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Islamist Terrorism and the “Pizza Effect”

By Mark Sedgwick

The purpose of this short essay is to suggest a new way of looking at the old question of how Islamist terrorism differs from other and better understood forms of terrorism, using the frames of globalization and localization and of the less well known but equally important phenomenon of the “pizza effect,” the nature of which will be summarized below. Using these frames, the essay argues that research is urgently needed in one area which has so far been almost totally ignored: the impact on young Muslims living in the West, and especially in Europe, of widespread understandings of Islam as an inherently violent religion.

In the narrowest sense, globalization is often defined as the increasing interconnection of economies. In a wider sense, it may be defined as the consequences of the tendency for previously separate regional systems to become fused into a single global system, not just in economic life but also in political, intellectual and cultural terms. In this sense, globalization alters the status of centers and peripheries. In the seventeenth century, Istanbul and Cairo were important centers in the Middle Eastern regional system; Paris, London and New York were irrelevant, belonging to different and separate regional systems. As regional systems merged in the nineteenth century, first Paris and London and then New York and Washington became global centers, in relation to which Istanbul and Cairo were peripheries.

Cultural and intellectual trends in Paris and New York had significantly more influence on Istanbul and Cairo than was the case the other way round – although there was cultural and traffic in both directions, with Parisians and New Yorkers reading the Rumi and the 1,001 Nights. Similarly, political decisions in London and Washington had more impact on Istanbul and Cairo than was the reverse—though once again there was traffic in both directions, with decisions taken in Istanbul becoming the chief issue in the British general election of 1876, and decisions made by a native of Cairo, Muhammad Atta, having significant impact on the United States after 2001.

“Localization” is a less frequently used term, but is the essential corollary of globalization. If globalization is about production, localization is about consumption, which is not just passive. In business terms, a global product such as Microsoft Word has to be localized by, for example, producing a version with Arabic language support. In cultural terms, localization may be deliberate (like Microsoft’s) or spontaneous. Rumi, for example, was deliberately localized for the US market by translating his poetry from Persian into English.

More interesting and often more important is spontaneous localization. Since being translated, Rumi has been read by millions of American readers, only a tiny fraction of whom were Muslim. American readers of Rumi, then, necessarily understand his poetry in their own way. For them, Rumi does not speak of the relationship between the Sufi

mystic and Allah, but of something else—possibly the spiritual dilemmas of life in the big city. The American reading of Rumi is the spontaneous localization of Rumi.

International transfer in a globalized world is often a recursive process, as is recognized by the term “pizza effect.” The original Italian pizza was a simple dish, consisting of bread with a tomato topping. Taken to America by Italian emigrants, the pizza was developed there into its present more complex form, which after the Second World War spread to Europe—including Italy. The contemporary pizza is now taken to be purely Italian, but it is not. The pizza effect can be found everywhere, for example in the homes of cosmopolitan Turks whose reading of Rumi derives from the American reading.

Applying these frames to Islamist terrorism, both globalization and localization are clearly visible. The “pizza effect” is less obvious, but may be important. One possible instance of the “pizza effect” is identified below; however there may well be other such instances.

As is well known, terrorism became a global phenomenon in the late nineteenth century, as anarchist “outrages” spread across Europe to the United States, and also to the Middle East. The first recognizably modern terrorist action in the Middle East was carried out in 1896, when armed members of the Hunchakian - an Armenian nationalist group that included former members of the Russian People’s Will group - occupied the headquarters of the Ottoman Bank in Istanbul, issued demands they did not seriously expect to be met, and threatened to kill off their (mostly foreign) hostages. By the 1970s, terrorism had become an even more global phenomenon, with members of the Japanese Red Army assisting the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in what they understood to be a global anti-imperialist struggle. Both the logic and most of the techniques of terrorism were by then well established, but were further developed in the 1980s by the addition of “suicide bombing.”

Islamist terrorism, then, can be seen as a localized form of a global phenomenon. “Suicide bombing,” for example, has been localized by being reinterpreted as “self-martyrdom,” using and developing the established Islamic concept of the shahid—initially understood as one who dies in the cause of God, not one who blows himself up. The 1970s global struggle against imperialism, and especially against the United States as the foremost imperialist power, has become the global struggle against Crusader-Zionist aggression against Islam, and especially against the United States as the foremost power in the Crusader-Zionist front. Further examples of localization of globalized techniques and analyses could easily be given.

Additional examples of the pizza effect are less obvious, but one may perhaps be found in contemporary conceptions of jihad, of which there are two main varieties. In one conception, jihad essentially denotes an endeavor in a good or Godly cause. In this conception, warfare is only one variety of jihad, and not the most important one. Warfare is justified principally in self-defense. In an alternative conception, jihad essentially denotes the use of violence against non-Muslims. The first conception is common to most

contemporary Muslims. The second conception is common to Islamist terrorists and to hawkish commentators such as Daniel Pipes. [1] This is a remarkable division of opinion.

Daniel Pipes, who sometimes quotes sources such as *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (the standard reference work among scholars) in his support, is undoubtedly right in a historical sense. In the tenth century, for example, jihad denoted warfare against non-Muslims. Self-defense was relevant only in so far as determining who was obliged to take part in that warfare—in Western terms, it was part of *jus in bello* (rules relating to fighting war), not *jus ad bellum* (just war theory). By the nineteenth century, however, as globalization produced a single unified system of international law, Muslim states such as the Ottoman Empire had for all practical purposes abandoned the Sharia rules of jihad, though they sometimes used the concept for propaganda purposes. The old rules of jihad were used only by occasional non-state groups fighting European occupation, as in Chechnya or Algeria. Far more widespread was the reinterpretation of jihad which stressed non-military struggle, and incorporated much of nineteenth-century international *jus ad bellum*—notably the importance of self-defense as a criterion, generally considered to derive ultimately from Saint Augustine of Hippo. [2] Localization is clearly visible. This reinterpretation has since become the standard understanding among Muslims.

The “pizza effect,” then, explains dovish Western commentators finding echoes of Saint Augustine in jihad theory. Something similar may also be happening in the opposite direction—though Daniel Pipes is clearly not responsible for Osama bin Laden’s conceptions of jihad. These may draw on localized forms of globalized analyses and techniques for their implementation, but they clearly derive from an alternative stream of Islamic thought which never accepted the nineteenth-century modifications that became generally accepted elsewhere: nineteenth-century Wahhabism. There is, however, some risk of a “pizza effect” among Muslims who know Western languages, who are separated from the societies in which conceptions of jihad as self defense are common, and whose knowledge of Islam is often poor.

So far as I know, there has been no research on the impact on Muslims living in the West of the oft-repeated view of jihad as “really” about violence against non-Muslims, though I know of one application for funding to perform such research which was—unfortunately—rejected. As is well-known, many young Muslims in Europe grow up alienated both from the older generation of immigrant Muslims and from the societies in which they live, which they regard as rejecting and excluding them. For alienated and rebellious young men and women who are labeled “Muslims” whether they are religious or secular, the image of a violent Islam which is feared by the West (and rejected by their parents) might well have significant appeal. [3] The ground might thus be unwittingly prepared for later fertile reception of terrorist definitions of jihad.

Understanding of Islamist terrorism through the frames used by this essay has clear implications for policy. Globalized aspects of Islamist terrorism may be addressed by tried and tested methods developed in the past, and globalized aspects may be found beneath localized forms. Localized forms, however, also demand localized remedies. Most importantly, the use of these frames suggests that research is needed into the “pizza

effect,” and that more attention needs to be paid to the risk that certain Western portrayals of Islam may be part of the problem, not the partial solution to the problem that their proponents presumably intend.

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NOTES:

[1] See, for example, Daniel Pipes, “What is Jihad?” New York Post December 31, 2002, available <http://www.danielpipes.org/article/990>.

[2] An excellent study of past and present understandings of jihad is Rudolph Peters, *Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979).

[3] In the Muslim world, “Muslim” generally denotes religiosity first, and identity second. In Europe, it is often a proxy for ethnic identity, imposed from outside.

Terrorism and the ‘Invisible’

By Michael Barkun

Much of the fear terrorism evokes is connected to its invisible character. Unlike states tied to fixed geographical locations, terrorists have, as is frequently said, “no return address.” The organizations are clandestine, the members melt into the general population, and “sleeper cells” may lie dormant for long periods waiting for the opportune time to strike. Although the weapons terrorists actually employ are visible enough – bombs, box-cutters, and the like – governments and citizens are often obsessively concerned about tools and tactics they might use, particularly those with means of dispersal that are invisible: biological, chemical, and radiological. Thus, fear of the unseen, both in terms of perpetrators and methods, provides contemporary terrorism with a particularly sinister edge.

Yet it is not automatically clear what it means to say that something is “invisible.” This article employs the term in a broader sense than its common usage. Here, it refers not merely to what cannot be seen, but to anything that cannot be detected by the unaided senses. The dangers connected to invisible terrorism are those that are either produced intentionally by terrorists or believed by potential victims to be produced intentionally. Thus, the invisible dangers associated with terrorism may be real, in the sense that they reflect the actions of actual terrorists and weapons; or they may rest on false attributions, for example, the frequently cited but specious link between Sadaam Hussein and the September 11th hijackers.

Terrorists can secure intentional invisibility through four principle means: organizational secrecy; secret communications; technical invisibility; and crowd invisibility. Organizational invisibility occurs through such well-known means as cellular organizations; the careful vetting of recruits; tests of loyalty; and other techniques through which secret societies of many kinds have historically maintained their boundaries against spies, informants, and surveillance.

Similarly, secret communications within clandestine groups has a long history. Much of it involves forms of encryption, ranging from the primitive to the sophisticated. Some organizations have kept secrets from their own members through internal hierarchies with differential levels of knowledge. This creates a form of invisibility even within the organization, to the extent that the organization as a whole may attempt to be invisible vis-à-vis the outside world, while creating degrees of invisibility within, depending upon what has been revealed to different classes of members.

The more hostile the relationship between a group and the larger society, the less adequate these techniques will be for maintaining invisibility. Where terrorists are concerned, therefore, one often finds two additional modalities, technical invisibility and crowd invisibility.

Technical invisibility refers to invisibility that systematically seeks to defeat the human senses and the attempts of authorities to artificially enhance them. Especially since September 11th, terrorists and governments compete; the former seeking to conceal, the latter seeking to unmask. Airport screening has become increasingly elaborate and with more attention being given to technologies that can detect minute quantities of dangerous chemicals and biological agents. Large cities are also using closed-circuit television to monitor public spaces. Research continues for ever subtler ways to detect behavioral cues that might separate terrorists from innocent members of the public. But however much the technology of detection has advanced, it has not produced the desired results. Neither governments nor the general public believe that all terrorists or weapons can be detected, or that the threat of a major attack can be reduced to something approaching zero. To that extent, terrorists are perceived as having maintained some degree of technical invisibility. Each new attack validates the perception.

Terrorists may utilize crowd invisibility, a condition encapsulated by the well-known phrase, “hiding in plain sight.” When the qualities that differentiate individuals can no longer be detected, as in a crowd, one person seems very like another. This is true by extension whether the class is made up of airline passengers, luggage, or shipping containers. Small differences cease to be noticeable in large groupings made up of superficially similar members.

Differences become of great importance if some members of a class are more dangerous than others. In that case, their ability to melt into a population and take advantage of crowd invisibility becomes an acute problem. Among the alternatives are either to carefully examine each member of the class, a laborious process, or to find some technology that ferrets out those that present dangers. Much of the attention given to the technological extension of the senses to defeat technical invisibility is also driven by the dilemma of crowd invisibility. To an extent, then, the two forms of invisibility are often linked. The challenge is to distinguish the particular suitcase, passenger, or shipping container that matters from all the rest, an enterprise that seeks to frustrate both technical and crowd invisibility. The same may hold true for so-called “sleepers,” whose members live conformist and superficially blameless lives, melting into the environment. This sub-group maintains a functional invisibility until such time as they are activated, unless members falter in their conformity to the community’s mores.

While these modalities are intentionally chosen by groups with hostile intent, putative targets may also identify invisible dangers where none in fact exist. These are cases of attributed invisibility. They occur in three principle ways: through over-inclusive classes, belief in conspiracy theories, and as a result of false or fragmentary intelligence.

Over-inclusive classes occur as a variant of the crowd invisibility problem. In this case, however, because observers’ difficulties are compounded by situations in which there is contact between groups with dissimilar cultures or belief systems, there is a strong likelihood that dangers will be invented as opposed to being recognized. At least one side, and sometimes both, will be burdened by substantial ignorance of the other. As a result observers lack the ability to correctly interpret behavior and intentions, and are

likely to impute risk and danger where none exists. In such a condition of ignorance, the entire observed group may seem both sinister and partially “invisible” due to its opaqueness to outsiders. This invisibility and particularly the associations of dangers with an amorphous “other” will be amplified when some of its practices cannot be publicly viewed because they take place behind the doors of homes, houses of worship, or other facilities. The effect of observers’ ignorance is to project danger on the other based on their own fears rather than on clear evidence.

Conspiracy theories are a more straight-forward form of attributed invisibility, because they offer a world-view built around imagined secrets. They do so because the conspiracist makes three cardinal assumptions: that nothing happens by accident; that everything is connected; and that nothing is as it seems. Thus the visible world, seen naively through the senses, is said to hide the real but invisible workings of evil. With the theory as a template, the conspiracist can then, as it were, “decode” the clues available in the visible world. Indeed, one can imagine situations in which both terrorists and their potential victims conceptualize each other through mirroring conspiracy theories, each imputing invisible perpetrators and weapons to the other.

Fragmentary or erroneous intelligence provides a clearer case. The cliché metaphor of “connecting the dots” presumes that enough pieces of valid information exist to construct an accurate representation. However, not all of the information may be valid, or there may be too few pieces from which to produce a coherent narrative. Whether or not it is possible to determine the validity of the information, the temptation may be to interpolate enough potential “facts” to create a plausible picture, but one which will presumably be consistent with pre-existing prejudices and expectations, including expectations about invisible perpetrators and weapons.

It remains only to emphasize that the fear invisibility engenders in potential victims is not lost on terrorists, who recognize that invisibility can be manipulated as a weapon. While the obvious advantage of invisibility is avoiding detection, there are two additional benefits. The first is the likelihood that potential targets will significantly over-estimate terrorists’ numbers and capabilities. Such mis-estimations were commonly made by nineteenth-century governments facing dissident secret societies, and there is little reason to think that this tendency has ceased. The second and more subtle effect, alluded to in much of the preceding, is the fear generated by the invisible. For those who live in a culture imbued with a materialist and scientific ethos, the presence of unseen dangers is particularly disturbing. They fill the world with mysterious and malevolent forces, transforming benign environments into, to use the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s evocative phrase, “landscapes of fear.”

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The Modern Terrorist Threat to Aviation Security

By James J.F. Forest

During this busy holiday season, much is being said by pundits and policymakers about the potential vulnerabilities of today's global aviation system. While no specific threats have been reported, there is a widespread fear based upon an extensive history of attacks, ranging from hijackings and in-flight bombings to surface-to-air missile. Most recently, authorities from the Saudi Arabian interior ministry arrested 172 suspected terrorists in April 2007 after uncovering a plot to hijack several airplanes and fly them into oil facilities and other critical infrastructure targets in that country. [1]

In the summer of 2006, law enforcement agencies foiled a plot to simultaneously detonate homemade bombs on at least 10 U.S. airliners while en route from London to the United States (US). According to U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, the suspects planned to smuggle a relatively small amount of homemade liquid explosives onboard disguised as sports drinks. [2] "If they had succeeded, there could have been thousands of lives lost and an enormous economic impact with devastating consequences for international air travel." [3] Fortunately, arrests in Pakistan led United Kingdom (UK) and US officials to a British Muslim terrorist cell, which disrupted the attack on American targets. Airports in the United States and the UK were put on red alert (meaning a potential attack could be imminent), and all liquids were banned from carry-on luggage. Furthermore, numerous suspects were questioned, including 24 British-born Muslims and seven Pakistanis. [4] Government authorities tested the explosive liquids and established a three ounce liquid limit for carry on items to eliminate the possible risk. To date, passengers are still restricted when bringing liquids onboard and those rules may remain in place forever. [5]

Following this attempt to carry out simultaneous suicide attacks on commercial aircraft, U.S. airports remained on high alert for nearly a year. Among law enforcement professionals, the plot resulted in a heightened awareness of the creativity and innovative thinking of today's terrorists. Thus, when officials discovered an Arabic-language video clip on the Internet in October 2007 illustrating how to convert a remote-control toy car into a detonator for a bomb, Transportation Security Administration officers nationwide stepped up their scrutiny of passengers carrying remote-control toys aboard airplanes. [6] Indeed, we should not be surprised in the future when other ordinary items that passengers would expect to carry on board without difficulty are suddenly given additional scrutiny because new intelligence indicates they could possibly be used in a terror plot. This dimension of creativity and innovation is a hallmark of the most lethal terrorist groups.

In truth, terrorists—at least the most sophisticated and lethal ones—learn from each other and are continually devising new and creative ways to wreak havoc and murder. [7] Attacks which have not yet occurred, but for which we are ill-prepared, could include using an aircraft's in-flight oxygen circulation system to infect the passengers and crew

with biological pathogens or unleashing a deadly chemical agent in the cockpit that renders the pilot and crew unconscious and causes the plane to crash. One could imagine a rash of in-flight food poisonings or attempts to corrupt signals from the air traffic control system in order to re-direct planes into each other or crash land in low-visibility conditions.

During the October 2007 “toy car scare”, additional scrutiny was initiated in part due to intelligence, but also because—as one federal official noted—remote-control toys might have been used already by terrorists in Sri Lanka and India. [8] Overall, as Bruce Hoffman recently observed, we should anticipate that terrorists are constantly searching for new vulnerabilities and adapting and adjusting to our countermeasures. [9]

Another form of vulnerability stems from the contemporary aviation environment. This ever-expanding global system has seen increases in (1) the number of airplanes in the sky carrying passengers and cargo, (2) the size of these airplanes (like the new Dreamliner), and (3) the number of locations to which one can now fly. Terrorists—much like criminals, insurgents and other violent non-state actors—exploit vulnerabilities in the systems they target, and these systems are only as strong as their weakest link. Thus, as the commercial aviation system becomes more globally interconnected, the overall impact of these measures at U.S. airports has an important, but relatively minor impact on the aviation sector worldwide. While airports in Europe and North America responded to the rash of hijackings and bombings during this period, many other countries—particularly in Africa and Asia—found it difficult to impose most of these costly security measures, thus providing vulnerabilities that could be exploited. The globalized aviation system, which includes numerous developing countries, is vulnerable and plagued with substandard security capabilities, corruption, bribery, and weak governance. Additionally, the Internet provides worldwide access to all types of information that could be useful to terrorists, including flight schedules, specific details and diagrams of both aircraft and airports, and reports of successful terrorist tactics and countermeasures developed by governments.

In a related area of concern, the nature of our response to the global threat to aviation relies on the strength of the partnership between governments and the private sector and how involved each want to be in diminishing the threat. In general, the aviation sector is driven by free market competition. Thus, airlines must maintain an emphasis on convenience and cost-savings; making investment in costly security measures relatively difficult. Among governments, we have seen bloated bureaucracies, a lack of intelligence sharing, and an overarching tendency to implement security policies in response to an attack that has already occurred, rather than embracing measures that might prevent an attack from occurring.

Beginning in the late 1960s, increasingly robust layers of security measures were put in place in response to hijackings. Yet, after four decades, the aviation sector was still vulnerable, as demonstrated by the events of September 11, 2001. Since then, we have seen additional security layers such as reinforced cockpit doors, armed pilots, increased presence of air marshals, and an overall increased awareness of the threat worldwide.

Therefore, the post-9/11 security environment may be one in which the threat to aviation is lower than it has been in the past, but in-flight bombings are still a possibility.

On August 24, 2004, at approximately 11pm local time, two Chechen females, Satsita Dzhebirkhanova and Amanta Nagayeva, carried out separate suicide bombings on a Siberia Airlines flight and a Volga-Avia Express flight. Chechen field commander Shamil Basayev claimed responsibility for the bombings in an open letter published on the Chechen separatists' websites less than a month later. The letter noted that the bombings had cost his organization roughly \$4,000—a small price to pay for killing 89 people. [10]

Responding to events is insufficient; modern aviation security requires preventive measures. While these new measures may inconvenience passengers and create some inefficiency, they will increase the breadth and depth of intelligence gathering and sharing worldwide. Additionally, government officials should no longer underestimate the adaptive nature of terrorists. Terrorism is a form of asymmetric warfare, where the statistically weaker enemy will try to attack its stronger opponent in ways they do not expect. The threat posed by innovative enemies requires a robust government response that does more than harden targets. In addition to examining the potential capabilities of terrorists to do harm to others by targeting airplanes and airports, we must commit ourselves to the study of terrorist ideologies, strategies, and motivations. We must educate both law enforcement and intelligence agencies in all countries about how our enemies might try to “game the system” and exploit new, perhaps even hidden, vulnerabilities in aviation security. Only then will we be able to respond to the threat with greater sophistication and success.

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NOTES:

[1] “Saudis foil ‘air attack plotters,’” BBC News April 27, 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6599963.stm.

[2] According to authorities, the formula included three components that would be assembled in flight. The main explosive was to be Hexamethylene Triperoxide Diamine (HMTD), a homemade explosive that has been used in several recent terrorist attacks. Another homemade explosive was to be used as an explosive initiator: Triacetone Triperoxide (TATP) that can be made from ordinary, commercial items like hair treatments, a car battery, drain cleaner and nail polisher remover. The third part of the formula involved an improvised detonator made from disposable cameras. Scientists at Sandia National Laboratory conducted a test using the formula, and when a small amount of liquid in a container was hit with a tiny burst of electrical current, a large explosion followed. See “Plot Would Have Killed Thousands: Homeland Security Secretary

Michael Chertoff Offers Chilling Details about 2006 Airplane Plot and Current Terror Threats,” ABC News, 6 August 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com>.

[3] “Plot Would Have Killed Thousands: Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff Offers Chilling Details about 2006 Airplane Plot and Current Terror Threats,” ABC News, 6 August 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com>.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Eric Lipton, “Airport Security Alert for Toys With Remotes” New York Times, Oct. 2, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/02/us/nationalspecial3/02tsa.html?th&emc=th>[7] For more on this, see James J.F. Forest (ed.), *Teaching Terror: Strategic and Tactical Learning in the Terrorist World* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

[8] Eric Lipton, “Airport Security Alert for Toys With Remotes” New York Times, Oct. 2, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/02/us/nationalspecial3/02tsa.html?th&emc=th>.

[9] Bruce Hoffman, personal communication and presentation at West Point, 14 Sept. 2007

[10] Nick Paton Walsh. “Russia blames Chechen sisters for suicide bombings.” *The Guardian*, (April 22, 2005), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,1465936,00.html>; and “Explosions led to Russia crashes,” CNN World Edition, August 30, 2004. <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/europe/08/30/russia.planecrash/index.html>

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