



**Video-recorded Decapitations
- A seemingly perfect terrorist tactic
that did not spread**

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ABSTRACT

Video-recorded decapitations have an enormous impact, they are cheap and easy, and they allow the terrorists to exploit the potential of the Internet. With these advantages, the tactic would have been expected to quickly spread across the globe as a favored tactic. Yet, years after its invention in 2002, this has not happened. This paper using evolutionary theory finds that video-recorded decapitations have not caught on for locally specific reasons: in the West because the tactic is less accessible than one might expect; in Iraq because of the unwillingness to be associated with Zarqawi, and in the Afghan context, it has not spread because it is mainly relevant for mobilizing resources from abroad, which is not a priority for the Taliban. These are however situational variables, and just as suicide bombings took years to spread, there may be campaigns of video-recorded decapitations as conditions change.

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, Daniel Pearl was kidnapped and beheaded in Pakistan. The horrific live footage of the decapitation quickly spread on the Internet causing widespread shock and revulsion, but also a realization that an effective new terrorist tactic had emerged. Video-recorded decapitations are neither technically demanding to carry out nor do they require a lot of money, training or weapons. Added to that the prevalence of Internet with reasonable bandwidth now makes it possible to disseminate video content, even if TV-networks will only air extractions of the decapitation videos or not at all. In other words, it seemed that the perfect terrorist weapon for the information age had been invented. It was therefore to be expected that decapitations the following years spread to Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Thailand, and India. It was however only in Iraq that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, two years later, in 2004 again took up video recording the decapitations and disseminating them on the Internet. Within Islamist circles, this created a prominent status for Zarqawi, who produced a shocking 11 decapitation videos in Iraq in 2004. Other groups quickly adopted the tactic. However, already the following year the number of videoed decapitations dropped to five in all of Iraq, followed by only two in 2006. This is odd because earlier research shows that terrorist tactics are subject to intense copying and strong mechanisms of selection: aircraft hijackings (Holden 1986), suicide bombings (Pape 2005) the use of certain homemade explosives (Clarke and Soria 2009). Yet despite the obvious advantages, video-recorded decapitations did not spread dramatically: Why?

This paper conducts an analysis based on evolutionary theory; the foundation for any evolutionary analysis is that the phenomena we find necessarily have passed a survival constraint. For this paper, this involves four cen-

tral claims: First, any kind of terrorism is the contingent outcome of the availability of the material and immaterial resources necessary under the given environmental constraints. Second, for terrorism to exist beyond the individual attack, it must be able to reproduce the resources it depends on. Third, terrorism reproduces itself by making an impact on two different audiences, a constituent audience and an enemy audience. Fourth, terrorist phenomena can be divided into two ideal types, emergent terrorism and instrumental terrorism. Terrorist tactics, which work well against the enemy audience, do not necessarily work well to mobilize resources from a constituent audience, and vice versa. The priority between the two depends on the type of terrorism, instrumental or emergent.

The immediate aim of the paper is to establish why the tactic of video-recorded decapitations did not spread. More broadly, the paper aims to contribute to the understanding of why some tactics are selected and others are not, and how and why terrorist tactics spread. The paper is divided into four sections: first, a brief account of how decapitations have been used and interpreted as a weapon of terror. Secondly, an account of the evolution of the video-recorded decapitations 2002-2009; thirdly, a theoretical discussion of the evolutionary dynamics of terrorist tactics; and finally, an empirical examination of the contentious performances in three critical venues where it would have been expected to see video-recorded decapitations: Iraq, Afghanistan and the West.

DECAPITATION AS A WEAPON

The existing literature on decapitations focuses predominantly on the functionality and the use in history of decapitations, especially on the symbolic effect of mutilating the body, and the use of power by the authorities in exercising

extreme violence. The use of decapitations as an effective and symbolic tool for underlining power and causing fear is therefore well known historically (Lentini and Bakashmar 2007). For example the 14th century mogul ruler, Tamerlane, decapitated several hundred thousands and raised pyramids of the severed heads in the sacked city of Isfahan to persuade other cities to surrender at the first warning (Chaliand and Blin 2007). It was also common practice by English monarchs to exhibit severed heads at the Tower of London. More recently, decapitations have been used by criminal organizations in Mexico (Campbell 2006), and by right wing extremists in Russia (Arnold 2009). Given the historical experience it is less surprising that modern Islamist militants adopted decapitations as a tactic, than why they would choose to back away from it, especially once the tactic has been developed and adopted.

Some of the reason for the apparent backing away from the use of video-recorded decapitations may be found in internal disagreements within the ranks of militant Islamists about the appropriateness of decapitations. In 2005 a letter was made public, which had been intercepted by US forces, from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, cautioning the latter to shoot hostages rather than decapitating them in order not to alienate potential supporters (Zawahiri 2005). The letter has fostered some debate on the strategic considerations of at least part of the militant Islamist movement stressing the schism between maximum effect on the enemy and the risk of alienating potential supporters (McCants and Brachman 2006; Hegghammer 2006). This dilemma has previously been demonstrated when international Islamist actors distanced themselves from the Algerian Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA), as their transgresses against the Algerian civilian population escalated, and eventually completely isolated GIA, enabling rivaling GSPC to take over as the primary Islamist opposition

group (Burke 2004: 214-218). However, even though the letter provides an insight into the considerations of Islamist militants, the fractured nature of the Islamist militant landscape means that the existence of the letter alone does not explain why the practice of video-recorded decapitations has stopped.

Charles Tilly has studied different contentious performances of social movements covering several centuries of development and change. He notes, “In any particular regime, pairs of actors have only a limited number of performances at their disposal. We can conveniently call that set of performances their repertoire of contention” (Tilly 2003: 45). Video-recorded decapitations can thus be considered as part of the repertoire for Islamist militants. For Tilly, it is the contentious performances which primarily define the contentious phenomenon. Nonetheless, the contentious performances within the same movement can change and mutate over time – starting as student protests that turn into violent clashes, that mobilize unions to file complaints and organize strikes, which might strengthen civil society and motivate the regime to enter into a democratic debate (Tilly 2008). According to Tilly, contentious performances are often based on shifting alliances and are selected by actors based on the availability of ‘repertoires’, ‘political opportunity structures’ and the strength of the actor. The value of the ‘repertoire’ for the contentious actors is that they do not need to invent courses of action from time to time – repertoires vary from very weak models to rigid formats that allow complex operations but which also limit the ability of the actors to adapt a tactic to different circumstances. The concept ‘political opportunity structures’ encompasses the opportunities and threats posed for claim making, including both the oppressiveness and the strength of the authorities. Finally, the shifting of alliances means that new alliances between actors may allow conten-

tious performances that were previously not possible, and disallow performances that are no longer acceptable, i.e. an alliance with the unions may allow general strikes but disallow political assassinations.

From the above perspective, the explanation for changes in choice of contentious performances should be found in similar changes in either the political opportunity structure, the strength of the contentious actor or the repertoire. Here it becomes evident that this theoretical body is not made to describe modern terrorism. The relative strength between authorities and contentious actors seems rather unimportant for terrorism in the West, because the political opportunity structure is better understood as a constant than a variable, and therefore not suitable as a predictor of change. Authorities in the West exert control over their territory and have a broadly accepted monopoly of violence. However, even after the tightening of counter-terrorism laws, the open societies of the West leave considerable room to maneuver for terrorists. The relative strength of the authorities and the contentious actor might therefore better explain changes between terrorism and other types of contentious performances, for example guerilla warfare, than changes from one terrorist performance to another, as phrased by Chaliand and Blin: “all terrorists want to be guerillas when they grow up” (2007: 45). Terrorists need a base of recruitment in order to reproduce themselves, but, unlike for instance guerillas, they do not depend on a broad acceptance or legitimacy in their local area. Ideally, from their point of view, terrorists blend in with the population and do not usually have to be concerned that they will be recognized as terrorists and reported to the authorities. Would-be terrorists in the West are able to benefit from low-paying jobs and social benefits, which makes it unnecessary to mobilize financial resources from a popular base. The bombs used for the 7/7 attacks in London

in 2005 were homemade from inexpensive, commercially available material, and the Theo van Gogh assassination was carried out with a knife (Prober 2005; Buchanan 2006). In strictly material terms, therefore, it is hard to imagine that terrorists, at least in the West, can be too weak or too poor to carry out a wide range of attacks. However, the concept ‘repertoire’ appears very relevant for choice of tactic.

At least two forms of contentious performances are related to video-recorded decapitations in the explicit and extreme way of breaking norms of contentious behavior: suicide bombings and self-immolation. Biggs describes how, in 1963, in Saigon, an elderly Buddhist monk, Quang Duc, assumed Lotus position and burned himself to death to protest the banning of Buddhist flags. The press had been alerted in advance, a photographer from Associated Press (AP) recorded the event on film, nuns and monks prevented fire trucks from reaching the scene, whilst a monk with a loudspeaker explained that Duc burned himself to raise attention to five demands, while others distributed Quang Duc’s final declaration – all in English (Chaliand and Blin 2007). According to Biggs, the ‘Duc format’, with few exemptions, became the template for more than a thousand self-immolations in more than three dozen countries spanning four decades. In a similar vein, Pape describes how suicide bombings have spread from Lebanon to Sri Lanka and back to the Middle East (Pape 2005). The account of both Biggs and Pape are nuanced and pay attention to the role of technology and the need to mobilize individuals. However, for both, the key explanation for the spread of the tactic is the effectiveness of the two performances in affecting the audience of the adversary, and in the case of suicide bombings also the brute effectiveness in killing people. Following this logic, the reason why video-recorded decapitation did not spread would be expected to be because it did not have the in-

tended effect on the audience of the adversary which, considering the massive attention, appears not to have been the case. This warrants an explanation of terrorists' choice of tactic, which allows for more complexity than a rational calculus on the side of the terrorists of the maximum impact on the enemy audience. This paper pursues an evolutionary argument by combining the terrorism literature with the literature on emergent social phenomena. There are already a number of studies employing complexity theory to analyze terrorism, it is however new to use this body of theory to examine the spread and selection mechanisms of specific tactics (Kuznar 2007; Knorr Cetina 2005; Fellman and Wright 2003; Beech 2004).

VIDEO-RECORDED DECAPITATIONS 2002-2009

Browsing the Internet for terrorism-related video content is not an activity for the faint-hearted. It is quite easy to find a plethora of different material ranging from religious speeches, testaments of suicide bombers, imagery of atrocities against Muslims, to footage of a number of actual attacks, including decapitations. It is common that the content from different categories is edited into one video to promote a certain message. Footage of actual attacks, suicide attacks, roadside bombs, car bombs etc. are in particularly high demand on jihadist websites. However, the footage is often of poor quality, which testifies to how difficult it actually is to get good footage from clandestine actions. To compensate, videos are produced with computer animated terrorist attacks, adding clarity but also removing authenticity. In the case of decapitation videos, however, the event can be choreographed and rehearsed and yet remain authentic, producing

a brutally clear and close-up visual record of a particularly violent nature.

In 1999, a video was widely circulated on the Internet, displaying a Russian conscript being beheaded by Chechen rebels. The video shows the face of a living soldier being depressed by a military boot when his head is sawn off with a knife. The first newer videotaped decapitation to spread was named 'The Slaughter of the Spy-Journalist, the Jew Daniel Pearl'. It was released in February 2002. Pearl was beheaded nine days after a ransom note unsuccessfully had been sent by his captors, which contained unrealistic political demands such as the release of all Pakistani detainees in the US. The video is three-minutes-and-thirty-six-seconds long. It starts with footage and audio of Daniel Pearl acknowledging his Jewish origin and comparing his own helpless situation to the one of the detainees at Guantanamo Bay. Around Daniel Pearl's face imagery appear and fade away of: US President Bush shaking hands with Ariel Sharon, pictures of dead Muslims, pictures from Guantanamo Bay, and the killing of al-Durra, the nine-year-old Palestinian boy allegedly killed by Israeli soldiers while clinging to his father. Eventually, Pearl's throat is slit and he is then beheaded. The last part of the video is a list of demands scrolling over a still image of Daniel Pearl's severed head.

The Daniel Pearl video is thoroughly edited and appears to have utilized all the effects in the video-editing software; possibly therefore it has a more amateurish look than more recent Jihadi productions from Global Islamic Media Front, Sahab or Fajr media outlets¹, but there

¹ The three media outlets are generally considered to be directly associated with al Qaeda but they also relay material from other groups. Their portfolio includes computer games, for instance a first person shooter game called 'Quest for Bush' see <http://www.gameology.org/node/1269> (for a more detailed discussion see Kimmage 2008).

Table I Documented Islamist beheadings 1992-2008

| Year | Country | Decapitations (Attacks) | Foreign/Local | Videotaped |
|-----------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 1992-1995 | Bosnia/Herzegovina | Mujahedin Bosnian Army | Serbs | 0 |
| 1998 | Chechnya | 4 (1) | 4 | 0 |
| 1999 | Chechnya | 1 | 1/0 | 1 |
| 2001 | Iraq | 25(1) | Kurds | 0 |
| 2002 | Pakistan | 1 | 1/0 | 1 |
| 2002 | Philippines | 2(1) | ?/? | 0 |
| 2004 | Iraq | 64(32) | 17/47 | 28 |
| 2004 | Saudi Arabia | 1 | 1/0 | 1 |
| 2004 | Afghanistan | 5(2) | 1(4) ² | 0 |
| 2004 | Thailand | 3(3) | 0/3 | 0 |
| 2004 | Indian Kashmir | 3(1) | 0/3 | 0 |
| 2005 | Iraq | 22+(20) | 0/? | 5 |
| 2005 | Chechnya | 1 | 1/0 | 0 |
| 2005 | Thailand | 16(10) | 0/16 | 0 |
| 2005 | Bangladesh | 1 | 0/1 | 0 |
| 2005 | India | 7(4) | 0/7 | 0 |
| 2005 | Afghanistan | 24(5) | 0/24 | 0 |
| 2005 | Indonesia | 3(1) | 0/3 | 0 |
| 2006 | Iraq | 56(7) | 3/53 | 2 |
| 2006 | Afghanistan | 14(6) | 1/13 | 0 |
| 2006 | Pakistan | 7(6) | 1/6 | 1 |
| 2006 | Somalia | ?(1) | 0/? | 0 |
| 2007 | Thailand | 2 | 0/2 | 0 |
| 2007 | Afghanistan | 14 | 0/14 | 0 |
| 2007 | Iraq | 22 | 0/22 | 0 |
| 2007 | Indian Kashmir | 1 | 0/1 | 0 |
| 2007 | Philippines | 17 | 10/7 | 0 |
| 2007 | Pakistan | 3 (4) | 0/4 | 2 |
| 2008 | Afghanistan | 13 | 0/13 | 0 |
| 2008 | Pakistan | 23 | 2/21 | 0 |
| 2008 | Thailand | 1 | 0/1 | 0 |

2 (4 was Taliban retaliatory killings)

is, nevertheless, a clearly told story in the video. The words of Daniel Pearl, admitting to being a Jew, the comparison to the Guantanamo Bay detainees, and the imagery of atrocities against Muslims present the case against Pearl, leading to the verdict and execution. The list of demands in the end of the video (in English) is the instruction for the US of what to do or face repetitions of Daniel Pearl's murder.

As it appears from table 1, even though the Daniel Pearl decapitation received a lot of attention, the decapitation campaign did not really start before the Nicholas Berg decapitation, two years later, in Iraq in 2004. The Berg video has a more simplistic setup, than the Pearl video. It consists of three clips. In the first clip, Nicholas Berg identifies himself and talks to the camera; he sits in a plastic chair in front of a white wall wearing an orange jumpsuit similar to the ones worn by the detainees at the Guantanamo Bay facility. In the next clip Nicholas Berg sits on the ground, behind him are five men dressed in black with their faces covered, carrying weapons, and vests similar to suicide vests and one of them read out a text in Arabic, before Nicholas Berg is knocked over and a man starts to decapitate him with a knife. One hardly notices the transition from the second to the third clip, where Nicholas Berg's head is sawn off, and finally placed on his back. The video looks as if at least the two last clips represent the beheading in unedited real-time.

The Berg video resembles the Pearl video in a number of ways, both identify themselves in the beginning and both were American citizens of Jewish dissent. Berg's decapitation video appears to be the model for future video-recorded decapitations. Nicholas Berg is beheaded by Zarqawi's group, Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn, later known as al-Qaida in Iraq. Subsequent videos from the group follow the format of the decapitation of Nicholas Berg. From the groups second video-recorded

decapitation, a black flag with Arab calligraphy is added in the background as a symbol of the connections to early Islam, where it is believed that the Prophet Muhammad, and later the leader of the Abbasid revolution, carried a black flag (Campbell 2006). The videos are similar, although a few minor variations do occur. For example, sometimes the victim is blindfolded (though not consistently), sometimes the victim identifies himself, and in the case of the Japanese citizen, Shosei Koda, the decapitation was carried out on an American flag. Nonetheless, all the videos are examples of extreme violence carried out without physical distance between the perpetrators and the victim and with symbolic linkage to violence carried out against Muslims by America, Israel and the wider West.

In June 2004, video-recorded decapitations spread to Saudi Arabia. American helicopter engineer Paul Johnson was taken hostage by the al-Qaida Organization in the Arab Peninsula, and a video recording of his decapitation was later released. The video cites the Berg video with Johnson wearing the same orange jumpsuit, and the severed head is at the end placed on the victim's back. The video however seems less carefully choreographed; no text is read out, it is just footage of the decapitation.

Other groups in Iraq quickly adopted the strategy of decapitations. Ansar al-Sunna began decapitations in August 2004, three months after the decapitation of Berg³. Amongst the first videos was the execution of twelve Nepa-

3 The Islamic army in Iraq, a religious nationalist (non-salafist) group in opposition to the transnational groups, also adopted the strategy of decapitations. On two occasions, a total of four or five individuals were video-recorded and beheaded. It has not been possible for me to find the video material, possibly because the group did not have access to global jihadi media outlets.

lese workers, of whom one was beheaded. In the video, which is filmed outdoors in a rural area, the twelve are lying face down; one is beheaded with a knife by a man wearing camouflage clothing. The remaining eleven victims were shot. Two months later, in October, Ansar al-Sunna adopted the format from Berg's decapitation; a Turkish truck driver, Ramzan Elbu, is seen holding up his identity cards, identifying himself in Turkish and saying that other Turkish drivers should stay out of Iraq. Then he is shown blindfolded and he is beheaded. The footage is recorded outside, behind him are four hooded men, dressed in black, in front of a black flag, holding AK47 rifles. In this case some of the symbolic linkage to Guantanamo is absent; Ramzan Elbu is not wearing an orange jumpsuit but his own clothes. In October 2004 another Iraqi group, The Salafist Brigades of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, beheaded two Iraqi nationals on video with clear references to the Berg style decapitations, the two men identify themselves, there is a flag in the background, a text is read out, and the four men carrying out the attacks are hooded. The victims are blindfolded, but not wearing the orange jumpsuit, and the perpetrators are not in black.

In March 2006, a video from the Pakistani Taliban emerged where alleged criminals had been beheaded. The video does not show the actual decapitations but shows the headless mutilated bodies and heads on sticks. The video warns people against co-operating with Musharraf's regime. In 2007, another Taliban video emerges. This time a young man (reported to be twelve) under the direction of an adult beheads a militant accused of treason. In August the same year, teenage militants decapitate one of sixteen captured Pakistani soldiers. The video somewhat resembles the Berg setup, as the four armed and masked teenagers stand

behind one of the soldiers, when one steps forward and performs the decapitation.

The decapitations are powerful and brutally violent statements, which link symbolism power and past grievances in an extreme way, where the viewer is left with no doubt that the victims paraded on the videos suffered violent and painful deaths. The reason why the videos are so powerful is caused by what Michael Biggs describes as an "aversion to the visible suffering of others" (Biggs 2008). Since the first videos made headlines, most media have stopped showing clips from them. However, mainstream media still function as a multiplier of the videos, because it is invariably reported on when a video is released. To see the actual footage presumably would make a bigger impact than hearing about it. Nevertheless, the mere knowledge that the videos exist makes a difference to the target audiences. In February 2009, another decapitation video was released from Afghanistan, but rather than showing extracts of the video, all major television networks only displayed still images from the beginning of the video. The still picture showed a man sitting in front of a black flag with Arab writing on it, two masked men with AK47's behind him, all facing the camera. The visual brand of the Berg style decapitation is so strong that no one needs to be told what happens next.

THE REPRODUCTIVE DYNAMICS OF TERRORIST TACTICS

Employing an evolutionary logic to understand the selection of a terrorist tactic has two dimensions: The accessibility of the factors necessary to employ the tactic, and the effectiveness of the tactic in mobilizing resources. The evolutionary logic is not that one tactic, which is better than all others, will become dominant. Rather, under different environmental constraints, different tactics will be

selected because they are more accessible or because they are better at mobilizing resources and because different niches can allow different tactics to mobilize resources from different sources in the same environment. It is therefore necessary to look at both how accessible a tactic is to potential terrorists and how and under what circumstances different tactics mobilize the necessary resources. The selection of tactics happens continuously, as does the selection of ideology, group structures, symbols, recruitment forms etc. Similarly, evolution in the external environment, technological, legal, media, etc. affect the effectiveness of one tactic in opposition to others. Any kind of evolution is therefore a co-evolution; a change in one will affect the attractiveness of the other. Relatively simple selection mechanisms will therefore, over time, create the emergence of new terrorist phenomena⁴.

The accessibility of video-recorded decapitations as a tactic

Mainstream media often gives the impression that carrying out a terrorist attack is a relatively easy undertaking: bomb making manuals can be found on the Internet; ingredients for bombs can be openly purchased as hair bleach or garden fertilizer; and because crowded places, critical infrastructure as well as symbolic sites are easily accessible in open liberal societies. However, in reality, three out of four Islamist plots in the West are foiled or fail⁵. Two weeks after the 7/7 2005 London bombings, a copycat attack in London failed because the bombs did not go off as intended, the same happened the

year after with two bombs on German trains in Dortmund and Koblenz. Richard Reid ‘the shoe bomber’ was overpowered by fellow passengers on the plane as he tried to detonate the explosives in his shoes. Other plots have come to the attention of the authorities because the would-be-terrorists sought out training in camps in Pakistan where they attracted the attention of security services⁶. In all of this, it seems that video-recorded decapitations could be the more accessible tactic. No particular technical skill needs to be acquired, thus both minimizing the risk of this element failing and reducing the need for training, which reduces the risk of attracting the attention of security services. Beyond the kidnapping, which obviously requires some coordination and planning, everything can be done in a pace that suits the terrorists. A terrorist attack is however much more than just a technical challenge!

Contentious actors are limited by the availability of repertoire, not just because they lack the ability to imagine other forms of contentious performances; being able to imagine carrying out a sit-in, imagine carrying out an attack with a roadside bomb or imagine making a video-recorded decapitation is far from being able to carry it through. Underlying any repertoire is a certain *software* which functions as a key to unlock the complexity of plotting and executing a terrorist attack (Arthur 1994; Harrow 2008). Committing an act of terrorism is extremely difficult, even for someone with the motivation to be a terrorist and all the necessary resources available: The would-be terrorist needs to ask: What kind of terrorism is morally acceptable? How do I justify killing to myself? How do I deal with my family and employer in the period when I am planning

4 For a thorough account of adaption and co-evolution, see Arthur 1994; Holland 1995.

5 1989-2008 there were 20 attacks in the west and 60 foiled and failed plots (Harrow 2010b).

6 For instance the Danish ‘Glasvej plot’ and the ‘Trabelsi plot’ to attack US servicemen at Kleine Brügge in Belgium.

the attack? How do I choose the type of attack? How do I select a target? How do I acquire the relevant materials and training? How do I recruit accomplices? How do we communicate clandestinely? How do we train sufficiently and undetected? In fact, creating a terror cell, and planning and carrying out a terrorist attack are such complex undertakings that only very resourceful organizations and exceptionally bright individuals should be able to do it. However, many of the individuals behind the plots since 2001 have been apparently quite un-resourceful individuals with little experience or training qualifying them to be terrorists. One reason why this may be the case is that most would-be terrorists do not need to address all the above issues, because they are able to adopt already existing software. In that sense, already existing terrorist software provides an individual with a complete how-to-be-a-terrorist kit, reducing the complexity of the task dramatically.

Where repertoire is tactic and technology, software is the emergent outcome of a co-evolution of tactic, ideology, group structure, framing, symbols etc. on the side of the terrorists but also on the side of their adversary. Software consists of complex elements of information that can be copied and recombined in different ways. However, the elements, because they have co-evolved, have a set of rules that govern how they may be combined and used, but adhering to these rules allows someone to take advantage of the complexity of the software without having to develop it, and without having to understand it or appreciate how it works (Arthur 1994). Zarqawi's video-recorded decapitations may not intentionally have been a drive for resources, but this is exactly how they have worked (Weaver 2006). Whether Zarqawi realized this and therefore increased the frequency of the videos, or if he did not realize this, but was enabled to do more video-recorded decapitations due to in-

creased influx of resources, is irrelevant; the tactic of videotaped decapitation was selected over other tactics because of its accessibility and ability to mobilize resources. Historically the same dynamic has also worked in the opposite way. 'The Islamic Brigade' of the Bosnian Army, which was financially supported by mainstream Muslim communities, had rules of engagement, which forbade attacks on monks and civilians and mistreatment of prisoners (Roy 2004: 255).

The slow expansion of Suicide bombings as a favored tactic is an example of how software needs to be developed through co-evolution of the necessary factors. It took twelve years for the tactic to travel from Lebanon to Palestine, and another eight years to start an actual campaign. Adopting a tactic of suicide bombings is not just a matter of designing a suicide vest. Ideology, recruitment practices, organizational structure and various practical issues, like setting up programs for taking care of the families of those volunteering to commit the suicide attacks, needs to be addressed (Pape 2005). One of the curious resources mobilized has been the introduction of suicide bombings into popular culture, where the romantic notion of giving ones life for a cause has been used in Arab pop-songs (Lyme 2009).

Possibly the most difficult element in a decapitation is the psychological element. All mammals have a resistance to killing their own species; this is an essential survival mechanism that prevents a species from destroying itself over mating and territorial battles. In humans, this has been observed in warfare where studies show that only 15-20 percent of the riflemen in World War II fired their weapon at an exposed enemy soldier. The resistance to killing is determined by the predisposition of the killer as well as the conditions of the actual killing. The predisposition of the killer is the result of demands of an authority, the proximity and legitimacy of this authority; group

dynamics, peer pressure and group support; as well as the killer's training and recent experiences. The resistance associated with the conditions of the killing is determined by the distance to the victim, both physical and emotional (Grossman 2000). It is much more difficult to distance oneself from the actual killing when decapitating someone with a knife, than when for instance placing a bomb. This raises the demands on the killer and the terrorist group, particularly in the absence of the formal authority of a military command structure. This also means that decapitation is much more demanding for someone who have not been exposed to extreme violence, applying to almost all westerners but also most other individuals in the world.

Effectiveness of terrorism – impacting two different audiences

Terrorism intentionally communicates fear to an enemy audience. Terrorism is, however, also an activist performance that seeks to win over sympathizers from a constituent audience. According to Koopmans, the impact of activist tactics depends on three elements: *visibility*, *resonance* and *legitimacy*. Any terrorist tactic will rank high in visibility. Video-recorded decapitation is an extreme type of terrorism and accordingly covered extensively in global media – especially when involving western hostages. The resonance is the ability to provoke reactions in the public sphere, positive as well as negative. Again, the extreme character of the video-recorded decapitations means that there has been a huge resonance. Koopmans argues that there often is an inverted relationship between visibility and resonance on one side and legitimacy on the other. Video-recorded decapitations is a good example of this, as most people react very negatively to decapitations. Koopmans concludes that controversial messages – here understood to be somewhere be-

tween the unnoticed and the illegitimate messages – have the evolutionary advantage. Even though the hugely illegitimate messages have very high visibility and resonance, and will be reproduced as they are refuted, they still depend on some legitimacy to have somebody furthering them. This may however not apply to the same extent to terrorism.

Terrorism is different from other forms of activist messages, because rather than simply aiming at convincing followers who are latently sympathetic to the cause, it addresses both the enemy and the people it tries to solicit support from. Towards the first audience there is little need for legitimacy, on the contrary, appearing completely 'off the rails' may make the terrorists appear more scary thus making concessions more likely (Kydd and Walter 2006). Towards the constituent audience, legitimacy is required to solicit support. However, in contrast to for instance guerilla warfare, broad popular legitimacy and support are not required. The resources necessary to conduct terrorism are quite small and can be mobilized from relatively few actors. However, if a terrorist phenomenon exists in complete isolation, without a network to recruit from, it is vulnerable and will cease to exist when the current activists die, split ways, become pregnant, retire or are caught. Further, being successful is a legitimizing factor, even if the success is obtained from doing something, which is considered illegitimate. This effect of preferential attachment (de Blasio et al. 2007) can for instance explain the support for Taliban, when they emerged in Afghanistan in 1994, which far exceeded the popular support for the extreme political agenda they represented (Rashid 2000).

Some terrorist campaigns resemble activist performances, as their prospect of moving the enemy audience into the desired behavior is very slim. This is the case for instance when goals are not linked to withdrawal of forces from a foreign country or changing conditions

for a minority in a specific part of the country, but instead aim at fundamentally changing the nature of a society for the entire population. Such cases include the left-winged terrorism of the Italian Red Brigades, French Action Direct, and the German RAF; the right-winged terrorism of the Oklahoma bomber, Timothy McVeigh; or the 7/7 2005 London bombings. These campaigns have high visibility and resonance, and scare the intended target, but have almost no chance of achieving the claimed target. We should therefore interpret their actions, not in relation to the enemy audience but in relation to potential supporters, also known as 'propaganda by deed' (Chaliand and Blin 2007).

Instrumental terrorism

Terrorism is sometimes an instrumental strategy to obtain a specific goal, which can be related to both constituent and enemy audiences. This is particularly the case when terrorism is undertaken by actors who are also engaged in other political activities. To affect the enemy audience, terrorist campaigns work as a means of dissuasion by making an alternative course of action more attractive. In Wilkinson's definition of terrorism, emphasis is placed on the instrumental logic: "It is premeditated and aims to create a climate of extreme fear or terror; it is directed at a wider audience or target than the immediate victims of the violence; it inherently involves attacks on random and symbolic targets, including civilians" (Wilkinson 1992). There are several examples of terrorism working, thus qualifying terrorism as a rational strategy: The British withdrawal from the mandate of Palestine following attacks of the Irgun group and the Stern gang; the withdrawal of the US from Lebanon following attacks of Hezbollah in Lebanon and abroad; and the increased autonomy of regions with violent secessionist movements across Europe, the

Basque region in Spain, Northern Ireland etc. Even the actions of al Qaeda, however apocalyptic they are sometimes portrayed to be, can be seen as using terrorism instrumentally. The 1998 declaration by the World Islamic Front, which was co-signed by Osama Bin Laden, read "to kill the Americans and Their allies – civilian and military – is an individual duty incumbent upon every Muslim in all countries, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Holy Mosque from their grip" (Lawrence 2005). The attacks against the US embassies in East Africa in 1998, the USS Cole in Aden harbor in 2000, and the attacks on 9/11 2001 can be seen as instrumental to obtain this goal, particularly as the US after much debate in 2003 redeployed 4,500 US troops, leaving only about 500 US military personnel in the Saudi Kingdom.

Actors using terrorism instrumentally will in relation to video-recorded decapitations need to balance the benefits of an extremely effective tactic in relation to the enemy audience against the potential loss of legitimacy from the constituent audience. Organizations like Hezbollah or Hamas, which are also involved in activities that more so than terrorism require popular support have the most to lose. Even an organization like al Qaeda, which is primarily engaged in terrorism, will need to consider this tradeoff carefully as it has ambitions of popular mobilization. This does not necessarily mean that they will not use video-recorded decapitations as a tactic, all three organizations mentioned above employ suicide attacks, which have undoubtedly cost them legitimacy. As mentioned above, being successful is also a source of legitimacy, and in the case of suicide attacks, they are reportedly 11 times more effective in terms of damage than other forms of terrorism (Pape 2005). Video-recorded decapitations have also been demonstrated to be a very effective weapon. In 2007 South Korea pulled out of the NATO ISAF mission after

Taliban had conditioned the release of 22 captured members of a Korean church group on this. It is likely that the decision to pull out was influenced by the incident three years earlier, when a Korean hostage was decapitated in Iraq, as the South Korean government refused to pull out of that country, something the South Korean government could not afford a repetition of.

The al Qaeda top is aware of this tradeoff between making an impact on the enemy and retaining legitimacy in the constituent audience. In two recovered letters from Zawahiri⁷ and Atiyah (Combating Terrorism Center 2006), Zarqawi is urged to shoot hostages rather than decapitating them. Zawahiri writes, “we are in a battle, and more than half of this battle takes place in the media” (Zawahiri 2005). This raises the question if the reason why the tactic has not spread is top-down control of the al Qaeda leadership. The quasi-official outlets exercise tight control of the content in the primary outlets of on-line material, and if you cannot get your material out, why produce it? However, Islamist militancy is not a monocentric organization with Osama bin Laden at the top. Bin Laden and Zawahiri have not had a monopoly on defining the objectives of the Islamist Militant movement, and they are continuously challenged (Brown 2007). Similarly do the quasi-official websites not have monopoly of the dissemination of jihadist material, there are an estimated 6,500 Jihadist websites to disseminate the material from (Weimann 2006) and there is a demand for the decapitation videos, for instance they almost always surface on computers of the defendants in terrorist court cases (O’Neill 2007). Even though most Islamist scholars avoid openly supporting

the videotaped decapitations, there are Muslim clergy who support and defend the decapitation practice (Jawa Report 2007).

The tactic of decapitation will be favored by instrumental terrorism under the rare circumstances when loss of legitimacy in the constituent audience is less important than the impact on the enemy audience, or if the effect on the enemy audience and the constituent audience can somehow be separated, for instance by hiving off parts of the organization. A historical example of this is Fatah that with some success hived off ‘Black September’ at a time when Fatah could not afford to alienate supporters abroad, but at the same time needed to carry out terrorist operations to avoid imploding (Chaliand and Blin 2007).

Emergent terrorism

Terrorist entities sometimes emerge out of a non-organized and non-violent social setting. Attempts to clarify by quantifiable background variables such as poverty, repression, etc. under which circumstances these emergents appear, have only been able to explain a very small part of the variation (see for instance Bjørgo 2005; Urdal 2006). Similarly, attempts to find out what distinguishes the individuals who end up in political violence, and particularly terrorism, have hitherto been unsuccessful (Sageman 2004). Instead, it appears that these emergent terrorist entities are the contingent outcome of the availability of the relevant material and immaterial factors.

Analytically it is very different to view terrorism as an emergent phenomenon rather than an instrumental choice. Instead of focusing on interests and motives of the actor, the actor is seen as one systemic component, among other material and immaterial components that need to be present for terrorism to emerge. The terrorists provide credibility to the theorist whose ideology he/she employs and relies on, terrorism provides content for the press it

⁷ Zawahiri is generally portrayed as the theorist and second in command of al Qaeda. See for instance Burke 2004.

relies on, etc. A terrorist phenomenon such as video-recorded decapitations emerges because the factors, broadband connections, grievances, a militant ideology, terrorist software etc. are all available (Harrow 2008; Knorr Cetina 2005). The factors needed for terrorism must be available simultaneously in a given location, but due to globalization they may, through different forms of connectivity, be available even if they physically are located far from one another (Olesen 2005). For an emergent terrorist entity in Germany, the ideology may come from Egypt, the software from Britain and Spain; the maneuverability may partially be a matter of the open liberal German society and the inadequately governed areas in Pakistan where they received training.

The complex nature of modern societies means that factors for a variety of phenomena are available at any given time and result in a number of complex outcomes. It is however only those able to reproduce the factors that allow them to come into being, which are relevant beyond the individual occurrence. In the cases of violence, authorities will generally provide negative sanctions. Thus, positive feedback not only needs to reproduce the factors necessary for terrorism, it needs to reproduce the factors quicker than they are depleted by counter measures from the authorities. The Oklahoma bombing by the right-wing extremist Timothy McVeigh is one such example, which did not mobilize resources. According to this logic, emergent terrorism relies exclusively on its impact on the constituent audience and the possibility to mobilize resources from this audience. The enemy audience is relevant, only, when making an impact on it creates legitimacy among the constituent audience. The constituent audience can be a relatively small group, as the resources needed for terrorism are limited. In fact, it may be an advantage for a terrorist phenomenon to have a small well-defined constituency, as a small constituency

possibly feels more individually catered for and therefore more inclined to contribute resources (Gerlach 2001). Conversely, a social system, operating illegally probably requires a critical size, below which it will be too difficult for individuals to find each other.

Video-recorded decapitations will be a favored tactic by emergent terrorists if the necessary resources, including functioning software, can be mobilized. The fact that a large part of the potential supporters of Islamist militancy regards this tactic as illegitimate should not be prohibitive, as popular mobilization is not needed. The popularity of the video-recorded decapitations suggests that the limiting factor is not the mobilization of traditional resources, like money, recruits or legitimacy, but rather functioning software.

A combination of emergent and instrumental terrorism

Instrumental terrorism and emergent terrorism are ideal types that are not likely found in the real world. Islamist militant entrepreneurs make critical resources available to Islamist militants around the globe, intending to facilitate terrorism. Individuals in Pakistan make training available to western Islamists, whilst individuals in Sweden make money available to Somali Islamists, and Fatwas and encouragement to commit terrorism are published and distributed with the intent to create terrorism by actors in various settings. The motives for those who make the different factors available vary. Those who edit and disseminate propaganda on the Internet may strive for peer recognition in their own limited online jihadist community; those who produce the ideology and frame, be it Osama bin Laden or Abu Hamza, compete with other ideologists for adherents and status; those who provide training in Pakistan may wish to legitimize their own existence to their economic sponsors in Saudi Arabia, who in turn need to legitimize their

own wealth and distance themselves from the perceived corruptness of the Saudi Royal Family.

The more, critical factors for terrorism are made available from a single actor, the more it makes sense to view terrorism as an instrumental choice. Organized terror groups like al Qaeda before 9/11 2001 or Laskhkar-e-Taiba for instance only rely on few critical factors outside their direct organizational structure, i.e. contact persons when traveling, individuals who surrender passports, act as couriers etc. Similarly, the more critical factors are made available from a multitude of actors the more it makes sense to view it as an emergent phenomenon. The home-grown terrorists seen in recent years in the West, who themselves only provide their person but take everything else (e.g. ideology, tactic, target selection, software, choice of explosives) from other sources are probably close to the emergent ideal type. Nonetheless, not even these fit the ideal type; the 7/7 2005 London bombers travelled to Pakistan and possibly made contact with organized Islamist militants who possibly influenced the action making it possible to view it as an instrumental action (Intelligence and Security Committee 2009). Conversely, even the 9/11 attack has emergent properties. The Hamburg cell was self-mobilized, self-radicalized and ready to go to Chechnya to fight, when the group by coincidence met a man on a train who put them in contact with the al Qaeda network. Over the next year he took them to Afghanistan and made them the primary component in the plot (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States 2004). This meeting was a twist of faith that arguably changed the course of history and could not possibly have been theorized or predicted. However, it was made possible because there was an emergent Islamist Militant social phenomenon, where individuals could recognize one another and an international order,

which permitted potential terrorists to travel from Germany to Afghanistan and to attend flight training in the US. One could even speculate: If the meeting on the train had not taken place, would the Hamburg cell have found a way to Afghanistan anyway, or would the man on the train have found someone else?

The difficulty in separating instrumental terrorism from emergent terrorism means that considerations of the broader Muslim public are probably never completely absent. This would disfavor video-recorded decapitations if this tactic provoke a broad sense of illegitimacy. Conversely, the presence of an emergent element makes it difficult to be completely instrumental, thus favoring video-recorded decapitations.

WHY NOT VIDEO-RECORDED DECAPITATIONS?

From an evolutionary perspective, anything is rarely just deselected; typically, something has been selected instead because it was been better at reproducing itself under the given environmental constraints. Examining the contentious repertoire in the venues where it would be expected to find video-recorded decapitations, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the West, provides insights into the reproductive inadequacies of video-recorded decapitations. The argument for looking at the Iraq scene is that this is where the tactic was (re) invented. The argument for looking at Afghanistan is that there has previously been a transfer of tactics, fighters and ideology between Iraq and Afghanistan, and the argument for looking at the West is that the low technical requirements and the utiliza-

tion of the Internet should make the weapon perfectly suited for the West.

Iraq

Iraq is characterized by a number of organized groups involved in various forms of violence, which suggest a need for legitimacy that video-recorded decapitations would go against. Nonetheless, the level of brutality in Iraq suggests that extreme violence can be reproduced unaffected by a legitimacy deficit. However, this might change, as the level of violence in Iraq has been declining since 2008, and the competition for power in a post-war Iraq is increasing. As mentioned above, Zarqawi changed his modus operandi to be able to take the al Qaeda 'franchise'. The fact that al Qaeda in Iraq stopped its practice of decapitations can therefore be seen as an instrumental decision, not to accommodate a need for legitimacy in a local constituency, but to accommodate al Qaeda's central leadership which in turn attempted to accommodate an international constituency.

Why Ansar al-Sunna abandoned its practice of videotaped decapitations is less clear. Ansar al-Sunna has its origins in the Kurdish Ansar al-Islam, which had tight connections to al Qaeda (International Crisis Group 2003). There has however also been reported fighting between the al Qaeda in Iraq and Ansar al-Sunna (Brown 2007; International Crisis Group 2006). Ansar al-Sunna will therefore not necessarily have felt obliged to follow instructions from the al Qaeda leadership. However, the apparent fallout with al Qaeda in Iraq might be the reason why they opted against the Berg-styled decapitations that could be considered 'Zarqawi repertoire'. Ansar al-Sunna published its second last video-recorded decapitation in September 2005. June 10, 2006, three days after the death of Zarqawi, Ansar al-Sunna released a video of the decapitation of three men who were allegedly part of a Shiite death squad. The video

does not follow the Berg format, no flag, no orange jumpsuits, no row of 3-5 hooded armed men, etc. The video thus distances itself both from al Qaeda and from Ansar al-Sunna's own earlier practices. Ansar al-Sunna does not reference the killing of Zarqawi in the video. The timing of the video, three days after the death of Zarqawi, nine months after the group's last video, and none since, is almost in itself such a reference. It can be seen either as a message to the Islamist community, "we are taking Zarqawi's place, you can direct resources to us", or as a message to the Shiite government and the US, that: "you can kill Zarqawi, but we are still here and as much of a threat to you as Zarqawi was!"

Afghanistan

In the case of decapitations it makes best sense to analyze Afghanistan and Pakistan together, as most decapitations has been carried out by Taliban or Taliban-affiliated groups, for whom the border between the two countries is little more than an asset in relation to evading capture. Since the five decapitations in 2004, there have – as shown in table 1 – been between 17 and 36 decapitations every year in the two countries., of which, however, only three video-recorded decapitations. Even though the Taliban is involved in a variety of activities, the level of brutality, like in Iraq, suggests at least a niche for violence that would normally be considered illegitimate by the population.

In February 2008, Mullah Omar, head of the Taliban, reportedly issued an order to stop decapitations. Decapitation in Pakistan and Afghanistan since 2004 has been part of a local struggle rather than an international struggle. There have been examples of members of the Afghan National Army decapitating Taliban prisoners in retaliation for Taliban decapitations, followed by even more retaliations. Jihadist material from Afghanistan and Pakistan

(including decapitations) account for about 10 percent of the material on the quasi-official websites (Kimmage 2008). Afghan and Pakistani government forces have not maintained a continuous presence in the countryside of either of the two countries. In this power vacuum Taliban has exercised authority over parts of the territory either through continued presence or through sporadic raids. Intimidation of the local population into what the Taliban regard as a pious life has been an important component of Taliban's operations. This has been done through burning down of girls' schools, public beatings or murders of those perceived to have transgressed against the rules set up by the Taliban. The video material has possibly played a role in this intimidation strategy. However, lack of equipment and electricity suggests that it can only have played a minor role domestically; instead, for instance radio has been used (Oppel and Shah 2009).

The Taliban has chosen not to spend significant resources on video material catering for audiences in the Middle East or the West. Taliban is dominant in some of the areas where drug production is widespread. The Helmand province, where Taliban is present, is accountable for an estimated 93 percent of the world's production of opium (Walsh 2007). It is not proven that Taliban is orchestrating the opium production in Helmand, it is however an accessible source of income for the Taliban. It therefore seems that the Taliban does not have an incentive to spend its resources on catering for somebody outside the country possibly at the cost of its domestic strategy.

The West

Plots in the West since 2004 have been self-organized rather than centrally organized, where the actors involved generally have not had terrorist training and where weapons and explosives are not easily accessible. This leads to an

assumption that potential terrorists in the West would adopt forms of terrorism with great impact, easy access to material resources, and few demands to the skills of the perpetrators, regardless of a legitimacy deficit in the broader Muslim population or reservations from the leadership of al Qaeda.

Since the Berg decapitation in May 2004, four terrorist attacks have been carried out in the West: The 2004 Madrid bombings; the 2004 Amsterdam assassination of movie director, Theo van Gogh; the 2005 London bombings; and the 2007 car bombing of Glasgow airport. In addition to these, 28 foiled and failed plots at various stages have been discovered until the end of 2008⁸.

Mohammed Bouyeri, who killed Theo van Gogh, slit his throat after shooting and stabbing him to death. This, happening in November 2004, was probably a reference to the decapitations in Iraq, peaking at the same time. Slitting the victims throat after stabbing him on a public street, works however differently than decapitations – the Berg-style video-recorded decapitations in particular. It does not show the strength and the level of organization displayed in the Berg-style decapitations. This is also reflected in the press coverage, which paid relatively little attention to this particular detail of the assassination.

Two of the foiled plots in this time span reportedly involved decapitations, a 2006 plot to attack political targets in Canada and possibly behead the Prime Minister, and a February 2007 plot in the UK to kidnap a Muslim soldier and behead him live on the Internet. Both cases were tried in court and the evidence was found sufficient to convict the suspects. However, the accused in both cases did not appear to be very aware of security concerns, their

⁸ For details see author's webpage, www.harrov.ws

plans were not very far along, and no convincing practical details of how the plots were supposed to be carried out were laid out in court. Neither of the two can therefore be treated as clear-cut examples of spreading of the tactic of decapitations. Also laid out in court in the Canadian case was the idea of blowing up the parliament building with a large quantity of ammonium nitrate, very much the 'standard repertoire' of western homegrown terrorists. It is impossible to say what role the 'resistance to killing' played in the plots or would have played, if the would-be terrorists would have been able to carry the decapitations through or opted for a tactic allowing more distance to the victims⁹.

CONCLUSION

As a purely instrumental tactic to affect an enemy audience, video-recorded decapitations seem unrivalled. It has maximum visibility, maximum resonance and incite maximum fear. It also has a constituent audience, and the videos are widely circulated among sympathizers of Islamist militancy. Furthermore, the tactic utilizes technologies of the information age better than older forms of terrorism and it does not require access to explosives or skills of producing them, weapons training or any of the other technical hindrances that have caused numerous terrorist attacks to fail.

This paper points to three general reasons why video-recorded decapitations have not spread. Firstly, the tactic is less accessible than one might think, partly because sawing off somebody's head is extreme because it does not

permit keeping a distance to the victim, particularly for those not accustomed to extreme levels of violence, and partly because there is no functioning software for how to do this in a western context. Secondly, the tactic is only relevant in venues with good access to the Internet – or to solicit support from actors in these venues, for Iraq and Afghanistan this has apparently not been worth it. Thirdly, there is a trade-off between maximum effect on the enemy and retaining legitimacy in the constituency. For emergent terrorist phenomena, this becomes a problem if they cannot mobilize resources to reproduce themselves; actors often only last one attack and new terrorists therefore need to be recruited continuously. For instrumental use of terrorism, this primarily becomes a problem if a legitimacy deficit has consequences for other activities in the organization. Finally, a number of local circumstances may have contributed to making the tactic less attractive, like the need in the Iraqi context to distance oneself from Zarqawi.

As shown above, it can take years for a tactic to spread. The initial question why, eight years after the Daniel Pearl decapitation, and six years after the Nicholas Berg decapitation, there has not been a greater spread of the tactic of video-recorded decapitations, may be that it takes longer for the software components to adapt to the tactic. Especially in a western setting where the potential for video-recorded decapitations appear to be the greatest, it should be expected that if software is developed, it could become a preferred tactic.

Another unknown factor is how technological developments and wider access globally to the Internet may affect the usefulness of software. When broadband Internet access is made available to the global south, it will be possible to cater for a much wider audience with video-recorded decapitations. The need to solicit support from abroad has apparently not been a very important factor in Iraq or Af-

⁹ This is consistent with my findings in a different study, where I found remarkably little effect of the Iraq war and the insurgency in Iraq on terrorism in the West. (Harrow 2010a)

ghanistan. One could however imagine that other venues with a bigger need to mobilize financial resources and foreign fighters could take up the tactic, in for instance Nigeria or Somalia.

Tilly's argument about historical contentious phenomena being defined by their performances, appear also to hold true for contemporary terrorism as it seems that terrorists are quite limited when it comes to changing repertoire. In a time of globalization, where almost every piece of information is available to everybody, where everybody can travel, actors are still limited by what has been proven and tested as a functioning tactic in a situation similar to their own. There is a demand for decapitation videos; however, the production of these is associated with a loss of legitimacy unacceptable for organized groups with aspiration of popular mobilization. Ironically, the organized groups are possibly because of their formal hierarchy the ones that could best overcome 'the resistance to killing' associated with this extreme form of killing. The situation in Iraq in 2004 where organized groups were unconcerned with losing legitimacy may not be unique, but is an exemption caused by the deep-felt resentment in large parts of the Muslim constituency following the invasion of Iraq.

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