders (Perry and Negrin 2008, 78-79; Musharbash 2005). The leadership of the Islamic State, however, used the chaos of the Syrian civil

[4] See for instance Law (2016, pp. 339-341) or Muller (2017)

[5] The Islamic State adheres to their ‘Management of Savagery’ doctrine of using extreme forms of violence through mass executions, terrorist attacks on public spaces and the undermining of (social) institutions to create a situation where they can introduce themselves as the bringers of order.

war, sectarian hostilities and extreme violence to conquer a significant territory from 2012 onwards (Saltman & Winter, 2014). Besides establishing regional control in which IS attempted to build a state inspired by Sharia-law, the organisation started getting involved in terrorist attacks in Europe in an attempt to inspire and kick-start the global Jihad and to involve the West in its fight (Hassan 2016; Dechesne and De Wijk 2017, 307). The rise to fame of IS meant a new following of sympathisers throughout the world, many of whom travelled to Iraq and Syria to join and live in the Caliphate or were inspired to commit terrorist attacks in the name of IS if they were unable to join the organisation physically (Gambhir, 2014).

2.2.3. Local Group (cell)

Terrorist groups or terrorist cells have received much attention since 9/11 as the primary unit to terrorist attacks.[6] Al-Qaida has in place a well-developed system of terrorist cells and support cells which, through their separated structure were able to maintain operational security and protect the identities of other units (Jones, 2012, p. 13). However, there are various ways a terrorist cells in the Jihadist context form, which includes different recruitment and radicalization backgrounds and varying levels of contact and interconnectedness.

The traditional cell

The traditional Jihadist terrorist cell, as part of the Al-Qaida doctrine until the late 2000's, was that of highly trained units being sent out to the area of their operation to commit their terrorist attack.

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[6] Following the reemergence from 2001 onward of Terrorism as a field of study following the 9/11 attacks, most research was focused on terrorist cells and organized terrorism (Al-Qaida). Only recently there has been a major shift towards single-actor ('lone wolf') terrorism.

Although in effect, a significant number of future terrorists first reached Europe as political refugees during the 1980's when Muslim extremists were not viewed as a direct threat by many European countries (Nesser, 2015, pp. 34-36). As the doctrine of Al-Qaida outlined, two kinds of terrorist cells were needed. One to execute the attacks, and the other to provide 'rear logistical services', which included fund-raising, weapon smuggling, propaganda and recruitment (Nesser, 2015, p. 36). Between 1999 and 2001, Al-Qaida was able to recruit, train and send out agents to Europe, the United States and the Middle East to attack Western and Jewish targets with various results, including the infamous attack of 9/11 and the compromised Strasbourg bomb plot in 2000 (Nesser, 2015, pp. 93-94). Other known cells established by Al-Qaida were in Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Germany, thus creating a network throughout Europe and abroad (Nesser, 2015, p. 136).

The social cell

Apart from the cells which are set up to complete a specific goal or mission, a significant number of Jihadist cells formed under classical group dynamics. Analysis by Perliger and Pedahzur (2011, pp. 45-46) shows that many terrorist cells existed before the social group gradually moved towards extremism and terrorist activities. They underline the importance of social network analysis to understand the group dynamics which enable and consolidate the radicalisation of a social group. By analysing various terrorist cells and local networks, Peliger and Pedahzur (2011, 48) recognised some groups to have self-organised as dense structures with strong links between most members. Other groups were organised for a specific purpose by individuals who acted as intermediates among these organisations, and thus had a tremendous amount of influence. Moreover, they identified members in the periphery of cells, which had few links to other members but who associated through other members or who were included because of specific skills or because of other beneficial features. As such, there is not a single way a terror cell starts, which results in the complex nature individual and group radicalisation.

2.2.4. Lone Actor

In the context of single actor Islamic terrorists, differentiating between different types of single actors has only become a topic of research in the last ten years. Spraaij (2010) was among the first authors to investigate this lack of analysis acknowledging the differences between single actor terrorists. He argues that there are multiple reasons why single actors have received little attention before, mostly because terrorism has been viewed in the past as a group-based activity. As a result, most research focused on group dynamics and social theories to explain radicalisation and terrorism (Pantucci, 2011, p. 4). A second reason Spraaij (2010) offers for the dominance of group-based analysis in terrorism studies was more practical in that it is much more difficult to distinguish between lone-actor terrorists from mass-murderers with an extreme ideology when membership of a terrorist group cannot be used as a prime indicator of someone being a terrorist. However, as a result of the growth of single actor terrorism in the last few years, and the impact of their attacks, increasingly researchers also focus on lone actor jihadist terrorism in the last couple of years.[7]

There are significant differences between a generic (mass-) murderer and a Jihadist terrorist. Liem, Van Buuren and Schönberger (2018) recognise this difference in the (emotional-) motivation of the perpetrators. They found that compared to ‘normal’ homicide perpetrators, the perpetrators had no direct or emotional link to the targets themselves but focused their attacks based on symbolic values their targets represented.

[7] See for instance Schuurman et al. (2018), Liem, Van Buuren and Schönberger (2018) or Abrahms, Ward and Kennedy (2018).

The lone actor community

The significant advantage of single actor terrorist over terrorist cells is that they are far more difficult to detect compared to isolated cells (Bakker & De Graaf, 2011, p. 46). Pre-attack leaking behaviour is limited as there is less opportunity for other persons to do so, and they are safer from being uncovered through compromised communication and association with others.

However, while single actor terrorists operate alone, ideologically inspired single-actor terrorists are still part or associate themselves with larger (virtual) communities (Pantucci, 2011, p. 5). Work by Gill, Horgan and Deckert (2014, p. 434) suggests that of lone actor terrorists, about a third had recently joined an extremist group or organisation, and that just under half interacted directly with members in a broader network or political basis. According to their research, almost seventy per cent regularly consumed materials from extremist sources associated with their cause, though less than only one in eight actively interacted with associated groups. Both on an ideological as well as on a strategic level they are thus much less isolated as the name does suggest.

The role of the internet is especially crucial for lone actor terrorists. Weimann's (2012) research points out that, besides regular internet activities, Jihadist lone actors use the internet to be part of virtual communities that function to exchange ideas, knowledge and to gain advice. Analysis by Schuurman et al. (2018) suggests that most of the single actor perpetrators upheld social connections which played an essential role in their initial radicalisation, the continued motivation to commit a terrorist attack as well as the terrorist ability to do so. As such, Jihadist lone actors can operate alone, they are not lonely nor isolated off from other radicals.

While single actor terrorists have some benefits, there are also significant downsides to their remote operation. In the traditional setting of single actor attacks, they need to do all the work themselves in planning, preparing and executing the attack. Moreover, while IS can enable the attacks though supporting the perpetrator, the perpetrator remains primarily reliant on its own experience, resources

and skills. Analysis by De Wijk and Kon (2017, pp. 121-122) illustrates the use of single actor terrorist attacks has steadily risen since 2014 and has become part of the official doctrine of IS and Al-Qaida in the last few years. This has been due to their success and the relatively low threshold to organise and plot an attack for a single actor terrorist (De Wijk & Kon, 2017, pp. 125-126).

2.3. Levels of engagement of a terrorist network

Terrorist organisations working through remote terrorism can do so through various levels of engagement with the perpetrators. Callimachi (2017) distinguishes three different levels of interaction between the organisation and the remote perpetrators. The terrorist organisation can *inspire* a group of sympathisers or an individual to commit an attack in the name of the organisation against a target in their home countries. They can *enable* those willing to commit an attack though providing support and facilitation of the process of radicalisation and in plotting and preparing the attack. And then there are plots which are *directed* by the terrorist organisation and which are committed by those who follow orders from their superiors within the organisation. Distinguishing between the levels of engagement of a terrorist organisation in a plot is often difficult to do due to various reasons, but there are significant differences in the role the organisation fulfils in each of these different types of engagement (De Wijk & Kon, 2017, pp. 126-128).

2.3.1. Inspiring plots

There are various ways to inspire terrorist attacks by sympathisers. Al-Qaida and the Islamic State both have put out significant amounts of multilingual propaganda materials and manuals aimed at sympathisers abroad (Gambhir, 2014). In 2010, Al-Qaida and the affiliate called *Al-Qaida in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP)* started with their English magazine *Inspire,* which focused on religious justification and encouraging lone-wolf attacks from among supporters in the West. In the magazine, a significant

amount of attention went to how-to-guides for single actor assaults (Gambhir, 2014, p. 1) In 2014, the Islamic State followed with its own online magazine called *Dabiq* [8]. The effects of these materials are difficult to assess, but they are, together with well-edited videos and active social media accounts, central to modern Jihadist propaganda (Winter, 2017).

The role of the internet plays a central role in inspiring radical Jihadism. Research by Weimann (2012) suggests that most terrorist actors use the internet to communicate, gain information, acquire training from websites run by the terrorist organisation and to visit supporting forums in addition to their off-line networks. A recent study by Gill et al. (2017) looked into the use of the internet as a channel for radicalisation and source of information for those wishing to commit a terrorist attack. Surprisingly, they conclude that the internet and online sources have become important, but most are a 'facilitative tool that affords greater opportunities for violent radicalisation and attack planning' (Gill, et al., 2017, p. 113).

2.3.2. Enabling plots

When enabling a plot, the terrorist organisation actively facilitates, supports and/or motivates the perpetrator during the planning and execution stages of the attack (Callimachi, 2017). These attacks also have been called 'remote-controlled attacks', because of the active role of the handlers of the enabling organisation (Callimachi, 2017). The Islamic State, and to a lesser degree Al-Qaida, have actively supported single-actors by providing online 'virtual coaches' through chat and other social

[8] Dabiq is an online magazine of IS which combined two short lived earlier English-language magazines called *Islamic State news* (ISN) which focused on the state-building activities and the civil life within the conquered area and *Islamic State Report (ISR)* which covered the military victories of IS. (Gambhir, 2014, p. 2)

media platforms with religious motivation, tips and advice (De Wijk & Kon, 2017, p. 127). Moreover, both organisations have provided access to training camps and the tools and weapons necessary to individuals seeking help to commit terrorist attacks on their behalf (Callimachi, 2017). Enabling an attack as such allows the terrorist organisation to utilise hesitant individuals and sympathisers without the opportunity or tools to commit terrorist attacks, which otherwise would not have taken place.

2.3.3. Directing plots

Plots under the control and direction of the terrorist organisation itself are the *directed plots*. These include plots executed by groups and individuals who have a strong connection to the organisation and who are assigned to travel to a country to await orders or to commit specific attacks (Callimachi, 2017). This group of directed terrorists includes all kinds of perpetrators like members of dedicated units from within IS and Al-Qaida. And aspiring Jihadists who were approached soon after their arrival in IS territory and who received limited training before being sent back as returned fighters (Callimachi, 2016). Directed attacks also include attacks perpetrated by local cells which are headed by a representative of the organisation. Directed attacks have a high potential for large-scale attacks because they combine specialised skills, trained operatives and are better aware of the doctrine of their parent organisation.

2.4. The strategy of a terrorist plot

In the broad context of terrorism studies, the primary approach to understand the act of committing a terrorist attack in recent years has been from a rational perspective, in which terrorism is understood as an act for the terrorist to reach an objective. Abrahams (2008, p. 78) for instance, sees terrorism as the result of a policies grievance which cannot be routed through peaceful measures and thus becomes violent. His model implies 1) the terrorist actors to be rational and to have stable objectives. 2) They

make a full cost-benefit analysis of the available options and 3) make a logical decision which maximises the outcome. Older works by for instance Sandler et al. (1983) already explained terrorism as a decision-making process which happens when the relative cost of terrorism is low, and the potential gains are high.

Statistical research has shown that most of these rational models also apply to Jihadist lone-actor terrorists (Gill & Corner, 2016). Terrorist type-independent work showed that the clear majority of lone actor terrorist attacks before 2014 were rational and well-planned instead of random and unprepared. Gill, Horgan and Deckert (2014, p. 434) found evidence that in the cases they analysed, a fifth of the perpetrators sought hands-on training, about half used online-recourses for study and half of the perpetrators had manuals and printed materials on bomb-making and other weapons at home. They also found that almost a third of the cases included practice-runs of the attacks. Although it is unclear how much these numbers can be applied to Jihadist single actor perpetrators, they do show an image of single actor terrorists often being well prepared and dedicated to their cause.

2.4.1. Modus Operandi

Following the idea that most terrorist attacks are the outcome of a rational process, the planning and preparations of the attack too can be seen as the outcome of rational decision-making by the perpetrator(s) resulting in the Modus Operandi. The Modus Operandi is the method of operating of a terrorist and is the complete tactical process of decision-making, planning, preparations and execution of a terrorist attack. It is a consideration between the desired strategic effect, the available targets, the possible tactics available to the attackers and the expected chance of success of the chosen strategy (De Wijk & Kon, 2017, pp. 101-114).

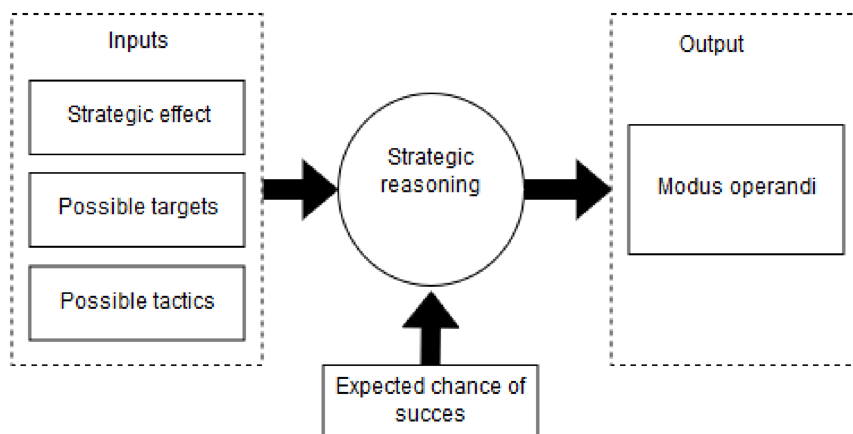

Figure 2 Strategic Reasoning for a Modus Operandi

2.4.2. Principal-agent problem

Following the logical reasoning of the classical cost/benefit analysis of terrorism, it should follow that all terrorist attacks, including those from affiliate groups, would make similar strategic decisions to achieve the optimal results for the terrorist organisation. Especially the choice of targets is of tremendous importance in the long-term for the terrorist organisation (Drake, 1998). However, this is not always the case. Associated terrorist groups regularly employ tactics which undermine the strategic goals of the parent organisation (Abrahms, Ward, & Kennedy, 2018, p. 40). Increasingly, this suboptimal use of strategy is associated with the principal-agent problem, which explains that when the network (principal) delegates decision-making to another actor, the actor behaves less strict to the interests of the principal. The affiliate then uses its delegated discretion to strike suboptimal targets because of their own agenda, lack of recourses or because of counter-terrorism measures (Shapiro & Siegel, 2012, p. 42).

To delegate decision-making and the use of affiliates in itself is not an illogical step for many organisations; the affiliated group has more flexibility to adapt to local circumstances and is more able to exploit local opportunities and increase the attention given to the terrorist movement. However, Abrahms, Ward and Kennedy (2018, p. 24) also conclude that affiliated groups are significantly more

likely to engage in actions which undermine the long-term objectives of the organisation in favour of short-term goals. Especially small and young cells can focus on their own survival and continuation instead of focusing on the overall goals. (Abrahms, Ward, & Kennedy, 2018, p. 41). The result of this is a deviation in strategy beneficial to the principal organisation in favour of the priorities of the local perpetrators acting on their behalf.

2.4.3. Claiming terrorist attacks

One of the methods through which terrorist organisations deal with (potential) backlashes from sub-optimal attacks is through disassociation. As discussed before, many authors see terrorism as strategic communication with the purpose of coercing a change of behaviour.[9] However, as Abrahms and Conrad (2017) found through statistical analysis, only one in seven attacks around the world are claimed by a terrorist attack. They also found that a small percentage of attacks are claimed by more than one group following the attack and that attacks against military targets had a significantly higher chance of being claimed than against civilian targets (Abrahms & Conrad, 2017, pp. 290-291). Moreover, while there is a logical explanation of multiple groups claiming success in a situation of competing terrorist organisations, the high number of unclaimed attacks goes against many traditional assumptions within the field of terrorism studies.

Abrahms and Conrad (2017) provide several explanations for this behaviour of anonymous claims. First, they acknowledge the possible influence of the principal-agent problem. Senior leadership might be reluctant to claim an attack if the target of an attack is likely to have an overall backlash against the

[9] See for instance page: 10 and 24.

organisational goals. Whereas younger and newer members of the organisation or affiliates might be less reluctant to show their capabilities and intentions by attacking civilian targets and might have fewer problems or caution for a potential backlash (Abrahms & Conrad, 2017, pp. 284-285). Secondly, based on their results they find the size of the attack to be an essential factor in determining the likelihood of the attack being claimed, with more massive and successful attacks being claimed more often. Which they associate with an organisation being more likely to seek association with success over unsuccessful and low-yield attacks (Abrahms & Conrad, 2017, p. 289).

2.5. Target preferences

One basic perception of terrorism is that most targets are entirely random (LaFree, Dugan, & Miller, 2015, p. 105). However, significant advances have been made in the field of terrorism studies to understand the strategic preferences of terrorists, although a significant gap of knowledge remains in understanding the targeting choices of, especially lone actor terrorism (Gill & Corner, 2016, pp. 693-694). Research by Drake (1998, pp. 53-54) has shown that the predominant indicator of target selection is the ideology of the perpetrators planning the attack. When the ideology provides a judgement between those deemed 'innocent' and 'guilty' it predicts and legitimises their targets. According to Abrahms (2006, p. 52), the target selection is even the most critical factor in the success of any terrorist organisation. Depending on the type of terrorist organisation and the context of the conflict, the effectiveness among varying targets differs. To maximise the strategic effect of the attack the target has to relate to the grievances of the organisation directly and thus have symbolic value (Abrahms, Ward, & Kennedy, 2018). However, for the perpetrator it is equally important to assure the attack has a 100% guarantee of success. The targeting choice therefore always must be a deliberation between the symbolic value of the target and the functional expectations of success to effectively mobilise

future support and work towards the operational goals of the organisation (De Wijk & Kon, 2017, p. 121).

2.5.1. Rational choice models of terrorism

Drake (1998, p. 56) argues that rational terrorists will choose among the available targets, the ones most beneficial to their cause. Rational models are also applied by other authors. Bier and Tas (2012) use game theory to present targeting decisions as an interplay between the attacker and defender in which the defender takes measures in response to the attacker (the terrorist) until the attacker sees an opportunity to strike. An alternative interpretation of the game theory is provided by Nemeth (2010, p. 40-44), who argues terrorist target selection to be a process in which terrorists play with an opposing actor, with the parameters of the attack being the bargaining outcome. Following all these authors, the decisions of terrorist perpetrators can be explained by some form of logical reasoning. Nevertheless, like in all logical models, other factors such as the pattern of earlier attacks, skills and personal preferences of terrorist perpetrators have to be taken into account. Moreover, the rational choice is limited by misjudgements of situations and opportunities and by a lack of full information (Drake, 1998, p. 56). Subsequently, when an attack results in an outcome with an adverse effect on the organisation's outcome, the organisation might decide not to claim responsibility for the attack (Abrahms & Conrad, 2017).

2.5.2. Symbolic and random targets

Following traditional terrorism studies, targets are divided into two types. Targets which have specific symbolic value and random targets (De Wijk & Kon, 2017). Symbolic targets are targets chosen because of the sub-national entity, community or person the target represents (Nesser, Stenersen, & Oftedal, 2016). They include religious institutions, media, police or the military. Hitting such targets,

if they directly align with the ideological values of the organisation and the wishes of the supporters, significantly increase the chances for the organisation to achieve its overall goals. (Abrahms, Ward, & Kennedy, 2018) In contrast, random targets are targets chosen opportunistically (De Wijk & Kon, 2017). These targets are chosen because of their low risk and high potential for inflicting significant damage and destruction. As such, they are less symbolic but strike society at large, rather than to a sub-national entity or individuals. Attacking random targets allow the perpetrator to go for a target with the prospect of the significant casualty rates with relatively little operational risk. Random targets, like government buildings, schools, public areas and national symbols hit society at large, but also have the high potential to have adverse side-effects if it hurts their supporters or targets bystanders who are deemed innocent by supporters (Abrahms, Ward, & Kennedy, 2018, p. 23). However, this distinction has limitations as targets can both be symbolic and result in significant causalities. It is important to look at the rationale of the attacker, is a target chosen because of what it represents beyond the general society, or is there an intention to hit a more specific entity which can logically be distinguished from the ideological perspective of the perpetrator? Nesser (2016, p. 122) argues that most Jihadist generalise many random targets as ‘the West’, ‘Christians’ and the ‘enemy’ and thus prefer non-specific symbolic targets rather than the specific institutions or organisations to which they belong.

2.6. Complexity

There are various parts of a modus operandi which makes an attack more complex. While the most straightforward attacks, like a knife attack, does not require much planning, preparations or supporting network it is limited in the scale and has less gravity than a large-scale attack with many victims. Organizing massive and ambitious attacks, like the 9/11 attacks or the London Metro bombing of 2005 requires significant more preparation, planning and persons involved and are therefore much more

complicated. What makes an attack complicated is 1) the involvement of multiple persons, 2) the use of materials and weapons which are difficult to attain and 3) the focus on multiple simultaneous targets. All these factors can significantly increase the strategic result of the attack, but also significantly increase the risk of exposure.

More than terrorist groups, lone actors are limited in their tactical and operational options (Gill & Corner, 2016, p. 695) and lone actors are in general less lethal and less able to adopt new technologies in their operation compared to their larger organised counterparts (Asal & Rethmeyer, 2006). An interesting implication to the targeting decisions of a lone-actor is decided by his/her contact with a larger terrorist organisation. Gill and Corner (2016, p695) argue that an increased level of contact with a parent group enables a terrorist to strike a more difficult target and can result in a more sophisticated attack. As such, they argue that there is a positive relationship between close interaction with a terrorist organisation, sophistication and technique. Following the same logic, Gill (2015) used earlier case studies to show that some isolated lone-actors tend to plan extensive campaigns but often have to reduce the scope of their attack(s) due to technical and material restrains later in the preparation stage of their plot.

2.6.1. Planning the attack

The time, acquisition of resources, information gathering, training and other tasks in preparation for a terrorist attack varies significantly among the types of attack, methods used and perpetrators. Smith, Roberts and Damphousse (2017) argue that the primary variables determining the planning cycle of the terrorists are 1) the type of attack, 2) the ideology or strategic effect the perpetrator wants to achieve and 3) the number of participants in the plot. Depending on the ambition and attack strategy, considerable variation exists in the difficulty and strategy the terrorists needs to use. There is also a significant difference between the various types of terrorists. Research by Smith, Roberts and

Damphousse (2017, pp. 70-71) shows that left-wing and animal-rights terrorism have relatively simple strategies and prefer using more available weapons and have on average a short timespan between the inception of the plan and the execution, in contrast to attacks committed by Jihadist and right-wing terrorism who generally use more elaborate strategies which need significantly more preparations.

Other factors, such as distance gives two separate patterns on the ambition and geographical distance between the terrorists and their intended target. Research on Al-Qaida related attacks in the U.S. and Europe show that about half of them take place within twenty-five kilometres from the home of the perpetrators, and about a third further than thousand kilometres away (Smith, Roberts, & Damphousse, 2017, p. 66). This duality in the distance shows a distinction in operations organised by cells from a distance, and attacks executed by perpetrators within their community following their radicalisation (Smith, Roberts, & Damphousse, 2017, p. 67). The attacks over a longer distance also correlated with a more extended period of planning and preparing (Smith, Roberts, & Damphousse, 2017, p. 68). In contrast to most other types of terrorism, the planning of attacks by Al-Qaida related terrorists could take more than a year and a half from planning to execution. However, for the larger plots, this period includes extensive border crossings and attending training camps with the actual process of acquiring weapons and manufacturing explosives happening only at a later stage (Smith, Roberts, & Damphousse, 2017, p. 71). It is unknown at this moment to how far these patterns also extend to IS, but a similar dynamic is not unlikely for both the extensive as rapidly deployed plots.

2.6.2. Use of weapons

The use of explosives and firearms by terrorists is a standard option for any terrorist attack. Both weapon types provide the option to create a large number of casualties in a short period and provide a high chance of success. However, both the ingredients for explosives as well as the acquisition of firearms is highly regulated and requires significant efforts to be obtained.

Depending on the explosive type, there is a need for expertise, a safe location for production, and the time to acquire the ingredients while covering from the authorities. And getting the right ingredients for making a bomb is difficult. While some parts of a simple IS-style pressure-cooker explosive, such as the high-pressure cooker, can be acquired with ease at most home appliances stores, other components such as high-grade fertiliser or oxidisers are more difficult to obtain and process. Sales base components for the ingredients are in most western countries restricted to industry and requiring the terrorist to set-up front-companies (IICT, 2008), to avoid suspicion. Other parts can only be bought in insufficient quantities or require additional refinement before they are usable. In which case a basic knowledge in chemistry is needed.

When planning to use firearms, links to criminal networks or smuggling contacts are necessary, and for efficiency, the attackers need a minimal level of training (Callimachi, 2017). Al-Qaida invested in organising a support network to enable such tactics. First, they established support cells to smuggle weapons from Europe to the Middle East, but in the late 90's the organisation started to transform this network towards supplementing cells in Western Europe until most of these networks were exposed (Nesser, 2015, p. 36).

2.6.3. Suicide terrorism

One specific type of terrorist attack, which is associated with Jihadist terrorism, is the use of suicide attacks. The use of suicide attacks has historically not been the sole domain of Muslim terrorists but has been used extensively over the last two decades by Jihadist terrorists to achieve their goals (Pape, 2003, pp. 343-344). The suicide attack is characterised by the fact that the attacker does not expect to survive the attack (Pape, 2003, p. 345). From an organisational perspective, the apparent impact and historical successes campaigns involving suicide attacks make it a viable weapon in the terrorist's

arsenal. (Pape 2003, 344 and Friedman 2016). Moreover, the use of suicide attacks has a track record as a successful strategy as part of a long-term terror campaign (Pape, 2003, p. 51).

According to Pape (2003), there are three reasons why the use of suicide terrorism as a strategy has more destructive potential. First, the use of a suicide attack increases the potential damage to the target. The attacker can get closer to a target, and he can infiltrate a location without the need for an escape without caring for his safety. Secondly, the conscious offering of one's own life to create death and destruction is a strategy which signals the dedication of the perpetrators to their cause. When committing a suicide attack, the attacker gives a clear signal that any expected retaliation or deterrence does not stop the attacker. Secondly, through the propaganda of their martyrdom, a suicide attacker can inspire more attacks from the ideological community (Schalk, 1997). Third, the organisation coordinating the suicide attacks are in a stronger position than organisations who use non-suicide attacks to escalate the violence through actively crossing norms and taboos. Through the use of a suicide-attack adds additional gravity to an operation and strengthen expectations about their willingness to continue are increased (Pape, 2003, p. 347).

The use of suicide attacks has become central to the doctrines of Al-Qaida and the Islamic State. (Gambhir, 2014) In Iraq, the Islamic State has used extensive suicide attack campaigns, both as a military strategy at the frontlines as well as against civilians (Friedman, 2016). However, research by Van Dongen (2017, p. 6) shows the number of Jihadist suicide attacks in the West increased marginally while the increase in non-suicide attacks grew exponentially since 2001. According to his research, only nine per cent of the terrorist attacks in the 2011 – 2017 timeframe were suicide attacks while in the period before 2011 only half the attacks were committed by an attacker who intended to survive his/her attack. He argues therefore that this could correlate with the rise in single actor terrorism which grew during the same period to become the predominant mode of terrorism in the West. Van Dongen (2017, pp. 10-11) argues that, based on the limited data available, this might relate to a preference of

single actor terrorist to use more readily available weapons instead of explosives to commit their attack, which makes it more difficult to combine an attack with an instant suicide.

2.6.4. The scope of the attack

A way to increase the scope and gravity of the attack is the inclusion of more individuals and more targets into the plot. Most high-level attacks in recent years have included multiple simultaneous attacks and a group of terrorists. Like the 2004 Madrid train bombing or 2005 London attacks, the use of multiple bombs at the same time against various targets increased the mayhem and attention the attack receives. However, there are significant downsides to including more individuals and targets to the attack. Preparing to strike multiple targets increases the work associated with scouting the area requires more resources and increases the operational risk of being detected before the terrorist attack itself. The inclusion of more individuals to the plot also increases the risks of intended and unintended leaking to the authorities.

In contrast, lone operators without a supporting network or who choose to prepare in solitude are significantly limited in the possible scope of their operation. If a perpetrator has to do the reconnaissance, weapon collection and preparations alone, it can be expected that there is a reluctance to skip labour intensive and dangerous tasks and choose more practical strategies like an attack with a knife, firearm or vehicle (Nesser & Stenersen, 2014, p. 2). The work needed to prepare for a suicide attack can also explain the lower estimates of suicide-attacks by lone actor terrorists, as it requires the labour intensive and challenging task of producing suicide vests and explosives (Van Dongen, 2017, p. 11).

2.7. Success

A successful terrorist operation is an operation which 1) remains uncovered during the initial planning and preparations, 2) is executed with the intended result and 3) has an outcome which contributes to the overall strategic aims of the terrorist organisation or group. Most terrorists prefer easy and unprotected targets or soft targets, which are easier to hit, and which thus improve their chances of success. However, depending on the symbolic value of available targets, and the ideological background of the terrorists, some perpetrators choose to attack a target which has active protective measures, a so-called hard target (De Wijk & Kon, 2017). A successful attack requires an effective combination of tactics, targets and execution of the plans, both during the initial preparation and the attack itself.

2.7.1. Operational security

Another critical factor to ensure the success of the terrorist plot is *operational security*. Operational security is a broad term but includes all organisational precautions and specific conducts used with the purpose to avoid detection. Al-Qaida used a combination of structure and compartmentalisation to secure the network and increase the survivability of the organisation through a system called C*ellular Networks* (Jones, 2012, p. 13). Subsequently, this system has also been used by the Islamic States' predecessor *Al-Qaida in Iraq* (Jones, 2012, p. 39). The primary function of this system is to compartmentalise the different units within the network and limit both the visibility and direct communication between the members. When one unit is compromised, the distance towards the rest of the organisation and the lack of information about the organisation itself ensures the survivability of the remaining parts of the organisation.

When used correctly, the cellular network structure limits visibility to those cells which come in direct contact with the authorities through their attacks and keeps other cells, the leadership and support

organisation hidden (Robinson, 2008, p. 180). However, for the individual cell to survive and for this members to remain hidden, the members must adhere to strict secrecy and techniques to avoid leaking behaviour which can compromise their operation by alerting the authorities about their intent (Jones, 2012, pp. 39-40). The structure of the organisation can protect the organisation as a whole but cannot guarantee the safety of the members of a cell and the individual perpetrators.

Terrorist organisations have taken the various precautions to hide their operations. Like criminal organisations, they use technology to secure their activities and communication from the authorities. While this provides new possibilities for organisations which would have been impossible a decade ago, they are of limited use in providing additional security. Moreover, besides technological tools, there will always be other weaknesses for intelligence agencies to exploit to uncover hidden plots.[10] Single actor terrorists might have an advantage from this perspective, as they have less need to communicate with others. However, the operational security of lone actors across the political spectrum is generally poor with significant leakage behaviour (Schuurman, Bakker, Gill, & Bouhana, 2018, p. 1196), which regularly result in the unravelling of the plot due to the perpetrator's inexperience, carelessness and their wish to claim fame after the attack (Schuurman, Bakker, Gill, & Bouhana, 2018, p. 1196).

[10] While most of the current methods used to infiltrate and unravel Jihadist plots remain classified, it is expected that police and intelligence agencies from around the world are actively involved in online Jihadist communities and chatgroups.

2.8. Summary

Jihadist networks, organisations and groups vary in function, form and background. However, all of these factors influence the strategic preferences, options and effective success ration of Jihadist perpetrators. As such, it is difficult to generalise without the specific context in which the terrorism takes place, whether a terrorist group or the lone actor is inspired to commit an attack, enabled or directed by a foreign terrorist organisation. It is essential to understand the factors which contribute to the role and influence of the parent organisation on the affiliated group and lone actors perpetrating violence and threats of violence on its behalf. Understanding these factors in the right context and their level of influence is necessary to logically deduct the preferences and success of terrorist plots and their chances of success.

3. Methodological Framework

The central question of this thesis is whether the level of engagement of a parent terrorist organisation influences the strategic choices made by isolated cells and lone actors plotting attacks on the organisations' behalf. This chapter explains how this research is set-up. The methods used to gather and analyse a dataset of Islamic State-inspired terrorist plots in Western Europe between 2015 - 2016. And how a measurement is made to analyse the relationship between the engagement of the terrorist organisation and the perpetrators through measurable decisions.

3.1. Research Design

Research within the field of terrorism studies is divided into two approaches. Qualitative and quantitative analysis. By using qualitative research, it is possible to gain an understanding of the specifics and dynamics of a small set of plots. In contrast, it is possible to find trends and relations between abstract variables by analysing larger datasets through quantitative research (Hamm & Spaaij, 2017, p. 206). Both approaches have benefits and downsides, and both can provide valuable insight into the strategies and effects of terrorism. In dept case studies provide the ability to look closely at the specifics and context of a small number of terrorist events, which makes them well suited to use when looking at specific terrorist events and the involved individuals (Hamm & Spaaij, 2017, pp. 207-208). However, to identify specific phenomena, trends and the effects of terrorism the quantitative approach is more useful as it looks at all the cases of terrorism; not only those which stand-out (Dugan & Distler, 2017, p. 189). This research aims to establish whether there is a difference between plots depending on the engagement between the terrorist organisation and the plot. This research, therefore, uses a quantitative approach to gain insight into this phenomenon.

To establish whether there is a difference due to the level of engagement between the terrorist organisation and the perpetrators of the plot, it is necessary to use a dataset of plots which distinguishes

the various levels of engagement. Subsequently, to answer the sub-questions, each plot has some characteristics which represent strategic decisions, preferences and the success ratio to establish whether there is a difference or not.

3.2. Case study

The reason for choosing the Islamic State and Western Europe is pragmatic because IS provides an optimal context to research on the effects of remotely influenced terrorist plots. The Islamic State has become the dominant global Jihadist terrorist network organisation since its rapid expansion since 2010, surpassing Al-Qaida in extremism, appeal to Jihadist extremists and organisational impact (McCoy, 2014). The ongoing 'War on terror' decimated the leadership and capabilities of Al-Qaida's central organisation which still impacts their organisational influence in the global Jihad (Law, 2014). Moreover, at the same time Jihadist sympathisers from around the world, as well as some Al-Qaida affiliates, shifted allegiance and focus towards IS, and IS inspired extremists joined the organisation in Syria or another place (Law, 2016).

The choice for limiting the research to plots in 2015 and 2016 in Western Europe is because of to the context of Western European terrorism, the availability of cases and the situation of IS in the Syrian civil war. Western European countries are comparable in their approach to Islamic terrorism and counter-terrorism policies, and as such provide a larger geographical area with more available plots while other variables are remaining generally equal. Furthermore, access to weapons and ingredients for explosives are limited and under strict government control in all these countries. And, the governmental agencies responsible for counterterrorism activities cooperate internationally and share relevant information to uncover plots and compromise cells among themselves (Keiber, 2016).

Jihadist terrorism affiliated with the Islamic State has existed in Western Europe from the outset of the Islamic States' public inception. However, terrorism related to IS had the most impact during the

years 2015-2016 (Dugan & Distler, 2017). During which it became increasingly difficult for supporters to join IS in Syria. And as a response, the Islamic State started increasingly to call upon its supporters to undertake terrorist attacks in their home countries, instead of travelling to join IS (Winter & Ingram, 2018). The result is that the separation between IS and the terrorist perpetrators became critical due to the risk and difficulty of (potential) perpetrators to get in contact and acquire support or direction from the organisation in Syria and Iraq. Plots later than 2016 are not included as IS has rapidly declined since the second half of 2016 in both military and organisational strength. Both operational capabilities as well as the propaganda of IS have deteriorated and became more sporadic with less effect (Winter, 2017). Thus, from early 2017 onward, a different environment existed which has likely changed the interaction between IS and those operating outside its territory, which could affect the results.

3.3. Data Collection

The data for the cases used in this research comes from the database of terrorist plots presented as an annex to the book 'Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History' by Peter Nesser (2016) and has been updated for the later article 'Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-effect' (Nesser, Stenersen, & Oftedal, 2016). This database provides an overview of vague and confirmed Islamic terrorist plots in several European countries, between 2014 and October 2016 based on open-source data. It provides a classification on the type of attack, targets, group-type and whether the attackers are foreign fighters and other information. The choice for this database has been made based on the fact that it provides an overview already composed of terrorist plots and additionally it provides a practical starting point for adding additional data.

The dataset of Jihadist plots has been expanded to apply to this research. First, cases from before 2015 are dropped, and missing cases have been added. The database provided by Nesser (2016) missed the last three months of 2016 due to its date of publication which has been added manually based on cases

from a variety of sources, including news reports and a secondary database of Islamic terrorist plots by De Wijk and Kon (2017, pp. 134-150).

The database of Wijk and Kon (2017, pp. 134-150) also distinguishes *Inspired, Enabled* and *Directed* plots according to definitions which are discussed later in the theoretical framework. An *inspired* plot is a plot in which the perpetrator(s) have received direct or indirect messages from IS which propagated an attack, but which had no operational contact or support from the organisation. 'Inspired' is also the default value for cases in which no credible link between the plots and IS can be established beyond association. This is because it is unlikely that a Jihadi inspired perpetrator is unaware of the existence and message of the Islamic State or has not taken notice of the available propaganda material. *Enabled* plots are plots in which the perpetrator has received direct or indirect support from the network. This enabling support can be in the form of coaching, limited financial aid, logistical support, a transfer of skills or any other enabling factor. And finally, *directed* attacks are plots in which the terrorist organisation was directly involved in planning and deploying individuals with specific training or assignments. These levels of interaction between the terrorist organisation and the perpetrator(s) are assigned on a conservative basis; thus when there was uncertainty or doubt about the level of interaction, the lowest category was assigned.

Other open-source databases, such as the Global Terrorism Database (GTD)[11] and the RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorist Events (RDWTI) [12] have been looked at but have not been used. The GTD is an extensive and up-to-date database with an extensive amount of information, but it does not provide

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[11] Available through https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/

[12] Available through https://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/terrorism-incidents.html

a distinction between the types of terrorism, which makes it unusable for this research. Moreover, the publicly available version of the RDWTI database has not been used as it currently does not cover the years 2015-2016, thus rendering the database unusable as it falls outside of the required timeframe.

3.4. Operationalization

Variables are assigned which represent the relevant indicators for this research using the data from the database. Among all sub-questions, the independent variable is the interaction between the perpetrator(s) and the network, to which every plot in the database was given a categorical value:

- *Inspired:* the perpetrator(s) of the plot has received direct or indirect messages from IS which propagated an attack, but which had no operational contact or support from the organisation
- *Enabled:* plots in which the perpetrator has received direct or indirect support from the network.
- *Directed*: plots in which the terrorist organisation was directly involved through financial aid, logistical support, planning and/or deploying individuals with specific training or assignments.

For sub-question 1 the dependent variable is the targeting choice, categorised per plot as either:

- *Symbolic*: The perpetrator(s) chose a specific target primarily because of the targets' associated symbolic value. The target represents a sub-national entity such as a religion, an institution such as the military, or an individual because of its relationship to ideological grievances.
- *Random*: The target is chosen because it provides a high potential for casualties and targets society in general, or national symbols and is less concerned with the symbolic relevance of the target. The category 'random' also includes Christian targets, political institutions and symbols of national culture as Jihadis would generally not differentiate between 'Western Europeans', the state or Christians.[13]
- *Unclear*: There is insufficient information about the target choice of the plot, or there is a combination of symbolic and random targets in the plot.

[13] See the codebook annex, this argument is also made in the original database of Nesser (2016)

For sub-question 2 the dependent variable is the complexity of the plot, categorised as either:

- *Simple*: The plot was planned to require or required little preparation/resources and technical skills necessary. As such, the plot can only include a maximum of one indicator of complexity to allow for coincidental availability of multiple involved persons, firearms or explosives.
- *Complex*: The plot requires significant preparations, resources and/or technical skills. For practical reasons, this is counted as a plot with minimal two or more indicators of complexity. These indicators are the involvement of multiple persons, the (planned) use of explosives/firearms or plans to strike multiple targets simultaneously or in a short period. Plots with one indicator are excluded to avoid counting cases accidentally as complex while they are intended to be simple.
- *Unclear*: Plots where there is insufficient information concerning the indicators to categorise the plot as simple or complex.

For sub-question 3 the dependent variable is the success of the plot, this is categorised as:

- *Successful*: Plots launched with a result of death and wounded independent of the fate of the perpetrator.
- *Unsuccessful*: The attack was not launched, was comprehended at any stage of the planning or was launched without victims (also known as a failed attack).

3.5. Validity and Reliability

Following Yin (2013), the research validity and reliability can be established through four tests. First, through establishing the construct validity, the linkages between the concepts and operational measures are guaranteed. Thus, assuring that the indicators are the correct ones to measure the phenomenon they are intended to measure. Secondly, through establishing internal validity, it is assured that the collected data represents the phenomenon and that the data collection is done correctly. Without internal validity, there can be no external validity. The external validity assesses the ability to generalise the research. It establishes whether the cases represent the whole range of cases and whether thee results fully represent the phenomenon. Finally, the reliability of the research should guarantee the reproducibility of the research with similar results by researchers looking at similar cases with terrorist agents at a distance from the principal terrorist organisation.

Construct Validity

The inherent problem of terrorism studies as part of security studies and criminology is the lack of (open) data and access to information (Dugan & Distler, 2017). As a result, finding useful indicators to measure the modus operandi and operational decision-making of terrorist plots is challenging and takes much effort. The research questions are therefore limited to measurable indicators which can provide a degree of certainty based on the available data. Secondly, the concepts of levels of interaction, targeting choice and complexity and success are clearly defined and measured as categorical indicators to simplify the data range and to accommodate the uncertainty associated with much of the information. As a result, that the construct validity is sufficient but should also look at with some reservation till more research on the subject is conducted.

Internal Validity

For data and information, there is a reliance on the media, public sources from governments and counterterrorism organisations which fall under various national security laws and which thus are only partially made public during court proceedings and through official documents. Secondly, terrorist organisations and perpetrators are – for practical reasons – highly secretive in their operations to the outside world. Making it difficult to verify data.

The case data rely on triangulation between the primary database by Nesser (2016), the secondary database of De Wijk and Kon (2017, pp. 134-150) and publicly available information. The primary database has an apt explanatory appendix and makes a distinction between ‘well-documented attack plots’ and ‘vague’ plots based on the availability of good open-source information about the perpetrators, target preference, weapons chosen, and evidence found. The secondary database lacked such information. Thus, the secondary database was used in a limited capacity to check the validity and add omitted data from the primary database. Contradictory and lacking data have been validated and supplemented with open source data, where possible.

Still, the dataset had some shortcomings. First, both the databases primarily use open sources and media reports, which although being often the first and easiest available resource, can be questionable in accuracy and factuality (Silke, 2009). Moreover, media can be biased towards terrorist instances which get a significant degree of media attention while omitting those cases less newsworthy (Dugan & Distler, 2017, p. 196). These factors result in an unknown degree of error in the dataset. Second, available information concerning many of the cases is lacking, speculation or unknown, resulting in missing data from the dataset (Dugan & Distler, 2017, pp. 193-196).

Much effort is put into closing these gaps of information and improving the internal validity of the data. The vague cases which lacked sufficient information, or which have a high degree of uncertainty were omitted from the dataset used for the analysis to increase the validity of the remaining cases. Because of these reasons, together with the small number of cases, the overall dataset and statistical results must be looked at with some reservations beyond the initial analysis but will provide an interesting insight into the dynamics of terrorist decision-making.

External Validity

The dataset is created in an attempt to have a full representation of all cases within the geographical boundaries and timeframe of the research with the omission of cases which are too vague, or which are unknown at this time. As a result of this is the dataset being a collection of cases selected by non-random availability with the included cases being proportional to the total of all cases, although there is no reason at this point to assume that omitted and lacking may affect the results or lead them into the direction of a particular bias.

Reliability

Due to the specific nature of IS related to Jihadist terrorism in Western Europe, and the changing context in the Middle East, the cases are the only representative of the time and place of the plots. However, the analysis and the conclusion can provide a useful insight into other instances of affiliated

(Jihadist) terrorism to gain a better understanding of the role of network distance. The specific role of IS as a network organisation and the context of Jihadist terrorism is specific to this case and setting. However, among other forms of terrorism in which a network organisation influences remote operating actors, and among other Jihadist terrorist networks, there will always be a principal-agent interaction. Moreover, as a result, other terrorist networks equally will have a form of a principal-agent interaction which affects the operational decision-making. The effects of distance between the network and the remote terrorist (cell) can be similar to other types of remote terrorism, but more research is necessary.

4. Case: The Islamic State

The Islamic State might well be the most notorious Jihadist terrorist organisation the world has ever seen. The horrific and shocking actions of the organisation combined with the innovative methods through which they are broadcasted around the world have started a new era of global Jihadism. The Islamic State was able to spread death and destruction through its involvement in terrorist attacks around the world. This chapter will first give a brief history of the Islamic State and the ideological context and organisational objectives of the organisation.

4.1. History of Islamic State

The Islamic State has come to be known under a variety of aliases since its inception in Iraq in 1999. During this period the organisation was led by the Jordanian founder *Abu Musab al-Zarqawi* who named the organisation '*Jama'at al-Tawhid Wal-Jihad'* which translates to '*Organisation of Monotheism and Jihad'* (Zelin, 2014, p. 1). Following the chaos in Iraq after the U.S. led invasion, the leadership of the organisation swore loyalty to Al-Qaida in 2004, although continuing to act independently from the Al-Qaida leadership. During this period the organisation renamed itself '*Tanzím Qaídat al-Jihad Fí Bilad al-Rafidayn',* which translates to *'Organisation of Jihad in Mesopotamia'* although this organisation is commonly referred to as *Al-Qaida in Iraq* (Zelin, 2014, p. 1). Following the killing of the founder Al-Zarqawi in 2006 (Knickmeyer & Finer, 2006), Al-Qaida in Iraq begun its first attempt to establish a caliphate in the west of Iraq in 2006-2007 and renamed itself the *Islamic State in Iraq (ISI)* (Mahnaimi, 2007). This attempt was finally crushed by the surge in U.S. troops in 2007 to combat insurgency in Iraq. During which aftermath, many founding members of the organisation were killed, and the organisations lost significant support in Iraq following a combination of political and policy changes (Petraeus, 2010, p. 116).

The rise of IS in Syria and Iraq

Following the troop withdrawal of the U.S. military forces out of Iraq and the instability following the events of the Arabic Spring, Jihadist organisations were able to surface again and extended their influence. The rapid advance was possible due to the availability of weapons, the increased political discrimination of the Sunni population of Iraq and the inability of the Iraqi government to keep control on radical organisations (Dechesne & De Wijk, 2017, p. 305). Like other movements, the Islamic State in Iraq used the civil war in Syria to expand its influence and quickly gained a foothold in Syria, backed by the weapons and experience it had acquired in Iraq (Dechesne & De Wijk, 2017, p. 306). Together with the official Al-Qaida affiliate in Syria, '*Jabath-Al-Nusra*', they were able to gain a foothold within Syria quickly. In 2013, following disagreements over influence, loyalty and methods, Al-Qaida and Jabath al-Nusra openly clashed with the Islamic State in Iraq, thus finalising the breach between Al-Qaida and ISI (Dechesne & De Wijk, 2017, p. 307).

During 2013 and 2014, the Islamic State in Iraq achieved several significant victories, including the capture of Raqqa in Syria. Moreover, the organisation started its move to gain territory over the Syrian border in Iraq. Using the aversion of many Sunni's against the Iraqi government, the organisation quickly conquered the second city of Iraq, Mosul in June 2014. (Law, 2016, pp. 336-337) Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was leading the organisation since 2010 used the capture of Mosul to proclaim the founding of the *Islamic State* (Dechesne & De Wijk, 2017, p. 307). By spreading fear and terror among the population within the conquered territories in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State tried to establish a society based on an extreme Salafist interpretation of the Islam. Trying to establish a Salafist Utopia and bring about global dominance of their Islam.

4.2. What does the Islamic State want?

The ideology of the Islamic State is in many perspectives even more extreme than the ideology of Al-Qaida. Both organisations have the long-term goal of building an Islamic caliphate based on strict Sharia law (Perry and Negrin 2008, 78-79; Musharbash 2005) and glorify the use of terrorism and martyrdom to achieve their goals. However, Al-Qaida only saw itself as a prelude to an Islamic Caliphate which Osama bin-Laden did not expect himself come into existence during his lifetime (Wood, 2015). As part of the long-term strategy, Al-Qaida uses a gradual approach towards establishing Sharia rule and control through local organisations to reduce exposure and to avoid scaring away potential sympathisers (Gartenstein-Ross, Fritz, Moreng, & Barr, 2015, pp. 2,16-17; Saltman & Winter, 2014, p. 43). In contrast with the Islamic State which openly uses extreme brutality, shock and violence against anyone who does not fit their ideology, including Shia Muslim (Dechesne & De Wijk, 2017).

The use of extreme brutality and sectarian violence has been among the main reasons for the initial rifts between Al-Qaida and IS (Dearden, 2017; Zelin, 2014). Besides violence between Muslims, the strategy of the Islamic State also attempts to polarise the division between Muslims and non-Muslims around the world. Central to the strategy of IS is the 2009 work *'The management of Savagery'*, written by Abu Bakr Naji, which argues that a constant use of extreme violence through terrorism and barbarism in Muslim countries would undermine the state's ability to maintain control and would lead to a state of chaos, or savagery (Hashim, 2014, p. 75). In the wake of which, the Islamic State was able to take over control and establish the caliphate as it has done.

Al-Qaida and the Islamic State both foster a sect-like belief in their role of bringing about Armageddon[14] which will result in the global dominance of Islam around the world. However, while Al-Qaida has been reluctant to propagate this belief, IS spend significant effort in predicting and proclaiming its role at the end of time (Dechesne & De Wijk, 2017). For example, the Islamic State's magazine 'Dabiq' has often featured the apocalypse and the magazine itself is named after a small town in Syria where they believe the final battle between Muslims and the Western – Christian –world will take place (Gambhir, 2014, pp. 2-3). As Toft (2017b) argues, an important reason for IS to attack the west is to force the hand of Western governments to launch a military campaign against IS to force the 'end of the world-struggle', which lead to the final victory of the Islamic caliphate (De Wijk & Kon, 2017, p. 104).

4.3. Short-term goals of the Islamic State

In effect, the Islamic State uses terrorist attacks because for more reasons than to destabilise and create polarisation in societies around the world (Caferella & Zhou, 2017). Much of the propaganda focuses on glorifying the successes and the ability to strike the enemies of IS far outside its territory to attribute to its legitimacy as the frontrunner in the global Jihad (Toft, 2017b). IS needs successful terrorist attacks to inspire others and to recruit followers but also needs terrorist successes to compete with Al-Qaida as dominant Jihadist organisation (McCoy, 2014). Since the establishment of the Islamic State in 2014, IS has continuously repeated critique against Al-Qaida and focused a significant portion of

[14] Also known as 'the end of time' or the apocalypse. Although the Koran gives almost no information about the conditions and how the events will take place, Wahhabis' scholars have predicted events like the Bible's end of time, including a world-wide war and the final coming of the savior and establishment of worldwide Islamic rule.

its propaganda on undermining the legitimacy of Al-Qaida (Gartenstein-Ross, Fritz, Moreng, & Barr, 2015, p. 2). Moreover, the Islamic State first required continues terrorist attacks to maintain its momentum and later to distract from military setbacks in Iraq and later Syria as a response to disillusionment among supporters.

4.4. Operational preferences of the Islamic State

Through its media outlets, the Islamic State called upon its followers to attack 'the disbelievers' in their home country. Since increased counter-terrorism measures by European governments against sympathisers travelling to the IS territory and military setbacks by IS made it significantly more difficult to reach the Islamic State, *Dabiq* magazine and other channels have increased the focus on propagating those loyal to its cause to focus on attacking their home countries (Winter and Ingram 2018 and Callimachi 2017). The propaganda of the Islamic State especially called upon its followers to commit lone wolf attacks, to keep the volume of terrorist attacks up in order to maintain the initiative (Gartenstein-Ross, Fritz, Moreng, & Barr, 2015, pp. 19-20). Furthermore, through Dabiq, IS advises perpetrators to keep their lone actor attacks uncomplicated, not to try to acquire specific weapons, not to involve others and to avoid communicating about intentions to ensure that the attack can be carried out without problems and to limit the chance of the plot being compromised before the execution.[15]

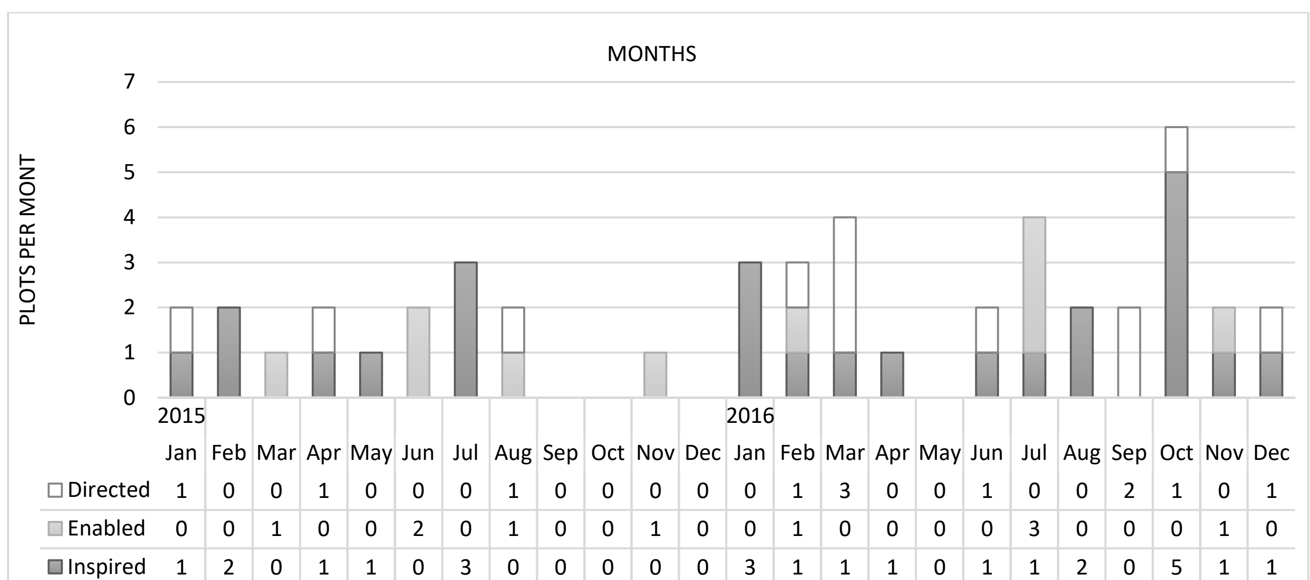
Much of the strength and operational security of IS has been through the embrace and integration of digital technologies for hidden communication with supporters and sympathisers outside of IS territory. The organisation has been able to use encryption and successful evasive behaviour to remain

[15] "Rush to Support Your State 'O Muslim" article in Dabiq magazine, issue nr. 4, September 2014, p.44.

visible towards supporters through social media and dedicated websites (Berger, 2015, pp. 21-22). However, this use of technology also creates barriers for some of its supporters who are on the other side of the internet. The Islamic State has put out manuals and information about correct and secretive online communication, by ways of using encrypted apps, burner phones and VPN-connections (Callimachi, 2016). Even when using specific methods and technological tools, they require discipline, consistency in use and cannot guarantee the complete secrecy of communication.

5. Results and analysis

Following analysis of the final dataset, there are a total number of 50 plots included in this research. On average there have been two plots uncovered or executed per month[16] with an increase of plots towards the end of 2016. During 2015, 19 of the plots are discovered (.38) and 31 (.62) during 2016, illustrating an increase of 63%. (See figure 1).



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Directed	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	1
Enabled	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	0
Inspired	1	2	0	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	0	5	1	1

Figure 3 - IS related to terrorist plots per month (2015-2016, N = 50)

Many of the uncovered plots have been discovered during the later stages of their preparations. Still, only limited conclusions can be drawn from this too when the attacks were to take place due to the intended dates of attack remaining unclear. A similar trend is also seen by other researchers analysing Jihadist terrorist attacks during the same period. Van Dongen (2017, p. 6) only included attacks in his

[16] 2.1 Plots/month average.

database, but also finds a significant increase of attacks between the period between 2011 and 2017 with 13 Jihadist attacks in 2015 and 19 attacks in 2016, an increase of 46%. The dominant explanation for this rise in Jihadist terrorist activity in Western Europe is the increased propaganda and attention given by the Islamic State to home-grown terrorism during 2015 and 2016 to distract attention off their decreased military successes and because of the increased difficulty for sympathisers to join IS in Syria (Winter and Ingram 2018 and Callimachi 2017).

Moreover, the relation of interaction between the plots and the Islamic State shows a pattern. Of the total cases, more than half were plots inspired by IS (.54), which is also the category of plots which also show the most substantial increase during 2015-2016. The second most numerous plots are the directed plots, which represent just over a quarter of the measured plots (.26). Moreover, finally, the enabled plots represent a fifth of the total plots (.20).

5.1. Targeting choices and the level of interaction

Looking at the representation of symbolic and random targets, about half the known plots planned to hit targets with a symbolic value (.40), the other half were aiming to targets because of the high potential damage (.46), and of the remaining 7 plots (.14) it remains unclear what target the perpetrators intended to hit (see Table 2).

	Total		Inspired cases		Enabled cases		Directed cases	
Total (N)	50		27	.54	10	.20	13	.26
Symbolic targets	20	.40	14	.52	4	.40	2	.15
Random targets	23	.46	11	.41	4	.40	8	.62
Unclear	7	.14	2	.07	2	.20	3	.23

Table 2 Calculated target choice (N=50)

Following the theoretical framework, a logical prediction is that directed plots would have a significantly higher chance of being targeted against symbolic targets than inspired plots. The latter one would be more opportunistically chosen to guarantee success on the perpetrator's behalf. In contrast to directed and enabled plots, which are under pressure from the terrorist organisation to use strategic targeting in line with the long-term goals of the organisation. At the same time, it is essential that terrorist organisations do not target civilians if they seek long-term success and support among civilian populations (Abrahms, Ward, & Kennedy, 2018).

However, this logic is contradicted by the data which shows that directed plots, and to a lesser degree the enabled plots, have a significant preference to strike random targets with the objective to maximise the civilian casualties. Which implies a reversed effect of the principal-actor dilemma or a preference of the Islamic States' leadership to achieve massive amounts of civilian deaths over targeting symbolic targets. For example, there were six attacks directed at military targets of which two were enabled though IS directed none. Even though western militaries would be a prime symbolic target due to the military operations against IS.

There are some explanations for this targeting behaviour. An explanation of these preferences can be that the Islamic State gives little value towards targets with a symbolic value compared to inspired attackers who target symbolic targets in almost half the plots (.40). Based on the ideology of the Islamic State, it is understandable that any civilians in the West are deemed guilty and should be targeted (Drake, 1998, pp. 53-54).

Another explanation is that the Islamic State focuses on 'lifestyle' targets to undermine western culture – which is seen as heresy (Burke, 2017). This logic follows the idea that attacks are not aimed at institutions, individuals or against specific subgroups, but against Western culture in general. This idea of a 'war against the Western culture' has been around since the 90's and took an important role in the ideology of Al-Qaida who wants to remove Western (cultural) influences from the Middle East.

(Rowley, 2006, p. 1) The Islamic State actively seeks to destroy non-Salafist expressions within its territory. However, there is little to no evidence of cultural influence is a prime motivator of IS beyond it being considered heresy (Beinart, 2015). Moreover, symbolic cultural attacks, such as the Charlie Hebdo attack, are contested on whether they actually were orchestrated by IS or that they have been undertaken by the Al-Qaida affiliate *Al-Qaida in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP)* (Winter, 2015).

A more appealing explanation for the IS strategy to target mass casualties over symbolic targets comes from the Islamic States' need to cater their message towards different audiences. As Gartenstein-Ross et al. (2015) argue, the intended audience for the attacks are not just the West but also includes supporters and the competitor of the Islamic State, Al-Qaida. As discussed earlier, the rivalry between the Islamic State and Al-Qaida centres on which is the leading organisation in the global Jihad. The reward being attention, increased recruitment for the organisation and financial support from sympatric donors. As an example, directly following attacks like the November Paris attacks the Islamic State released multiple videos and messages aimed to delegitimise Al-Qaida (Gartenstein-Ross, Fritz, Moreng, & Barr, 2015, p. 3).

Moreover, as Toft (2017b) argues, the Islamic State needs to keep momentum to inspire and distract its followers from the military setbacks through terrorist attacks outside its territory. And through the use of the attacks in propaganda, a symbolic context to an attack can be added later (Berger, 2015). Finally, the Islamic State has the long-term intention to lure the West into an open war as part of the apocalypse scenario it aspires to unleash (Toft, 2017b; De Wijk & Kon, 2017, p. 104), for which the Islamic State does not need symbolic targets, just mass-casualties as a trigger for western governments.

In conclusion, there is a difference in the target reference based on the level of interaction between the Islamic State and the terrorist perpetrators acting on its behalf. However, in contrast to what is expected based on the literature which predicts tighter control from the principal organisation to lead to more symbolic targets, the majority of directed plots were associated with random targets. More so than

inspired and enabled plots which are more evenly split over random and symbolic target choices. The explanations for this sub-optimal targeting behaviour are specific to the cause and context of the Islamic State which makes it difficult to assess if this relation holds when generalised to other terrorist organisations and Jihadist movements or terrorist organisations in general.

5.2. The complexity of the attack strategy and the level of interaction

Looking at the (planned) complexity of the plots, half the plots (.50) were simple in their approach, a third (.30) complex and of a fifth (.20) of the plots it remains unknown to which extent they planned to utilise a simple or complex attack. For both the inspired cases and enabled cases the majority of the plots were planned to use simple strategies (respectively .60 and .22 of the cases), although the limited number of enabled cases does not give a clear distinction. And of the directed cases, there were more complex (.46) than simple (.31) plots.

	Total		Inspired cases		Enabled cases		Directed cases	
Total (N)	50		27	.60	10	.22	13	.29
Simple	25	.50	17	.63	4	.40	4	.31
Complex	15	.30	6	.22	3	.30	6	.46
Unknown	10	.20	4	.15	3	.30	3	.23

Table 3 Calculated Complexity of the attack strategy (N=50)

From the theory, there are various reasons because of which inspired and enabled perpetrators would prefer simple attacks over complex ones (De Wijk & Kon, 2017, p. 126). First, isolated cells and single-actors are significantly limited in their options. Their resources, access to specific training, logistical capabilities and tools are limited. Moreover, especially singe-actors must do most, if not all, of their preparations by themselves. Which further limits any capacity to plan, prepare and scout in advance. Secondly, keeping plots simple increases the secrecy of the plot. For this reason, the Islamic

State promotes simplicity in plots it tries to inspire and enable to reduce the chance of the plots leaking before the execution (Gartenstein-Ross, Fritz, Moreng, & Barr, 2015, pp. 19-20). Furthermore, following the principal-agent principle, it is more critical for decentralised actors to be successful than to have a long-term strategic impact (Abrahms, Ward, & Kennedy, 2018). For a Jihadist terrorist, to fail an attack is likely the worst outcome. Thus a preference exists for strategies which provide a higher chance of overall success. That many plots are kept as simple as possible by perpetrators is confirmed by half the inspired plots (.63) and almost half the enabled plots (.40) using relatively simple plots. This simplicity is also underlined by a large number of plots which planned the use simple weapons like knives (.36) compared to more effective alternatives like firearms and explosives (both .32) or attacks with vehicles (.06) which make a plot more difficult.

At the same time, a significant number of inspired and enabled plots use complex strategies. A fifth (.22) of the inspired plots and a third (.30) are complex, thus increasing risks of exposure and creating more operational challenges. The limited explanation for this behaviour is available and requires an in-depth analysis of the specific complex cases. However, two explanations come to mind. First, many terrorist cells develop out of social units in which case the multi-member terrorist unit would be pre-existing and possibly encourage more elaborate plots. Secondly, beyond the desire to be successful, the ambition of perpetrators could play a significant role. They might want to achieve more than a small-scale attack or try to mimic the impact of another large-scale terrorist attack.

Contrasting theories exist concerning the complexity of the directed cases. Theory predicts that perpetrators under close direction are more capable and have more resources available and are thus better prepared to undertake complex attacks. Complex attacks can have much more impact than simple attacks and therefore have more strategic value in the long-term. This preference for complex strategies is confirmed by almost half the directed cases opting for complex approaches (.46). On the other hand, almost a third of the directed plots (.31) use simple strategies instead of more elaborate

ones. This might be for the same reason why IS promotes simple plots to inspired terrorists, to increase the chances of the plot reaching the execution stage but requires more research.

In conclusion, the results suggest a connection between the chosen complexity and the level of engagement between the terrorist organisation and the perpetrators. As expected, inspired perpetrators often use less complex strategies and methods than enabled or directed plots. This can be due to the limitations associated with the inspired plots and with an individual having a desire for success over impact. Simple plots are also propagated by the Islamic State as the best strategy for perpetrators to maximise the chances of success. However, the variable of interaction only shows to have a limited impact on the chosen complexity, and the explanations offered by various authors suggest underlying variables to have a more significant impact on the chosen complexity. These include the social context of the perpetrators or group, the perpetrators' personal ambitions and the specific role of the terrorist organisation to name a few possibilities. It is therefore difficult to conclude how significant the influence of the organisation is, and whether the level of interaction is the right variable to predict the chosen complexity.

5.3. Success and the level of interaction

Looking at the success rate of the plots, it shows that most plots are unsuccessful (.48) with only a small majority of the inspired plots resulting in a successful attack (.52). At the same time, only half the enabled cases are successful (.50), and a clear majority of the directed cases (.77) are uncovered or fail during launch.

	Total		Inspired cases		Enabled cases		Directed cases	
Total (N)	50		27	.60	10	.22	13	.29
Successful	22	0.44	14	.52	5	.50	3	.23
Unsuccessful	28	0.56	13	.48	5	.50	10	.77

Table 4 Success in relation to network-distance

Theory predicts that inspired plots have a high chance of success due to many of them being isolated and using simpler strategies. Inspired attackers are more difficult to detect, have fewer opportunities for leaking the plot to the authorities and have fewer ambitions and thus smaller footprints during the planning and preparation stage. Enabled cases are in between. Although, when enabling plots the role of IS can take multiple roles, from directly providing firearms and explosives to the coaching of individuals who would otherwise not commit to an attack (Callimachi, 2017). The Islamic State actively tries to improve the success ratio of its affiliated perpetrators by advocating simple strategies to avoid detection, offering manuals and by endorsing technological solutions to overcome challenges associated with operational security. However, these efforts do not result in a high degree of success.

Plots orchestrated by directed perpetrators should have the skills and operational support to remain hidden from authorities and to execute a plan with a high chance of success. However, this is contradicted by the numbers which show many plots failing. Moreover, it is de directed plots which show the highest chance of failure due to them being uncovered, as all of the failed directed plots were uncovered during the preparation stage.

With the technological and organisational precautions and security measures, it remains difficult to explain why this is. Although some explanations are available. Research by Schuurman, Bakker, Gill and Bouhana (2018, p. 1196) has shown that lone actors generally have low operational security and suffer from significant leakage behaviour. Other research underlines the amateurism in terrorist plots which fail during the execution phase (De Wijk & Kon, 2017, p. 126). An example being the London 7/7 anniversary bombing plot, where the explosive was discovered quickly due to the bomb being placed during an off-peak hour long before it was intended to ignite.

Another and likely option for many of the plots being unsuccessful can be the active measures taken by security services to uncover, intercept communications between the organisation and the perpetrators and by infiltrating radical networks. Many counterterrorism activities have traditionally

focused on cells, and terrorist organisations and cells with ambitious plans leave significant footprints during their planning and preparations.

In conclusion, the data on the success rate of plots suggests an inverse relationship between the level of influence of the Islamic State and the chance of a plot being successful. Half the inspired and enabled plots failed, but among the directed plots, the fail-rate is much higher. This implies that the role of directing the plot weakens the chances of success. The exact reason behind this remains unclear, for a part because the methods and operations through which counterterrorism actors uncover these plots remain classified for now. However, it seems reasonable that it has something to do with the communications between the organisation and plot being compromised, the infiltration of the organisation by security forces or that the more ambitious preparations create more leakage behaviour to the authorities.

6. Conclusion

The results of this thesis show several contra-intuitive results on the influence of remote terrorist networks on the strategic decision-making and overall success rates of Jihadist terrorists in Western Europe. A closer connection between the perpetrators of a terrorist plot and the Islamic State did increase the preferred complexity for an attack. However, a higher level of interaction also had an opposite result on the targeting choice and the success rate of terrorist plots which contradicts much of the expectations of the existing literature.

The Islamic State is an extremist organisation, not just because of their radical Salafist ideology, but also because of the strategies which they follow. Some of the operational tactics to increase the chances of successful terrorist attacks make sense. However, many of the broader strategies are contradictory to conventional logic and undermine the long-term achievements of the Islamic State.

As a result, it is possible to conclude that the current rational theories are not able to explain terrorist behaviour and logic in the case of the Islamic State. As such, the idea that terrorist organisations are strategic organisations does not hold without further explanation of the context and ideology. It is, therefore, necessary to find the missing variables or to develop new theoretical models to understand the strategic logic of the Islamic State and the impact it has engaging in remote terrorist plots.

Applying this knowledge to understand other terrorist groups means that logical models also need to be reviewed. The vast variety and differences between organisational structure, ideology and operational contexts among terrorist organisations predict that the impact of the interaction between terrorist organisations and remote plots varies as well in accordance to their specific context. This thesis as such has not been able to provide definitive answers. The relationship between organisation and perpetrators has an impact on the strategy, preferences and success rates of the plots. However,

the current understanding of terrorist organisations as logical actors is insufficient in providing an explanation and needs further development to include more variables into the equation.

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Annex

The next pages contains a shortened version of the database, based on the original by Nesser (2016).

A complete version can be found here:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/ppll1ry8v7xta59/180803%20DatabasePublication.xlsx?dl=0

Codebook

Date – Date of the attack, when first arrest was made or the date of the first publication.

Plot country – Country of the plot or where most arrests have been made. Some countries are grouped.

Launched – If the plot has been set in motion or not.

Killed – Number of killed during the attack. Perpetrators within brackets.

Injured – The number of non-fatal casualties of the attack.

Weapon type – The type of weapon used.

Act. Type – The type of actors, being a single actor, group or unknown.

Attack type – The type of attack planned.

Target – The type of intended target, being symbolic, random or unknown.

Interact. – The level of interaction between the organisation (Islamic State) and the perpetrator.

Complex. – The complexity of the attack, being simple, complex or unclear.

Succ. – The success of the attack. Has a plot been launched with significant injury or has it been discovered during before the attack.

Plot Name	NR	BASIC INFO					WEAPON						TACTIC									TARGET			INTERAC.			COMPLEX.			SUCC.	
		Date	Plot country				Weapon type						Act. Type			Attack type						Random										
		Date		Launched	Killed	Injured	Knife	Firearms	Rocket	IED	Vehicle	Unknown	Single	Group	Unknown	Armed	Assassinatio	Bombing	CBRN	Other	Unknown	Symbolic	Random	Unclear	Inspired	Enabled	Directed	Simple	Complex	Unclear	successful	Unsuccessfu
Charlie Hebdo attack	1	07/01/15	France	1	17			1	1					1		1				1		1			1				1		1	
Verviers plot	2	15/01/15	NL/BEL	0				1		1				1		1		1				1					1	1				1
Added: Jewish community centre attack	3	03/02/15	France	1		3	1						1			1						1			1			1			1	
Copenhagen attack	4	15/02/15	Scandinavia	1	2	6		1					1			1						1			1			1			1	
Ceuta plot	5	10/03/15	Spain	0								1		1							1			1		1			1			1
Catalonia plot	6	08/04/15	Spain	0				1		1				1							1			1	1				1			1
Ghlam church bomb plot	7	19/04/15	France	0				1					1			1							1				1	1				1
Germany bike race plot	8	01/05/15	GER/CH/AU	0						1				1				1					1		1				1			1
Added: Armed Forces Day Plot	9	25/06/15	UK	1						1			1					1				1				1				1		1
Lyon gas factory attack	10	26/06/15	France	1	1		1				1		1			1		1					1			1		1			1	
Plot against French military base	11	15/07/15	France	0			1	1						1		1						1			1				1			1
Junead Khan Serviceman plot	12	30/06/15	UK	0			1						1			1						1			1			1				1
London 7/7 anniversary	13	07/07/15	UK	0						1				1				1					1		1				1			1
added: Ghedi Air Base plot	14	22/07/15	Italy	0								1										1			1			1				1
Reda Hame French concert hall	15	15/08/15	France	0				1					1			1				1			1				1	1				1
Am-Paris high speed train shooting	16	21/09/15	NL/BEL	1		2		1					1			1							1			1			1		1	
November Paris attacks	17	13/11/15	France	1	130			1		1				1		1		1		1			1				1		1		1	
Touloun Navy Base Plot	18	31/10/15	France	0			1						1			1						1				1		1				1
London subway stabbing	19	05/12/15	UK	1		3	1						1			1							1		1			1			1	
Paris police station attack	20	07/01/16	France	1			1						1			1						1			1			1				1
Danish teenage girl plot	21	31/12/15	Scandinavia	0						1				1				1						1	1			1				1
Added: Marseille teacher stabbing	22	11/01/16	France	1	1		1						1			1						1			1			1			1	
Swingers club plot	23	31/01/16	France	0								1		1							1	1			1					1		1
Added: Berlin terrorist plot	24	04/02/16	GER/CH/AU	0								1		1							1	1				1				1		1
German girl police stabbing	25	26/02/16	GER/CH/AU	1		1	1						1			1						1					1	1			1	
Added: Paris teenage girls plot	26	09/03/16	France	0				1		1				1		1		1					1		1				1			1
Brussels attacks	27	22/03/16	NL/BEL	1	32			1		1				1		1		1					1				1		1		1	

Plot Name	NR	BASIC INFO					WEAPON						TACTIC									TARGET			INTERAC.			COMPLEX.			SUCC.	
		Date	Plot country				Weapon type						Act. Type			Attack type						Random										
		Date		Launched	Killed	Injured	Knife	Firearms	Rocket	IED	Vehicle	Unknown	Single	Group	Unknown	Armed	Assassinatio	Bombing	CBRN	Other	Unknown	Symbolic	Random	Unclear	Inspired	Enabled	Directed	Simple	Complex	Unclear	successful	Unsuccessfu
Reda Kriket plot	28	24/03/16	France	0				1		1				1		1		1						1			1		1			1
Added: Spain Harrak Plot	29	31/03/16	Spain	0											1									1			1			1		1
UK crowded places plot	30	31/03/16	UK	0								1		1							1		1		1					1		1
Düsseldorf plot	31	02/06/16	GER/CH/AU	0				1		1				1		1		1					1				1		1			1
Paris policeman home attack	32	13/06/16	France	1	2		1						1			1						1			1			1			1	
Nice truck attack	33	14/06/16	France	1	84	308		1			1		1			1				1			1		1			1			1	
Würzburg axe attack	34	18/07/16	GER/CH/AU	1	0	5	1						1			1							1			1		1			1	
Ansbach suicide bombing	35	24/07/16	GER/CH/AU	1	0	15				1			1					1					1			1			1		1	
Normandy priest beheading	36	26/07/16	France	1	1		1							1		1				1		1				1		1			1	
Belgium knife attack on police	37	06/08/16	NL/BEL	1	0	2	1						1			1						1			1			1			1	
Added: Strasbourg stabbing	38	19/08/16	France	1		1	1						1			1						1			1			1			1	
Car bomb plot near Notre Dame	39	31/08/16	France	1		0				1				1				1					1				1		1			1
Schleswig-Holstein plot	40	02/09/16	GER/CH/AU	0								1		1							1			1			1			1		1
AlBakr Chemnitz-Berlin bomb plot	41	30/09/16	GER/CH/AU	0						1			1					1					1		1			1				1
added: Brussels knife attack.	42	05/10/16	NL/BEL	1	0	3(+1)	1						1			1						1			1			1			1	
Added: Berlin Airport bomb-plot	43	10/10/16	GER/CH/AU	0									1										1				1			1		1
added: Hamburg stabbing attack	44	16/10/16	GER/CH/AU	1	1	1	1						1			1							1		1					1	1	
added: Nice stabbing	45	17/10/16	France	1		2	1						1										1		1			1			1	
added: Mülheim stabbing	46	31/10/16	GER/CH/AU	1		2(+1)	1						1										1		1			1			1	
added: Cologne Intelligence Bomb plot	47	29/11/16	GER/CH/AU	0						1					1			1				1			1					1		1
Added: Rotterdam Plot	48	20/11/16	NL/BEL	0				1		1					1	1		1						1		1				1		1
added: DisneyLand Paris plot	49	01/12/16	France	0								1		1									1				1		1			1
added: Berlin vehicle attack	50	19/12/16	GER/CH/AU	1	12	56		1			1		1			1				1			1		1			1			1	