

TECH AND TERRORISM: EXAMINING THE MEDIUM AND THE MESSAGE

GW Program on Extremism
Audrey Alexander - alalexan@gwu.edu

Context and History: Insurgencies + Propaganda



VIVE L'ALGERIE LIBRE!

Une répression sauvage contre les Algériens.
De nombreux travailleurs algériens ont souffert de la loi.
Le M.T.L.D. et son Journal "L'ALGERIE LIBRE" ont été interdits.
... la Commission des Droits de l'Homme en ce qui concerne le régime algérien et ses relations int.

Résistants Algériens,
A cette campagne de force destinée à contrôler les médias algériens, nous espérons...

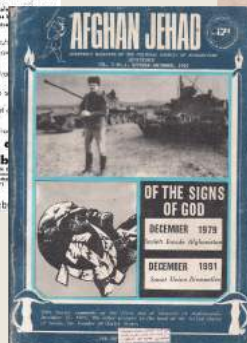
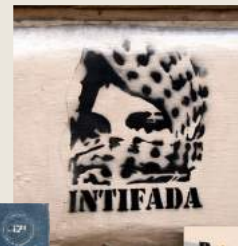
Le terrorisme n'est pas un fait isolé, n'est pas provoqué par les Algériens de la Radio de Casablanca.

La seule et la seule cause de **124 ans d'exploitation, de surexploitation, de répression, de menaces.**

Elle est le seul espoir des Algériens et des autres Algériens qui ont souffert de la loi de l'Algérie, d'Algérie refusant tout le monde dans une lutte pour la liberté, la justice, la solidarité.

Tout cela, malgré un message de solidarité et de fraternité, nous devons et nous espérons...

le retrait du contingent et de toutes les forces...



Backdrop of Discussion

- The presence of violent extremists and violent actors online is not unique to the global jihadi movement → neo-Nazis, for example, have long used tech to advance their aims
- Most analysis on the topic emerged in the last 10(ish) years
- How do we define ‘online radicalization’ or ‘internet radicalization’ if there is not a unified understanding of ‘radicalization’?
- Online vs. Digital Communications Technologies
- Mo’ Tech, Mo’ Problems - Terrorism and the affordances of emerging tools



Examining IS’ Flow of Communications

FAILURE OF THE MEDIA WAR ON THE ISLAMIC STATE

40

Intelligence offices fighting the Islamic State on different online websites

≈ 4,000,00

Accounts have been deleted on social media websites so far

≈ 1,000,000,000

Dollars has been spent on the media war so far

RESULTS TODAY:

- Islamic State media is spread in more than 40 languages today.
- More than 35 new releases everyday for the Islamic State and its supporters such as photo reports and others.
- Islamic State media releases is spread in all main famous websites such as Twitter and Facebook.
- Nearly 18425 posts related to the Islamic State are written each day on social media websites.
- More than 1000 new accounts are made by Islamic State supporters each day on Twitter.

TYPES OF ONLINE FIGHTING:

SPREADING SPEES AND TEAMS

MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

ARRESTING SUPPORTERS

CREATING SPECIALIZED CENTERS

And the Islamic State and its supporters continue to conquer the online field everywhere and to spread thousands of posts with thousands of accounts in tens of languages each day to reach everywhere and it didn't spend a tenth of what the Kuffar has spent and it doesn't have a tenth of the capabilities the Kuffar have and all of that is by Allah's grace, so continue O Ansar to spread terror in the hearts of the Kuffar and to support your religion and nation.

MAY 2017

Digital Decay: Scope of Report

- This report explores how English-language IS sympathizers on Twitter fare in the face of online and offline initiatives aimed at weakening the wider movement
- It examines change over time in a sample of 845,646 tweets produced by 1,782 English-language pro-IS accounts between February 15, 2016 and May 1, 2017



Questions Examined In Digital Decay

Key Question

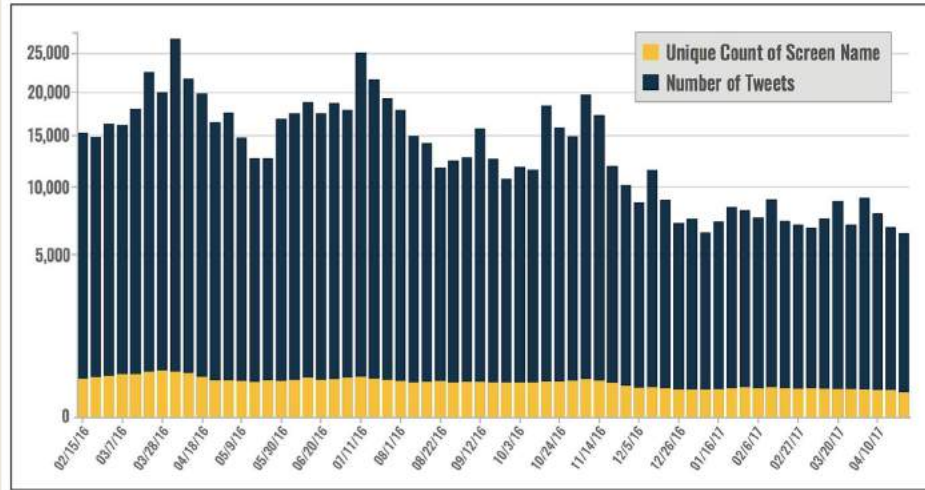
How have Twitter's counter-extremism policies affected English-language IS sympathizers on the platform?

Additional Inquiries

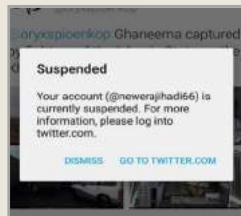
How do IS sympathizers on Twitter engage with

- ◆ *Battles*
- ◆ *Attacks*
- ◆ *Current Events*

English-Language Sympathizers and Twitter’s Policy



Factors like declining tweet frequency, mounting account suspensions, and falling follower count initially indicate that English-language sympathizers suffer at the hand of Twitter’s counter-extremism policy

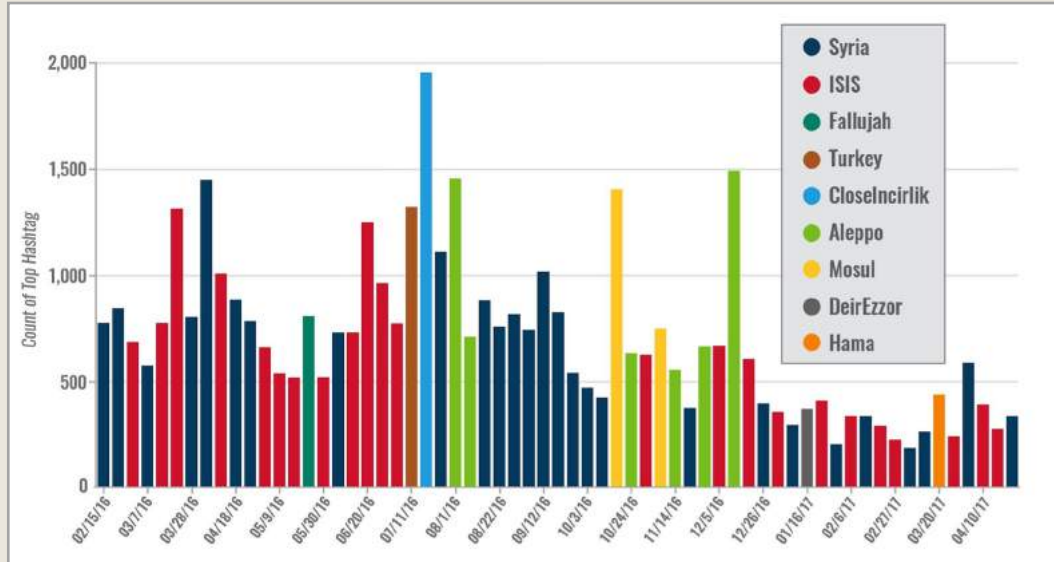


Looking Beyond Numbers

The decline in activity by English-language IS sympathizers is caused by Twitter suspensions and IS’ strategic shift from Twitter to alternative messaging platforms.

Battles, Attacks, and Current Events

Understanding how and when sympathizers stray from the path set for them by IS central



Observations and Transition to Policy

- Data may suggest that the company's efforts have been effective, but a deeper analysis reveals a complex, non-linear portrait of decay.
- This outcome has major implications for the broader fight against IS in the digital sphere.
- Are contemporary measures sufficient?

Violent extremists and their digital networks tend to be...

1

strategically opportunistic and skilled problem solvers

2

adaptable, volatile, and continuously influenced by the competing agendas of organizations, states, companies, and individual users

3

defiant of straightforward analysis and convention solutions

Compare and Contrast



The PRESUMED Threat Picture



The ACTUAL Threat Picture

Grey Media and Liminal Content

- An evolving structure of communications defies black and white categorization
- A significant portion of the content shared by extremists is not conventional terrorist propaganda
- This grey zone between problematic terrorist content and material that is suitable for the public highlights the need for tactics that complement content removal



MARGINALIZING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE DIGITAL SPHERE

Questions? Comments? Concerns?
Please reach out at alalexan@gwu.edu