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**Bowman-Grieve, L, Palace, M and Shortland, N**

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# **VENGEANCE AS A TERRORIST MOTIVATOR**

Psychology perspectives on community vengeance as a terrorist motivator

## VENGEANCE AS A TERRORIST MOTIVATOR

**Purpose:** The paper explores the concept of vengeance as a terrorist motivator.

**Approach:** The paper takes a community psychological perspective to examine vengeance in a number of forms. Firstly covering 'blood vengeance', it then examines vigilantism and death squads as functional examples of vengeful entities, as well as the morality of vengeance and the impact of propaganda on vengeance as a terrorist motivator. Finally, both group processes and individual factors relating to the promotion and use of vengeance in terrorism are covered.

**Findings:** Vengeance can be conceptualised in a number of ways: as a predisposing factor to individual involvement, a factor that contributes to keeping the movement 'bound' together (but which can also negatively affect the group's strategic logic), a factor in the escalation of violent activity through vigilantism, retribution and retaliation which can result in a perpetuation of a cycle of violence, and as a moral mandate that is ideologically rationalised and justified, with perceptions of righteousness and obligation inherent to it.

**Limitations:** The presented research is limited by the scarcely available data.

**Practical implications:** Efforts should be made to defuse vengeful motivations by tapping into collective identities of communities and incorporating multicultural values.

**Social implications:** Policy makers should be wary of scoring populist scores by ridiculing outgroup/religious elements as that creates potential for vengeful terror attacks.

**Originality/value:** The paper offers insights by renewing the neglected perspective of vengeance in terrorism research.

**Keywords:** Vengeance, Terrorism, Vigilantism, Death Squads, Community Psychology, Individual and Group Processes

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### Psychology perspectives on community vengeance as a terrorist motivator

The paper aims to explore terrorism from the perspective of vengeance, defined here as the act of punishing or harming someone in return for their perceived baleful action against the group one identifies with (i.e. the ingroup). The psychological process of becoming involved in terrorism is multi-faceted (also referred to as “radicalization”; see Horgan 2013) that involves a series of push and pull factors. While the media sometimes attribute terrorists’ motivations solely to their religious beliefs (Dawkins, 2006), none of the 9/11 plane bombers or Madrid train bombers, and only one of the London Underground bombers were known to have had religious upbringings or had attended religious schools (Ginges, Atran, Sachdeva, & Medin, 2011). Although religion may be used as an ideological justification for a political endeavour, it is a poor explanation of terrorism roots.

Early attempts to understand involvement in terrorism also rested on the assumption that they were “special” or different from members of the general population (i.e., those who would not engage in extremist violence). Such research sought to identify psychological “markers” (such as specific manifestations mental illness, narcissism, psychopathy or suicidal tendencies; Lasch, 1979; Lankford, 2013) or demographic differences (Sageman, 2004). However, these studies did not rely on valid behavioural measures, lacked methodological rigor and failed to prove that those involved in terrorism possessed higher levels of these qualities than the general population (Horgan, 2014). Similarly, as root causes are often speculated upon, poverty has also been found to be a poor predictor of terrorist involvement (Atran, 2011). As any single “silver bullet” explanations are inherently problematic, psychologists have increasingly looked to more process-based models that focus on (amongst other elements) close social networks (Sageman, 2008), perceived foreign

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meddling (Pape, 2005), hardship under occupation (Pape & Feldman, 2010), a sense of national humiliation (Merari, 2010), and frustrated expectations (Ginges et al, 2011). These appear to have a far better explanatory value in understanding extremist resentment. Building upon these approaches, and integrating research across several relevant fields of study, in this paper we focus on the need for vengeance (i.e., punishment or retribution for perceived or imagined injury, injustice or wrong suffered by the ingroup (Baumeister, 1997) – as a process that drives an individuals' motivation to be involved in extremist activity. While research (and indeed popular press) has discussed the role of revenge in the instigation of terrorism (e.g., Richardson, 2006), research to date has not fully explored this process.

This paper takes the perspective that vengeance is a terrorist motivator, identifying it as a potential driving force (albeit one of many) that can be used to facilitate initial involvement and continued engagement in terrorism at both an individual and group levels. Vengeance has been used in a variety of settings for why people engage in anti-social or violent actions (e.g., fire-setting; Barnoux & Gannon, 2014). Importantly, it is important to acknowledge that is only a minority of individuals engaging in actual acts of violence as most terror group members offer only support that may take logistical, financial or planning forms (Palasinski & Bowman-Grieve, 2017).

While the desire for vengeance is not institutional and stems from the emotions of the social members that comprise the group, particularly its leaders, it can be manifested in actions and activities which are strategic and logical; there are functional aspects to vengeance (Van Goozen, Van de Poll, Sergeant, Sergeant, & Van Goozen, 2013). However, even in such cases where vengeance is functional and

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strategic, an emotional imperative can be recognised as a driving force, with moral justifications constructed within in-group discourses as central to this.

Vengeance in circumstances related to terrorism (defined here as the threat or use of violence to achieve political goals) and terrorist movements usually occurs “on behalf of comrades or even the constituency the terrorist aspires to represent” (Crenshaw, 1981, *p.* 394). Examples of these include acts of violence by such movements as the FLN in Algeria in response to the French government execution of FLN prisoners; and Irish Republican acts of vengeance in response to acts carried out by the British military in Northern Ireland, such as the firing on civil rights demonstrators on Bloody Sunday. Thus, while the declaration of violence is often the prerogative of the state, what distinguishes terrorism from other forms of political violence is often the political environment itself (Crenshaw, 2000). Anecdotal evidence from individual explanations of involvement also supports the role of vengeance in this process, for example Michael Collins’ decision to join the Irish Republican Army; and Michael Baumann’s decision to join the Red Army Faction (Silke 2003). Bloom’s (2012) research on the involvement on women in violent extremist organizations also specifically identifies “revenge” for the loss of a loved one as a motivator for involvement.

Despite personal motives being intertwined with societal and organizational ones, however, it does not seem that the latter alone are enough to motivate potential terrorists at an individual level. It appears that the experience of individual traumatization and humiliation is also exploited by terror-sponsoring organizations to radicalise people with the partial aim to avenge the alleged loss, and in so doing, fight for ‘the cause’ (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006). Thus, as with many other risk factors, far more individuals will experience the risk factor that will engage in acts of

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terrorism. That said, while acknowledging that (1) vengeance is not a single, causal explanation for involvement in terrorism and (b) the role of vengeance is likely to interact with a host of other social, personal and political factors experienced by the individual, the role of vengeance identified elsewhere coupled with the lack of direct exploration of the topic warrants this research.

The desire for vengeance should not be limited to explanations of terrorist actions and activities; actors within governments are not immune from the desire to seek retribution for acts carried out against them and their citizens. Throughout history, acts of terrorism have elicited emotional responses from governments who feel pressure to react swiftly and with force; these measures are often widely supported by the public these governments represent (Silke, 2003). Although such forceful responses are proposed to act as a deterrent for future violence, in many cases they can have the opposite effect, facilitating the principle of reciprocity (Newman & Lynch, 1987) and acting as a driving force for further vengeful acts, thus perpetuating a cycle of violence that can escalate over time.

In this paper, a range of understandings of vengeance, identifiable within the sphere of terrorism and based on the 'desired outcomes' of the vengeful act, which have some explanatory value as a terrorist motivator, will be discussed. This list is not exhaustive, however, as it is used here to frame a community psychology discussion on vengeance as a terrorist motivator as it relates to blood vengeance, vigilantism, death squads, individual explanations, moral justifications, and group solidarity.

### **Blood Vengeance**

It may sound ironic that the classic definition of "blood vengeance" in the West has been retaliatory violence among the very Catholic Italian Cosa Nostra (Agius, 2016). Vengeance can be defined as "the infliction of harm in return for a perceived injury or

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insult or as simply getting back at another person” (Cota-McKinley, Woody, & Bell, 2001, p.343), which is related to a number of factors, such as righting a perceived wrong, deterring future injustices or promoting one’s own self-worth through a vengeful action (Cota-McKinley et al., 2001). An important element of the desire to carry out an act of vengeance is the willingness to make personal sacrifices in order to do so (Cota-McKinley et al., 2001). Similarly, the potential opportunity to exact retribution can be a catalyst motivating interest in joining a terrorist movement (Horgan & Horgan, 2004) aimed at restoring the balance the balance of suffering (Van Goozen et al., 2013, p. 272).

Current research suggests that some groups are more prone to vengeance than others. For example, men were found to hold more positive attitudes toward vengeance than women, with young people more prepared to act to achieve vengeance than older people (Cota-McKinley et al., 2001). Similarly, religious beliefs may also affect attitudes to vengeance, with more religious individuals showing more approval for vengeful attitudes (Silke, 2003). In a study examining the psychological responses of young Arabs to vengeance, in particular what they refer to as blood vengeance (Al-Krenawi, Slonim-Nevo, Maymon, & Al-Krenawi, 2001), it was found that the role of cultural and societal norms in sustaining a cycle of violence based on vengeance was important. The authors identified blood vengeance as a specific phenomenon in Arab societies, which differs from other acts of ongoing violence within the broader conflict, and which was found to be a long-standing Arab tradition rooted in the mainstream culture of the people involved.

In fact, the Arabic term for Vengeance, ‘*Thaar*’ means ‘*to ask for his blood*’ and/or ‘*to kill the killer*’. Because the term is so culturally embedded within the Arab world, seeking revenge is considered, at least by some, to be a ‘right’ or ‘duty’.

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However, it is not necessarily conceptualised on an individual level, with one person seeking vengeance for another, but rather as a means of promoting group action, so that the group is responsible for enacting vengeance to restore symmetry lost through the perceived wrong suffered by the ingroup (Jabbūr, Jabbūr, & Conrad, 2006). Consequently, if a male group member is killed, then a grievance against the group as a whole is believed to have been committed (Ginat, 1987), and retribution must be achieved by killing a member of the offending group in return; if a female is killed then tradition dictates that four males from the offending group should be killed in revenge. Additionally, if the murderer is female, then it is the duty of a female member of the aggrieved group to seek vengeance. Because blood vengeance in Arab society has become so culturally entrenched and embedded, it has become a normative reaction under specific circumstances and those who choose to carry out acts of vengeance, like the attacks on the headquarters of the French magazine Charlie Hebdo in 2015, are often considered to be heroes, praised for their self-sacrifice and elevated to a status of martyrdom (Al-Krenawi, & Graham, 1997).

Of course, vengeance is not limited to specific cultures and is recognised as a universal human phenomenon (Crombag, Rassin, & Horselenberg, 2003), purposefully driven by factors, such as the desire to equalize power (Van Goozen, 2013), to deter the infliction of future harm (Van Goozen, 2013) and to avenge humiliation (Lindeer, 2001).

The importance of group, organisational and community psychology is apparent here in relation to a ‘collective identity’, which can be used to promote, induce and encourage hatred and engagement in acts of violence against others (Post, 2010). As violence in a political setting has an aspect of sociability, which is equally true of direct action groups, paramilitaries, terrorist cells, or

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governments, it is worth acknowledging a related approach of social identity theory. Social Identity theory (Reicher, 1987; 1997) has recently been applied to the study of crowd dynamics, in which, crowd events are a function of the evolving interaction between the police and the present crowd (Earl et al., 2003). The basic premise here is that individual behaviour shifts from an autonomous personal identity, towards the contextually specified social identity (Reicher, 1984, 1987) as a function of dyadic inter-group interactions (Tajfel, 1982, Turner et al., 1987).

Thus, the collective identity of the crowd determines the normative boundaries for appropriate action (Reicher et al., 2004; Reicher et al., 2007). The Extended Social Identity Model (ESIM) emphasises the role of inter-group encounters in shaping crowd behaviour. Collective action is therefore a function of the social relations facing crowd participants, rather than individual pathology (Le Bon, 1985). Henceforth, the dyadic inter-group interaction holds pervasive influence over social identities, redefining the shape of collective action (Stott, Hutchinson & Drury, 2001). Motivation for violence against the “outgroup”, for example, stems from vengeance for behaviours by the “out-group” that are deemed illegitimate and indiscriminate by the “in-group”. The promotion of collective identity is of course not limited to explanations of blood vengeance but can be applied more broadly to the group and community psychology explanations of terrorist behaviour to follow later in this paper.

### **Vengeance and Vigilantism**

Vengeance might also be well discussed as a form of ‘vigilantism’. Vigilantism is most often taken to refer to the use of violence by individuals seeking to take the law into their own hands for grievances suffered by them or others known to them, thus fitting with most definitions of vengeance. Taking a criminological perspective, six

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necessary features have been associated with vigilantism: (i) it involves planning and premeditation; (ii) engagement is voluntary; (iii) it is a form of ‘autonomous citizenship’; (iv) it uses or threatens the use of force; (v) it arises when an established order is under threat from the transgression of institutionalized norms; (vi) it aims to control crime or other social infractions by offering assurances (or ‘guarantees’) of security both to participants and to others (Johnston , 1996). Arguably, these features of vigilantism can be applied to a specific set of behaviours often employed by terrorist movements and paramilitary organisations. Vigilantism of a paramilitary nature is most often manifested at the extreme end of the vigilante behaviour scale, (e.g. beatings, shootings, expulsions and executions).

Acts of vigilantism carried out by terrorist movements may be seen as more ‘directed’ perhaps than other forms of terrorist activity, i.e. the acts of violence are not directed at ‘innocent bystanders’, but rather at specific individuals who might see themselves or be considered as potential ‘legitimate’ targets due to their perceived involvement in certain types of ‘unacceptable’ behaviours (i.e. those behaviours deemed unacceptable by the paramilitary organisation and/or the community it claims to represent), thus warranting acts of revenge (Silke, 2000).

Thus, acts of vigilante violence are commonly used for disciplining and/or punishing in-group members who have digressed in some form, and for punishing out-group members for acts which have injured, harmed, humiliated or threatened the in-group. For example, in Northern Ireland, vigilante terrorism is seen to be carried out (in a high proportion of cases) against those ‘known’ to have committed crimes and/or engaged in anti-social behaviours, drug dealing, informing, joyriding, sex offences and burglary (Silke 2000). Similarly, such vigilantism may be directed inwards upon in-group members in response to some unacceptable deviation of

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behaviour from group norms, which is evidenced by biographies of former IRA members (Collins, & McGovern, 1998). Vigilante terrorism of this nature often requires the formation of 'punishment squads'; Individuals who form part of these squads are required to carry out violent, action against individuals who may very well be known to them within their community.

### **Death Squads**

Death Squads are clandestine, often paramilitary, groups who carry out assassinations and other violent acts (torture, rape arson, bombing etc.) against clearly specified individuals or groups of people (Campbell, 2000), often as acts of revenge and vengeance for perceived wrong doing. Death squads can be differentiated from vigilante groups, with the primary difference being the direct involvement of the state often associated with death squads. However, in reality there may be considerable overlap between these categories (Campbell, 2000). For example, some death squads, like vigilante groups, are formed to combat crime and uphold social norms through acts of violence and threat, while vigilante groups, primarily initiated by private/civil interests, may also involve state/elite influence.

For both vigilante groups and death squads, instigation and participation generally have a covert nature and a murderous outcome (Campbell, 2000). Furthermore, death squad activity may be portrayed as spontaneous acts of vigilantism in order to hide the true sponsorship of those involved, for example the South African government sponsored and encouraged vigilante groups to act as death squads during the time of apartheid in South Africa (Campbell, 2000). Similarly, vigilante groups, partly initiated and sustained by the government, may develop their own political agenda and turn into lawless organizations terrorizing citizens and the state itself (Schuberth, 2013).

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As with punishment squads, death squads have also been identified in use by paramilitary organisations, such as terrorist movements, for example the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) of Northern Ireland in collaboration with security forces carried out the murder of the lawyer Pat Finucane in 1979 (Rolston, 2005). An important distinction between death squads and vigilante groups is related to the goal of the action. For vigilantes, the targets chosen are often instrumental in nature, serving a symbolic purpose and sending a message of revenge to a wider audience. Alternatively, while death squads use repressive violence to induce compliance through fear, the main aim of their activity is killing (Mason & Krane, 1989). Interestingly, targeted killings aimed at ‘decapitating’ militant groups suggest that they tend to redirect violence from military to civilian targets, thus lending empirical weight to the role of vengeance as a terrorist motivator (Abrahms, & Mierau, 2015).

### **Moral Justifications**

In order for vengeance to become an entrenched emotional motivator within a society or given movement, it must be justified and promoted over time. To this end, vengeance becomes embedded through the promoted normative values of the society and the specific propaganda of the terrorist movement. Whether terrorism is part of a wider campaign of revolution or a free standing conflict form, its political objectives can only be reached by a complex psychological-military process in which propaganda and violence are intertwined (Rapoport & Alexander, 1989). This use of propaganda can become more apparent following government responses to the movement that are perceived as particularly harsh, thus perceived as warranting a vengeful reaction.

As part of a propaganda campaign, justificatory accounts that promote vengeance provide the individual and group with the moral imperative they may

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require to justify their actions and activities. Moral imperatives can be promoted as obligations within terrorist discourses (such as ‘blood vengeance’), minimising personal culpability in the very act of vengeance, with blame and responsibility for actions taken laid firmly in the hands of the ‘enemies’. Psychologically, this is a powerful position in which to perceive oneself, for with no belief in personal blame there is no responsibility for one’s own actions, therefore any action, no matter how abhorrent, can be undertaken and justified. Belief in being morally correct, and therefore morally obligated to act, can be assessed most comprehensively in terms of moral convictions and mandates.

Moral convictions form the basis for the strong and absolute beliefs and attitudes best referred to as moral mandates; they have a high action potential because they are based on ‘*oughts*’ or ‘*shoulds*’, and are closely connected to people’s sense of themselves as decent, good people (Higgins, 1987). A commitment to a moral mandate allows the individual to classify actions (of in-group/out-group members, perceived enemies etc.) into mutually exclusive categories of legitimacy versus illegitimacy (or fundamental transgression). As such, judgements and actions will be perceived as legitimate and fair when they are consistent with the individual’s moral mandates (Skitka, & Houston, 2001).

Traditionally, moral judgements have been framed within a rationalist perspective, which argues that moral judgements are primarily reached through a process of reasoning and reflection (Kohlberg, 1969). However, the social intuitionist approach argues that moral judgments may be more intuitive in nature than rational, and that the reasoning processes involved in moral judgments are post hoc rather than a priori (Haidt, 2001). Although the rationalist model of moral judgement cannot account for why a person would ‘know’ something is wrong without being able to

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explain why, it may be argued that many of our moral judgements are based on cultural and societal norms which allow us to make such intuitive judgements. Nevertheless, a priori reasoning may have a role to play as the driving force behind seemingly intuitive judgements (Pizarro & Bloom, 2003).

Although further research in this area is recommended, the notion of intuitive rather than rationalisation processes playing the dominant role in moral judgements is useful in further conceptualising the moral imperative that fuels the belief in the righteousness of seeking vengeance and the subsequent rationalisations which are used to justify involvement in a terrorist movement to achieve this aim. This model of moral intuition is also comparable to the mechanisms outlined in the theory of moral disengagement (Bandura, 2017) i.e. that post-hoc rationalisations are often used to justify behaviour undertaken for moral purposes in order to minimize cognitive dissonance and guilt (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996).

The moral conviction of the righteousness of terrorist movements' goals often becomes embedded and entrenched to such a degree as to legitimate any range of actions to achieve them. Terrorist organisations have demonstrated their capacity to adopt and adapt moral mandates justifying their righteousness and supporting their behaviour and action, for example Al Qaeda which is based on a fundamental belief in their moral mandate requiring '*jihad*'. The moral mandate of '*jihad*' (as espoused by Violent Islamic Jihadis) not only justifies and legitimates the actions of each member of this movement, but the rationalisations used are fast becoming embedded within the wider support community which in turn become potential recruits for the movement. Speeches and communiqués from Islamic Fundamentalists, such as Al Zawahiri provide ample examples of the importance of 'vengeance' to discourses central to promoting support for the holy war against infidels (Berner, 2007).

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Acts of vengeance are a clear statement that grievances or injustices will not be tolerated and that retaliatory action is obligated because of a moral conviction of righteousness. If terrorism is used as an act of vengeance, the message is quite clear and achieves at least the fulfilment of vengeance for the terrorist movement and for the individual motivated, at least in part, by such a moral mandate. This can subsequently be further used by the terrorist movement for propaganda purposes; i.e. with vengeance achieved, the act itself is considered successful and this can be used to boost internal morale and promote further support for the movement, their goals and activities.

### **Terrorism, Vengeance and Propaganda**

Terrorism has often been referred to as ‘propaganda of the deed’; a strategy used to attract attention and influence audiences. However, the propaganda of terrorism is not bound to the act of terrorism alone but rather is a more complex strategy used by terrorist movements not only in their activities but also in their communications with the public, their perceived adversaries and also with their own supporters, members and potential recruits. There are many different forms of propaganda and means by which this strategy of psychological warfare can be used (Garth, Jowlett & O’Donnell, 1986).

Terrorist movements predominantly use propaganda to draw attention to themselves, their ideology, grievances and goals. It is essential for the terrorist movement to have a successful propaganda campaign which synchronises itself with the actions and activities of the movement. Without it, the movement has little hope of influencing public opinion, changing perceptions and ultimately achieving their long-term goals. Using discourses of vengeance and retribution to justify involvement and action serve this propaganda strategy well. This can be exemplified

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by the calls of the Hutu extremists for the killing of ‘Tutsi cockroaches’ in Rwanda in 1994. The dehumanised Tutsis were seen as a taller lighter-skin minority outgroup demonised in propaganda as alien oppressors. Given that most people try to keep a positive self-concept, the sudden drop in their living standards can question the concept. As people also tend to look for simple answers to complex problems, scapegoating others can then easily follow (Pizarro, & Bloom, 2003).

In terms of implications, it is worth drawing here on social categorisation theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Proposing that social categories are fluid and subject to contextualised change, its employment was already proven to meaningfully recategorise a former outgroup as part of the ingroup (Palasinski, Granat, Seol, & Bowman-Grieve, 2014). Thus, the vengeance motive against indiscriminate outgroup civilians might be potentially undermined by ingroup-inducing verbal primes that redefine the supposedly ‘evil others’ as sharing at least some characteristics of the ‘justice’-seeking ingroup. One way to put it into practice might be online counter-terror communication (Palasinski, & Bowman-Grieve, 2017). Such communication in the form of webcasts or podcasts can challenge the rhetoric of cherry-picking merchants of hatred or divert some of the street warfare to rhetorical exchanges in cyberspace. This might be exemplified by branding indiscriminate attacks on the ‘evil (outgroup) others’ as being against the fundamental values of the ingroup or as having an adverse boomerang effect on the ingroup, and feeding the ever-escalating vicious circle of vengeance.

In terms of group dynamics, vengeance can play a key role in both the development and sustenance of group cohesion and solidarity. This can be seen particularly in cases where the perceived enemy of the terrorist movement retaliates violently, thus providing the justifications necessary for the further use of terrorism to

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achieve the movements' goals. Violent retaliation by perceived enemies can be used to the advantage of the propagandist to promote a mortality salience effect, whereby the idea of death becomes more cognitively available. Such an effect is linked to an increase in support for extremism, particularly when it is linked to group identity (Pyszczynski, Abdollahi, Solomon, Greenberg, Cohen, & Weise, 2006).

Just as 'successful operations' of the terrorist group are reported online (e.g., on Jihadi websites and their discussion forums), so too are the operations of the 'enemy', particularly when these operations result in loss of life (e.g., accidental civilian deaths resulting from drone strikes). Such information can be easily manipulated within the propaganda machine to justify and legitimate the continued and sustained use of terrorism in the name of vengeance, retaliation and 'justice'.

The Islamic Resistance Support Association website, for example, at one time provided access to information detailing "Israeli aggressions", which included monthly reports from 1998 to 2003 detailing experiences ranging from invasions of airspace to street conflict, numbers of wounded and killed, and information on bombings and shootings. The following information table (Table 1) taken again from the Islamic Resistance Support Association website (2006) provides an account of 'enemy aggression' to present readers with 'evidence' of the outgroup evilness.

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Table 1

*Table of Enemy 'Aggressions'*

<u>Massacre</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Victim's &amp; number</u>
<u>Qana</u>	April 18-1996	Qana village - South Lebanon	- 102 persons killed including children, women and old men <a href="#">(Video Clip)</a>
Mansouri	April 13-1996	Mansouri village - South Lebanon	Six martyrs including three children <a href="#">(Video Clip)</a>
Janta	December 22-1998	Janta village – Beqaa	- seven martyrs (a mother and her six children). <a href="#">(Video Clip)</a>
Sohmor	12-4-1996	Sohmor village - South Lebanon	- nine martyrs including four children
School bus	21-3-1994	Nabatieh- South Lebanon	- two martyrs and 28 wounded all of them are children
Nabatieh El-Fawqa	18-4-1996	Nabatieh city	Martyrdom of a mother and her seven children

Providing information of this nature, which recounts the 'aggression' of the enemy in particular, is an important feature of terrorist websites as it promotes and supports the justifications for pursuing aggressive retaliation. The creation of a discourse of this nature serves to further polarise viewpoints and demonise the enemy, thus legitimising the use of violence in return. In recounting the attacks made by the enemy (in this case governments and policy makers) the terrorist movement can argue that their own legitimacy is maintained because their decisions to retaliate are perceived as being made in self-defence. The responsibility of further attacks made

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by the terrorist organisation, in which innocents may be killed, is thus laid firmly with the enemy.

The reference to those killed as ‘martyrs’ is particularly noteworthy as the term endows the statements with a sense of sanctity, and in so doing provides moral justifications for retaliation. The encouragement to act in vengeance is promoted in the name of lost martyrs, legitimising the decision to become further involved in terrorist activities. Additionally, the inclusion of (decontextualized and carefully edited) video footage fragments of some of the attacks mentioned adds a sense of factuality and truth.

A promoted and sustained desire for vengeance, particularly when propagated effectively within a movement, makes it difficult for members to withdraw their support or membership. Although vengeance alone may not be enough to sustain group solidarity and cohesion (especially when other factors, such as disillusionment with society, withdrawal from family and friends, ideological commitment and involvement in violent activity are taken into consideration), it is not surprising that group cohesiveness will reach a high level, so much so that disengagement becomes difficult, if not impossible.

However, vengeance can also have a negative role in relation to the group processes of the terrorist movement, particularly in terms of the internal dynamics of the group and their strategic decision making processes. For example, high levels of group solidarity and cohesiveness, facilitated not only by the desire for vengeance but also by the fact that the group is illegal (and operating underground) can have a number of results. Such a group will be prone to increased levels of anxiety and decreased ability to identify alternatives and to assess outcomes. These effects can lead to groupthink, whereby the need for consensus overtakes the need to obtain

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accurate information to make appropriate decisions, which in turn can result in less rational or logical choices, such as higher levels of risk-taking (Crenshaw, 1992).

### **The Psychology of Group Solidarity**

Vengeance in the group dynamics context is perhaps best conceptualised in terms of how it facilitates specific group processes which seek to internally strengthen the group in terms of cohesion and solidarity. Vengeance can play a key role in terrorist movements both in relation to the decision to use terrorism in the first place and subsequently to continue with the use of terrorism to achieve set goals.

Drawing upon the pioneering research showing how a group's behaviour and the influence of its leaders depended on identification and dis-identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), it appears that to engage in violence on behalf of the (seemingly hurt) in-group, one must identify with the in-group and demonise or dehumanise the outgroup. Becoming a part of the in-group, facilitates the adaptation of a new collective identity, potentially providing individual members with anonymity and diminishing their sense of personal responsibility. It is the group and/or its leaders, not individual group members that then become accountable for action. Thus, individual behaviour becomes less inhibited, anger towards the perceived outgroup no longer has to be suppressed and emotions become more intense and spread fast. These community psychological processes of high group cohesiveness and conformity contribute to group polarization, which can in turn result in a 'risky shift' of attitudes and behaviours supportive of vengeful acts. Couple this with deindividuation of group members and a contagion effect, along with severe repercussions for deviating outside of group norms supportive of acts of vengeance, and what is created is a potentially widely justified and legitimised perspective of violent retribution.

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As a consequence, moral constraints (e.g., getting non-target bystanders, like children, caught up in the cross fire) can become loosened, and independent judgment decreased, compromising the boundaries of the self that becomes heavily affected by the concept of the extremist and retribution-seeking ‘we’ (Staub, 2013). It is quite clear, therefore, that more likely than not, it is not a personality defect, but the person-changing dynamic of one’s perception of the in-group that turns people into fanatics (Atran, 2011). In this way, radicalisation can be driven by rifts among groups that ‘merchants of hatred’ seek to create, exploit and exacerbate (Clayton, Ballif-Spanvill, Barlow, & Orton, 2003).

### **Vengeance and Individual Accounts of Involvement**

Discourses of vengeance can be used to promote and justify the perpetuation, and in some cases, escalation of violence over time. To that end, the extent to which vengeance and the desire to seek retribution play a role in terrorist motivation is best considered by examining the discourses that support and justify the use of this strategy by both individual supporters and members of terrorist movements, as well as the groups they claim to represent.

Vengeance has an important role to play in both recruitment and involvement processes. The desire to exact revenge can be an influential factor for individual involvement, and terrorist movements use recruitment procedures that target areas or individuals who are known to have been negatively affected by experiences (such as conflict in the case of nationalist separatist groups), and for whom vengeance may be a factor contributing to their decision to become involved in some capacity within a terrorist movement. While some attention has been paid to the potential for victims of terrorism (and/or vigilantism) to become terrorists themselves (Silke, 2000), it is apparent from examining individual accounts of involvement that situational factors

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which result in a desire to seek revenge have a relevant role to play in this process. Vengeance can be recognised in individual accounts of involvement and also recognised in the propaganda campaigns of terrorist movements.

Analysis of online discourses created within virtual communities in support of terrorist movements contributes supporting evidence of the role of vengeance in personal decisions to become involved in terrorist activities (Bowman Grieve , 2006). For example, in a set of virtual community contributions to the topic “*How did you become a Republican?*”, taken from a larger project investigating online discourses of Irish Republicanism, many responses included personal histories and accounts that identified the desire for vengeance or retribution as a contributing factor in the decision to become involved, at levels ranging from online support to more active support. Whether all contributions to the thread are true accounts of pathways to involvement, or not, what is identifiable nonetheless is a discourse supportive of involvement based on ideas of revenge and vengeance.

Interestingly, individual members of this virtual community, who identify vengeance or the need for revenge as an influencing factor in their decision to become part of a terrorist movement, and who limit themselves to online involvement in particular, appear to have found an outlet for their desire for retribution without having to become directly involved in the acts of terrorism themselves. This may indicate that the supporter of a terrorist movement may perceive involvement, even at any level of online support, as a means of exacting revenge on the perceived enemy i.e. that any activity in support of the terrorist movement is a form of retribution and an outlet for vengeful emotions.

Similarly, online activity in support of a terrorist movement allows the individual to retain relative anonymity, thus affording them the opportunity to be part

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of a terrorist movement without necessarily disrupting their day-to-day lives. In this way, an individual supporting a terrorist movement for can participate (without fear of further retribution) in the promotion and dissemination of the justificatory discourses and propaganda that promote the movement their ideology and goals. Additionally, they may become involved in fundraising and recruitment activities with the potential to become further involved both online and in everyday life. The Internet facilitates the potential of the ‘armchair warrior’ whose involvement can be limited to online activity, but who nevertheless perceives him/herself to be contributing to the movement and in so doing achieves satisfaction in such activity as a means of retribution and revenge.

Importantly, revenge does not have to involve direct action – it can also be passive, for example in the form of silence, turning a blind eye to tell-tale extremist activities and non-reporting of threats to authorities. Such hostile passivity can be easily bred, for example by resentment towards interrogating airport security staff that may inadvertently question the identity of British home-coming Muslims (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2015). This, in turn, may likely humiliate and alienate them, potentially discouraging them from sharing vital intelligence, and in some cases at least, might push some of them on the pathway towards a new dignity-restoring extremism. The vicious circle of revenge-driven extremism, then, starts with the minorities’ need to belong or be treated equally, misrecognition, disengagement and dis-identification. In other words, a tiny section of the minority group uses hate and violence to provoke majority leaders to start surveillance against all minority group members, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy. This can be exemplified by the Patriot Act, which was signed into law by President George W. Bush in response to the September 11 attacks, equipping the US government with the

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powers to search various communications, such as email, telephone records and medical records. Its counter-terrorism impact is still debatable, controversial and divisive (Bullock, Haddow, & Coppola, 2011). As we see terrorists as aggressors and ourselves as defenders, they see us as aggressors and themselves as defenders.

### **Conclusions**

From a psychological perspective, vengeance can be conceptualised in a number of ways, as a predisposing factor to individual involvement or a factor that contributes to keeping the movement 'bound' together, but which can also negatively affect the group's strategic logic. Vengeance can also be a factor in the escalation of violent activity through vigilantism, retribution and retaliation, which can result in a perpetuation of a cycle of violence; and as a moral mandate that is ideologically rationalised and justified, with perceptions of righteousness and obligation inherent to it. Certainly, the perception of vengeance as an emotive force with the potential to influence behaviour warrants further consideration. Future research might consider questioning why some groups favour vengeance discourses more strongly than others or why some individuals are more motivated by vengeance tropes than others. Other studies might explore the correlations between widely publicised populist political statements questioning religious elements and follow-up terror attacks.

Propaganda (& auto-propaganda) campaigns that effectively use the potential desire of group members (& prospective recruits) to seek revenge and exact retribution (and which may provide, in so doing, the justifications required to counter the cognitive dissonance that may be associated with involvement in such violent activity), arguably have a powerful role to play in the continued and potentially escalated use of violence and terrorism over time. As exemplified by terrorism campaigns in Iraq, Chechnya, Palestine, Syria and Turkey, independence-driven

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nationalistic conflicts involving an occupying out-group that is perceived as hostile facilitate sustained waves of suicide terrorism aimed at exacting revenge on the out-group even when in-group members get caught up in the cross-fire. Such waves can be brought to an end only if the conflicts are successfully resolved on both political and individual levels, and when vengeful motivations are defused by tapping into collective identities of communities and incorporating multicultural values.

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