The Issues Islamic State's Communications Strategy Pose in Russia and the UK: A Comparative Study of Problems Faced and Ways to Counter Them

Introduction

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (now referred to as IS) originated in 2013 in the territories in Syria and Iraq rent by a civil war and a struggle for power.[1] Following their swift gains of territory in the Anbar area of Iraq and northern Syria, on the 29th June 2014 IS declared itself a world caliphate thereby announcing its unconditional clout throughout the world.[2] While the UK had listed IS as a proscribed terrorist group in July 2014,[3] the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation acknowledged IS to be a terrorist entity in December 2014. Within the last eighteen months IS have become the most influential terrorist group within the Middle East and North African region as well as posing the greatest Islamist terror threat to the national security of nation states around the world that oppose their religious and political doctrine. Their retribution towards those they see as kuffars or heretics, and therefore an enemy of the group, has been merciless. This has ranged from beheading captives from the UK, the US and Japan as well as Syrian soldiers fighting for the al-Assad regime, massacres of Sunni Muslims in cities like Tikrit in Iraq, to more recent terrorist attacks such as those carried out in Susse, Tunisia in June 2015 where 38 UK citizens holidaying at the resort were killed, the bombing of the Russian airliner over the Sinai Peninsula in October 2015 and the attacks in Paris in November 2015. These recent events appear to have brought together many nation states as they seek to find a way to deal with the threat IS pose on a global scale. This collaborative approach has been underpinned by the United Nations Security Council's resolution 2249(2015) that states all UN Member States with their requisite capacity take all necessary measures to prevent and suppress IS' terrorist acts on territory under its control.[4]

This article is a comparative study of the threat IS' communications strategy that promulgates a narrow and extreme Islamist ideology poses to Russia and the UK. By looking at the structure of IS' communications strategy, this article analyses how it has influenced Russian and UK citizens who have been recruited as Jihadist foreign fighters to join IS in its self-proclaimed Caliphate in Syria. The analysis examines how IS has exploited Russian states with a predominantly Muslim population and Muslim communities in the UK in their drive to recruit not just fighters but citizens to emigrate to the Caliphate or to follow the group's ideology in their home state. This leads to an analysis of the potential danger this poses to the security of Russia and the UK. If their counter measures are to be effective, Russia and the UK's actions must be based on the rule of law. As a result the article examines the legal basis upon which their respective agencies operate assessing if their actions are compatible. The legal analysis focuses on two areas, the legal definition of terrorism and extremism.

The threat IS pose to the Russian Federation and the UK

Because of Russia's support of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, in September 2014 IS not only declared war on Russia, they also issued a personal threat to the Russian President, Vladimir Putin.[5] Russia's support for al-Assad emanates from implications Islamist radicalisation has throughout the Middle East and the experience of the aggravating problems following the state collapses in the cases of Iraq and Libya that presents a global threat.[6] As centuries-old coexistence of Muslims and Christians in Russia has borne fruit and wrought a certain mutual understanding thereby hindering IS propaganda, IS regards Russia as an impediment for the expansion of the 'true' faith. As a result IS is increasingly active in radicalising individuals to their cause in Ciscaucasia where Russian states have predominantly Muslim populations and other Muslim areas within Russia.

While IS have not formally declared war on the UK like they have with Russia, there is no doubting that the UK is one of IS' major targets for both a terrorist attack and in radicalising individuals to their cause. Most of the UK citizens who have been radicalised to their cause emanate mainly from the UK's Muslim communities. It has not been limited solely to these communities, converts to Islam have also been influenced by the IS propaganda advocating their cause. While there have been no attacks carried out by IS fighters or those influenced by IS propaganda in the UK like those witnessed in Brussels in 2014 or Paris in 2015, it was released that in 2015 alone seven major planned IS attacks in the UK were prevented by the police and security services with intelligence received that IS are plotting further attacks in the UK.[7] The influence of IS radicalisation was seen in the 15 year old boy from Blackburn who, via the Internet in his bedroom, plotted with Australian counterparts to behead Australian police officers at the ANZAC day celebrations in 2015. As a result the UK now has the youngest convicted terrorist receiving a life sentence.[8] This renders extremism and terrorism extremely urgent from the viewpoint of state, public and personal security. In both the Russian and UK legal and political discourse IS retain close attention. Underpinning IS' success is its communications strategy that encourages individuals to travel to IS occupied territory or to carry out terrorist attacks in the countries they reside. Regarding carrying out attacks in the country they reside, in 2014 IS issued a call via their communications strategy for their followers to kill soldiers and civilians in Europe, the US and Australia.[9]

IS' Communications Strategy

IS is a wealthy organisation receiving finances from a variety of sources that, among others, includes extortion, the sale of oil and gas from numerous oil fields it has seized, the selling of cultural artefacts, kidnapping for ransom and human trafficking.[10] Spreading their propaganda in forty languages, IS' communications strategy exploits social media platforms

for terrorist financing purposes. As communications are critical in terrorist strategy to bring people over to their cause, recruitment and in raising finances to run their activities, the Internet has been a gift on all these strategic aims.[11] For example, IS have called for donations to their cause via Twitter or asking donors to contact them through Skype.[12] IS' communications strategy has demonstrated not only egregious, inordinate cruelty through the releasing of video's such as those where Emwazi beheaded US, UK and Japanese hostages or the beheading of Syrian soldiers,[13] IS has demonstrated an efficient awareness-building work based through mass media and Internet resources that has attracted people of all ages to their cause. One of the tactics deployed by IS is their use of social media regarding the hostages they hold by releasing a series of videos showing a UK citizen they hold hostage, John Cantlie, who has read out messages from IS saying they have been misrepresented by Western media and they will present the truth about the group in forthcoming videos.[14] The Cantlie videos do not just demonstrate IS' careful and skilful production of items with sharp filming quality, they are modes of presentation that show a mixture of fear and reason that Milton sees as a potent combination.[15] IS' use of the various media resources available to it reveals a cynical use of propaganda through the medium of social media where, to the more discerning, IS past actions cannot be misrepresented and neither can the threat they pose.

IS has created structures and layers of communications where they use various media to get their message out to local and international audiences. One important structure IS has created is its Ministry of Media that consists of more centrally controlled media outlets. These include the al-Furqan Institute, l'tisaam Media Foundation, Anjad Media Foundation and the al-Hayat media Centre (which is an English based IS media outlet).[16] IS' media agency al-Furqan Institute for Media Production manufactures quality CDs and DVDs, posters, brochures and informational materials to circulate in the Internet.[17] The main mass medium used by IS is through the al-I'tisaam Media Foundation. Established in March 2013

IS disseminate information through Global Islamic Media Front in English, German, Russian and French[18] At the same time IS launched the Ajnad Media Foundation project, which circulates materials with jihadist sermons and chants.[19] More recently IS established the Al Hayat Media Centre which is predominantly focused on distributing IS propaganda via social media enabling IS to control dozens of social media accounts related to the group. This has allowed IS the ability for its messages to go viral in order to gain wide range support.[20] Since July 2014, another development in its communications strategy has been the publishing of IS' online magazine Dabiq. Printed in several languages,[21] Dabiq contains a larger quantity of speeches and articles written in a manner that seeks to validate the legitimacy of IS and the ideas of the Caliphate with the aim of encouraging Muslims to immigrate to its self-proclaimed caliphate.[22]

Another very effective layer of IS' communications strategy is the use of social media. Twitter is the most accessed form of social media IS use. The Director of the EU's policing agency, Europol, Rob Wainwright revealed that IS is believed to have up to 50,000 different Twitter accounts, tweeting up to 100,000 messages a day.[23] Berger and Morgan claim the number of IS Twitter accounts could be as high as 90,000[24] thereby nearly doubling the number of daily tweets from Islamic State. Katz highlights the difficulty intelligence and policing agencies face in monitoring social media and encrypted electronic communications, where again using the example of Twitter, she reports how IS is circumventing the blocking of their social media accounts.[25] One method being IS account holders having multiple back-up accounts and tweet followers to follow and retweet up to six accounts at a time. Another method IS have of by-passing countries like Syria who have shut down Internet and phone communications under their control is to use satellite modems to create hotspots and temporary pop-up wi-fi networks.[26] For Katz the threat of Islamic State on Twitter is real. She says Twitter alone is a launch pad for Islamic State recruitment or calls for lone wolf

attacks or to send dangerous messages into every corner of the world.[27] IS have official Twitter accounts allowing only a small group of IS supporters to follow the accounts and read their tweets, but from there they encourage those living in the IS Caliphate and their followers around the world to open Twitter accounts and use relevant hashtags to increase the number of followers who can access the IS messages contained in the Tweets.[28] This forms part of IS' unofficial social media outlets in their communications strategy. As a result of their overall communications strategy, IS has become extremely efficient in disseminating its propaganda, intimidation and attraction of attention at a global level.[29]

IS Recruitment of Russian and UK Citizens

Russia

Through its communications strategy, IS possesses a set of means and instruments to expand its ideological, political and military influence. This makes it a match for the multinational and multi-confessional Russian society and compels it to resort to any available assets. One area where IS' communications have been effective and pose a significant threat to Russian stability through its media and online recruitment processes is in the Ciscaucasia region.[30] The Chief Federal Inspector of Karachai-Cherkess, Potapov, has identified Ciscaucasia region as the main target area for the dissemination of extremist ideas. Abazaliev, the Deputy Chief of the Centre for Combating Extremism at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, believes that while the main problem of terrorist attacks from groups within the region has been virtually dealt with in the republic, IS Internet propaganda remains a burning issue to be resolved. The yearning for social justice in certain quarters of society has influenced the resolve of citizens to join IS. Residents in Ciscaucasia who left the region to join IS admitted they did so because they did not have a job worthy of a man (they deemed it below themselves to work in agriculture; it was their strong belief that a man must assert his interests with a gun in his hand). As a result Potapov reported that the Ministry of Internal

Affairs brought legal action against the Internet Service Providers (ISP), including the large transnational ISP's whose main servers are located in European and US states.[31]

After Russia had abandoned its communist ideas an ideological vacuum formed that has been filled with various meanings and, in some regions of Russia, it is radical Islamist ideology such as the takfiri ideology espoused by IS that filled the role.[32] Takfiri ideology is a highly intolerant strain of jihadism where anyone who does not conform to IS' Islamic belief and practice is labelled an apostate and sentenced to death.[33] Islamist militants believe their resolve to kill for a cause and to fight against those who 'denigrate' Islam is sufficient proof of the trueness of the ideas espoused by Islamic extremism with its goal being to establish an Islamic form of state power through various forms of armed and political violence. Aiming to create a 'state of Islam', the ideology of Islamism reflects the yearning to rally Muslims in their struggle against the expansion of the European way for the sake of preserving Islam as a religion and exemplary social model. Islamists castigate modernization, secularism and nationalism stemming from the stranglehold of the West because of the adverse effect these can produce on Ummah.[34] The genesis of radical jihadist ideology in the Ciscaucasia region can be traced to the second Chechen War where a significant number of foreign fighters joined the native Chechen groups desirous of independence from the Russian Federation.[35] As a result, the jihadist foreign fighters introduced Islamist values in the Chechen independence movement weakening its cohesion. As a result it exacerbated ideological divisions within the resistance leading to physical confrontations between opposition forces.[36] For Stupin the speedy expansion of these ideas can be accounted for by the religious ignorance of the population, which facilitated the acceptance of alien extremist ideas in Islamic disguise, adding this was happening when the global information society was in the making, which offered opportunities for dissemination of any, including radical, ideas.[37] This positon has led to a number of Russian citizens leaving the Russian Federation to join IS in

Syria and Iraq. Facing the lack of social and political support within the region and, exposed to the pressure on the part of the authorities and the law-enforcement agencies, militants in Ciscaucasia have started to show greater interest in cooperation with certain international terrorist structures such as IS where they intend to play a more important role in the Muslim realm.

It is difficult to ascertain exactly how many Russian citizens are now members of IS. Various reports give differing figures making it problematic to recognise trends and patterns in the behaviour of Islamist radicals in the Russian Federation overall. In February 2015 the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation estimated the number of Russian citizens who have joined IS was 1,700 persons[38] with other estimates seeing that figure rise to 2,500.[39] A large number of Russian citizens joining IS come from Ciscaucasia where again the figures vary according to various sources from 800[40] to 2,000.[41] This data shows how effective IS' ideology through its communications has been disseminated in Russia and is one of the reasons Chechens (who are referred to as 'al-Shishani' in the Arab world)[42] in particular have become a branded armed formation.[43]

What makes it difficult in establishing the number of Russian citizens who have travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight with IS is some of the data appears to have linked together both Russian citizens domiciled within the Russian Federation with those who domiciled in countries outside Russia (ethnic Chechens). An important reason to draw a distinction between a domiciled Russian citizen and a Russian (ethnic Chechen) domiciled in other countries is that during the two Chechen wars (1994-1995 and 1999 – 2009) a number of states provided asylum and granted citizenship to Chechen militants without inquiring about their ideological views and if they had committed crimes while in Russia. The case of the Boston terrorists who emigrated from Dagestan manifestly demonstrates the misjudgement of special services of the states that granted these people asylum, residence permit and even

citizenship though they can pose a threat to the stability of any community. While there was no immediate suspicion of the family's involvement in extremist activity at the time the US granted the family asylum, following a trip to Dagestan by Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the Russian Government requested the US' FBI to check Tsarnaev's possible links to Chechen extremism, but the FBI found no derogatory information.[44] In combining both categories in determining the number of Russians fighting with IS the resultant data is skewed. It is submitted that in drawing up data on the numbers of people recruited by IS and travel to Syria and Iraq should be counted in the statistics of the nation state they were last domiciled in. The Director of the Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rogachev stated that a significant number of ethnic Caucasian people are joining IS from countries where they were granted asylum as Chechen refugees. One example is the 800 IS members of Chechen origin who are Georgian Kists. Georgian Kists are Chechens and Ingush descendants that migrated from Chechnya and Ingushetia to Georgia in the 1830's,[45] where some of these 800 Georgian Kists are among the most notable IS field commanders. Salvadore emphasises the point that Kists should not be perceived as Russian citizens in any data sets as they are Georgian citizens who were trained by Georgian experts and instructed in warfare by Americans.[46] In another data set that emphasises this point, Runkevich and Malay's research found about 2,200 persons of Russian descent are now engaged in hostilities in Syria and Iraq, with 500 of them joining IS from European states where they were either naturalized or granted either a residence permit or refugee status.[47] This is further confirmed by the fact that in August 2014 nine Chechens, enjoying refugee status were detained in Austria while they were on the way to IS along with Chechen communities in France and Poland who are active in raising funds, procuring weapons and recruitment for ISIS.[48]

The main worry Russian citizens have is the growth the threat IS pose to Russian national security placing further pressure on Russian authorities to counter this threat in Ciscaucasia. These are not unwarranted fears, concerned about the extremist nature of IS communications in their radicalising messages it was recently reported that Ciscaucasian states are ripe recruiting grounds for IS. The report claims that following the two Chechen wars, Islamist insurgency has swept through the region where an umbrella group of rebels from several Caucasus provinces who have sworn allegiance to IS have recently formed the Caucasus Emirate with the goal of carving out an independent state governed by Sharia law[49] While there has been an increase in recruitment activity by IS in Ciscaucasia, one anomaly is a decrease in Islamist inspired terrorist attacks in the North Caucasus that Malashenko's research found is a result of militants leaving for the Middle East to join groups such as IS and the Al Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra Front.[50] An example of this is Dagestan. The police official from Dagestan's capital, Makhachkala charged with fighting Islamist extremism in the region, Arslanbekov, says it is estimated that 700 of the 2,500 Russian citizens fighting with IS emanate from Dagestan, amounting to over a quarter of the Russian citizens in Syria with IS.[51] There is no doubting that because of its geo-graphical location and ethnic diversity, but mainly because of the societal tension in the Ciscaucasia region with its cultural and religious differences, enhanced with the growth of radical Islamist ideology that has developed since the second Chechen war, Ciscaucasia remains a 'tinderbox' and an area ripe for IS recruitment.[52]

The UK

Due to the effectiveness of its communications strategy, in the UK it is estimated that more than 750 of its citizens have travelled to Syria to fight with IS in the region, with around half of that number having returned to the UK.[53] The danger of those returning from the region is the potential for them to carry out attacks in the UK. One example is Imran Khawaja

was convicted and received a prison sentence at the Old Baily Court in London for preparing acts of terrorism, attending a terrorist training camp in Syria, receiving training there and for possessing firearms. Khawaja had spent six months in Syria fighting with IS and using social media sources faked his own death in an attempt to return to the UK where he posed a threat to UK's security.[54] The threat posed by what Byman refers to as the 'bleedout', which is the return of jihadi fighters from Syria and Iraq[55] is that they are more likely to engage in domestic acts of political violence than other parts of the community.[56] This violence is less likely to be on an amateur level as the returning fighters are hardened in battle, have learned how to construct sophisticated improvised explosive devices, developed assassination tactics and gained experience with the mass use of suicide bombings.[57] Another threat these returning fighters pose is that having networked and gained contacts for future co-operation, by relaying IS messages they often play an important role as recruiters. In the UK this was seen in the legal case *SSHD v CC and CF* [58] where UK citizens CC and CF had travelled to Somalia to fight with Al Shabaab and on their return to the UK they were suspected of recruiting and raising funds for the group. The UK is an example of Byman's bleedout supposition that in reducing the risk of bleedout they hinder the travel of volunteers to conflict zones involving terrorist organisations. The UK's Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 gave UK police and border agencies the power to retain on a temporary basis travel documents of persons suspected of leaving the UK in connection with terrorism-related activity.[59] The Act also gives the UK's Home Secretary the power to issue a temporary exclusion order on those who have already travelled to conflict zones such as that occupied by IS in Syria and Iraq.[60] How effective these provisions have been in the short time they have been in operation has yet to be assessed as those committed to travelling to Syria to join IS appear to have found methods that can bypass these provisions. An example of this was seen with the three sisters and their children from Bradford who left the UK in May 2015 to

travel on a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. It is believed their intention was always to join IS in Syria as their brother had already travelled to Syria to fight with IS. In order to join their brother and avoid detection from the travel arrangements they made in the UK, they left the hotel in Saudi before their departure date, bought flight tickets from Saudi to Turkey, from which they joined IS in Syria.[61]

Russian and UK Citizens Emigrating to IS' Caliphate in Syria and Iraq

This leads to the influence of IS communications has not just on those who wish to travel to Syria and Iraq to fight alongside IS, but those who wish to emigrate to the region to live in IS' self-proclaimed Caliphate. This has not just impacted in Ciscaucasia, but has influenced citizens throughout Russia and the UK. In May 2015 a 19-year-old female student from Moscow State University and born to a well-to-do Russian family attempted to join IS in Syria. This incident caused sensational turmoil in Russian society as it made Russians pay heed to the attempts made by citizens who had no apparent extremist aspirations to join IS. Incidents like this demonstrated how efficiently the IS propaganda machine was functioning in Moscow. This spurred Russian citizens to question the reasons behind why Russians with no Islamic connections or related to Islamist groups would want to perform such acts. Fearing prosecution, the runaway student accounted for her actions by saying she had been under the influence of psychotropic substances, never realizing whatever she was doing.[62] On 4 May 2015, together with another eighteen Russian citizens, she was detained on the Turkish-Syrian border. Among those detained were six young children who were being taken to join IS by a woman from Dagestan who was trying to join her husband who was already an active IS member.[63] Another Russian example was when a student from the Volga River Region was reported as attempting to travel to Syria to join IS. Being a Russian region with a high Muslim population who are not traditionally associated with radical Islamist ideology this example demonstrates how active IS propaganda is with Muslims in the Volga River

Region.[64] The Director of the Federal Security Service in the Volga River Region, Bortnikov, claims that twenty people from this region are already known to be members of IS.[65] These cases that have come to light from outside Ciscaucasia regarding Russian citizens travelling to Syria to join IS reveals a pronounced dangerous tendency where radicalised individuals can pose a threat to Russian security.

Regarding the UK, in addition to the sisters from Bradford mentioned above, there have been similar feelings of consternation among the UK population similar to that expressed in Russia as other families with very young children have immigrated to Syria to live in the Caliphate. This has included another family from Bradford where a married couple and their five children aged five to fifteen years old travelled to Syria to join IS. Regarding this family it was a complete surprise they travelled to Syria as the family were perceived to have integrated into the community with three of the children attending a Christian Church of England school.[66] A main concern regarding families immigrating to IS' Caliphate centres on the safety of the children. Among many UK citizens is a widespread disbelief that parents would want to take their children to live in a war zone.[67] Regarding those going to Syria from the UK, they travel via Turkey and as a result Turkish authorities have been co-operating with UK counterparts. An example of this was regarding a mother from the London Borough of Waltham Forest who was travelling with her four children aged four to 12 years to Syria to join IS. Having left the UK from London City Airport, she arrived in Turkey on a flight from Amsterdam and was detained by Turkish police who ensured the children returned to the UK.[68] As seen in Russia, via its communications IS encouragement for people to join them in their Caliphate includes encouraging young people to travel to Syria. In the UK one example was three teenage girls from Bethnal Green in London aged fifteen and sixteen years who left the UK in February 2015 to join IS in Syria to become Jihadi brides.[69] While these girls managed to cross the Turkish border to join IS, once again we see the co-operation of the

Turkish authorities with the UK as they have stopped young people from the UK at their border who they suspect to be travelling to Syria to join IS. An example of this was in March 2015 when the Turkish authorities stopped three UK teenage boys aged seventeen and nineteen years to fight with IS. They were detained by Turkish police and returned to the UK where they were arrested by the UK police for suspicion of preparing acts of terrorism.[70]

In relation to individuals travelling to join IS in Syria and Iraq, be it to fight with IS or emigrate to their Caliphate, this increases the number of individuals who can be deployed in IS' communications strategy to get out their official message via the unofficial social media sources. IS' use of the media has been without equal among other terrorist groups in how it has used all forms of social media from Twitter to YouTube. By decentralising this strand of IS' communications strategy, it enables IS' propaganda to have a truly global reach as via social media their messages can be sent out in a variety of languages. As Milton's research reveals, IS' success in seen in the appeal the group has to thousands of foreign fighters and those who wish to live in their Caliphate.[71] Klausen's research into IS' supporters' Twitter use found five categories of content regularly used in the messages contained in the tweets:

1. Religious instruction – which included religious advice;
2. Reporting from battle = this included picture of dead martyrs, reports on locations and activities on battles;
3. Interpersonal communication – included regular conversation between the account holder and to other participants;
4. Tourism – covering topics related to everyday life of the jihadist that covers what they ate for dinner and posting tourist-like pictures that are not related to battle;
5. Threats against the West and countries perceived as an IS enemy state – which includes any specific and direct threats against Western countries.[72]

Key IS players in the use of the unofficial social media communications is the 'Umm' factor where IS women act as social media propagandists for jihadist insurgents. By demonstrating that females are accepted within the Caliphate, the messages not only attract fighters to Syria but as seen in the examples above, young women and families to live there. The danger IS communications strategy poses with its extremist ideology to the security of Russia and the

UK is real, along with many countries. While there are two other theatres of conflict with IS, the battles literally fought in Syria and Iraq and the fight to prevent IS terrorist attacks outside Syria and Iraq, this third theatre of conflict, the propaganda battle with IS is just as important and needs to be tackled just as ardently as the other two theatres of conflict. This involves countering the extremist message and the processes IS use in its strategy to radicalise individuals to their cause.

Russian and UK Legal Definitions of Terrorism and Extremism

To enable Russian and UK agencies tasked to counter extremism and radicalisation, they must operate from a legal basis under the principle of the rule of law. As the likes of Islamist extremism is directly related to terrorism, if Russian and the UK agencies are to co-operate in their efforts to counter the radicalisation processes in the extremism doctrine espoused in IS' communications strategy, to ensure they are operating within a comparative legal framework there has to be a degree of uniformity between their legal definitions. One of the first areas to identify is how each state defines terrorist activity. In the Russian law, terrorism is understood as an extreme form of manifestation of extremism, as a multifaceted phenomenon emerging as a result of complex controversies of domestic and foreign political development. The Russian legal definition of Terrorism is defined as:

> '…an ideology of violence and practice affecting the way the decisions are made by state and local authorities' institutions or international organizations related to intimidation of the population and (or) to other illegal acts.'[73]

In comparison the UK's legal definition is more specific in relation to the action that amounts to an act of terrorism as it includes serious violence against a person, serious damage to property or endangers a person's life (other than the person committing the action) or creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public or seriously interferes or disrupts an electronic system.[74] There is a similarity where the violence or threat of action is designed to influence the government or international governmental organisation

or to intimidate the public or a section of the public.[75] This resonates with the Russian definition in relation the violence and practice affecting the decision making of the state, local authorities and international organisations as well as being designed intimidate the population. Compatibility between Russian and UK law as what actions amount to an act of terrorism can be found in the Russian law on counteraction of terrorism where action includes making an explosion, arson or actions connected with frightening the population and posing the risk of loss of life, considerable damage to property on the onset of an 'ecological catastrophe'.[76]

While underlining the importance Russia attaches to terrorism being a theory,[77] the word 'ideology' in the Russian definition is a wide term encompassing a wide variety of causes groups have inspiring their terrorist actions. In comparison the UK has specific categories for advancing causes in terrorist actions. As in the Russian definition, it includes an ideological cause, but it also includes a political, religious or racial cause.[78] When the UK's Terrorism 2000 was a Bill going through its passage in Parliament, during the debate in the House of Commons there was a concern that industrial action could fall under the ideological cause under the definition. It was made clear by the Home Secretary that industrial action did not amount an act of terrorism but ideological causes such as eco-terrorism, anti-abortion groups and animal liberation groups' actions be seen as ideological for the purposes of the Act.[79] While the Russian and UK definitions provide for what amounts to an act of terrorism, some Commonwealth countries have included in their legal editions actions that do not amount to an act of terrorism. For example, both Australia and New Zealand have made it clear in their respective definitions that strike action or a lock-out, provided it is not intended to be linked with an act of terrorism, is not action to come under their respective definitions.[80] A reason why the UK included specific categories of terrorist causes compared to Russia is to cover the threat the UK has under political causes from the

likes of dissident Irish Republican groups,[81] the threat under religious causes from Islamist groups like IS where terrorist action motivated by an interpretation of religion[82] and racial causes regarding potential threats from UK far right groups such as the English Defence League, and, Blood and Honour.[83]

How the law recognises extremist activity is equally as important as establishing what actions amount to an act of terrorism under the law. In Russia extremism is considered to mean a yearning among persons, groups or organizations for taking radical measures in public activities as well as promulgation and dissemination of radical views. According to Federal Law extremism is:

> '…the will to forcibly change the constitutional system; incitement to social, racial, national or religious discord; propaganda of racial inferiority of a nation and superiority of another; encouragement and justification of terrorist activities and participation therein; preventing people from the realization of their rights; calls for extremist acts; circulation of extremist materials; as well as their storage and production with a view of such dissemination; financing of such actions and any contribution thereto.' [84]

In 2006 amendments to this definition were introduced to include into the law activities taken for political and ideological hatred.[85]

Russia has a number of legal instruments in place to counter the dissemination of extremist ideas posted on the Internet where certain resources of extremist slant can be blocked not only following a judicial decision but also without legal proceedings under the requisition of the Prosecutor General. Owners of social networks and popular bloggers (over 3,000 site sessions a day) bear responsibility for controlling the extremist content in Russia.[86] They can be held administratively liable for lodging extremist materials on their personal Web-sites.[87] Extremist materials in Russia are taken to mean printed materials or information on other media which call for carrying out various forms of extremist activities, not just radical Islamist activity. To increase legal awareness among the young people, the Ministry of Internal Affairs conducts a special campaign 'Together against Extremism', which is

meant to expound the meaning of legislation of the Russian Federation and the threats young people may encounter in the Internet. Also engaged are social networking sites, for example VKONTAKTE (VK), where the Ministry of Internal Affairs disseminates information about the Russian legislation and conducts various opinion polls among young people.[88] IS were also quick to use the VK site as up until early 2015 it had its own official media page with VK that has now been shut down.[89]

The central issue of all the cited documents is to monitor the situation and its constant analysis, in which all authorised institutions of state power and organs of local self-government take part. Federal authorities' efforts are coordinated by the National Counter-terrorist Committee. The Committee drafts annual reports for the President on the general state of affairs in the country, from the viewpoint of the established trends in its various subjects. It also organises the preparation of materials on various matters of security. Research institutions and public organisations are encouraged to join in these activities. These reports always reflect the international experience of combating extremism and terrorism, which is closely scrutinised. Reports and monitoring are further summarized and decisions are taken on strengthening measures for preventing and countering extremism and terrorism, on staff training, on appropriate infrastructure and financial support of counter-extremist and counter-terrorist activities.

The functioning of the federal authorities and subjects of the Federation can be deemed successful though it always evokes response on the part of extremists and their enhancement of propagating activities. For example, Aznaur Adzhiev, Minister of the Press and Information in Dagestan reported that, while in 2014 the Internet in his region contained about 13,000 propaganda materials on terrorism and extremism, in the first quarter of 2015 their number grew to over 50,000. In the Minister's opinion, recruiters, fearing the actual counteraction on the part of government agencies, are forced to step up their presence in the

Internet.[90] Together with the National Counter-Terrorist Committee, the Ministry of the Press of Dagestan released several audios and videos to condemn extremism, including the ones made following the visit to Dagestan of the Secretary General of the World Union of Muslim Scholars, Sheik Ali Muhiddin al-Karadagi, Doctor of Islam Theology. These audios and videos are broadcast on the radio and TV of Dagestan. Among them are videos featuring militants condemned for extremism and terrorism.[91]

The UK does not have such a wide legal definition of what activity amounts to extremism or such legal instruments as that in Russia. The current legal basis upon which UK agencies can act under comes from the Terrorism Act 2006. It is an offence under the Act to encourage terrorism be it directly or indirectly where a person publishes or causes to be published a statement encouraging members of the public to commit, prepare or instigate acts of terrorism.[92] Regarding where a person indirectly encourages an act of terrorism, this can be committed where that person glorifies the commission or preparation of a terrorist act regardless of whether it was in the past, currently or in the future.[93] Also, under the 2006 Act it is an offence to disseminate terrorist publications.[94] The threshold of *mens rea* required for these offences is quite low as that person not only is required to intend the encouragement of others to commit acts of terrorism, from their statement or material distributed they only need to be reckless as to whether a person is inspired to commit a terrorist act.[95] Because sections 1 and 2 of the Terrorism Act 2006 were designed to address more specific and rigid forms of disseminating extremist ideology, they are relatively inadequate in forming a legal basis upon which UK counter-terrorism agencies can take when dealing with diverse and fluid dissemination methods of extremism such as that used by IS. Rather than having in place a wider, more flexible law to counter effectively the current communications of extremist material, the UK is currently trying to fit a statutory provision to a set of facts it was not designed to deal with.

It is important this is addressed as extremism is dangerous because it is capable of psychologically affecting both separate persons and whole groups, the public conscience, relations between ethno national and confessional groups, as well as political communities. It is grounded in the transformation of human aspirations into political and aggressive stimuli for struggle. Thus, extremists can make use of the discontent with their status in the society a person or a group of persons might feel. Moreover, extremism, strange as it may seem, is also fostered by the ideas of false romantic heroism, especially with those on the younger side.[96] When joining groups, people are quick to change their motives and the manner of their behaviour. Communication within a group foments the formation of extremist views and makes people eager to commit crimes, as long as they are backed by their group members. This also engenders a diversification of extremism, which threatens life, health and property. Due to the low threshold of *mens rea* the English courts have taken strong position in their decisions related to these offences. The courts have consistently held the prosecution has to prove the publications would be understood by a significant number of its readers as directly or indirectly encouraging acts of terrorism.[97]

In an attempt to address this issue, in 2015 the UK Government released that during the 2015/16 parliamentary session they would be introducing a Counter-Extremism Bill that will introduce new powers to ban extremist organisation that promote hatred and draw people into extremism.[98] This legislation is expected to include:

1. Banning orders for extremist organisation who seek to undermine democracy or use hate speech in public places;
2. Disruption orders to restrict people who seek to radicalise young people;
3. Powers to close premises where extremists seek to influence others.[99]

Crucial to this legislation being successful in countering extremism will be the legal definition of what actions amount to extremism. The UK government's press release in May 2015 only indicated that it will be based on British values,[100] which is a highly subjective

term from which one cannot assess if a person's actions or speech is extremist in nature. Even in the Counter-Extremism Strategy the UK government introduced in October 215, there is no indication as to how extremism will be defined. The document discusses hate crime and issues around radicalising processes and, while stressing that the strategy is not aimed solely at extreme Islamist ideology, IS is mentioned in the document calling IS a:

> 'grotesque manifestation of an extreme Islamist narrative which seeks to impose a new Islamic state governed by a harsh interpretation of Shari'a as state law and totally rejects *liberal values such as democracy, the rule of law and quality*'.[101]

It might be the emphasised part of the quote above that could form the foundation of a definition of extremism that will be perceived as attacking core British values. In drafting the legislation the UK Government could replicate some of the phrases in the Russian legislation regarding action to change the constitutional system, incitement to social, racial, national or religious hatred, encouragement of terrorist activities and preventing people from the realisation of their rights as it is these points that form the basis of democracy and freedoms for citizens to go about their business peaceably.

Conclusion

The experiences Russia and the UK have faced as a result of IS communication's strategy with their citizens joining IS in their Caliphate either as a fighter or to emigrate to the area as well as citizens radicalised to IS' cause who remain in their home state has also been a problem other nation states have had to address. IS terrorist activity within its self-proclaimed Caliphate and in countries outside the area has resulted in many nation states outside Syria becoming involved in taking direct action against IS in order to destroy or degrade the group's capacity to carry out acts of violence and in spreading its message via its sophisticated communications. While the UK's actions have been more closely aligned with its traditional coalition partners from Western Europe, North America and Australasia and Middle Eastern states they have had long established ties with, the political situation

regarding direct action from states outside Syria against IS' Caliphate has recently changed, especially with Russia having started military action in the country. Unlike the UK and its coalition partners who are opposed to the al-Assad regime, Russia has close ties with the regime along with Iran and Hezbollah fighters from Lebanon who are fighting alongside al-Assad's forces.

This may seem an impasse to closer co-operation between all of the different parties involved in Syria, especially in dealing with IS. While the focus of this article is not on the political and diplomatic discourse on the current situation in Syria, the example of how IS' communications strategy impact's on nation states is one example that has the potential not only to bring together nation states that have historical differences, but can be a catalyst to increasing meaningful co-operation between those nations. A decision to study the impact IS's communications strategy has on the UK and Russia was made to highlight the similarity of problems both states face. The UK and Russia have not co-operated closely to engage a common enemy since the end of the Second World War in 1945 (when Russia was the Soviet Union), rather they have been vehement opponents on many issues in the last seventy years. Now is an opportunity for the UK, along with its Western allies to work with Russia. As covered in this article, IS do not recognise nation states' geographical boundaries and see all who do not follow their narrow view of Islam as an enemy. As the findings reveal, IS is desirous of radicalising citizens in both states. This process has three components to it, recruiting jihadist fighters, encouragement of individuals to emigrate to IS' Caliphate or to influence individuals to follow IS' call to kill soldiers and civilians in Europe, the US and Australia.[102]

In states like Russia and the UK, whose citizens are targets of IS' communications strategy related to recruitment to their cause, having a comparative legal basis that demonstrates their counter-terrorism agencies operate within the rule of law is important.

This is on two counts. Firstly to ensure the admissibility of evidence obtained in one state is admissible in any judicial proceedings in another. Secondly, if those agencies seek the co-operation of internet and Communications Service Providers. In the current situation, examining what states like Russia and the UK face when dealing with IS a positive step forward in eradicating IS' threat as it allows for an assessment of similarities they face rather than focusing on their differences. By looking at commonality in relation to problems states suffer at the hands with groups like IS, political differences can be set aside and closer ties in co-operation and trust can be achieved, which in this case will enhance the security Russian and UK citizens.

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