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Terrorist Celebrity: Online Personal Branding and Jihadist Recruitment and Planning

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Terrorist Celebrity:

Online Personal Branding and Jihadist Recruitment and Planning

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Abstract

Shifts in culture and technology have changed the manifestation of celebrity in modern society, culminating in the practice of internet microcelebrity, where one views followers as fans, produces content consistent with a personal brand, and engages in strategic interaction with devotees. This thesis examines how those effects have also changed how terrorists present themselves and operationalize celebrity status. An original typology of terrorist celebrity is presented: traditional, martyr, and internet micro-celebrity. Two in-depth case studies of terrorist micro-celebrities are analyzed: Anwar al-Awlaki of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Junaid Hussain of the Islamic State. The case studies are examined through content analysis of social media postings, personal chat transcripts, as well as mainstream media coverage of the individuals used to reconstruct their biographies. Following mainstream trends, these terrorist internet celebrities have built personal brands that target specific communities. Awlaki targeted English-speaking Muslims living in the West and IS foreign fighters like Hussain often target young people in the fighter's countries of origin. Their online personas are created to be relatable and engaging to those specific audiences. Ultimately, mainstream celebrity trends have bled into terrorist behavior. By creating brands and managing them through micro-celebrity practices, terrorists have effectively weaponized online celebrity, using it for recruitment and planning.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In February 2016, Mohammad Nur Solikin, in Indonesia, opened the Telegram messaging application and shared a simple message with a man living in Syria that Solikin had never met: Solikin wanted to commit a terrorist attack.[1] Could the stranger help him plan? Bahrun Naim, the man receiving the message, was a fighter with the Islamic State who emigrated to the caliphate in January 2015.[2] Naim was very receptive, with one caveat—he wanted Solikin not to martyr himself, but to instead recruit an inconspicuous female suicide bomber and a few accomplices.[3] Moreover, Naim wanted a high profile target, the Indonesian Presidential Palace. He instructed Solikin and his group over the internet on how to build a pressure cooker bomb, and even transferred money to pay for the materials.[4] On December 10, 2016, Solikin and an accomplice drove to drop off the bomb.[5] Shortly after Solikin left to go scout the target site, Indonesian special counterterrorism police forces knocked on the door, arrested the would-be bomber, and confiscated the bomb.[6]

In terms of terrorist attacks, this process of recruitment and planning solely on the internet is relatively new, leading to the term "virtually-planned" plot or attack. A remotely-directed, or virtually planned, attack occurs when a foreign fighter in Syria, the planner, contacts an Islamic State sympathizer and recruits, trains, and directs them using solely digital, and typically encrypted, communications.[7] The potential operative is located in the

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[1] "Mothers to Bombers: The Evolution of Indonesian Women Extremists," *Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict*, IPAC Report No. 35, Jan. 31, 2017, http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2017/01/IPAC_Report_35.pdf, 22-23.
[2] R. Kim Cragin and Ari Weil, ""Virtual Planners" in the Arsenal of Islamic State External Operations," *Orbis* 62, no. 2 (Spring 2018), 304.
[3] IPAC, "Mothers to Bombers," 23.
[4] Cragin and Weil, ""Virtual Planners,"" 308-309.
[5] Cragin and Weil, ""Virtual Planners,"" 309-10.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Andrew Zammit, "The Role of Virtual Planners in the 2015 Anzac Day Terror Plot," *Security Challenges* 13, no. 1 (2017), 42-44.

foreign fighter's country of origin or in a country where the fighter has language proficiency.[8] Naim's plot is only one of fifty-one such operations that the Islamic State planned.[9]

Scholars and analysts have explored the mechanics of virtually planned attacks, their prevalence in comparison to more traditional forms of attacks, the effectiveness of these plots, and the methods of encryption used.[10] However, there is one key element that has yet to be fully explored: why are these individuals contacting each other? And in cases such as Naim and Solikin, why would the recruit initiate first contact with the planner?

In this case, the answer is clear: Naim was famous in Indonesian militant circles. He had masterminded several plots and attacks in the Indonesia, all while residing in Syria, and Solikin wanted to be a part of the next plot. Naim started a blog when he arrived in Syria and gathered a following in Indonesia.[11] Solikin was a "long-time admirer" of Naim and devoted

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[8] Bridget Moreng, "ISIS' Virtual Puppeteers," *Foreign Affairs*, September 21, 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-09-21/isis-virtual-puppeteers.

[9] Cragin and Weil, ""Virtual Planners,"" 302.

[10] For typologies and prevalence, see Clare Ellis, "With a Little Help from my Friends: An Exploration of the Tactical Use of Single-Actor Terrorism by the Islamic State," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (December 2016): 41-47; Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, and Emilie Oftedal, "Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (December 2016): 3-24. For the effectiveness of virtual plots, see John Mueller, "The Cybercoaching of Terrorists: Cause for Alarm?," *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 9 (October 2017): 29-35. For the mechanics of virtual plots, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Madeleine Blackman, "ISIS' Virtual Planners: A Critical Terrorist Innovation," *War on the Rocks*, January 4, 2017; Moreng, "ISIS' Virtual Puppeteers."; Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Seamus Hughes, "The Threat to the United States from the Islamic State's Virtual Entrepreneurs," *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 3 (March 2017): 1-8; Rukmini Callimachi, "Not 'Lone Wolves' After All: How ISIS Guides World's Terror Plots from Afar," *New York Times*, February 4, 2017; Thomas Joscelyn, "Terror Plots in Germany, France were 'remote-controlled' by Islamic State operatives," *Long War Journal*, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, September 24, 2016, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/09/terror-plots-in-germany-france-were-remote-controlled-by-islamic-state-operatives.php; Zammit, "The Role of Virtual Planners"; R. Kim Cragin and Ari Weil, ""Virtual Planners"".

[11] "8 things to know about Muhammad Bahrun Naim, alleged mastermind of Jakarta attack," *The Straits Times*, January 15, 2016, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/8-things-to-know-about-muhammad-bahrun-naim-alleged-mastermind-of-jakarta-attack.

follower of his blog, and tried to reach out for *six months* before finally getting in contact

with Naim.[12] Naim was, in effect, an internet celebrity.

As social media has proliferated, individuals without established celebrity or "a

strong public identity" are able to gain large followings through postings online, leading to

the notions of internet celebrity, "instafame," and "micro-celebrity."[13] Social media allows

for the development of internet celebrity through two key processes: impression

management, where the user strategically chooses how to present themselves; and personal

branding, where users promote their reputation through the use of profiles on different

networks.[14] Just as bloggers, YouTube video creators, and other internet personalities have

become micro-celebrities through their personal brand online, so too have terrorists.[15]

The recent case of the Islamic State's social media usage brings up several questions

that have largely been left out of terrorism studies research: how is terrorist internet celebrity

constructed and what effect does it have on the recruitment and planning process for

contemporary terrorist groups? These questions are broader in scope than just virtually

planned attacks, and they go much further back in time than just the Islamic State. Celebrity

consumption matters in mainstream culture, and it also matters in terrorist organizations and

radical milieus for spreading ideology, inspiring followers, and recruiting members. In order

to approach these questions, this thesis first examines the terrorism studies literature and

research on the relationship between terrorist organizations and mass media. As celebrity is

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[12] IPAC, "Mothers to Bombers," 22. Cragin and Weil, ""Virtual Planners,"" 304.

[13] Susie Khamis, Lawrence Ang, and Raymond Welling, "Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of Social Media Influencers," *Celebrity Studies* 8, no. 2 (2017), 194-200.

[14] For impression management, see Nicole C. Kramer and Stephan Winter, "Impression Management 2.0: The Relationship of Self-Esteem, Extraversion, Self-Efficacy, and Self-Presentation Within Social Networking Sites," *Journal of Media Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2008): 106-116; For personal branding, Dorie Clark, *Reinventing You: Define Your Brand, Imagine Your Future,* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2013).

[15] Khamis et al, 191-208.

largely excluded, the paper then turns to media and culture studies to establish the concept of celebrity and its applicability to the study of terrorism. Following the literature review, a study of historical and contemporary terrorist celebrity is conducted, with an analytic focus on two case studies of terrorist micro-celebrities.

Literature Review

The Dual Audiences of Terrorism

In 1974 Brian Michael Jenkins, one of the pioneers of terrorism studies, aptly noted that "terrorism is theater."[16] To Jenkins, terrorist attacks were distinct from other forms of violence because the target is not those directly harmed in the act, but rather the broader audience who views and is impacted by the attack. While no singular definition of terrorism has ever been developed in the literature, this notion that terrorist attacks seek to have a wide psychological effect and have distinct victims and targets is included in many definitions. In Schmid and Jongman's study of 109 definitions of terrorism, 51% included fear, 41.5% included psychological effects, and 37.5% included the victim-target differentiation to which Jenkin's theater metaphor alludes.[17]

Victim-target differentiation points to one audience, those the terrorist group wishes to intimidate or coerce. But the theater of terrorism has another audience: those whom terrorists wish to recruit. In their seminal work on the strategies of terrorism, Kydd and Walter point to two key audiences, the target government whom the terrorists want to coerce and individuals that terrorists want to sway.[18] Thus, terrorists must use spectacular acts of

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[16] Brian M. Jenkins, "International Terrorism: A New Kind of Warfare," *RAND Corporation*, RAND Paper Series, June 1974, 4.

[17] Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988), 5-6.

[18] Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006), 58.

violence to speak to both audiences. One attack and the publicity surrounding it may create a sense of fear in the target population and simultaneously demonstrate strength to supporters.

Due to the target-victim differentiation involved in terrorist acts and these two audiences, terrorists and terrorist organizations are inherently dependent on some form of media and communication to spread their message. The early, anarchist wave of terrorists developed the notion of "propaganda by deed," where their violent actions would speak to a larger audience about the group's goals.[19] Yet without mass media tools of either news coverage or self-published communiqués and manifestos, news of the attack may not spread and the terrorists may not reach their target audience.

Thus, for the majority of the 20th century, terrorist organizations were dependent on media outlets to ensure public attention to their attacks. The early European anarchists relied on pamphlet distribution to explain their attacks, but only reached a limited audience.[20] Menachem Begin's "glass house" strategy used spectacular attacks on targets representative of British prestige in order to gain attention in the British and international media, discredit the British, and force them to leave Mandatory Palestine.[21]

Terrorism and Modern Mass Media

This media dependency only increased as terrorist attacks moved out of the domestic realm and took an increasingly transnational and international nature. Hoffman argues that 1968 presents two key turning points in terrorism: the start of modern international terrorism with Palestinian aircraft hijackings in Europe and the launch of the first television satellite,

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[19] David C. Rapaport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James Ludes (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 50-2. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 3rd edition, (New York: Columbia, 2017), 5.

[20] Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn, *The Theater of Terror: Mass Media and International Terrorism* (New York City: Longman Publishing, 1994), 53.

[21] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism,* 49-55. Weimann and Winn, *Theater of Terror,* 54

which allowed for faster coverage of international terrorist events.[22] By the early 1970s, improved broadcasting technology allowed for the live coverage of the terrorist attack on the Munich Olympics, captivating viewers around the world.[23]

This led to what ABC broadcaster Ted Koppel described as a "symbiotic relationship," where the media needs exciting stories to cover and terrorists need an outlet to spread their exploits and message.[24] Increasingly, terrorists began to see their attacks as what Brigette Nacos termed a "media event," a premeditated spectacle meant to garner coverage.[25] Terrorists could harness the increasingly broad reach of the news media in the 1970s and 80s to spread their message to a larger audience. In order to maximize the effect, Jenkins, in a continuation of his theater metaphor, argued that "terrorist attacks are often carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the international press."[26] The hostage-taking and airplane hijacking that became prevalent in the 1970s and 80s is demonstrative of this trend, because both tactics can be made into drawn-out events that maximize media coverage.

Terrorism and the Internet

However, towards the end of the 20th century, a shifting media and communications landscape enabled terrorists to reach their target audience and supporters in new ways, often circumventing traditional media entirely. The internet enabled terrorist organizations to reach out directly to both supporters whom terrorists wish to sway and the target audience whom terrorists wish to coerce. American neo-Nazis were the first to acknowledge the potential use

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[22] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism,* 187.
[23] Idem, 188.
[24] Quoted in Weimann and Winn, *Theater of Terror,* 51.
[25] Brigitte Nacos, *Mass-mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), xiv.
[26] Jenkins, "International Terrorism," 4.

of the internet by radical groups.[27] In the early 1980s, three far-right electronic bulletin

boards were launched.[28] While the boards did not have wide readership, they were used in

1983 by former Texas Grand Dragon Louis Beam to release an essay titled "Leaderless

Resistance."[29] Beam spelled out a new strategy of autonomous units operating independently

whose attacks would combine for a greater effect without the traditional pitfalls of

hierarchical terrorist organizations that could be more easily disrupted by law enforcement.[30]

The internet would serve as a medium through which disparate cells and sympathetic

individuals could be educated in the movement's ideology and tactics.[31]

While Beam's dream of a white supremacist revolution did not materialize, the

American far right message boards of the 1980s demonstrated the start of a new approach to

terrorist communications and networking. Since then, terrorists have continued to expand

their use of digital tools. Over the last forty years, terrorist use of the internet can be

envisioned in three distinct, but not entirely separate or exclusive, stages. The first terrorist

websites lasted from the 1980s until the early 2000s, then a focus on training led to a second

stage in the early to mid-2000s, and finally the rise of social media enabled the third and

current stage.

From the 1980s to the early 2000s, the first stage involved the creation of terrorist

websites primarily to post news, share ideological documents, and elicit donations. This first

stage represents a traditional, one-to-many, form of communication.[32] In many ways, early

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[27] Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Audrey Alexander, and Nick Kaderbhai, "The impact of digital communications technology on radicalization and recruitment," *International Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2017), 1234.
[28] George Michael, "The New Media and the Rise of Exhortatory Terrorism," Strategic Studies Quarterly 7, no. 1 (Spring 2013), 42.
[29] Michael, "The New Media," 43.
[30] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism,* 122-3.
[31] Michael, "The New Media," 43.
[32] John Curtis Amble, "Combating Terrorism in the New Media Environment," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35, no. 5 (2012), 340.

terrorist websites provided a parallel structure to old media by providing their supporters

with news of their exploits straight from the source. In 1995, the Tamil Tigers' first website

served this purpose, circumventing the state-controlled media to deliver news of the group's

attacks through their website.[33] This enabled the group to speak to both audiences: the

website's news feature emboldened potential supporters by demonstrating strength and

evinced fear in the target population who were suddenly hearing about many more attacks.

Gabriel Weimann's study of the early uses of the internet by terrorist groups shows that

websites were also used to post ideological documents and elicit donations from supporters.[34]

This enabled terrorist groups to interact with supporters worldwide in new ways, although,

with the exception of donations, the interaction was largely unidirectional at this point.

Terrorist websites sought to inform supporters and targets of the organization's goals, but did

not enable the supporters to fully interact with the organization yet.

At the turn of the century, the number and diversity of terrorist websites increased

drastically. In 1998, fewer than 15 groups had websites and by 2005, there were 4,300

terrorist websites representing a broad range of groups.[35] With this growth came a shift in

how terrorists used the internet. The second stage, beginning in the late 1990s and going until

the mid to late 2000s, involved an increased focus on training supporters through how-to

guides and online discussion forums. As then-FBI Director Robert Mueller noted in 2007,

"the information age means you don't need training camps to become a terrorist; all you need

is an Internet connection."[36] Perhaps the quintessential example is Al Qaeda in the Arabian

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[33] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 213.
[34] Gabriel Weimann, "www.terror.net—How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet," *United States Institute of Peace*, Special Report 116, March 2004.
[35] Amble, "Combatting Terrorism," 341.
[36] Quoted in Evan K Kohlman, ""Homegrown" Terrorists: Theory and Cases in the War on Terror's Newest Front," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618, no. 1 (2008), 99.

Peninsula's (AQAP) famous *Al-Battar Camp* magazine. Released from January to October of 2004, the magazine included articles on a range of training topics, including physical training, communications, and tactics.[37] *Al Battar* is known for the famous line included on the last page: "you don't have to travel to other lands…you too can begin the training program. You can join the al-Battar Camp."[38] Thus, terrorism studies scholars began to describe the internet as a "virtual training camp."[39] One analyst warned of the danger of "cyberplanning": the prospect for terrorists to use the internet to train, coordinate, and plan attacks.[40]

To be sure, terrorist and anarchist instructional materials had existed and been circulated for years.[41] As early as 1885, anarchists such as Johann Most were writing essays and delivering speeches that explained how to build a bomb.[42] Carlos Marighella's famous *Minimanual of the Urban Guerilla* taught tactics to guerillas and terrorists from Uruguay to West Germany.[43] Training manuals were not invented at the turn of the century; rather, the internet allowed violent non-state actors to spread their training manuals to anyone with an internet connection, a far larger audience than ever before. However, the feared "cyberplanned" attacks largely did not materialize. As Anne Stenersen showed, rather than running an organized program to virtually train followers, Al Qaeda was instead using the

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[37] Anne Stenersen, "The Internet: A Virtual Training Camp?" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 2 (2008), 223.
[38] Stenersen, "Virtual Training Camp," 224.
[39] Gabriel Weimann, "Virtual Training Camps: Terrorist' Use of the Internet," in James JF Forest, ed., Teaching Terror: Strategic and Tactical Learning in the Terrorist World (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2006), 110-132.
[40] Timothy L. Thomas, "Al Qaeda and the Internet: The Danger of "Cyberplanning," *Parameters* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 112-113, 117-118.
[41] Nacos, *Mass-mediated Terrorism*, 49-67.
[42] Nacos, *Mass-mediated Terrorism,* 49-53.
[43] Idem, 59.

internet to create a library where sympathizers could seek out materials and manuals.[44] This

one-way directionality meant few attacks were attributed to online training materials.

With the rise of social media, a third stage began in the late 2000s and continues to

the present day. Whereas traditional media and the first stage were marked by the one-to-

many model, social media allows for "many-to-many" communications.[45] Terrorist

organizations are not only able to reach a broader audience, but now their worldwide

adherents can interact with them. The Islamic State has excelled at the use of social media

through the use of "tailored online interventions."[46] Islamic State recruiters monitor social

media feeds of potential recruits to look for anti-Western sentiment, and then groom the

recruit through repeated interactions leading to a potential action, from immigrating to Syria

to conducting a domestic attack or merely helping to spread propaganda.[47]

Another case of the Islamic State's media-savvy approach is their beheading videos,

which provide perhaps the best example of how the media landscape has changed how

terrorists communicate with multiple audiences. The Islamic State's rapid rise in the summer

of 2014 was followed by a series of videos in autumn of that year depicting Islamic State

fighters beheading captured western journalists and aid workers.[48] The videotaped beheading

is not a new tactic—it was first introduced in the 1990s by terrorists in Chechnya and was a

hallmark of the Islamic State predecessor, Al Qaeda in Iraq—but the Islamic State

disseminated the videos more widely than previous groups and the brutality displayed

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[44] Stenersen, "Virtual Training Camp".
[45] Amble, "Combatting Terrorism," 340.
[46] J.M. Berger, "Tailored Online Interventions: The Islamic State's Recruitment Strategy," *CTC Sentinel* 8, no. 10 (October 2015), 19.
[47] Berger, "Tailored Online Interventions," 21-2.
[48] Simone Molin Friis, "'Beyond anything we have ever seen': beheading videos and the visibility of violence in the war against ISIS," *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015), 725-6.

became an essential part of the group's brand.[49] To Western audiences, the videos were a

clear threat. Cragin and Padilla point to an article in the Islamic State magazine *Dabiq* that

rationalized the James Foley beheading because the United States government treated the

issue with "apathy"; this rhetoric is targeted to make western civilians feel that their

governments cannot or will not protect them.[50] Yet that same brutality was a tool of

recruitment. The videos sent a message that the Islamic State was in control of territory, and

it would not hesitate to enforce its vicious rule of law within that territory. It was this brutal

brand that attracted thousands of fighters who joined the fledgling caliphate in 2014.

As noted previously, these stages are not exclusive. While the primary use of the

internet has shifted to social media platforms, terrorist groups still produce online magazines

and other training materials. Since 2010, AQAP has produced a magazine titled *Inspire* that

contains a training section under the name "Open Source Jihad."[51] However, the majority of

terrorist activity online has moved to social media platforms, becoming the predominant

space for terrorist organizations to spread their message and interact with followers.[52]

Additionally, this third stage allows for the inclusion of new informally-affiliated

terrorist actors and for the actualization of the "cyberplanned" terrorist attack that Thomas

warned of in 2003.[53] In his study of terrorist cooperation, Assaf Moghadam identified the

internet as the medium through which informal and formal agents of terrorism are able to

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[49] Friis, "Beyond anything we have ever seen," 729.

[50] Quoted in R. Kim Cragin and Phillip Padilla, "Old Becomes New Again: Kidnappings by Daesh and Other Salafi-Jihadists in the Twenty-First Century," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40, no. 8 (2017), 674-5.

[51] Alastair Reed and Haroro J. Ingram, "Exploring the Role of Instructional Material in AQAP's Inspire and ISIS' Rumiyah," Europol Report, May 26, 2017.

[52] Yuki Noguchi, "Tracking Terrorists Online," *The Washington Post,* Live Q&As, April 19, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2006/04/11/DI2006041100626.html.

[53] Thomas, "Al Qaeda and the Internet," 112-113, 117-118.

collaborate.[54] The networked and interactive nature of social media allows any individual "entrepreneur" to receive the training, guidance, and inspiration they require from an organization to carry out their own attack.[55] Over the last decade, terrorists have used the internet to successfully inspire and direct attacks and plots by individuals around the world who have only interacted with the organization online.

Thus, it is clear that as media has diversified, terrorists have been able to spread their message to a wider audience and the traditional media-terrorist relationship has drastically shifted. Terrorists once craved media interviews in order to spread their message, yet today they behead journalists to the same effect. No longer entirely dependent on traditional media, terrorists can now use a broad variety of digital platforms to produce their own content, promote their ideology, recruit new fighters, command remote cells or unconnected sympathizers, and inspire adherents around the world.

While terrorism studies research has explored these various changes in terrorist use of the internet, the field has not adequately addressed the power of web 2.0 to build the brands of specific terrorists and raise the profile of individuals. The literature leaves out a parallel and important change—that with the expansion of information technology and changing consumer habits, the nature of celebrity itself has drastically shifted. An ordinary individual is now able to become famous by posting videos or blogging, and terrorists are not separate from these changes. Previous terrorists were dependent on the media to raise their individual profile, but today they can create their own heightened status through the use of the internet. Take, for example, the famous American internet preacher and AQAP ideologue Anwar al-

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[54] Assaf Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2017), 77.
[55] Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad,* 77-93.

Awlaki, whose internet lectures reached thousands through YouTube and made him a celebrity in the global Salafi jihad movement. More recently, the infamous masked IS executioner Jihadi John became a household name after IS uploaded a video of him beheading James Foley.[56] Both used the tools of the internet to derive a newfound status, demonstrating that terrorism is not detached from broader trends in social media use and consumption. However, this shift has yet to be fully explored in field of terrorism studies. The lacuna in the literature prevents a complete understanding of how technological and cultural changes work together to provide the context for changes in the manifestation of terrorism. Thus, it is worthwhile to examine the celebrity, media, and culture studies literature to understand how the concept of celebrity has changed with the expansion of digital platforms.

The Concept of Celebrity

Scholars have situated the beginnings of the modern concept of celebrity in the mid-eighteenth century.[57] Inglis argues that this point in time represents the convergence of several factors that enabled the transition from an age-old framework of fame and renown to the new concept of modern celebrity: "the rise of urban democracy, the two-hundred-year expansion of its media of communication, together with the radical individualisation of the modern sensibility made fame a much more transitory reward and changed public acclaim from an expression of devotion into one of celebrity."[58]

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[56] Nacos, *Mass-mediated Terrorism*, 104-5.
[57] Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage Publications, 2013), 11, ProQuest Ebrary.
[58] Fred Inglis, *A Short History of Celebrity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 23, ProQuest Ebrary.

How is celebrity separate from renown? As Studlar argues, "it is not automatically moored to significant accomplishment(s) in traditional arenas of cultural contribution."[59] For centuries, certain figures (royalty, accomplished generals, famous writers, politicians, etc.) had achieved fame and even heroic status for their accomplishments.[60] In turn, renown "brought honour to the office not the individual, and public recognition was not so much of the man himself as of the significance of his actions for the society."[61] In contrast, celebrity is about the individual themselves. While a celebrity can be someone with significant accomplishments, their status is ultimately derived from the public knowing them—as Boorstin noted, being "*known for his well-knownness*."[62]

In this sense, as Marshall presents, there are two key elements from which celebrity derives power: individuality and visibility.[63] Celebrities present unique personas that are then promulgated through available forms of media.[64] In turn, it is both the media and the consumer who combine to create a celebrity. Boorstin aptly noted that the celebrity "is made by all of us who willingly read about him, who like to see him on television, who buy recordings of his voice, and talk about him to our friends."[65] Other scholars have added a third element: intimacy. A person of renown was far away and untouchable; in contrast, a celebrity is someone the public thinks they know intimately. Tellingly, Shickel titled his 1985 study of contemporary celebrity culture *Intimate Strangers*. One may never meet a

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[59] Gaylyn Studlar, "The Changing Face of Celebrity and the Emergence of Motion Picture Stardom," in *A Companion to Celebrity*, ed. P. David Marshall and Sean Redmond, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 58-9, Wiley Online Library.
[60] Daniel J. Boorstin, "From Hero to Celebrity: The Human Pseudo-Event," in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, ed. P. David Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2006), 74.
[61] Inglis, 10.
[62] Ibid. Daniel Boorstin, "From Hero to Celebrity," 79.
[63] P. David Marshall, "The Genealogy of Celebrity: Introduction," in *A Companion to Celebrity*, ed. P. David Marshall and Sean Redmond, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 16-7, Wiley Online Library.
[64] Ibid, 17.
[65] Boorstin, "From Hero to Celebrity," 79.

specific celebrity, but the highly visible nature of their persona as spread through media makes the public "think we know what makes them tick."[66]

One additional factor is highlighted primarily in the sociological literature on organizations and leadership: the quality of charisma. The previous three elements: individuality, visibility, and intimacy, are all definitional: a public figure needs them to maintain celebrity status. In contrast, charisma is not necessary but is rather a quality with which one can improve the three key factors of celebrity. Max Weber codified three pure ways in which individuals gain and keep legitimacy: rational, a legal form of authority; traditional, based on lineage or ordained rule; or charismatic, authority based on devotion to an individual with exemplary qualities.[67] Weber never connected this to celebrity, but his description lines up exactly with celebrity's key function of an audience or consumer: he argued that no attempt to judge the individual's quality mattered, but rather "what is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to his charismatic authority, by his "followers" or disciples.""[68] Thus, a particular skill in oration, interpersonal interactions, or some other quality can allow the celebrity in question to gain a following. If the followers are particularly swayed, they will endow that individual with authority and the followers may even become devotees.

Thus, celebrity is inherently reliant on mass media to maximize the number of people who are familiar with each celebrity's individual persona. Due to this dependency, the

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[66] Richard Schickel, *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1985), 29.

[67] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 215-216.

[68] Weber, *Economy and Society,* 242.

manifestation of these three elements has changed over time with the introduction of new media and communications technologies.

History of Celebrity

In the nineteenth century, celebrities were dependent on print media to promote the individual persona that the celebrity was presenting. The introduction of the telegraph, telephone, photography, and further advances in mass printing all contributed to a new and richer media landscape. Take, for example, an entertainment celebrity such as Buffalo Bill. These new communications technologies were used to promote his appearances while dime novels kept fans entertained and enthralled with his persona between performances.[69]

The turn of the century also marked a new media landscape; one in which celebrity was not entirely reliant on print media but rather could be propagated through radio, movies, or television.[70] A telegraph or pamphlet could only do so much—now the masses could experience celebrity personas by hearing their voices and seeing them in a moving picture. Giles points to the way celebrity was manufactured in Hollywood: by the 1910s and 20s, movie studios began signing contracts with specific actors and turning them into star personalities whom audiences would flock to see on screen.[71] Studios created cults of personality through interviews, magazine profiles, and billboards, which in turn solidified the actor's unique image in the public's eye.[72] Television went even further by bringing the stars into one's living room, effectively integrating them "into the everyday and the domestic flow of life."[73]

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[69] Studlar, "Changing Face of Celebrity," 62-63.
[70] Marshall, "The Genealogy of Celebrity," 17.
[71] David Giles, *Illusions of Mortality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 21-2.
[72] Ibid.
[73] P. David Marshall, "New Media-New Self: The Changing Power of Celebrity," in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, ed. P. David Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2006), 636.

At the end of the 20th century, celebrity went through another change that once again affected the key elements of individuality, visibility, and intimacy. In Gabler's model of celebrity supply and demand, the increased demand for celebrities led the media to create more celebrities outside of the traditional fields of sports and entertainment.[74] In particular, scholars highlight the rise of reality television in the 1990s as a major turning point, representing the diversification of who could become a celebrity.[75] Reality television not only elevated ordinary individuals to high levels of visibility, it did so by giving viewers an intimate look into the star's everyday life. Take Maureen Reece, who became famous on the 1997 BBC series *Driving School*, a reality show that documented learning drivers. Reece had previously failed seven tests, and the show documented her continuing struggle to pass.[76] Before long, she was a household name in Britain with newspapers and other shows running profiles of her, and the series finale garnered 12 million viewers.[77] In no previous era could someone have become famous for failing seven driving tests. Yet the changing media landscape allowed for the creation of a new class of celebrity. Suddenly, anyone, not just a movie star, musician, or football player, could be famous for their individualism if they received enough visibility.

Fame on the Internet: Microcelebrity

The internet solidified this transformation by fully challenging the pre-existing modern celebrity system, which relied on a media production process separate from the celebrity in question. New digital tools revamped the processes through which individuality

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[74] Neal Gabler, *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 156.

[75] Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 58-9.

[76] Giles, *Illusions of Mortality,* 70.

[77] Ibid.

and visibility can be attained. No longer was an individual reliant on the print or visual media to increase their visibility. Rather, the explosion of online platforms allowed anyone to post content and increase their own visibility, sharing text, photos, or videos with a few to millions of followers. Celebrification, the process through which ordinary people become celebrities, was occurring at faster rates and with lower barriers to entry.[78] The late twentieth century saw the rise of bloggers, while the early twenty-first gave way to "YouTubers," "vloggers," the "instafamous," and other forms of internet celebrity, often typified by the content they produce.

Enabling the greater frequency of celebrification is a larger process labeled celebritization. Driessens defines this as a meta-process that has changed the accessibility of celebrity in society and culture.[79] He highlights three indicators of this process: democratization, the increased access of a wide range of individuals to celebrity status; diversification, the opening of celebrity to new areas other than entertainment as Gabler described; and migration, the movement of celebrities between two different fields, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger's move into politics.[80] These indicators are driven by three engines: mediatization, the manner in which the media shapes discourse; personalization, the increasing importance of the individual as opposed to the collective; and commodification, the process of giving an individual an economic value based on their status and profiting from that value.[81] None of these engines are new, but the new revolution in communications technology has sped up these processes with respect to celebrity.

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[78] Olivier Driessens, "The celebritization of society and culture: Understanding the structural dynamics of celebrity culture," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, no. 6 (2012), 643.
[79] Driessens, "The celebritization of society," 644
[80] Idem, 645-649.
[81] Idem, 645-652.

At the heart of the democratization of celebrity on the internet is the manner in which individuals present themselves. In her seminal 2001 study of women using webcams (so-called "camgirls"), Senft coined the term "micro-celebrity."[82] At face value, micro-celebrity is a status, "the state of being famous to a niche group of people."[83] Yet micro-celebrity is much more than merely a status. Senft observed micro-celebrity as a set of actions –"the commitment to deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same."[84] Each camgirl was broadcasting her daily life, and as such was cultivating and presenting a unique persona that she needed to maintain with a semblance of consistency and authenticity.

The practices of micro-celebrity mirror those of traditional celebrity: presenting a unique persona, viewing followers as fans, producing content consistent with that persona, and engaging in strategic interaction with the goal of maximizing both intimacy and continued visibility.[85] Micro-celebrity is thus "a way of thinking of oneself as a celebrity."[86] However, in contrast to traditional celebrities, micro-celebrities carry "fame that is native to social media."[87] Take, for example, the "Youtuber" as a micro-celebrity. The label "Youtuber" refers to someone who creates and posts videos on the video-hosting site Youtube.com. This may come in many forms; prominent channels have included content such as pranks, beauty tutorials, music reviews, comedic skits, and countless more. Each one

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[82] Theresa M. Senft, *Camgirls: Celebrity & Community in the Age of Social Networks* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008).

[83] Alice Marwick, S*tatus Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 114, EBSCOhost eBook Collection.

[84] Theresa M. Senft, "Microcelebrity and the Branded Self," in *A Companion to New Media Dynamics*, ed. John Hartley, Jean Burgess, and Axel Bruns (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 346, Wiley Online Library.

[85] Alice E. Marwick, "You May Know Me from Youtube: (Micro-)Celebrity in Social Media," in *A Companion to Celebrity*, ed. P. David Marshall and Sean Redmond, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 337, Wiley Online Library.

[86] Marwick, *Status Update*, 115.

[87] Marwick, "You May Know Me from Youtube," 338.

cultivates a specific image that appeals to a target audience, and by keeping content consistent, they can effectively manage their brand. Many prominent Youtubers have created a second channel for behind the scenes videos ("BTS") and video blogs ("vlogs") that detail their daily lives outside of the channel content, proving a chance for fans to feel a sense of intimacy.

The rise of individualism highlighted by Driessens has a distinct impact on the internet environment for micro-celebrity. With increased media access and saturation, "the premium on distinctiveness and visibility grows."[88] Micro-celebrity practitioners are competing for attention, and each is developing a distinctive brand with which to attract visibility. As Senft succinctly described, the micro-celebrity "must brand or die."[89] And social media platforms provide built-in metrics to determine each user's success in branding, namely how many likes, comments or shares their posts receive.[90] By effectively creating content, whether text, photo, audio, or video, which supports and maintains their unique personal brand, a micro-celebrity practitioner without any previous public profile can compete for attention and become famous to a niche population.

In a 2012 article, Driessens called for more "analysing and comparing celebritization in different social fields."[91] The intense focus on cultural and political celebrities has enabled the development of a strong theoretical model, but it remains to be seen if this model is qualified in other social fields.[92] What makes this practice particularly fruitful is that by nature, micro-celebrity practices are not static; techniques change depending on the digital

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[88] Khamis, Susie, Lawrence Ang, and Raymond Welling, "Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of Social Media Influencers," *Celebrity Studies* 8, no. 2 (2017), 195.

[89] Senft, *Camgirls*, 26.

[90] Alice E. Marwick, "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy," *Public Culture* 27, no. 1 (2015), 140.

[91] Driessens, "The celebritization of society," 654.

[92] Ibid.

platform used and the social context of the user.[93] Thus, studies in other arenas can illuminate different types of micro-celebrity and allow scholars to test whether the original model as proposed by Senft accounts for micro-celebrity practices in a wide range of social contexts.

But why study celebrity at all? The field of celebrity studies, which stands as a subfield of media and culture studies, has struggled to gain legitimacy.[94] Yet for all the claims that celebrity studies represents a "'dumbing down' of academia," the field remains relevant for the simple reason that celebrity plays a large and ever-increasing role in society.[95] "Entertainment is the primary standard of value for virtually everything in modern society"; entertainers, whatever their form, are mythologized and placed upon pedestals as varied as role model, mythic figure, and status symbol.[96] As Rahman notes, "celebrity is a manifestation of globalized commodity consumerism."[97] In various manners, the public consumes celebrity, and that consumption creates demand for new celebrity personas. Gabler's model of celebrity supply and demand helps explain the explosion of celebrity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century precisely because the masses consuming celebrity wanted more.[98] Celebrity culture seems to permeate all aspects of life today, and terrorism is no different.

This study takes terrorists as the object of focus in order to understand how they fit the existing theoretical model and where terrorist celebrity differs. To take Jenkins' metaphor of terrorism as theater, several questions remain: who are terrorism's stars, how is their

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[93] Marwick, "You May Know Me from YouTube," 334.

[94] See the opening editorial of the journal *Celebrity Studies* for a discussion of the field's struggles with legitimacy. Su Holmes and Sean Redmond, "A journal in *Celebrity Studies*," *Celebrity Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 2010): 1-10, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19392390903519016.

[95] Idem, 1.

[96] Gabler, *Life the Movie*, 176.

[97] Momin Rahman, "Is Straight the New Queer? David Beckham and the Dialectics of Celebrity," in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, ed. P. David Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2006), 223.

[98] Gabler, *Life the Movie*, 156.

celebrity constructed, and how are terrorist celebrities deploying that celebrity towards their political ends? And have the same forces of consumerism that have driven the expansion of mainstream celebrity also compelled a shift in terrorist celebrity? While celebrity has not been examined in depth by terrorism scholars, the above examination of the history of terrorism and the media and the history of celebrity demonstrates that they are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, the same changes in media consumption and production have altered the functions of both terrorism and celebrity, most prominently the rise of digital communications platforms, which democratized both.

Ultimately, while much scholarly attention has been paid to the many platforms that new media provides for terrorism, analyzing the process of celebritization goes a step further by combining the study of changing technology with an examination of shifting cultural behavior. This combination provides a more holistic understanding of the current changes in terrorism and the context in which they are taking place. The technological changes cannot be studied in isolation—to do so would ignore how societal and cultural trends feed into terrorist behavior. In bridging these discussions, this study examines how terrorist celebrity is built and maintained, how it has changed with the advent of digital micro-celebrity, what opportunities it has created for terrorist organizations, and the potential of celebrity to spread to more terrorist organizations.

Outline

This thesis is structured as follows. The second chapter takes the societal and technological trends identified in the literature review and examines how terrorist celebrity in particular has changed in parallel with shifts in mainstream celebrity culture. The chapter starts with terrorist celebrity and the old media, which largely mirrors traditional forms of

celebrity. It then examines the advent of martyrdom videos in the 1980s and 1990s, which is a period of transition from a broad celebrity to a more narrowly focused form. The chapter ends by analyzing how the internet changed the manifestation of both mainstream and terrorist celebrities, resulting in a targeted celebrity that can create a stronger sense of intimacy and provide more opportunities for strategic interaction. Throughout each of these stages, the different forms of terrorist celebrity are examined to see how each has contributed to terrorist organizations' abilities to recruit operatives and carry out operations.

Two case studies are analyzed of terrorists engaging in micro-celebrity. For analytic focus, only jihadists are examined. Further research will explore far right organizations, leftist groups, and single-issue terrorist organizations. The third chapter examines the first case study of Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born AQAP cleric who became famous for his online sermons. The fourth chapter examines the second case study of Junaid Hussain, the British hacker turned Islamic State foreign fighter and virtual planner. The analytic focus is on celebrity production (how terrorist micro-celebrities create a personal brand), maintenance (how they keep up that brand), and outcomes (the opportunities the brand affords the terrorist).

The conclusion summarizes the research findings on the effect of celebrity and analyzes the implications for terrorist recruitment and planning based on the case studies examined in chapters three and four. It then seeks to understand what will happen next in terrorist celebrity. Will these—and can these—micro-celebrity practices be exported to other terrorist groups or is this is unique to the Islamic State?

Chapter Two: A Brief History of Terrorist Celebrity

This chapter analyzes how the manifestation of terrorist celebrity has changed from the mid-twentieth century to the present. While celebrity is an individual status, it can have a larger effect, particularly when the individual belongs to or represents a larger movement. Thus, the analytic focus is on how different types of celebrity contributed to terrorist organization's abilities to recruit operatives and carry out operations.

As celebrity is an understudied aspect of terrorism studies, this chapter uses a media and culture studies lens to analyze the history of international terrorism and develop an original typology of terrorist celebrity (see figure 2.1, at the end of the chapter). Three types of terrorist celebrities are identified. First, traditional terrorist celebrity derives its status in the same way as traditional mainstream celebrity—through media coverage and public attention. These are typically terrorist leaders, especially charismatic operatives, or particularly elusive terrorists, all of whom capture the public's attention and garner media coverage. Traditional terrorist celebrity status is broad: the individual in question is known both to their supporters and detractors and often acts accordingly. Second is the celebrity status achieved by suicide bombers who are labeled as martyrs. This celebrity status is unique is that it is bestowed posthumously to someone with little prior public profile. This creates a narrower celebrity that is targeted towards the local community in order to recruit rather than the public at large. Third is internet micro-celebrity, where terrorists treat followers as fans and engage in strategically intimate interactions online. This is the narrowest of the categories, as each micro-celebrity maintains a persona that appeals to a specific group of people online.

These types are presented as evolutionary, but not completely distinct or separate. Evolutions in type occurred due to changes in technology, the media environment, and consumer demand for new celebrities, but the new types evolved alongside the former. For example, while traditional terrorist celebrity began in the 1960s and 70s and thus is very similar to the mainstream celebrity of that time, it still continues even as martyrdom and internet micro-celebrity are present today.

While the focus of this study is on terrorist celebrity, it must be examined in the general context of celebritization in society as a whole, because this larger shift is what contributes to changes in terrorist celebrity. Terrorists have not suddenly created their own celebrities, but rather have engaged in and thus both deliberately and inadvertently weaponized the existing celebrity culture. Each of the three categories of terrorist celebrity will be contextualized within the mainstream celebrity equivalent and compared for similarities and differences. Finally, each category will be examined to determine how terrorist organizations create, maintain, and exploit celebrity status.

Traditional Terrorist Celebrity

Celebrity terrorism in its original form is a direct outgrowth of the advent of international terrorism, which Hoffman posits began in 1968.[99] With the growth of the mainstream media apparatus, terrorist acts were covered much more quickly and news reached a truly global audience. Just as media coverage of an attack is important for the terrorist organization to get out their message, it also has the effect of raising the profile of specific terrorists. Typically, these terrorist celebrities are charismatic group leaders or particularly elusive individuals who capture public attention through media coverage. One of

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[99] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 65-67.

the first of these traditional terrorist celebrities was Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, more commonly known as Carlos the Jackal.

Carlos was a major figure in the 1970s and 80s. Effectively a terrorist freelancer, Carlos worked for actors as disparate as the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Red Army Faction (RAF), the Japanese Red Army, and Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Yet even as he crisscrossed Europe, staging attacks and gaining media coverage, he was not arrested until the mid-1990s. This elusive nature, and Carlos' involvement in some of the most high-profile attacks of the 1970s and 80s, made him into a terrorist celebrity. As Dobson described, Carlos became "a television show anti-hero translated into real life, a star on the world stage."[100]

Carlos recognized his newfound fame. During one of his most high-profile and brazen attacks, the December 1975 raid on the OPEC headquarters in Vienna, he introduced himself to an Iraqi negotiator thusly: "you will have heard of me already; I am the famous Carlos."[101] He used media coverage in order to bolster his public profile: during the OPEC attack, Carlos reportedly waited until television cameras arrived before leaving the building with hostages, in full view of a world audience.[102] And Carlos tracked his media coverage, clipping and translating newspaper reports of his attacks because he believed that greater coverage made him seem more dangerous.[103] Carlos' celebrity status extended into mythical realms; after an attack in France in June 1975, attacks around the world were wrongly attributed to the newly famous and elusive terrorist.[104]

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[100] Christopher Dobson and Ronald Payne, *The Carlos Complex: A Study in Terror* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 7.
[101] Dobson and Payne, *The Carlos Complex,* 89.
[102] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* 192.
[103] Idem, 260-1.
[104] David Yallop, *Tracking the Jackal* (New York: Random House, 1993), 137.

This model—attacks begetting media coverage which create a public profile and persona for an individual terrorist—is that of the traditional terrorist celebrity. These terrorists are highly reliant on traditional media coverage to turn them into household names, and thus achieve celebrity status. Brigette Nacos is one of the only terrorism studies scholars to examine the concept of terrorist celebrity. In her study of the relationship between media and terrorism, Nacos examined how Timothy McVeigh reached celebrity status. McVeigh carried out the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, the deadliest terrorist attack on U.S. soil prior to 9/11. Nacos argues that it wasn't just the media coverage of the sensational attack that turned McVeigh into a celebrity, but rather the media's willingness to cover him as they would a mainstream celebrity from the world of entertainment or sports. For example, *Newsweek* magazine ran an interview with McVeigh and placed a photo of him "staring dreamily into space" on the cover of the issue.[105] In that sense, McVeigh "received the kind of glamour treatment from *Newsweek* magazine that was usually only accorded movie stars."[106] McVeigh was even one of *Time* magazine's runners-up for man of the year in 1995.[107]

Every major American news outlet wanted to interview McVeigh, allowing him to reach an even higher level of celebrity than the publicity his attack provided. By Nacos' calculation, in the last half-year of his life, McVeigh received more coverage than Vice President Dick Cheney, and McVeigh received a third of the mentions of President George W. Bush in the news.[108] A victim's family member told reporter Katie Couric that the bomber

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[105] Neal Gabler, *Life the Movie,* 181.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Lou Michel and Dan Herbeck, *American Terrorist: Timothy McVeigh & The Oklahoma City Bombing* (New York: ReganBooks, 2001), 298.
[108] Nacos, *Mass-mediated Terrorism*, 102.

"made himself a name" through his appearances on television.[109] Once this public profile was created, McVeigh began receiving love letters and marriage proposals from as far afield as Germany and Ireland.[110] Ted Kaczynski, the notorious Unabomber, also received similar treatment by the media upon his capture: *TIME* magazine ran an interview with him, and outlets all over the United States, including major programs such as Good Morning American and the Today Show and even regional papers such as *The Denver Post* clamored to get interview access, but Kaczynski was not forthcoming.[111] Katie Couric personally wrote Kaczynski to request an interview, mentioning her "huge audience" as an incentive.[112]

One final case is illustrative: Osama bin Laden, the deceased former leader of Al Qaeda and arguably the most well-known terrorist of all time. Bin Laden was keenly aware of the importance of media relations. After his declaration of war against the United States, he gave several interviews to news outlets, which helped to start building a public profile. In 1997, bin Laden specifically chose CNN to give his first broadcast interview targeted towards a Western audience.[113] He finished that interview with a summary of his approach to media and terrorism: "when asked about his future plans bin Laden had replied: "'You'll see them and hear about them in the media, God willing.'"[114] He consciously used terrorist attacks to spread his message and build a profile for his organization, but also became a celebrity in the process. According to Nacos' calculations, NBC and CBS coverage in 2000

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[109] Idem, 100.
[110] Michel and Herbeck, *American Terrorist*, 299.
[111] Nacos, *Mass-mediated Terrorism*, 102-3.
[112] Katie Couric, "Letter from Katie Couric to Ted Kaczynski, October 27, 1999," University of Michigan Special Collections Library, available online at http://www.thesmokinggun.com/file/katie-couric-also-writes-perky?page=0.
[113] Peter Bergen, *Holy War Inc: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 1.
[114] Bergen, *Holy War Inc*, 23.

of bin Laden far outweighed that referring to allied leaders Tony Blair and Gerhard Schroeder.[115]

Indeed, even though bin Laden had given several interviews in the 1990s, it was the spectacle of Al Qaeda's attack on 9/11 that elevated bin Laden to new celebrity heights. After the attacks, the American public in particular had a desire to learn more about the mysterious terrorist leader. At that point, granting interviews to Western journalists became too risky and bin Laden released a steady stream of video and audio statements from hiding, speaking both to friends and foes and maintaining his terrorist celebrity status.

Celebrity production and maintenance

In summary, traditional terrorist celebrities are typically a charismatic leader, an especially elusive individual, and/or a terrorist who carries out a spectacular attack. A leader could be a celebrity because they are a stand-in for the organization, or because they give interviews on behalf of the group. An elusive terrorist might garner fame by frequently escaping capture and thus continually gaining media coverage. And a successful terrorist could become a celebrity through high levels of media coverage, and in particular, as noted in the Timothy McVeigh case, a certain type of treatment by the news media.

But terrorists have historically needed interviews or profiles run about them in order to become a more well-known public figure. Traditional terrorist celebrities are thus dependent on external media, and their celebrity is produced through media coverage and strategic public appearances. However, terrorists can also take celebrity production into their own hands by selectively granting interviews to media organizations. In the case of bin Laden, the Taliban banned him from giving interviews in 1999. In order to maintain his

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[115] Nacos, *Mass-mediated Terrorism*, 102.

celebrity status and push his message to the world, he began taping his statements and sending them to media outlets, most frequently Al Jazeera, for distribution to the world.[116]

One Guantanamo detainee expertly described this process of traditional terrorist celebrity production before a military tribunal:

> "Detainee: I knew Osama bin Laden for a long time. When I met him, he was not famous…When the Russians attacked Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden was like anyone else. After the Gulf War, he became famous. Who made him famous? Do you know who made him famous?
>
> Tribunal President: You tell me.
>
> Detainee: I will tell you: America. By the media and television and by magazines. Everybody is talking about Osama Bin Laden. Through the media, you made him famous. In the seventies, it was Carlos ["The Jackal," a notorious terrorist]. Today, it is Osama bin Laden."[117]

However, this dependence on external media means that there is limited ability to control how one is presented. Terrorists can certainly try to influence how they are presented, particularly by granting interviews. For example, in accepting an interview, Timothy McVeigh's lawyer hoped to "present our client to the public as we believe he really is."[118]

Traditional terrorist celebrities, dependent on the mainstream media, face an audience of both potential supporters and adversaries. The scope is broad because the coverage reaches a wide audience. Bin Laden in particular targeted his taped speeches towards both followers and those he wished to fight.

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[116] Bergen, *Holy War Inc*, 164.

[117] Peter Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 227.

[118] Gabler, *Life the Movie*, 182.

The dependence on external media also leads to limited opportunities for recruitment and planning because there are few options for strategic interaction between the celebrity and potential recruit. Take the case of the RAF in West Germany in the 1970s. The group's leaders, Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, became famous amongst young left-wing Germans for their act of arson in 1968 and subsequent courtroom antics during their trial. However, they were not able to operationalize that celebrity because they only reached their audience through media coverage. That was until the pair was required by the court to conduct social work with juvenile delinquents. Baader and Ensslin first recruited for their terrorist organization during that social work; it gave them the opportunity to engage in strategic interaction with fans and make use of their celebrity status.[119]

One subcategory of this type is a celebrity who chooses to become a terrorist. This involves someone with a pre-existing public profile, typically achieved in the traditional manner of producing celebrity, transitioning to the realm of terrorism and bringing their celebrity status along. An early example is Ulrike Meinhof, who gained acclaim as a left-wing columnist before joining the first generation of the RAF. In May 1961, she wrote a column for leftist publication *konkret* comparing Franz Josef Strauss, the Christian Social Democrat's chairman, to Hitler.[120] Strauss sued and the trial resulted in Meinhof becoming a "household name throughout West Germany."[121] When she again targeted Strauss in a November 1964 column, she was called "courageous" by popular news magazine *Der Spiegel*, which also published a photo of Meinhof, putting a face to the name and greatly

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[119] Stefan, Aust, *Baader-Meinhof: The Inside Story of the R.A.F,* trans. by Anthea Bell, (London: The Bodley Head, 2008), 46-50.
[120] Idem, 22.
[121] Ibid.

increasing the public's knowledge of the columnist.[122] Meinhof gained her celebrity through

traditional means in a mainstream environment of the news media and intelligentsia, and then

transferred that celebrity status to her involvement in terrorist activities. In Meinhof's case,

she continued to maintain her terrorist celebrity status in a traditional manner: through media

coverage of her statements and the RAF's attacks. This is perhaps epitomized by the term

"Baader-Meinhof Gang," which was used by the media and government to refer to the

organization rather than the group's self-proclaimed title, the *Rote Armee Fraktion*.

More recent examples include famous Europeans who traveled to Syria to join the

Islamic State. Denis Cuspert was a Berlin native who began a rap career in 2002 under the

name "Deso Dogg."[123] He had opened for American rapper DMX and contributed music to a

movie soundtrack.[124] However, after a car crash in 2010, Cuspert gave up rapping and

converted to Islam.[125] He took up the kunya "Abu Talha al-Almani," and joined the Islamic

State in 2014.[126] The Islamic State made full use of Cuspert's status by featuring him in many

videos, the most notorious of which included Cuspert holding a severed head. Commenting

on the Islamic State's usage of Cuspert, a spokesperson for the German domestic security

agency called Cuspert "a pop star of jihad."[127] This also made him a target: in January 2018,

a pro-Islamic State media group reported that Cuspert had been killed in Syria.[128] Cuspert

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[122] Jillian Becker, *Hitler's Children: The Story of the Baader-Meinhof Terrorist Gang* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1977), 145.

[123] "Berlin rapper in 'Islamic State' beheading video," *Deutsche Welle*, May 11, 2014, http://www.dw.com/en/berlin-rapper-in-islamic-state-beheading-video/a-18039786.

[124] Souad Mekhennet, "German Officials Alarmed by Ex-Rapper's New Message: Jihad," *New York Times*, September 1, 2011, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9806E1DD1E3BF932A3575AC0A9679D8B63

[125] Ibid.

[126] "German rapper-turned-jihadi Denis Cuspert reportedly killed in Syria," *Deutsche Welle,* January 18, 2018, http://www.dw.com/en/german-rapper-turned-jihadi-denis-cuspert-reportedly-killed-in-syria/a-42213092.

[127] Amos Barshad, "The Pop Star of Jihad," *The Fader*, August 2, 2016, http://www.thefader.com/2016/08/02/isis-denis-cuspert-deso-dogg-rapper

[128] *Deutsche Welle*, "German rapper-turned-jihadi".

gained his celebrity through traditional means, just as Meinhof had done fifty years prior. However, he maintained his celebrity terrorist status through the practice of online micro-celebrity, a process which will be examined later through in-depth case studies.

In comparison to mainstream celebrity

Traditional terrorist celebrity is highly similar to mainstream celebrities who are also reliant on various forms of mass media to increase their visibility and status. Indeed, as Nacos argues, it was the same culture of a media obsessed with celebrity coverage that lead to the "infotainment" manner of covering McVeigh in the same light as a traditional star.[129] In both cases, traditional terrorist and mainstream celebrities hope that media outlets cover them in order for the public to know them, and engage in interviews and other appearances to build up that public profile.

Another parallel is the celebrity status of criminals. In 1975, artist Andy Warhol wrote "if you're a crook you're still considered up-there. You can write books, go on TV, give interviews —you're a big celebrity and nobody even looks down on you because you're a crook."[130] Warhol had seen criminals like Lee Harvey Oswald become household names, and keenly understood that they had an incentive to take advantage of the free media coverage, particularly as a ladder to fame. Indeed, Lankford's study of mass killers showed that after an attack the killers received "more coverage than professional athletes and only slightly less than television and film stars."[131] In the same manner as Nacos' study on media

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[129] Nacos, *Mass-mediated Terrorism*, 99-105.

[130] Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (San Diego: Harvest Books, 1977), 85.

[131] Adam Lankford, *The Myth of Martyrdom: What Really Drives Suicide Bombers, Rampage Shooters, and Other Self-Destructive Killers*, (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2013), 1.

coverage of terrorists, mass killers can earn celebrity status through public acts of violence. Traditional terrorist celebrities have followed the same path to fame.

Celebrity and Martyrdom

The next type of terrorist celebrity is martyrdom, or posthumous celebrity status. This status is derived from the act of suicide terrorism, and is bestowed upon the individual by the terrorist organization and the local community once the attack is complete. For terrorist celebrity, the advent of martyrdom videos represents a period of transition from a broad celebrity to a more narrowly focused form. Whereas traditional terrorist celebrity relied on mass media to create more widespread public knowledge of the individual terrorist in question, martyrdom was a classification of celebrity targeted specifically at a local community, not the public at large.

Suicide bombing first entered the international terrorist's repertoire in the final two decades of the 20th century. The tactic originated in early 1980s Lebanon, when Hezbollah began using suicide bombers to strike Israeli and American targets.[132] The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) then took up the tactic in their insurgent campaign in Sri Lanka starting in 1987.[133] In the 1990s, a constellation of Palestinian groups in Israel and the Occupied Territories began employing suicide bombings as well, with a particular focus on transportation and civilian targets.[134] The tactic became increasingly common in the 21st century: Pape and Feldman counted only 350 suicide attacks from 1980 to 2003, but found 1,833 between 2004 and 2009.[135] Moghadam has shown that the tactic has not only increased

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[132] Martha Crenshaw, "Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review Essay," *Security Studies* 16, no. 1, 134-7.

[133] Michael Horowitz, "The History and Future of Suicide Terrorism," Foreign Policy Research Institute, E-Note, August 6, 2008, https://www.fpri.org/article/2008/08/the-history-and-future-of-suicide-terrorism/.

[134] Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 19-44.

[135] Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman, *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 2.

in frequency, but also diffused globally to locations as disparate as Britain, Uzbekistan, and Iraq.[136]

Individuals willingly turn to suicide terrorism for various reasons.[137] Pape's primary argument is that nationalism motivates suicide terrorists, who wish to use the tactic to rid their country of a foreign occupying force.[138] The underlying motivation is altruism, because a deep connection to one's community will drive them to sacrifice themselves.[139] Other motivating factors for an individual include a sense of injustice, personal loss, and a desire for religious purity (if a religious frame is used to mobilize the bombers).[140] However, there is an additional motivating factor that is particularly salient for the study at hand: the incentive of celebrity status.

Individuals are often drawn to suicide bombing for the promise that in death they can achieve fame. This is a distinct form of terrorist celebrity status: the martyr. That title is deliberately used by terrorist organizations to describe dead suicide terrorists; a martyr is one who has sacrificed themselves for a cause and is in turn venerated for their act. For a potential bomber, suicide terrorism is "a way of becoming a hero and part of an exalted elite."[141] This search for fame can be the sole motivator or can be combined with another, such as an altruistic desire to help one's community. As Crenshaw notes, "the act is not just about dying and killing. The expectation of gaining status and respect as a martyr for the cause is important, so the individual action is linked to anticipation of both popular approval

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[136] Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

[137] This discussion leaves out cases in which an individual is forced to commit an attack, or what Lankford calls "coerced suicide terrorism". Lankford, *The Myth of Martyrdom*, 130-7.

[138] Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

[139] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 179-187.

[140] Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 85-88.

[141] Crenshaw, "Explaining Suicide Terrorism," 153.

and collective political success."[142] In this manner, the act of suicide bombing and the celebrity it bestows offers an "opportunity to impress a wider audience and be remembered."[143]

With the diffusion of suicide bombing as a tactic came the rise of martyrdom videos. A martyrdom video is a film created to be released after the suicide bomber completes their mission. The videos typically feature solely the bomber speaking directly to the camera. A martyrdom video is a way for the terrorist to share their personal narrative and motivation for committing the attack. It frequently involves the bomber introducing themselves, explaining why they chose to attack, listing perceived or real grievances against the enemy, and offering religious rationale for the action.

The systematic production and dissemination of martyrdom videos began with the First and Second Chechen Wars (1994-1996 and 1999-2009, respectively), and was continued by Palestinian groups in the Second Intifada in 2000.[144] The Iraq War saw a large increase in martyrdom videos, and they have since become standard practice for suicide bombers in the global Salafi jihadist movement.[145] These martyrdom videos became the primary means through which suicide terrorist celebrity was created and maintained because they can be easily distributed and focus solely on the individual in question. If the task of creating celebrity is to increase visibility and individuality, then a martyrdom video for each suicide bomber provides a clear method of achieving posthumous celebrity status in the local community.

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[142] Ibid.
[143] Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 87.
[144] Arjen Nauta, "Radical Islam, Globalisation and Social Media: Martyrdom Videos on the Internet," in *Social Media, Religion, and Spirituality*, ed. David Eric John Herbert, Anita Greenhill, and Marie Gillespie (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2013), 127-8, ProQuest Ebrary.
[145] Nauta, "Radical Islam," 127-130.

Similar to traditional terrorist celebrities, martyrs and martyrdom videos technically have two audiences. One is external: namely, the target audience the terrorist wishes to intimidate. Mohammad Sidique Khan, the ringleader of the cell that attacked London public transport on July 7, 2005 focused the almost the entirety of his martyrdom video on the external audience. Khan repeatedly threatened civilians in Western countries, whom he found culpable:

> "Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters. Until we feel security, you will be our targets. And until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight."[146]

While these videos are sometimes used to threaten the opponent, in contrast to traditional celebrity, the overwhelming focus of the operationalization of martyrdom status through videos is on the internal audience. One of the primary purposes of martyrdom videos is to recruit new bombers to the terrorist organization. Once a video is created and circulated, the dead bomber becomes a known individual in their community. This martyrdom status is in turn used by terrorist organizations as a recruitment tool. As Nauta notes, a martyr needs an audience, because it is only through their recognition that the deceased will live on in the collective memory of the community.[147] By idolizing the dead bomber and creating a small celebrity out of them, the organization increases the incentives for potential recruits to sign on.

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[146] "London bomber: Text in full," *BBC News*, September 1, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk/4206800.stm.
[147] Nauta, "Radical Islam," 122.

Take for example the case of Hezbollah, the Shi'ite militia and political party based in southern Lebanon. While Hezbollah was the first terrorist group to adopt a campaign of suicide terror, the organization initially did not claim attacks or reveal the identity of the bombers for fear of government retaliation.[148] However, in May of 1985, the group used its weekly newspaper to claim credit for the November 1982 bombing of an Israeli military installation and reveal the identity of the bomber, fifteen-year-old Ahmad Qasir.[149] Not only did Hezbollah take credit for the attack that occurred three years earlier, but in December 1985, they placed posters of Qasir's face throughout his home village of Dayr Qanun al-Nahr.[150] This marked the start of a new practice of publicly glorifying dead suicide bombers as martyrs. And it worked—an Associated Press report quoted local residents describing Qasir as "brave," and a "hero" who lived on "in our hearts."[151] As Pedahzur describes, Qasir became a "mega-celebrity in both Lebanon and Iran" once propaganda efforts celebrating Qasir spread, including large posters of the teenager placed on roadsides throughout southern Lebanon, not just in his home village.[152]

Hezbollah then mastered a highly efficient martyr production process. In order to incentivize potential bombers, the organization provides financial support to the individual's family after the bomber's death.[153] Most importantly for celebrity, Hezbollah creates a revered status for suicide bombers through parades and tributes. A massive Martyr's Day

[148] Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 160.
[149] Martin Kramer, *Arab Awakening & Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 231.
[150] Juan-Carlos Gumucio, "Suicide Bomber Called Hero by Arabs: Lebanese Village Honors Teen-ager Who Attacked Israeli Post," *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
[151] Gumucio, "Suicide Bomber".
[152] Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 160.
[153] Matthew Levitt, "Hezbollah Finances: Funding the Party of God," *Washington Institute for New East Policy*, February 2005, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-finances-funding-the-party-of-god

celebration is held every year on November 11 in honor of Qasir, Hezbollah's first suicide bomber, and all bombers since.[154] While less than 20 percent of ordinary suicide cases involve a note, Pape found that the majority of Hezbollah suicide bombers left behind martyrdom statements, in either video or writing.[155] These narratives are then disseminated in the local community.[156] All of this posthumously increases the status of the martyr, increasing their celebrity profile in the local community and creating strong social incentives for potential recruits to sign up to be the next martyr and achieve celebrity status.[157]

Another case is Al Qaeda, the perpetrator of the most high-profile suicide attack in history: the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center. The organization's adoption of martyrdom videos epitomizes the celebrification aspect of the process. Al Qaeda did not initially use martyrdom videos until member Abu Huthayfa wrote a memo extolling the benefits of the tactic in June of 2000.[158] Impressed by Hamas' practice of using martyrdom videos as a publicity and recruitment tool, he saw an opportunity for Al Qaeda as well.[159] In particular, Huthayfa was disappointed that the world was "unaware of the heroes" who had carried out Al Qaeda's 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Africa.[160] In order to remedy this situation, Huthayfa explained his rationale for Al Qaeda using martyrdom videos, writing that:

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[154] Pape, *Dying to Win,* 135.
[155] Idem, 133.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 191.
[158] Omar El Akkad, "Terror goes digital. With Canadian help," *The Globe and Mail*, published August 18, 2007, updated March 27, 2017, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/technology/terror-goes-digital-with-canadian-help/article20400609/?page=all.
[159] "A Memo to Sheikh Abu `Abdullah," Harmony Collection, Combatting Terrorism Center, Reference Number AFGP-2002-003251, https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2013/10/A-Memo-to-Sheikh-Abu-Abdullah-Translation.pdf, 13.
[160] "A Memo to Sheikh," 11.

"[Martyrdom] operations should be utilized to rally many mujahidin to join

the

Movement. A martyrdom operation executed by men from the Peninsula has a

great stimulating psychological effects on hundreds of mujahidin from inside

to practice this experiment and acquire martyrdom. In fact, one of them

opened the door for this effort. How nice it would be if in the future the

executor of an operation is videotaped while he is giving an inciting speech to

the nation and then his speech is published after the operation is carried out

successfully similar to what HAMAS is doing. The opportunity is still there to

bridge the informational and political gap via publishing the wills of these

martyrs, to follow their steps and to rely on their magnificent

accomplishments and their ability to break the psychological apprehension

whereby they will be introducing this experiment to the people in the

Peninsula."[161]

Huthayfa's explanation clearly highlights the use of martyrdom videos to recruit new

bombers, thus creating and operationalizing the celebrity status of each bomber. After this,

Al Qaeda pivoted and became the world leader in martyrdom videos by using its two media

branches, The Global Islamic Media Front and Al-Sahab Productions, to produce

professional videos.[162]

Both Hezbollah, the first adopter of suicide campaigns, and Al Qaeda, a later

implementer, did not initially employ propaganda that highlighted individual bombers. Both

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[161] "A Memo to Sheikh," 13.

[162] David Cook and Olivia Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks: The Faith of Politics and Martyrdom Operations* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 91-94

terrorist groups turned to bomber statements and public glorification in order to create a culture of martyrdom celebrity that could increase recruitment and public support. In the case of Al Qaeda, it was the success of martyrdom celebrity in earlier campaigns that convinced the organization to begin using the tactic after bombings.

Celebrity production and maintenance

In summary, martyrdom celebrity status is circular: terrorist organizations create high profiles for previous bombers and use their narratives to incentivize potential recruits to join the ranks. The terrorist organization is instrumental in the production of martyr celebrity status; while the individual commits the attack, the organization is responsible for disseminating statements and creating a culture in which bombers are honored with parades, posters, and memorials. Ultimately, as Pape argues, it is then up to the local community to decide whether or not to accept the individual as a martyr.[163] If the community deems them worthy, then they bestow upon the individual a posthumous celebrity status of martyr and enshrine the status in collective memory by participating in yearly celebrations or agreeing to put up memorials.

However, one distinct difference from other forms of celebrity is that the construction of martyrdom celebrity relied on the operative being dead. Even more distinct is that almost none of these bombers were famous beforehand, but were made famous after they died in order to increase recruitment in target communities. Thus, terrorist organizations were using the tools at hand—video recording—to create local celebrities from previously unknown individuals. Importantly, this celebrity is targeted; rather than a broad-based celebrity such as traditional celebrity status, suicide bomber martyrdom is a status that largely only applies to

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[163] Pape, *Dying to Win,* 82

the local community. After death, a previously unknown individual is marketed to the community for their sacrifice and becomes well-known within that area, but not in the world at large. In order to produce these celebrity martyrs, terrorist groups were initially dependent on TV networks to air clips of martyrdom statements. However, with advances in online video hosting, groups began posting the videos directly online, which is the standard practice today.

Once this posthumous celebrity profile is created, terrorist organizations maintain the status through public memorials and the continued dissemination of martyrdom statements. Some suicide bombers have gained strong followings through their celebrity status. Wafa Idris and Hawa Barayev, the first Palestinian and Chechen female suicide bombers, respectively, each gained celebrity status in the local community: both inspired future female bombers, with Idris becoming a "cult heroine" and Chechen insurgents writing songs in Barayev's honor.[164] This celebrity status is then operationalized by terrorist organizations with the goal of recruiting more bombers.

In contrast to the strict dependence on external media in traditional terrorist celebrity, the organization-driven creation of martyrdom means that terrorist groups have much more leeway in how they create a martyr. The terrorist organization gets full creative license in crafting the narrative for the martyr, whereas traditional terrorist celebrities must try to manage a celebrity profile that is largely in the hands of the mainstream media. However, one similarity between traditional terrorist celebrity and martyrdom celebrity is the primacy of the terrorist attack. In the former, media coverage of an attack is crucial to gain celebrity status and in the latter, an individual must be associated with a completed suicide bombing in

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[164] Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 148, 154.

order to be recognized as a martyr. The mechanisms of celebrity production are different, but the attack itself is still at the heart of that celebrity status.

In comparison to mainstream celebrity

Unlike traditional terrorist celebrity status, there is no clear parallel to mainstream celebrity. As martyrs are originally individuals without a public profile, they are not created in the same manner as mainstream celebrities. Typically, in order to retain celebrity status after death, an individual must have been a celebrity while alive. Death can certainly increase one's level of fame, particularly in the art world. Rappers Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls both gained increased followings and enshrined status as two of the best rappers of all time, in no small part through a combined nine posthumous album releases since their respective deaths in 1996 and 1997. However, both had a public profile beforehand that was built on in death. Terrorist martyrs stand in stark contrast as they are completely unknown during their lifetimes and are transformed into celebrities only after death. Another key difference is the size of celebrity status. In mainstream celebrity, those who retain fame in death are typically famous enough to be known to a wide swath of people. With terrorist martyrs, however, the goal is only to make the individual a celebrity in the local community, capping how broadly the individual is known. With this type of terrorist celebrity, it appears that terrorist organizations succeeded in creating their own specific form of celebrity, separate from the cultural trends and machinations that drive celebrity in the world at large.

One important similarity is that martyrdom videos acted as a phase of transition between types of celebrities, and their origins in the 1990s and 2000s parallel a similar transition in mainstream celebrity. The rise of reality television involved entertainment companies elevating previously unknown individuals, albeit alive throughout the whole

process, to some level of stardom by appearing on television programs.[165] Moreover, just as martyrdom marks a transition from a broad form of celebrity to a community-focused, narrowly-targeted form, so too does reality television. While previous television stars appealed to a wide swath of the public, reality television stars were famous in smaller circles: a show about home repairs or restaurant overhauls appeals to a subsection of the public with those interests, while competition shows such as *Survivor* have more widespread appeal. In both cases it is the organization, the terrorist group or media company that both creates the celebrity status of the individual and also benefits from that status.[166]

Early Internet Micro-Celebrity

The early 2000s saw the emergence of a distinct type of terrorist celebrity. The internet and new media provided different opportunities for terrorists and sympathizers to build a brand online and connect with followers. This could be done without the aid of mainstream media, in contrast to the dependence of the traditional type of terrorist celebrity. These individuals practiced "micro-celebrity" by producing content with a specific brand and cultivating a following.

One of the first cases of a terrorist internet micro-celebrity was Sheikh Terra and the Soul Salah Crew. A group of pro-Al Qaeda British rappers, the group released a music video in February 2004 for a song called "Dirty Kuffar" (*kuffar* refers to non-believers, in Arabic).[167] The song, in English, is rapped in the style of reggae hip-hop, and focuses on criticizing both American and Western leaders (most prominently President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair), as well as Muslim leaders Pervez Musharraf and Hosni

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[165] Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 58.
[166] Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 58.
[167] A version of the video is available here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnhe_cPRJQQ&bpctr=1517634880.

Mubarak, whom the rappers imply are traitors to Islam by calling them kuffar as well. Dirty Kuffar features rappers in black hoodies brandishing guns and the Quran, and rapping in front of a black flag. The song ends with the rappers laughing while footage of the World Trade Center collapsing plays, followed by a scrolling list of countries that is titled: "victims of US violence since 1945."

Since Dirty Kuffar's release, the video "has been downloaded onto millions of computers and remixed by many like-minded web jihadists."[168] The video also inspired a series of follow-ons and copycats. As Gartenstein-Ross notes, after Dirty Kuffar's release, "there has been a definable trend toward *jihadi* rap music," which combines popular music styles with anti-American sentiment in order to win support for the transnational Salafi jihadist cause.[169] While Dirty Kuffar provides a strong example of self-produced media and personal brand building, the music video was a one-off event. The group did not continue with more music, and gained fame from only the one video. Neither Sheik Terra nor the rest of the group appear to have engaged with fans, thus missing a key element of micro-celebrity. Thus, this case demonstrated the early potential of the concept of a terrorist micro-celebrity, which would be built on in the coming years.

A second example highlights the way in which terrorist micro-celebrities engage with followers online. Perhaps the first internet terrorist micro-celebrity practitioner was a man who went by the screen name "Irhabi007." The screen name translates to "terrorist 007," after the famous fictional British spy James Bond's code name.[170] Irhabi007 was in fact Younes Tsouli, a young Moroccan-born man who had been brought to live in London with

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[168] El Akkad, "Terror goes digital".
[169] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "Jihadi Rap," *Front Page Magazine*, November 1, 2004, http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=10635.
[170] Kohlmann, ""Homegrown" Terrorists," 103.

his father in 2001.[171] Tsouli studied information technology in college after arriving in the UK.[172] Accounts point to the US invasion of Iraq and the subsequent insurgency as having a particularly radicalizing effect on Tsouli.[173] Tsouli initially viewed images of U.S. forces in Iraq on jihadist internet chat rooms, and then became a frequent poster. Soon he was moderating and then running jihadist websites where supporters around the world shared propaganda.[174] Tsouli's obsession with the Iraq War continued, and his internet presence allowed him to begin contact with members of Al Qaeda in Iraq. He acted as an internet host and facilitator for AQI, providing them with new sites to spread material and different download locations for files.[175] Due to his role as the go-to man for file hosting, Tsouli "earned virtual celebrity status on extremist Web forums by his adroit use of new media platforms to distribute jihadist propaganda."[176]

In Irhabi007's case, he built a personal brand around his reputation as a skilled hacker. His exploits included hacking into and storing files on servers running the websites of George Washington University and the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department.[177] At the moment of his arrest, Tsouli was even creating a jihadist video-hosting website titled "Youbombit.com" as an alternative to YouTube, demonstrating his effort to create a new medium for his micro-celebrity practice.[178] These exploits made him famous in two communities. First, he gained fame amongst actual jihadists in Iraq, who became

[171] Gordon Corera, "Al-Qaeda's 007," *The Times*, January 16, 2008, ProQuest International Newsstream.
[172] Corera, "Al-Qaeada's 007"
[173] Ibid.
[174] Gordon Corera, "The world's most wanted cyber-jihadist," *BBC News* January 16, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7191248.stm.
[175] Kohlmann, ""Homegrown" Terrorists," 104.
[176] Amble, "Combatting Terrorism," 343.
[177] Rita Katz and Michael Kern, "Terrorist 007, Exposed," *Washington Post*, March 26, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/25/AR2006032500020.html. "A World Wide web of terror," *The Economist*, July 12, 2007, https://www.economist.com/node/9472498.
[178] "A world wide web of terror," *The Economist*.

increasingly grateful to and dependent on Tsouli for file and forum hosting online. At one point a high-ranking AQI member approached Tsouli for help producing an electronic magazine.[179] Second, he became well known amongst jihadist sympathizers and those who wished to travel to Iraq to join AQI, as his forum was a primary point of contact. Analysts have described Tsouli's role for this second audience as a "matchmaker," linking potential recruits with actual members of AQI.[180] In one case, he helped broker contact between a Moroccan recruit who had traveled to Syria and AQI.[181] Tsouli also trained other online jihadist sympathizers in operational security by teaching them how to remain anonymous and thus avoid capture; at one point, he shared a twenty-page guide to hacking websites on a forum so that others could also secretly host files on others' servers.[182] This reputation earned him a virtual celebrity status among his peers: one analyst labeled him "the undisputed king of internet terrorism."[183] Ultimately, Tsouli's operational security slipped when he used a cell phone to contact another AQI supporter in Eastern Europe; when that cell was raided, the call logs gave away Tsouli's location.[184] Tsouli, then twenty-two years old, was arrested in a West London basement in October 2005.[185]

Celebrity production and maintenance

Early terrorist internet celebrities were often anonymous or pseudonymous. They were known only by their screen names. Additionally, the internet served as a democratizing force. Neither Sheik Terra nor Irhabi007 were members of a terrorist group, but new digital tools allowed sympathizers worldwide to get involved in their own ways. No longer did a

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179 Kohlmann, ""Homegrown" Terrorists," 104.
180 Ibid.
181 Idem, 103-4.
182 Katz and Kern, "Terrorist 007.
183 Corera, "The world's most wanted".
184 Kohlmann, ""Homegrown" Terrorists," 105-6.
185 Corera, "The world's most wanted".

terrorist celebrity have to belong to a terrorist organization. In Irhabi007's case, he used his internet celebrity as leverage to establish actual connections with AQI without ever leaving London.

In stark contrast to other types of terrorist celebrity, the internet celebrity doesn't have to be involved in an attack. As seen in the cases, one can gain a following online merely through posting. Real acts may increase credibility, but some terrorist micro-celebrities, as in both cases highlighted above, are just sympathizers who have never committed violent acts. The ability to self-produce and publish online allowed them to become small celebrities.

What is clearest about terrorist internet celebrity is that it involves the deliberate cultivation of a personal brand, designed to appeal to a specific consumer. In the case of Dirty Kuffar, the brand was reggae and hip-hop. Through the music style and a video which emulated that culture, the rappers hoped to appeal to young Muslims living in the West who listened to hip-hop, harbored similar sentiments and thus would be drawn to the song. This is a style that would not appeal to all jihadist sympathizers. Many would likely disavow the video because it is not permitted under their strict guidelines. However, Sheik Terra and the Soul Salah Crew were expanding the pool of potential sympathizers by making jihad "cool" and engaging with the target population, young Muslim males in Western countries, in a language familiar from popular culture: "hypermasculine rage, defiance, and gunplay."[186] This "reggae/rap hybrid style in the mold of popular artist Sean Paul" would appeal to young potential sympathizers in a way that, for example, Bin Laden's video lectures might not.[187] By building a personal brand meant to appeal to a specific consumer base, internet terrorist

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[186] Travis Morris, *Dark Ideas: How Neo-Nazi and Violent Jihadi Ideologues Shaped Modern Terrorism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 10.
[187] Gartenstein-Ross, "Jihadi Rap".

celebrities deliberately target those with whom they want recognition. While it's narrower, it's also more potent because there are more frequent opportunities for strategic interaction and the creation of intimacy between the fan and the individual practicing micro-celebrity. Irhabi007 was able to connect prospective terrorists from around the world with the actual organization of AQI, thus engaging with his followers in a manner not seen previously.

In comparison to mainstream celebrity

These cases are highly similar to mainstream micro-celebrity. In particular, both cases appeal to a narrow audience who connect with the material. Just as Sheik Terra and Irhabi007 gained fame by creating and posting their own content online, so too do mainstream micro-celebrity practitioners on YouTube, for example. The actions of Tsouli in particular match with Senft's seminal study of micro-celebrity. In her examination of camgirls, Senft demonstrated how each was creating their own persona and sharing it with the world, often by broadcasting their daily lives. In similar fashion, Tsouli not only created a persona that appealed to both AQI leadership and potential recruits, but was also known for being "online day and night, ready to answer questions about how to post a video."[188] Tsouli was accessible and relatable to his target audience in just the same manner as the camgirls studied by Senft.

Conclusion

As far as the typology of terrorist celebrity, these two cases fall neatly within micro-celebrity. However, in the decade since Sheik Terra and Irhabi007, hybridizations have occurred: namely, those who practiced micro-celebrity but also became famous in wider circles through mainstream media coverage. Some even became martyrs. In particular, the manifestation of internet terrorist celebrity has been affected by the rise of social media.

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[188] Katz and Kern, "Terrorist 007".

Social media platforms were still in their infancy at the time of Sheik Terra and Irhabi007. The rise of social media has affected not only mainstream celebrities, but also the demand for and production of terrorist micro-celebrities. The next two chapters will examine case studies of these hybrid terrorist celebrities in order to understand how terrorist celebrity manifests itself in the contemporary age, and the implications of those changes.

Figure 2.1: An Evolutionary Typology of Terrorist Celebrity

Type of Celebrity	Mainstream Examples	Terrorist Examples	Production of Terrorist Celebrity	Consumer of Terrorist Celebrity	Significance for Terrorists
Traditional Celebrity	Film or television actor, sports star	Terrorist leader or elusive operative	Interviews and media coverage	General public	Attention and notoriety, means of
Posthumous celebrity or martyr	Deceased actors and public figures	Suicide bomber	Created at the level of the organization. Produced and maintained through martyrdom videos and public celebrations	Local community	To recruit new bombers
Internet celebrity	Instagram models, YouTube beauty vloggers, video game streamers	Foreign fighters on Twitter and Telegram, clerics on YouTube	Created both at the individual and organizational level. Through online postings and contact with followers	Potential recruits or supporters	Highly targeted recruitment

Chapter Three: Sheikh Anwar

Anwar al Awlaki is perhaps the most famous terrorist internet micro-celebrity of all time. The American-born imam built a reputation for himself within the western Muslim community through his lectures and sermons. Moreover, Awlaki entered the transnational Salafi jihad scene just as social media platforms were coming of age, and he used platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and a blog to his full advantage. Awlaki thus represents a strong micro-celebrity practitioner, but also someone who was a hybridization of all terrorist celebrity types. He gained traditional media coverage, built his own profile through online postings, and was venerated after his death. This chapter examines his nature as a traditional celebrity, as a practitioner of micro-celebrity, and as a martyr. A particular focus is placed on Awlaki's personal branding and the persona he presented to followers around the world.

Case Study Background

Anwar al Awlaki was born in 1971 in New Mexico while his father was studying as a Fulbright Scholar.[189] Awlaki grew up in the U.S. until he was seven and then returned with his Yemeni parents to their homeland in 1978.[190] In, 1991, Awlaki traveled to the U.S. to start an engineering degree at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado.[191] Awlaki had not been particularly devout as child. In a telling example, he repeatedly removed a prayer rug that his mother placed in his luggage for college, telling her it wasn't necessary in the U.S.[192] Yet it was his time in the U.S. that would change his mind. Awlaki behaved like most American college students during his first semester, but his Saudi roommate noticed a change

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[189] Gregory D. Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2013), 245-6

[190] Idem.

[191] Morris, *Dark Ideas,* 28.

[192] Scott Shane, *Objective Troy: A Terrorist, A President, and the Rise of the Drone* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015), 52.

after winter break in academic year 1990-1991. Awlaki had been spending time with members of the proselytizing group Tablighi Jamaat and the start of U.S. airstrikes on Baghdad in particular struck a nerve with him.[193] One year later, he spent his winter break traveling to Afghanistan to see the battleground of the mujahedeen for himself.[194]

While in college, Awlaki began delivering sermons at the Fort Collins Islamic Center.[195] Upon graduation, he took his father's advice and accepted an entry-level engineering job in Denver, but also chose to take a part-time job as an imam.[196] This would be the start of eight years of preaching in the U.S., even though Awlaki had never formally studied Islamic theology. Awlaki served as an imam at mosques across the U.S., going from Denver to a position in San Diego, and then finally to Falls Church, Virginia at a large mosque just outside of Washington, D.C.[197] On September 11th, he was an imam in Virginia and after the attacks was often asked to explain Islam to non-Muslims, including during a webcast hosted by the Washington Post and a prayer breakfast at the Pentagon.[198] Awlaki was initially a fairly moderate preacher. He criticized Al Qaeda after September 11th for their decision to carry out the attack.[199] By that time, Awlaki had developed a well-known profile as an imam, and in 2002 he was asked to lead the first Muslim prayer to occur at the U.S. Capitol.[200]

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[193] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 47-9
[194] Idem, 54-55.
[195] Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, "As American as Apple Pie: How Anwar al-Awlaki Became the Face of Western Jihad," *ICSR*, July 2011, 25, http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/1315827595ICSRPaperAsAmericanAsApplePieHowAnwaralAwlakiBecametheFaceofWesternJihad.pdf.
[196] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 58.
[197] Morris, *Dark Ideas,* 29.
[198] Johnsen, *The Last Refuge*, 246.
[199] Morris, *Dark Ideas*, 28.
[200] Ibid.

However, Awlaki had also attracted the attention of federal authorities. Two 9/11

hijackers had prayed at Awlaki's mosque in San Diego.[201] While it was concluded that

Awlaki did not have a substantive connection to the bombers or the plot, the FBI did discover

and document Awlaki's frequent solicitation of escorts.[202] Upon learning that the FBI had a

file of information that could ruin his public career, Awlaki fled to the United Kingdom in

March of 2002.[203] After briefly preaching in the U.K., Awlaki returned to Yemen in 2004.

Awlaki was then arrested in Yemen on August 21, 2006 on charges of kidnapping a

teenager and involvement in a separate Al Qaeda kidnapping plot targeting a U.S. official.[204]

He was released in December 2007 for a lack of evidence.[205] Following his release, Awlaki

moved to the family home in Saeed, a town in the Shabwa Mountains.[206] It was at this time

that Awlaki's statements became more openly militant, and he began making more public

calls for violence.[207] These included his December 2008 letter of support for al-Shabaab, the

terrorist group in Somalia.[208]

In January 2009, Al Qaeda announced a new affiliate in Yemen called Al Qaeda in

the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Shortly thereafter, Awlaki moved further into the Shabwa

Mountains to an area near the group's training camp.[209] In late 2009, U.S. Director of

National Intelligence James Clapper stated that Awlaki had pledged allegiance to the group's

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[201] Melagrou-Hitchens, "Apple Pie," 26.
[202] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 119.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Morris, *Dark Ideas,* 30.
[205] Johnsen, *The Last Refuge*, 246.
[206] Ahmed Al-Haj and Lee Keath, "AP Enterprise: Tribe in Yemen protecting US cleric," *The Seattle Times*, January 19, 2010, https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/ap-enterprise-tribe-in-yemen-protecting-us-cleric/.
[207] Christopher Heffelfinger, "Anwar al'Awlaqi: Profile of a Jihadi Radicalizer," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 3 (March 2010), 3.
[208] Katie Zimmerman, "Militant Islam's Global Preacher: The Radicalizing Effect of Sheikh Anwar al Awlaki," Critical Threats Project, March 12, 2010, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/militant-islams-global-preacher-the-radicalizing-effect-of-sheikh-anwar-al-awlaki#_edn08d4f90aca8868f40b3205320ee8895844.
[209] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 31.

leader, Nasir al-Wuhaishi.[210] In May 2010, Wuhaishi confirmed the link when he released an

audio statement claiming Awlaki as one of their own.[211]

Yet it was two events in late 2009 that would put Awlaki under intense scrutiny from

American counterterrorism authorities. First was the November 5th shooting at Fort Hood by

Nidal Hasan, an Army doctor who had conversed with Awlaki over email, although Awlaki

did not discuss operational details or give express permission. Awlaki later released public

statements celebrating the attack and calling Hasan a hero. The second event was the failed

Christmas Day attack by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who attempted to detonate an

explosive device hidden in his underwear as the plane he was aboard was landing in Detroit.

The young Nigerian had traveled to Yemen and received direct training and instructions from

Awlaki.[212] After a series of internal deliberations, the Obama administration placed Awlaki

on targeted killing list in February of 2010, even though he was an American citizen by dint

of being born in New Mexico.[213] After several failed attempts, a U.S. drone strike killed

Awlaki on September 30 while he was in transit near the Saudi border.[214]

Celebrity Production

How was Awlaki's celebrity constructed? This section addresses the manners in

which the mainstream media and AQAP contributed to his celebrity status. The following

section will focus on Awlaki's personal brand and how he developed his celebrity himself.

By the Media

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[210] Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Apple Pie," 30.
[211] Shane, *Objective Troy,* 43.
[212] Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Apple Pie," 83.
[213] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 219
[214] Idem, 290-2.

Awlaki was moderately popular and well-known in a traditional celebrity sense even before he went to Yemen and joined AQAP. Awlaki gained acclaim within the mainstream Muslim and Salafist communities in the United States and the United Kingdom: "by 2000 he was one of the most well known English speaking Islamic preachers in the United States."[215] He gained further exposure after September 11th, when National Geographic and PBS conducted interviews with the imam, and Awlaki participated in an online Q&A hosted by the Washington Post.

Yet it was his connections to two high-profile terrorist attacks on American soil that garnered the most media coverage and elevated his celebrity profile. Awlaki was "thrust into the media spotlight" after his connection with Nidal Hasan broke after the attack on Fort Hood.[216] At the time, Awlaki was thought to have been involved in the planning of the attack, and news outlets wanted to know about Awlaki. Al Jazeera conducted an interview with Awlaki in which he explained his relationship to and support for Hasan.[217] The media attention intensified after the failed Christmas Day airplane bombing. Al Jazeera again interviewed Awlaki, who identified Abdulmutallab as his student and praised him for his actions.[218] Additionally, in July 2010 the first release of AQAP's magazine *Inspire* led to a flood of Western media coverage. Western news outlets clung to a rare case of English jihadist propaganda and occasionally sensationalized coverage of the threat that the magazine presented.[219] In turn, this gave Awlaki "an international spotlight unmatched by any terrorist

[215] Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Apple Pie," 6.
[216] Heffelfinger, "Profile of a Jihadi Radicalizer," 1.
[217] Evan Kohlmann, trans., "Transcript of interview with al-Awlaki," *NBC News,* December 23, 2009, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/34579438/ns/us_news-tragedy_at_fort_hood/t/transcript-interview-al-awlaki/#.WtI4kS7wbX4.
[218] "Interview: Anwar al-Awlaki," *Al Jazeera*, February 7, 2010, https://www.aljazeera.com/focus/2010/02/2010271074776870.html.
[219] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 248-251.

other than Osama bin Laden."[220] Awlaki's celebrity status was initially built by media coverage, but it was maintained and amplified much further by actions of his organization and his own practice of micro-celebrity.

By the Organization (AQAP)

Awlaki's terrorist organization, AQAP, also had a hand in creating his celebrity status. In July 2010, AQAP released the first issue of an English-language web magazine named *Inspire*. The glossy magazine had high production value and looked like many other online publications. Fellow AQAP member and American citizen Samir Khan served as the editor of the magazine until his death in the same drone strike as Awlaki. *Inspire* features articles on jihadi ideology, how to commit certain types of attacks, and testimonials from current members about their reasons for joining. Analysts such as J.M. Berger have been quick to note that this is not the first time jihadists have published English language magazines online.[221] And Nacos' aptly titled chapter "Terrorists Have Always Found Alternative Media: *Same Objectives, Different Technology*," serves as a reminder that *Inspire* merely represents a contemporary manifestation of the terrorist pamphlets of the 20th century.[222] Yet an analysis of *Inspire* demonstrates how the magazine contributed to Awlaki's celebrity status.

AQAP gave Awlaki a platform through *Inspire*: while he was alive, Awlaki often authored the cover story of the magazine, which increased his visibility. Awlaki authored the cover article in half of the eight issues published before his death. Moreover, as previously noted, the news media took serious interest in Awlaki following the first release of *Inspire*.

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[220] Idem, 250.
[221] J.M. Berger, "Inspire Inflation: We're all to blame for giving al Qaeda's magazine more credit than it's due," *Foreign Policy*, April 23, 2013, http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/23/inspiration-inflation/.
[222] Nacos, *Mass-mediated Terrorism*, 49-67.

By placing Awlaki prominently in the publication, AQAP ensured that he would be covered

by the mass media, thus increasing Awlaki's notoriety. *Inspire* also included opportunities

for direct contact with Awlaki: the fifth issue featured a half page advertisement for "an

exclusive video interview with the Shaykh where he will answer your questions.[223]

Awlaki's Personal Brand

In order to fully understand how Awlaki himself took actions to increase his celebrity

status, his personal brand must first be identified. Every micro-celebrity has a personal brand

meant to appeal to a specific audience. Personal identity is treated like a "branded good": it

must be carefully maintained and marketed through micro-celebrity practices.[224] The personal

brand itself is key to this process; if identity is treated as a commodity, then the micro-

celebrity must find and target consumers.[225] This section will analyze the character of the

personal brand Awlaki created, and the following section examines the ways in which

Awlaki propagated and used that brand. Three key elements of Awlaki's brand are identified.

First, he modeled himself as being an authoritative voice on theology, irrespective of his lack

of theological credentials. Second, he targeted aspects of his personal brand towards English

speakers. Lastly, Awlaki specifically geared his personal brand towards Muslims living in the

West, often by sharing his own experiences growing up in the United States.

Authoritative Religious Voice

After serving as an imam for years, Awlaki developed a personal brand as an

authoritative voice on Islam. Yet he did so without having any formal religious training or

education in theology. Regardless, his followers still were impressed by the authority with

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[223] *Inspire* no. 5 (Spring 2011), 12, available online at http://jihadology.net/2011/03/29/al-qa%E2%80%99idah-in-the-arabian-peninsula%E2%80%99s-al-mala%E1%B8%A5im-media-releases-inspire-magazine-issue-5/.
[224] Senft, "Microcelebrity and the Branded Self," 346-7.
[225] Senft, "Microcelebrity and the Branded Self," 348-9.

which he spoke. One comment on an online forum is particularly illustrative: "there is no need to find out if he is at par with true scholars or is he just an "imam". He is a leader whose message is very, very relevant for today's Muslims. So, listen to him. You can't go wrong, insha'Allah."[226]

Awlaki created this brand in particular by making jihad more accessible for many people. In his "Constants on the Path of Jihad" lecture, Awlaki argued that serious religious instruction was not necessary before engaging in jihad.[227] In saying so, he was lowering the barriers to entry to jihad for anyone listening. That lecture, often cited as his most well-known, was not even an original work. It was a translation of a work by Yusuf al-'Uyayri, the founder of the Al Qaeda affiliate in Saudi Arabia.[228] In that lecture, he also translated the original text into less formal language, thus making the very lecture more accessible.[229] Awlaki replaced al-'Uyayri's traditional religious style of writing to one that used stories to provide a more relatable and emotional speech.[230] By presenting himself as a learned scholar of Islam and translating previous texts with his own flair, Awlaki lowered the barriers to entry for his followers.

Targeting English Speakers

In addition to building a brand as a religious scholar, Awlaki's personal brand specifically targeted English speakers. As a young imam in the United States, Awlaki's American accent stood in stark contrast to the heavy accents of the older imams who had

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[226] Jarret M. Brachman and Alix N. Levine, "You Too Can Be Awlaki!," *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2011), 28
[227] Heffelfinger, "Profile of a Jihadi Radicalizer," 3.
[228] J.M. Berger, "The Enduring Appeal of Al-'Awlaqi's "Constants on the Path of Jihad," *CTC Sentinel* 4, no. 10 (October 2011), 12.
[229] Berger, "Enduring Appeal", 13.
[230] Idem, 13.

immigrated to the United States.[231] With the exception of Arabic words peppered into his lectures, which acted to bolster his image as a religious authority, all of Awlaki's writings and sermons were delivered in English. In his 2010 statement, "Western Jihad is Here to Stay," Awlaki famously proclaimed that "jihad is becoming as American as apple pie and as British as afternoon tea."[232] Awlaki believed that he could make the transnational Salafi jihadi movement palatable to segments of western populations by speaking their language. This is clearly shown by his pattern of frequently translating work from Arabic to English, adding his own flair to the delivery, and packaging the final product as his own, just as he did for his "Constants" lecture.

Moreover, he often spoke in plain English, using idioms that westerners would be familiar with.

Targeting Muslims living in the West

In line with his targeting of English speakers, the most important audience for Awlaki was Muslims living in Western countries. Awlaki repeatedly spoke of Muslim alienation in the west, and his brand sought to highlight tensions and harp on grievances in order to gain support.[233] Awlaki was able to do this because he himself had lived in the United States and Britain, and he frequently shared his own experiences as a way of developing this aspect of his personal brand. For example, in his 2010 audio statement titled "Message to the American people," Awlaki focused on the tension he felt as both a Muslim and an American citizen:

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[231] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 59.
[232] Anwar al-Awlaki, "Western Jihad is Here to Stay," NEFA Foundation, March 19, 2010, available online at https://www.scribd.com/document/32498688/Western-Jihad-is-Here-to-Stay.
[233] Morris, *Dark Ideas*, 31.

"I for one, was born in the US, I lived in the US for twenty-one years.

America was my home. I was a preacher of Islam, involved in non-violent

Islamic activism. However, with the American invasion of Iraq, and continued

US aggression against Muslims, I could not reconcile between living in the

US and being a Muslim, and I eventually came to the conclusion that Jihad

against America is binding upon myself, just as it is binding on every other

able Muslim. Nidal Hassan was not recruited by Al-Qaida. Nidal Hassan was

recruited by American crimes, and this is what America refuses to admit.

America refuses to admit that its foreign policies are the reason behind a man

like Nidal Hassan, born and raised in the US, turning his guns against

American soldiers. And the more crimes that America commits, the more

Mujahideen will be recruited to fight against it."[234]

Awlaki sought to use American actions abroad to create an in-group and out-group

bias among his followers: they could be American citizens and support everything the

government did, or they could be Muslims bound by jihad, but under this worldview,

they could not be both.

Charisma

In addition to these three characteristics of his branded persona, Awlaki

possessed a quality that proved vital to his success: charisma. One member of

Awlaki's Denver mosque said that Awlaki "had a beautiful tongue" and "a nice

voice."[235] Awlaki's brother Ammar thought he was "a charismatic guy, one of a

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[234] Anwar Al-Awlaki, "Message to the American People," *Global Islamic Media Front,*
https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/message-to-the-american-people-by-anwar-al-awlaki.pdf
[235] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 59.

kind."[236] Awlaki's charisma was instrumental in his career as an imam. His oratory skills gained him not only a series of imam positions at successively larger mosques, but also speaking invitations from around the United States.

Some have argued that his charismatic delivery was key to him becoming a successful preacher without receiving formal religious training.[237] In the Weberian model, Awlaki gained his authority through his gift of impassioned speech, rather than a legally authorized position of power or an inherited one. This helps to explain why both the masses who bought Awlaki's CDs in the early 2000s and the more radical followers who engaged with him on the internet during the AQAP period viewed Awlaki as a religious authority because he spoke confidently and with emotion. For example, take this description, from Briton Nussaibah Younis, who met Awlaki when she was a teenager and he was preaching in the United Kingdom:

> When I hit 17, I attended a 10-day Islamic studies course and was thrilled to discover that Awlaki was the centrepiece of the schedule. He taught us about the life of the prophet Muhammad for three hours a day and it was mesmerising. He taught by telling stories. He spoke about the prophet Muhammad, his wives, his companions and their lives with such passion, intimacy and humour – it was as though he knew them first hand. His stories were so good because he wasn't afraid to see the humanity in the characters he described. He spoke about their weaknesses as well as their strengths, about jealousy, anger, love and lust.[238]

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[236] Idem, 117.
[237] Heffelfinger, "Profile of a Jihadi Radicalizer," 2 note 10.
[238] Nussaibah Younis, "The Anwar al-Awlaki who impressed me as a teenager," *The Guardian*, November 1, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/nov/01/anwar-al-awlaki-transformation-political

Because of his oratory skills and savvy use of social media, Awlaki was dubbed the "bin Laden of the Internet."[239] However, this comparison obscures the real and important differences between the two. As Shane notes, "Osama bin Laden had helped pioneer the use of the internet to promote violent jihad, but his web performances were in Arabic and favored obscure poetry and high-flown rhetoric that sometimes bordered on the incomprehensible, especially to Western audiences."[240] While the two may seem similar at first—both were bearded figures who sat and spoke directly into the camera—their approaches were quite different. Awlaki not only spoke in English, but also spoke directly to the experience of living as a Muslim in the West. Awlaki's flair for storytelling was also more digestible. Thus, Awlaki both literally spoke in a language his target audience understood, English, and in a manner that would connect with them by speaking to the experience of living as a Muslim in western countries. In this manner, Awlaki's charisma acted to bolster his three-pronged personal brand that was precisely targeted towards a different population than bin Laden typically spoke to.

Micro-Celebrity Practices

Anwar al-Awlaki deliberately created a personal brand targeted towards English speaking Muslims living in Western countries. He sought to inspire and to make Salafi jihad more accessible. Once he had built his branded identity, Awlaki engaged in micro-celebrity practices to capitalize on and maintain his celebrity status. Yet even before he joined AQAP, Awlaki had a long history of understanding the importance of using text and video to reach out to others. He always had an eye for imaging and branding. After becoming a popular preacher in his own mosques as well as in traveling appearances, Awlaki began finding ways

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[239] Bari Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate* (London: Saqi, 2015), 19, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[240] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 26.

to increase his visibility. When Anwar's brother Ammar visited Anwar in San Diego in 1998, Ammar stood on the sidewalk outside the mosque and sold audio recordings on cassette of Anwar's recent lecture series.[241] In February 2000, after only six years of being a full-time imam, Awlaki created a Nevada-based corporation named Al Fahm Inc. to sell CDs of his lectures.[242] Awlaki effectively capitalized on his status by mass producing his content, thus spreading it to more followers in the form of audio lectures. This early fascination with audio and visual led to Awlaki's range of micro-celebrity practices as an actual member of AQAP. As Shane notes, "[Awlaki] appears to have lived his entire professional life before audio and video recorders."[243]

Awlaki used a variety of mediums with which to propagate his personal brand and connect with followers. In June 2008, he launched a blog, "Anwar-Awlaki.com".[244] The blog was only online from May 2008 to November 2009, but provided a platform to connect with followers.[245] Similarly, Awlaki's Facebook page, which had 4,800 likes, was taken down shortly after the Fort Hood attack, when Awlaki had praised Hasan's actions.[246] Lastly, Awlaki encouraged followers to share and spread his material, and thousands of his audio and video lectures have been posted on YouTube, other video-hosting sites, and jihadist forums.

Awlaki largely engaged in celebrity and micro-celebrity practices that mirrored those of the mainstream. In particular, this made him very relatable to a young generation who grew up seeing such practices every day. For example, in January 2009 Awlaki released a

[241] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 62.
[242] Idem, 63.
[243] Scott Shane, "The Enduring Influence of Anwar al-Awlaki in the Age of the Islamic State," CTC Sentinel 9, no. 7 (July 2016), 18.
[244] Morris, *Dark Ideas*, 40.
[245] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 184.
[246] Heffelfinger, "Profile of a Jihadi Radicalizer," 3.

blog post titled "44 Ways of Supporting Jihad". Each item had a least a paragraph of text, but the overall structure was simple and easily digestible. Moreover, the title and structure of the piece strongly evoke that of a Buzzfeed list article, commonly known as a "listicle," which became famous at around the same time. Number 29 on the list is "WWW Jihad", which encourages followers to establish online forums and share jihadi literature.[247] This provides a follow-on activity for fans to do once they finish reading Awlaki's post, thus keeping them involved.

Yet it was not enough to merely produce content—like all micro-celebrity practitioners, Awlaki sought to strategically interact with his followers. In his first blog post, Awlaki explained the benefits he received from online communication, and displayed some of his own micro-celebrity attitudes towards followers:

> "Now we can communicate all over the globe within seconds; text, audio and video, all within seconds. So I would like to tell all of the brothers out there whom I personally know and whom I spent memorable time with: Assalamu alaykum and isha Allah I will never forget you. And to those whom I grew to know through these modern means of communication but the circumstances have separated me from meeting them, nevertheless, I still feel a bond with them and I love them for the sake of Allah because they have chosen to follow Islam."[248]

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[247] Anwar al-Awlaki, "44 Ways of Supporting Jihad," *www.anwar-alawlaki.com*, January 5, 2009.
[248] Anwar al-Awlaki, "Assalamu alaykum all," *www.anwar-alawlaki.com*, May 31, 2008, archived copy available at http://cryptome.org/anwar-alawlaki/08-0531.htm.

Awlaki's final comment about still feeling a bond with others he only met over the internet represents the potential for intimacy with celebrities that is afforded by new media technology.

Awlaki's fans endearingly called him "Sheikh Anwar".[249] In turn, Awlaki fully embraced the moniker. His blog featured a page called "Contact the Sheikh" and *Inspire* frequently referred to Awlaki as "Sheikh Anwar". Awlaki's blog allowed followers to comment on each post, and "Contact the Sheikh" page enabled fans could submit questions directly to the cleric himself.[250] Awlaki's followers readily made use of these features. For example, his "44 Ways" post received 737 comments in ten days.[251] AQAP's *Inspire* featured a similar opportunity; the fifth issue included a half-page advertisement for "an exclusive video interview with the Shaykh where he will answer your questions."[252]

Awlaki made sure that this was not a one-way relationship; he frequently responded to follower questions in both public and private venues. In addition to responding personally to messages, several of his blog posts stated "I have gotten several questions about [x]," and then addressed that topic, showing he was interacting with followers by providing the content for which they asked. Awlaki's cover article in the eighth issue of *Inspire* begins by explaining that the most asked question from the issue four advertisement was "the legality of targeting non-combatants in countries that are at war with the Muslims."[253] Awlaki dedicated his cover article to the topic of killing civilians as a direct response to fan questions. This article is particularly interesting because it combines all facets of Awlaki's

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[249] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 31
[250] Idem, 174
[251] Idem, 185
[252] *Inspire* no. 5, 12.
[253] Anwar al-Awlaki, "Targeting the Populations of Countries That Are at War With the Muslims," *Inspire* no. 8 (Fall 2011), 40-41, available online at http://jihadology.net/2012/05/03/al-qaidah-in-the-arabian-peninsulas-al-mala%E1%B8%A5im-media-releases-inspire-magazine-issue-8-and-9/.

personal brand: it is written in English, provides an Islamic legal argument, and is targeted to those living in Western countries.

Moreover, his online presence attracted engagement with followers who, inspired partly by Awlaki, were eager to take his words and turn them into action. Zachary Chesser, who was convicted in 2010 of trying to join al-Shabab and violently threatening the creators of South Park online, regularly commented on Awlaki's blog.[254] Awlaki even responded to Chesser's emails on two occasions. [255] In a similar case, Nidal Hasan, the Fort Hood shooter, began sending Awlaki messages via the "Contact the Sheikh" page starting on December 17, 2008.[256] The exchange is representative of Awlaki's personal brand. Hasan frequently asked for comment on the Islamic legal or religious logic and rationale for various attacks, and he was clearly turning to Awlaki because of the authoritative religious voice brand. In one email, Hasan labeled himself as a "novice" who was seeking Awlaki's "reassurance."[257] Additionally, Hasan seemed to be swayed by Awlaki's celebrity status. On February 16, 2009, he wrote that he was creating a $5,000 prize for an essay contest with the topic "Why is Anwar Al Awlaki a great activist and leader."[258] Awlaki responded only twice to Hasan's fifteen emails, but in his second reply asked Hasan to tell Awlaki more about himself, showing an effort to engage in strategic intimacy.[259]

Awlaki also propagated his personal brand through articles published in the AQAP magazine *Inspire.* Take, for example, the "main article for the first issue" of Inspire, which

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[254] Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Apple Pie," 70.
[255] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 187.
[256] Idem, 191.
[257] J.M. Berger, "ANWAR AWLAKI E-MAIL EXCHANGE WITH FORT HOOD SHOOTER NIDAL HASAN," IntelWire, July 19, 2012, http://news.intelwire.com/2012/07/the-following-e-mails-between-maj.html.
[258] Berger, "EMAIL EXCHANGE".
[259] Berger, "EMAIL EXCHANGE".

Awlaki authored.[260] Titled "May Our Souls be Sacrificed For You!" the article described how to protect the Prophet Muhammad from slander.[261] Awlaki explained that protest—in the form of burning flags and effigies, and using boycotts—had failed. Therefore, he argued that the proper response to defamation of the Prophet is "execution of those involved" and situated his argument in the literature by stating that this is the "medicine prescribed" by the Prophet and giving a historical example.[262] Awlaki specifically stated the name of a Seattle cartoonist who he wanted to make "a prime target of assassination."[263] Yet he didn't limit targets to those creating cartoons, but also targeted the "system that is offering them support and protection," including the government, media, and law enforcement.[264] By drawing on theology, this article represents Awlaki's brand as an authoritative scholar, and by engaging with a contemporary controversy about Islam in the West (depictions of the Prophet), the article also contains some of Awlaki's personal brand of creating tension for Muslims living in the West.

Overall, it is clear that Awlaki took care to build a personal brand and market that persona through various platforms: Facebook, YouTube, his blog, and *Inspire*. He portrayed himself as a learned scholar of Islam and targeted English-speaking Muslims by creating a sense of tension between being a Muslim and living in the West. Awlaki not only produced content, but engaged with followers through email and Q&A sessions. Yet how did Awlaki's death impact his celebrity status?

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[260] Anwar al-Awlaki, "May Our Souls be Sacrificed For You!" *Inspire* no. 1 (Summer 2010), 26, available online at http://jihadology.net/2010/06/30/al-qa%E2%80%99idah-in-the-arabian-peninsula-releases-it-first-english-language-magazine-inspire/.
[261] Idem, 26-7.
[262] Idem, 27.
[263] Idem, 28.
[264] Ibid.

Martyrdom

Almost immediately following Awlaki's death in the September 2011 drone strike, he was hailed as a martyr to the cause of transnational Salafi jihadism. Yet Awlaki's case represents a different type of celebrity than the typical terrorist martyr, who is unknown before they commit a suicide attack. Instead, Awlaki already had a large public profile, which was then amplified in death. While this is different than the typical terrorist martyr, there were important changes to Awlaki's celebrity status that occurred after he died.

Awlaki's death did not stop the maintenance of his celebrity profile. In fact, AQAP's efforts to celebritize Awlaki only increased after his death. The first issue of *Inspire* to be released after his death was largely devoted to Awlaki, featuring a record seven articles mentioning Awlaki. These included "My Story with Awlaki," a five page article by an AQAP member that speaks in glowing terms of Awlaki's "solid knowledge" of Islam and labels Awlaki as "of the best Islamic preachers in the English language."[265] The second page of that issue features two pictures of a smiling Awlaki and one partial picture of him holding a rifle.[266]

A basic analysis of *Inspire* content over time demonstrates a great increase in Awlaki-related content after his death (see figure 3.1). Eight issues were released before his death and nine have been released since. In the issues before his death, an average of 0.75 articles per issue were written or translated by Awlaki and an average of 1.25 articles mentioned Awlaki. In contrast, the nine issues released since Awlaki's death feature an average of 0.667 articles written or translated by Awlaki and an average of 3.89 articles mentioning Awlaki.

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[265] Shaykh Harith Al Nadari, "My Story with Awlaki," *Inspire* no. 9 (Winter 2012): 9-13, available online at http://jihadology.net/2012/05/03/al-qaidah-in-the-arabian-peninsulas-al-mala%E1%B8%A5im-media-releases-inspire-magazine-issue-8-and-9/.
[266] *Inspire* no. 9, 2.

Posts by Awlaki dipped slightly, which is sensible because the group could only rely on

unreleased drafts or transcripts of previous lectures. Yet the issue with the greatest number of

articles by Awlaki was released in 2014, two and a half years after his death. What is most

telling is the drastic increase in articles mentioning Awlaki. The three issues after Awlaki's

death featured either six or seven articles mentioning Awlaki, whereas before his death he

had only been mentioned in a maximum of two articles in an issue. This demonstrates that

AQAP sought to keep Awlaki in its follower's collective memory and use him as a continual

tool for recruitment. Lastly, AQAP used *Inspire* to revive the micro-celebrity practices of

Awlaki. Issues 12 and 13 featured Q&A's with Awlaki. These may have been either faked or

real answers from before his death, but regardless they symbolized a revival of Awlaki's

strategic engagement with fans.

Figure 3.1: Inspire Breakdown					
Issue	*Date*	*Articles Authored or Translated by Awlaki*	*Cover Article*	*Number of Articles Mentioning Awlaki*	*Type of Mentions*
1	Summer 2010	1	Yes	2	"Hear the World", mentioned in interview with AQAP head
2	Fall 2010	2	No	0	N/A
3	November 2010	0	No	1	"Hear the World"
4	Winter 2010	1	Yes	2	"Inspire Reactions," "Inspire Feedback"
5	Spring 2011	1	Yes	1	"Protest Focus"
6	Summer 2011	0	No	2	"Reactions," News Flash (celebrating the fact that drone strikes had missed Awlaki)
7	Fall 2011	0	No	1	"A Decade in Pictures"
8	Fall 2011	1	Yes	1	"Letter from the Editor"
9	Winter 2012	1	No	7	"Letter from the Editor," "Inspire Continues to Inspire," "My Story with Al Awlaki," "They Killed

					Father, They Killed Son," "This is How We Win and This is How You Lose," "Do the Mujahideen and Christian Terrorists Have Similar Goals?," "Winning on the Ground"
10	Spring 2013	0	No	6	"Letter from the Editor," "Hear the World," "Inspire Reactions," "Brother 'Askar, Abu Yazeed Al Qatary," "America Will Never Profit from the Assassination of Imam Anwar Awlaki," "We are All Usama"
11	Spring 2013	0	No	7	"Hear the World," "Inspire Reactions," "Message to the American Nation," "Words of Wisdom," "Dear American Muslim," "Inspired by 'Inspire'," "Who and Why"
12	Spring 2014	2	No	4	"Inspire Reactions," "City Wolves," "24/7 Terrorism," "Shattered: A Story About Change"
13	Winter 2014	3	No	3	"Editor's Letter," Inspire Reactions," "Words of Wisdom"
14	Summer 2015	0	No	3	"Statement Regarding the Blessed Paris Operation: "Vengeance for the Prophet"," "Hear the World," "Words of Wisdom"
15	Spring 2016	0	No	1	"Hear the World"
16	Fall 2016	0	No	1	"Echoes of Events"
17	Summer 2017	0	No	3	"Editor's Letter," "American Raids in Yemen," "Exclusive Inspire Interview: Sheikh Abu Mus'ab Abdul Wadood,"

Awlaki's material also remained readily available. In particular, his videos remained on YouTube and gained thousands of views. In June 2016, a search by Shane found 40,000 results in 2013 and 65,000 in June 2016.[267] Not only were some of his speeches staying online, they were also being re-uploaded regularly, which helps to account for the increase

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[267] Shane, "Enduring Influence," 16.

the number of results. In a 2017 search, one lecture had been uploaded only eight months prior.[268] However, in a large move by the video-hosting site, in November 2017 YouTube took down over 50,000 of videos with content from Awlaki.[269] Prior to that move, the most recent research on Awlaki's videos, an August 2017 study by the Counter Extremism Project found a search for Awlaki's name on YouTube produced 70,100 results.[270] After the take-down, only 18,600 results came up from the same search, and many were news clips about Awlaki, coverage of the debate over whether killing him was justified, and criticism of his work by Islamic scholars.[271]

Due to his martyr status, Awlaki continues to be a major presence in transnational jihad. Al Qaeda central and the affiliates continue to use Awlaki's image and words. Moreover, even though he was a propagandist for Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, itself a splinter group of Al Qaeda, has dutifully embraced him. In newsletters and online postings, Islamic State members frequently suggest Awlaki's lectures and writings to followers.[272] Islamic State fighters often quote Awlaki, and the group named a brigade of English-speaking foreign fighters after Awlaki.[273] Going above and beyond memorializing, the Islamic State is not above appropriating Awlaki's material. The Islamic State's English language magazines, first *Dabiq* and then *Rumiyah*, clearly take inspiration from Khan and Awlaki's *Inspire* magazine. *Dabiq's* fourth issue even featured a picture of Awlaki.[274] In December of 2013, the Islamic State released a video that featured audio from Awlaki's 2008

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[268] "Part III: Anwar Al-Awlaki Online," *Counter Extremism Project*, August 2017, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/themes/bricktheme/pdfs/Anwar_al-Awlaki_on_YouTube.pdf
[269] Scott Shane, "In 'Watershed Moment,' YouTube Blocks Extremist Cleric's Message," *New York Times*, November 12, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/12/us/politics/youtube-terrorism-anwar-al-awlaki.html.
[270] *Counter Extremism Project*, "Anwar Al-Awlaki Online".
[271] Shane, "'Watershed Moment'".
[272] Shane, "Enduring Influence," 16-18.
[273] Idem, 17.
[274] Idem, 16-17

speech at a South Africa conference in which he praised the Islamic State of Iraq, the predecessor to the Islamic State.[275] Yet with expert editing, it appeared as if Awlaki, from the grave, was sanctioning the Islamic State in its current form. As Shane notes, "the upstart Islamic State used his words for the jihadi equivalent of a celebrity endorsement."[276]

Awlaki's inspiration has been found in many attacks after his death. From 2011 to 2016, Shane found Awlaki's influence present in over half of the U.S. jihadist terrorism cases.[277] These include the Boston Bombing, and the Garland, San Bernardino, and Orlando shootings. Each individual or group involved had watched and read Awlaki's work. Orlando gunman Omar Mateen found Awlaki's lectures "very powerful" and one American who conducted a suicide attack in Syria noted in a martyrdom video that he was inspired by Awlaki's words comparing devotion to jihad to jumping off a cliff with faith.[278] While the presence of Awlaki's material doesn't equal causation, it does show the enduring influence and relevance of Awlaki in transnational jihad.

Celebrity Significance

Why does Awlaki's celebrity matter, and what effect did it have? As Shane notes "in the world of online extremism, celebrity matters."[279] Celebrity extremists inspire others to commit attacks, and they can use their status to recruit new members to an organization. In particular, micro-celebrity practitioners can use their targeted personal brand to find and

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[275] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 316-7.
[276] Idem, 317.
[277] Shane, "Enduring Influence," 15.
[278] Mohammed A. Malik, "I reported Omar Mateen to the FBI. Trump is wrong that Muslims don't do our part.," *The Washington Post*, June 20, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/20/i-reported-omar-mateen-to-the-fbi-trump-is-wrong-that-muslims-dont-do-our-part/?utm_term=.a9a34fc9a60d. Robert Windrem, "American Suicide Bomber Says He Was Watched by FBI, Inspired by Awlaki," *NBC News*, August 27, 2014, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/investigations/american-suicide-bomber-says-he-was-watched-fbi-inspired-awlaki-n190606.
[279] Shane, "Enduring Influence," 18.

entice recruits. However, in examining this phenomenon it is important to denote the limits of analysis. It is not wholly possible to draw causation in every case. However, it is possible to understand the correlations between branding, recruitment, and terrorist attacks.

Awlaki's audio lectures, videos, and writings have been found in relation to numerous plots while he was alive, in addition to the previously discussed connections to plots after his death. By the time Awlaki was killed, his "Constants of Jihad" lecture had been heard by and potentially influenced "the Fort Dix Six, a number of Somali-Americans recruited into al-Shabab, Alaskans Paul and Nadia Rockwood, New Jersey residents Mohamed Alessa and Carlos Almonte, the Toronto 18 in Canada, and Rajib Karim in the United Kingdom."[280] A direct link cannot be tied between listening to a lecture and committing a terrorist attack; however, the ubiquity of Awlaki's material in plots and attacks in the West demonstrates his status as a go-to voice of jihad for many disciples. The connection becomes clearer in cases where Awlaki was directly in contact with followers and engaging in strategic intimacy. For many, this was an opportunity to speak to the revered "Sheikh Anwar." In Nidal Hasan's case, he wanted Awlaki to give his blessing over a potential attack but never received a clear reply. Awlaki also was in direct contact with Umar Abdulmutallab, Zachary Chesser, Samir Khan, Mohammed Hamid, Rajid Karim, and Hisham Assem.[281] An analysis of one case demonstrates the way in which Awlaki's personal brand and celebrity status were intertwined with the recruitment for and planning of a terrorist attack.

One case in particular serves to illustrate the manner in which Awlaki's celebrity status played a role in his interacted with the recruitment of operatives and planning of terrorist attacks: the 2010 plot by Rajib Karim and Awlaki to commit a terrorist attack on a

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[280] Berger, "Enduring Appeal," 12.
[281] Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Apple Pie," 83-85

British Airways flight to the United States. Karim had been a British Airways information technology employee since 2007.[282] Rajib was put into contact with Awlaki through his brother Tehzeeb, who was living in Yemen.[283] Rajib and Awlaki began emailing in 2009, shortly after his brother met in person with Awlaki.[284] Rajib also wished to travel to Yemen and join the fight himself, but Awlaki convinced Rajib that it was more valuable for him to stay in England and commit an attack in the West.[285] Awlaki had a distinct focus on attacking the United States, and asked Karim about how much access he had at Heathrow, for information on British Airways security measures, and if it would be possible to get an explosive package on board a flight to the United States.[286] Karim even volunteered to become a flight attendant and conduct a suicide bombing on board a plane, but his application was denied.[287]

From 2009 to 2010, Awlaki and Karim communicated through a complicated system of encrypted texts. The four-step process involved writing messages in Microsoft Excel, then saving and password protecting in Microsoft Word, encrypting through the compression program RAR, and finally uploading online through a URL shortener website.[288] For an understanding of how sophisticated this encryption was, it took British authorities nine months to decipher the messages after confiscating Karim's hard drive during the arrest.[289]

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[282] Thomas Joscelyn, "Awlaki's emails to terror plotter show operational role," *Long War Journal*, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, March 2, 2011, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/03/anwar_al_awlakis_ema.php.

[283] Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Anwar al-'Awlaqi's Disciples: Three Case Studies," CTC Sentinel 4, no. 7 (July 2011), 7.

[284] Joscelyn, "Awlaki's emails to terror plotter".

[285] Steve Swann, "Rajib Karim: The terrorist inside British Airways," *BBC News*, February 28, 2011, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-12573824

[286] Cassandra Vinograd, "BA worker jailed for 30 years for plane bomb plot," *Washington Post*, March 18, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/18/AR2011031802000.html. Joscelyn, "Awlaki's emails to terror plotter".

[287] Swann, "Rajib Karim".

[288] Robert Graham, "How Terrorists Use Encryption," *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 6 (June 2016), 23.

[289] Shane, *Objective Troy*, 247.

Karim was eventually arrested in February 2010 and then convicted one year later, preventing the plot from progressing past the planning stage.

What was the involvement of Awlaki's celebrity in the plot? It is clear that the Karim brothers felt honored to be speaking with Awlaki. In an email from Tehzeeb to Awlaki, the former wrote that "it fills our heart with happiness to be in direct communication with you. only allah knows what we feel about you. and this is from the honor which allah bestows on those who honor his words and his deen [religion] and its sanctities."[290] In stating their happiness to be in contact with Awlaki, the brothers specifically cite part of Awlaki's personal brand; by saying that Awlaki is someone who honors god's will, Rehzeeb alludes to Awlaki's image as a learned scholar of Islam. In turn, Awlaki engaged in strategic interaction, contacting the brothers not only with operational instructions, but also with messages to maintain the relationship. For example, after one U.S. drone strike "Al-Awlaki sent the brothers a personal audio message confirming that he had survived a US missile attack. Rajib told Tehzeen that, "hearing the shaykh's voice filled my heart with joy.""[291] The brothers not only felt honored to speak with the celebrity Awlaki, but also were emotionally invested in his survival.

Awlaki's personal brand is evident in much of the communication with the Karim brothers. Had Rajib gained the flight attendant position, he would have been forced to engage in activities such as serving alcohol. Rajib treated Awlaki as a religious authority and inquired whether or not that was sanctioned if the actions were carried out with the ultimate

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[290] Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Disciples," 7.
[291] Swann, "Rajib Karim".

aim of jihad.[292] Karim also discussed the tension of living as a Muslim in a western country, a
key part of Awlaki's personal brand:

> "Dear shaykh…I always write to my brother saying how depressed I am living
> in Britain and how I hate myself for not making hijra and also not being able
> to do anything here…from the moment I entered this country my niya
> [intention] was to do something for the deen [religion], it was not to make a
> living here and start enjoying life in this country. As month after month and
> then slowly years went by without anything happening and also not being able
> to have any concrete plans to do anything here, my iman [faith] was getting
> affected. I started feeling like a real munafiq [hypocrite]. It has been three
> years that I have been living here away from the company of good brothers
> and spending a good part of my working day with the kuffar [non-
> Muslims]."[293]

In contemporary terms, Karim could be considered what Byman has labeled a "frustrated
foreign fighter": someone who wishes to join the transnational jihad abroad but is prevented
from doing so.[294] Karim wanted very badly to travel to Yemen to fight, but did not. In
Karim's case, he was blocked only by wanting to stay with his family in the U.K. Yet Awlaki
was able to convince him to stay by arguing that Karim had more value in the U.K. than in
Yemen. In turn, Awlaki took the tension evidenced in Karim's email and provided him an
outlet—committing an attack at home on an airliner.

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[292] Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Awlaqi's Disciples," 7.
[293] Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Awlaqi's Disciples," 7.
[294] Daniel Byman, "Frustrated Foreign Fighters," *Lawfare*, July 12, 2017, https://lawfareblog.com/frustrated-foreign-fighters.

Conclusion

Awlaki represents a combination of several forms of celebrity, from his traditional engagement with mass media to AQAP's efforts to make him a martyr (see figure 3.2). Most consequentially, Awlaki opened the door in terms of using new platforms to propagate his personal brand, and he produced content through speeches and articles that was consistent with that brand. However, Awlaki only tried to operationalize this celebrity twice: once in person with Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab and once virtually with Rajib Karim. He operated during the infancy of contemporary social media. Facebook had only been open to the public for four years when Awlaki was killed in September 2010. In the ensuing years, communications technology and social media platforms improved greatly, and with that came a shift in cultural attitudes about communication. More contact was expected over the internet, and even constant contact was normal. In turn, a new terrorist celebrity materialized: the Twitter celebrity and virtual planner, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Figure 3.2: Awlaki's Celebrity Traits			
Type of Celebrity	*Awlaki examples*	*Significance*	*Cases*
Traditional Celebrity	Interviews with Al Jazeera, media coverage after the Fort Hood and Underwear Bomber attacks	Gained notoriety, particularly in the United States	N/A
Martyr	*Inspire* magazine coverage greatly increased after his death, audio and video lectures continue to circulate, and the Islamic State has memorialized Awlaki in various ways	Continues to inspire members of the transnational Salafi jihadist movement, taken up by Islamic State	Omar Mateen, Tsarnaev brothers
Internet Celebrity	Blog posts, interaction with fans, video and audio lectures, personal brand that targeted English-speaking Muslims	Engaged with followers one-on-one	Rajib Karim, Zachary Chesser, Nidal Hasan

Chapter Four: Junaid Hussain

Following Awlaki's death, the rise of the Islamic State led to the emergence of a new type of terrorist internet micro-celebrity: the virtual planner. In contrast to Awlaki's role as an inspiring preacher who could give a blessing for an attack to followers who asked, the virtual planners are more focused on recruiting specific individuals and actually planning attacks. These planners are typically foreign fighters in Syria who recruit, train, and direct sympathizers in the fighter's country of origin using digital, and typically encrypted, communications. Often the planners are among the most prominent foreign fighters from their country. They include the British fighter Junaid Hussain, Frenchmen Rachid Kassim and Maxime Hauchard, Australian Neil Prakash, Indonesians Bahrun Naim, Bahrumsyah, and Abu Jandal, Malaysian Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi, and Hindi-speaking Abu Issa al-Amriki.[295] Ten planners are linked with the majority of the virtual plots and attacks: half were featured prominently in Islamic State propaganda videos and all managed active social media profiles that attracted followers.[296]

Unlike the early terrorist internet micro-celebrities, these fighters are largely no longer pseudonymous or anonymous. The days of Irhabi007 hiding behind a screenname were gone—instead the micro-celebrity foreign fighter might be featured in a beheading video with their face on display to the world. Each became a jihadi "rock-star" through their online presence and by dint of their Islamic State membership, and they represent the current culmination of the evolving types of terrorist celebrity.[297]

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[295] Cragin and Weil, ""Virtual Planners,"" 304-305.
[296] Author's count.
[297] Hughes and Meleagrou-Hitchens, "The Reach of ISIS's Virtual Entrepreneurs".

Perhaps the most prolific of the virtual planners was Junaid Hussain, a British national who traveled to Syria in 2013 and joined the Islamic State. At the time of his death in 2015, Hussain was connected to at least nine plots or attacks in the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia. This section investigates Hussain's personal brand and micro-celebrity practices. The Hussain case was chosen for several reasons. First, he was among the most prolific virtual planners. Hussain is connected to at least nine attacks or plots, behind only Naim's eleven.[298] Additionally, Hussain managed to build one of the biggest public profiles of an Islamic State foreign fighter through micro-celebrity practices. Most notably, his profile rose considerably when he convinced British citizen Sally Jones to marry him and move to Syria, and the two together became well known. Evidence is drawn from Hussain's social media postings, court records of cases in which Hussain was involved, and media reports on Hussain. While Hussain played an important role in his organization, he was a less central and less public figure than Awlaki. Instead, Hussain represents someone who built his brand largely on his own, without help from an organization. Additionally, Hussain was far more accessible and engaged with his followers than Awlaki. This represents the most recent manifestation of terrorist internet micro-celebrity and provides a sense of what future iterations might look like.

Case Study Background

Hussain was born in 1994 in Birmingham, England. He grew up in Kings Heath, a suburb just south of Birmingham and was of Pakistani descent. At age 11, Hussain was hacked while playing an online game. To seek revenge, he began browsing online forums

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[298] Hussain cases are the author's count. Naim's cases come from Cragin and Weil, ""Virtual Planners"".

and reading tutorials to teach himself how to hack.[299] When Hussain was 13 he took on the

moniker TriCk; he would use the pseudonym for all of his online activity and hacks until he

joined the Islamic State.[300] Yet it was not until two years later that Hussain transition from

viewing hacking as a game to hacking as a vocation and a form of activism. According to

Hussain, he "became political" when he "started watching videos of children getting killed in

countries like Kashmir & Palestine…I then started using hacking as my form of medium by

defacing sites to raise awareness of issues around the world and to "bully" corrupt

organizations and embarrass them via leaks etc., which is how I got into hacktivism."[301] It

was at that time that Hussain created the hacking forum "p0ison.org" and shortly afterward

co-founded a hacking collective named TeaMp0isoN.[302] Hussain then studied information

technology at Wheelers Lane Technology College and Aston University.[303]

Most of Hussain's hacks at this point targeted private corporations and national

governments: the group gained access to Israeli credit card numbers and hacked NATO and

the British Ministry of Defense.[304] In June 2011, Hussain hacked former Prime Minister Tony

Blair's former advisor's email and posted her contacts, including Blair's email address,

online.[305] He also called the United Kingdom national terrorism hotline 111 times over three

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[299] Eduard Kovacs, "Hackers Around the World: It's No TriCk, He's Among the Best in the UK," *Softpedia News*, February 18, 2012, http://news.softpedia.com/news/Hackers-Around-the-World-It-s-No-TriCk-He-s-Among-the-Best-in-the-UK-253652.shtml.

[300] Christopher Heffelfinger, "The Risks Posed by Jihadist Hackers," *CTC Sentinel* 6, no. 7 (July 2013), 2.

[301] Kovacs, "Hackers Around the World".

[302] Ibid.

[303] Nick McCarthy, "Isis hacker Junaid Hussain 'was radicalised by a computer', neighbour claims," *Birmingham Live*, August 27, 2015, https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/isis-hacker-junaid-hussain-was-9941768.

[304] Hannah Furness, "Team Poison: profile of the hackers," *The Telegraph*, April 12, 2012, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/9200751/Team-Poison-profile-of-the-hackers.html.

[305] "'Team Poison' hacker who posted Tony Blair's details is jailed," *The Telegraph*, July 27, 2012, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/internet-security/9432459/Team-Poison-hacker-who-posted-Tony-Blairs-details-is-jailed.html.

days, which effectively prevented others from calling in.[306] Hussain was arrested and served

six months in total for both charges.

After being released from prison, Hussain seemed to be more violent and ready to

take up arms rather than just hacking.[307] This turn had been presaged in a 2012 interview in

which Hussain stated: "I don't recognize the law or its enforcers, I don't fear "prison" – at

least I'd be blocked from the mad world outside, I'd be able to focus on myself and practice

my religion more. I don't fear no one except god (Allah)."[308] The reasons for this shift are

unclear. It may be that prison was a radicalizing experience for him; as one hacker friend of

Hussain's described, "I think we put someone with leadership skills who had committed only

nonviolent crimes around actual criminals and created a monster."[309] It also seems that

Hussain began to value direct action more than mere hacking after his time in prison.[310]

Lastly, Hussain's friend suspected that anti-South Asian racism in the United Kingdom may

have driven him towards a group like the Islamic State.[311] As a hacktivist, Hussain had

championed the cause of Muslims in Kashmir and the Occupied Territories, so the turn to

Salafi jihadism is a potential, albeit radical, extension of his previous campaign. Regardless

of the reason, Hussain traveled to Syria in 2013 and formally joined the Islamic State.[312]

Once in Syria, Hussain played two roles. First, he utilized his considerable hacking

skills. Hussain became one of the leaders of the CyberCaliphate, the Islamic State hacking

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[306] "'Team Poison' hacker"

[307] Lorraine Murphy, "The Curious Case of the Jihadist Who Started Out as a Hacktivist," *Vanity Fair*, December 15, 2015, https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2015/12/isis-hacker-junaid-hussain.

[308] Kovacs, "Hackers Around the World".

[309] Murphy, "The Curious Case of the Jihadist".

[310] Ibid.

[311] Ibid.

[312] Colleen Curry, "A British Mother Reportedly Left Welfare Behind and Is Now Helping Recruit for the Islamic State," *Vice News*, December 22, 2014, https://news.vice.com/article/a-british-mother-reportedly-left-welfare-behind-and-is-now-helping-recruit-for-the-islamic-state.

division.[313] The CyberCaliphate's most well-known action occurred in January 2015 when they took over the U.S. Central Command Twitter account; the profile picture and banner were changed to black images with text supportive of IS, and IS-related tweets were posted.[314] Hussain's second role within the Islamic State was as a recruiter and planner. Hussain led "The Legion" or "Raqqa 12", the Raqqa-based collective of online recruiters and virtual planners.[315] The group used social media accounts and encrypted messaging to connect with sympathizers around the world and encourage them to either come to Syria or conduct an attack at home. Hussain was one of the most prolific of these recruiters and planners.

In one of his online encounters, Hussain met Sally Jones, a punk rock guitarist from Greenwich. Jones converted, married him, and moved to Syria in 2013 with her young son.[316] In turn, Jones became a particularly effective and well known recruiter of western women. Hussain's high-profile hacks and connections to plots in the United States and United Kingdom had made him a target of the anti-IS coalition. On August 24, 2015, Hussain was killed in a drone strike in Raqqa, Syria. He was possibly located after he clicked a link sent to him through SureSpot by British authorities. The "poison link" allowed them to find his

[313] "Junaid Hussain: How a Boy From Birmingham Became ISIS'S Leading Hacker," *Newsweek*, August 27, 2015, http://www.newsweek.com/janaid-hussain-isis-us-syriabritainisis-cybercyber-caliphateisis-hackermiddle-601034.

[314] "CENTCOM Twitter account hacked, suspended," *CNN*, January 12, 2015, https://www.cnn.com/2015/01/12/politics/centcom-twitter-hacked-suspended/index.html.

[315] Del Quentin Wilber, "Here's how the FBI tracked down a tech-savvy terrorist recruiter for the Islamic State," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 2017, http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-fg-islamic-state-recruiter-20170406-story.html.

[316] Curry, "A British Mother Reportedly Left Welfare".

location and target him.[317] Jones and her son were then reported killed in an October 2017 drone strike.[318]

Celebrity Production

How was Hussain's celebrity constructed, first as a hacker and then as a foreign fighter with the Islamic State? This section addresses the manner in which the mainstream media and the Islamic State contributed to his celebrity status. The following section will focus on Hussain's online personal brand and how he developed his celebrity himself.

By the Media

Hussain garnered some coverage when he was a hacker, but never enough to build a large public profile. Each high profile hack would garner some coverage of TriCk and his hacking collective. TriCk was able to operate under the pseudonym until his arrest in 2011, after which the trial revealed his identity as Junaid Hussain. However, there was little attention to the man himself. Short of a 2012 interview with the tech website "softpedia.com" that explored Hussain's childhood and motivations for hacking, most of the coverage merely focused on the effects of each hack.[319]

This type of media coverage would change once Hussain joined the Islamic State, and Western media dove into his past to search for the answer for why he had made the pivot from hacktivist to terrorist. Suddenly, media outlets were interested in Hussain's personal life rather than his hacking feats, and began running profiles of his life. Additionally, Hussain's marriage to Sally Jones garnered a lot of media coverage. Nacos described several frames

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[317] James Cartledge, "Isis terrorist Junaid Hussain killed in drone attack after boffins 'crack group's code'," *Birmingham Live,* September 16, 2015, https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/isis-terrorist-junaid-hussain-killed-10069425

[318] Ewen MacAskill, "British Isis member Sally Jones 'killed in airstrike with 12-year-old son'," *The Guardian*, October 12, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/12/british-isis-member-sally-jones-white-widow-killed-airstrike-son-islamic-state-syria

[319] Kovacs, "Hackers Around the World".

through which media organizations describe female terrorists, and coverage of Jones and

Hussain most clearly fit into the physical appearance and the "terrorist for the sake of love"

frames.[320] Take for example, *The Mirror* headline "Mr. and Mrs. Terror".[321] This fits with the

pattern that there is particular media scrutiny towards female terrorists; Bloom found that

attacks by female terrorists receive an average of eight times more coverage than those by

male terrorists.[322] However, Hussain never gained a media moniker such as "Jihadi John," the

name given to Mohammed Emwazi. Instead, Hussain was referred to only as his legal name

or his kunya, Abu Hussain al-Britani. In contrast, the media labeled Jones the "White

Widow," which added both to her profile and theirs as a couple. Lastly, tabloids and British

newspapers used undercover employees to reach out to both Hussain and Jones. In one case,

Hussain coached an employee of *The Sun* through planning an attack.[323] In another, a

journalist with *The Sunday Times* posed as a seventeen year-old and approached Jones online

about how to join the Islamic State.[324] Ultimately, media coverage did not seriously

contribute to Hussain's celebrity status until he joined the Islamic State, and particularly

increased after his marriage to Sally Jones.

By the Organization (Islamic State)

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[320] Brigitte L. Nacos, "The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism," St*udies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005): 435-451.
[321] Natalie Evans, "'Mr & Mrs Terror': British ISIS couple Sally Jones and Junaid Hussein met their grisly ends in 'his and hers' drone strikes," *The Mirror*, October 11, 2017, https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/sally-jones-junaid-hussain-isis-11328581.
[322] Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 23, 128, ProQuest Ebrary Central. Tested in Maura Conway and Lisa McInerney, "What's love got to do with it? Framing 'JihadJane' in the US press," *Media, War & Conflict* 5, no. 1 (2012): 6-21.
[323] "I.S. plot to bomb UK today," *The Sun*, Jun 26, 2015, https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/241550/i-s-plot-to-bomb-uk-today/?CMP=spklr-_-S9SunSocial-_-FBPAGE-_-TheSun-thesun-_-20150626-_-News-_-201361053
[324] "Rocker turned ISIS recruit lures girls, says life is 'awesome'," *Al Arabiya News*, December 21, 2014, https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/12/21/British-ISIS-recruit-lures-girls-to-Syria-says-life-is-awesome-.html

While the Islamic State is noted for its media efforts, Hussain was not featured in any Islamic State propaganda videos. This tells us that his celebrity allure was largely produced through a combination of media coverage and his own online presence. However, the Islamic State was strategic in building the brand of their non-Arab foreign fighters by filming videos where the fighters explain why they emigrated and call on those from their home country to emigrate or commit attacks at home.[325] Several of the other virtual planners gained their initial celebrity profile by appearing in Islamic State propaganda videos. Most notably were the two French planners Maxime Hauchard and Rachid Kassim, who appeared in beheading videos in 2014 and 2016, respectively. Australian planner Neil Prakash was the star of a twelve-minute recruitment video in May 2015. These videos helped to build visibility for each foreign fighter in their country of origin and created credibility for their brands as true members of the Islamic State. In turn, each video appearance also garnered mainstream media coverage in the country of origin as news outlets ran profiles about each fighter and recreated their path to terrorism.

Hussain's Personal Brand

While media coverage gave Hussain some status and the Islamic State did not use its media wings to bolster his profile, it was ultimately Hussain's actions online that built his celebrity status. This section will analyze the character of the personal brand Hussain created, and the following section examines the ways in which Hussain propagated and used that brand. Hussain had two brands. First, he was the hacker "TriCk," who used online exploits to build a fan base in the hacking community and small-scale notoriety in the general public, culminating in his arrest. Second, he employed the brand of the hardened Islamic State

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[325] Nico Prucha, "IS and the Jihadist Information Highway—Projecting Influence and Religious Identity via Telegram," Perspectives on Terrorism 10, no. 6 (December 2016), 49.

fighter, Abu Hussain al-Britani. Three elements of this terrorist personal brand are identified: being a fighter and not only a hacker, being a genuine member of the Islamic State who lived in Syria, and being able to connect worldwide sympathizers to the caliphate.

Hussain as Hacktivist

Hussain's first personal brand was that of the hacker "TriCk". Hussain's 2012 interview with softpedia.org highlighted not only why he became a hacker, but how he portrayed himself as one as well. The interviewer specifically used the term "hacktivist", which refers to someone who uses hacking for a political or social purpose. Hacktivism often has a defensive logic—hackers view themselves as punishing large corporations or governments for their actions. This defensive logic comes through in Hussain's hacker persona. Again, the turning point appeared to have been age 15 for Hussain; he stated that the videos of Kashmir and Palestine "made me angry, it changed the way I lived my life and the way I saw the world."[326] In turn, hacking was Hussain's medium to take action; for him, "TeaMp0isoN is like Internet Guerilla Warfare."[327] Adding to this defensive logic, in a 2012 profile of TeaMp0isoN by *The Telegraph*, Hussain "said he believed the anti-terrorist police were the "real terrorists" and said: "Terrorism doesn't exist. They create the terrorism and fabricate it to demonize a certain faith."[328]

Hussain bolstered this personal brand with hacks that fit the persona; in 2012, Operation Free Palestine raided Israeli credit card details as a means of highlighting the occupation of Palestinian territory.[329] Another of TriCk's hallmarks was defacing websites as

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[326] Kovacs, "Hackers Around the World".
[327] Ibid.
[328] Furness, "Team Poison".
[329] Murphy, "The Curious Case of the Jihadist".

"a form of raising awareness."[330] He saw this as a way of getting his message out to thousands of people: he claimed 20,000 people viewed his hack of the *Daily Mail* website, which not only increased visibility but also "embarrasses the organization targeted."[331]

Fighter

Hussain kept some aspects of this hacker persona when he joined the Islamic State. This most notably manifested in his position with the Islamic State's CyberCaliphate. Each of his hacks with the Islamic State spoke for him by demonstrating his hacking ability, which then gave him credibility. For example, the CENTCOM hack hit a very high-profile target and thus received a lot of attention. That hack was likely largely due to Hussain, who brought a wealth of hacking knowledge and experience with him that allowed the CyberCaliphate to pull it off.

Yet while Hussain maintained some of this hacker persona, he specifically altered his brand once he joined the Islamic State to portray himself as more of a fighter. Hussain was no longer TriCk, but rather the Islamic State member and terrorist fighter "Abu Hussain al-Britani." This nickname, or kunya, served as his new Twitter username. Upon marrying Hussain, Jones took on a kunya as well: Umm Hussain al-Britani. It is important to note that this process is not unusual. In fact, the taking of a kunya is typical of those who join jihadist organizations. However, for someone like Hussain whose brand is built online, the use of the kunya in his social media profiles represented a key aspect of the way he was changing his online presence to be aligned with his new identity and brand. Additionally, Hussain concurrently changed his Twitter profile picture to one of him pointing a gun at the camera. The account's profile photo had previously been a child with a Palestinian flag. In this

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[330] Kovacs, "Hackers Around the World".
[331] Ibid.

manner, Hussain moved past his image as only a hacker and developed the "persona of a hipster thug."[332]

Member of the Islamic State

The second element of Hussain's personal brand was that he was living in Syria and was an official member of the Islamic State. Some have argued that virtual planners can do their work anywhere.[333] Theoretically this is true because of the technology the planners relied on. But actually being in Syria added to his credibility and his brand. As Hughes and Meleagrou-Hitchens note, virtual planners "may, for example, lose credibility in the eyes of Western jihadis gained by the likes of Hussain and Miski who, due to their locations, were able to present themselves as legitimate members of terrorist organizations."[334]

Providing a Link to the Caliphate

In line with the idea that Hussain was in Syria and a member of the Islamic State, the third element of his personal brand was that he acted as a connection between the Islamic State and sympathizers around the world. Hussain tweeted about life in the caliphate and provided a concrete connection to the Islamic State for potential recruits. When Hussain married Jones, it not only built his profile through media coverage, but it added to this element of his personal brand. Hussain had proven publically that he could bring you, the disaffected westerner, to the caliphate in Syria, which was advertised in glowing terms. This was all the more potent because the pair had met online: if Hussain could bring her to the caliphate, then he could potentially bring anyone with whom he conversed online.

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[332] Wilber, "Here's how the FBI tracked".
[333] Moreng, "ISIS' Virtual Puppeteers".
[334] Hughes and Meleagrou-Hitchens, "The Threat to the United States," 7.

Micro-Celebrity Practices

How did Hussain put this personal brand into action? First, he was very active on Twitter. Hussain's tweets often represented his personal brand. From his @AbuHussain102 profile, he tweeted "You can sit at home and play call of duty or you can come here and respond to the real call of duty…the choice is yours."[335] Hussain was challenging others to recreate his shift in persona from hacker who sits behind a computer to terrorist who takes action in the real world. Additionally, Hussain would continually create new Twitter accounts as his various profiles were suspended by the company. This suspension and account creation cycle was a standard part of the Twitter experience for Islamic State members and supporters.[336] However, for a micro-celebrity practitioner, it is an essential element of keeping up their profile and staying relevant and accessible to followers.

Hussain also focused on the micro-celebrity practice of strategically interacting with fans. Once Hussain and a follower had met on Twitter, he often directed them to move to encrypted applications for personal and secure conversations. The app SureSpot appears to have been his program of choice, but he also used Kik and Telegram. Moreover, Hussain made this transition easy: in some of his early Twitter accounts, he listed his SureSpot account name in his Twitter bio, which is prominently displayed directly under the profile photo at the top of the account page. Australian planner Neil Prakash did the same thing: his SureSpot account name was in his Twitter bio of the @AbuK_313 account.[337] In this manner,

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[335] Lorenzo Franceschi-Bicchierai, "How a Teenage Hacker Became the Target of a US Drone Strike," *Motherboard*, Vice News, August 28, 2015, https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/jp5wed/junaid-hussain-isis-hacker-drone.

[336] Elizabeth Pearson, "Online as the New Frontline: Affect, Gender, and ISIS-Take-Down on Social Media," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2017): 1-25, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2017.1352280.

[337] "Neil Prakash," *Counter Extremism Project*, https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/neil-prakash

Hussain could either provide the follower with the means of discretely contacting him or they could take the initiative themselves.

John Miller explained this transition from Twitter to personal communication thusly:

> The thing that ISIS does is they really understand their audience. They have some very convincing material, for example putting out compelling videos glorifying fighters from the West killed in battle. That's to get you into the tent. What they do after that goes from brilliant to genius. They start to talk to you personally. If you look at the postings of Junaid Hussain, who was a British individual who went by the Twitter handle Abu Hussain-al-Britani, he would post such things as, "You no longer need to go to a training camp to learn everything you need to know; you can get it all online." And people would respond with questions or comments, and he would say, "Meet me on my Kik account." Then he would talk to them directly.[338]

That transition allowed followers to feel a real sense of connection to Hussain, and by extension, the Islamic State.

Hussain's brand as a fighter is also evident in his tweets and interactions with followers. Many of Hussain's tweets involved threats against the enemies of the Islamic State. In July of 2015 he threatened that "soon we will send our 'drones' to attack you in your lands" and that "spears" from Islamic State terrorists would "reach the lands of the crusaders."[339] Hussain kept up this persona when interacting one-on-one with followers. One hallmark of Hussain's plots was a contingency plan: in many of his virtual plots, he

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[338] Maria Southard, "A View from the CT Foxhole: John J. Miller, NYPD Deputy Commissioner for Intelligence & Counterterrorism, with Ambassador Michael Sheehan," *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 3 (March 2016), 7.
[339] United States v. Justin Nojan Sullivan (2016), Factual Basis, available online at https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/extremism.gwu.edu/files/Sullivan%20Factual%20Basis.pdf, 19.

instructed his operatives to regularly carry a knife to stab any authorities that tried to apprehend them.[340] Just as he was presenting himself as a hardened fighter, Hussain was getting others he met on the internet to do the same.

Celebrity Significance

Due to his micro-celebrity practices both publically on Twitter and privately through communication with supporters, Hussain became a key figure in the online community of English-speaking Islamic State supporters. As Hughes and Meleagrou-Hitchens describe, "Hussain gained such respect among English-speaking Islamic State supporters around the world that they were also sought out online in order to give their blessing for attacks."[341] In several cases, operatives reached out to Hussain first because they knew of his reputation.

Hussain is connected to at least nine virtually planned foiled plots or successful attacks. The operatives Hussain recruited or was approached by were mostly young people. The youngest was 17, and the oldest was 34. The average age of operatives working with Hussain was 23.5 (see figure 4.1). In most cases, Hussain provided technical expertise or operational suggestions to his followers as they decided how to carry out an attack.

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[340] Wilber, "Here's how the FBI tracked".
[341] Hughes and Meleagrou-Hitchens, "The Threat to the United States," 5.

Figure 4.1: Junaid Hussain Connected or Directed Plots and Attacks				
Name of Operative	*Date*	*Digital Platforms Used*	*Type of Plot/Attack*	*Age of Operative*
Munir Abdulkader	May 2015	Twitter	Beheading plot	21
Justin Sullivan	June 2015	Twitter	Shooting plot	19
Garland, Texas	May 3, 2015	Twitter, SureSpot	Art exhibit attack	30, 34
Usaamah Abdulla Rahim (and David Wright and Nicholas Rovinski)	June 2015	Twitter, Kik	Attempted police stabbing	25, 24, 26
Ardet Ferizi	June 2015	Twitter	U.S. service member personal information hacking	19
Armed Forces Day Plot	June 2015	Kik, SureSpot	Parade bomb plot	-
Munther Omar Saleh and Fareed Mumuni	June 2015	Twitter	Police bombing plot	21, 22
Junead Khan	July 2015	SureSpot	RAF base bomb plot	24
Melbourne Mother's Day plot	May 2015	Facebook, SureSpot	Bomb plot	17
				Average: 23.5

The Hussain cases demonstrate several implications of terrorist micro-celebrity. First there is the draw of Hussain's celebrity status and the manner in which he evoked his personal brand in interactions with followers. In May 2015, Hussain promised to give Ohio resident Munir Abdulkader the address of a soldier who served at a nearby military base, with instructions that Abdulkader should film a beheading video.[342] Abdulkader reached out to Hussain first: "the defendant was the one who reached out and met these ISIL operatives in Syria online by himself and began communicating with them directly, not just Hussain, but

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[342] Kevin Grasha, "West Chester man sentenced for terror plots," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 23, 2016, https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2016/11/23/west-chester-man-sentenced-terror-plots/94298896/

others. That was all done at the defendant's own initiative."[343] This doesn't necessarily point to celebrity as a factor. Abdulkader appears to be a determined US citizen who was going to take the initiative to reach out to the Islamic State anyways. Yet it was Hussain's profile and reputation within the online community of Islamic State supporters that likely led Abdulkader to specifically seek out Hussain for guidance.

In line with most of his plots, the two initially conversed over Twitter DMs and then moved to encrypted chat apps. Abdulkader wished to travel to Syria, but Hussain steered him towards an attack in the United States.[344] Even though he was not very involved, Hussain bragged to Abdulkader about his connection to the May 2015 attack on the Prophet Muhammad cartoon contest in Garland, Texas.[345] This demonstrates Hussain's personal brand of being a hardened fighter in Syria. Hussain wanted recruits to trust him and his expertise; from the court proceedings: "this is really significant to this case because you had Hussain reaching out to Munir directly telling him that he helped direct [the Garland, Texas] attack, and then he was trying to pursue the same thing through others, makes a statement to the effect of "There's more to come."[346]

The newest iteration of terrorist micro-celebrity allows for a new and powerful form of strategic interaction: near constant communication. In the Justin Sullivan case, Hussain and Sullivan texted on June 19, 2015 about filming an attack that Sullivan would commit.[347] Sullivan planned to commit the attack the next week, but was arrested that night after asking

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[343] United States v. Munir Abdulkader (2016), Sentencing Proceedings, available online at https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/extremism.gwu.edu/files/AbdulkaderSentencingProceedings.pdf, 62.
[344] Idem, 55.
[345] Hughes and Meleagrou-Hitchens, "The Threat to the United States," 6.
[346] United States v. Munir Abdulkader, 70.
[347] United States v. Justin Nojan Sullivan, 23.

an informant to kill Sullivan's parents.[348] Similarly, Hussain and Abdulkader conversed

"right up until the last day…about who they would want to target."[349]

In this sense, improvements in technology allow for operatives to be in constant

communication with their terrorist celebrities, even up to the moment of an attack. In another

virtually planned attack in Germany, a man trying to plant a bomb was denied entry into his

target, a music festival in Ansbach. His handler quickly came up with a new plan and urged

the operative to complete the task, writing "forget the festival and go over to the restaurant.

Hey man, what is going on with you? Even if just two people were killed, I would do it. Trust

in Allah and walk straight up to the restaurant."[350] The 27 year-old then walked over to a

wine bar and his backpack bomb accidentally exploded, causing his death and injuring 15.[351]

Additionally, there is an element of celebrity on the part of the virtual operative who

the celebrity foreign fighter is directing. This manifests itself in two ways. First, virtually

planned operations are sometimes used as tests. An early example of this dynamic is the July

2006 train bombing plot in Germany, when two Lebanese students who wished to join Al

Qaeda in Iraq were asked to conduct an attack in Germany first to prove themselves before

traveling to Iraq.[352] Six months prior to planting the bombs, one plotter emailed another

saying that they had to wait to pass "the initiation test. Then we will travel to Iraq

together."[353] This pattern was repeated in some of the Islamic State's virtually planned

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[348] Idem, 12.

[349] United States v. Munir Abdulkader, 64-5.

[350] Joscelyn, "Terror Plots in Germany, France were 'remote-controlled'".

[351] Andreas Ulrich, "Germany Attackers Had Contact with Suspected IS Members," *Der Spiegel*, August 5, 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/attackers-in-germany-had-contact-with-suspected-is-members-a-1106271.html.

[352] Petter Nesser, "How Did Europe's Global Jihadis Obtain Training for their Militant Causes?," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 2 (2008), 248-9.

[353] Anreas Ulrich, "Failed Bomb Plot Seen as Al-Qaida Initiation Test," *Der Spiegel*, April 9, 2007, http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/terrorism-in-germany-failed-bomb-plot-seen-as-al-qaida-initiation-test-a-476238.html.

attacks; in 2014 an Austrian teenager was promised $25,000 and a position with IS in Syria if he carried out an attack in Austria first.[354] In these types of plots, the attack serves as a test of loyalty, both to the terrorist organization and the micro-celebrity planner.

Secondly, there is the use of allegiance and martyrdom videos in virtually planned operations that represent the operative's ability to gain celebrity status. The Islamic State has taken the practice of martyrdom videos started by Hezbollah in the 1980s and used it as a key part of the virtual plotting process. Whether or not the attack is a suicide mission, operatives are asked to create a video of allegiance before their attack, which is then sent to the virtual planner to be used in official Islamic State propaganda.[355] Once the video is sent to the Islamic State, it is then edited and branded with the Amaq logo and released to the IS Telegram community with the intention that the swarm would fan it out to other online sites and platforms for maximum visibility."[356] During one text conversation between Hussain and Sullivan, the latter proudly announced "Very soon carrying out 1st operation of Islamic State in North America…U will see on news."[357] Hussain responded "Can u make a video first?"[358] The video serves two purposes: acting as an element of pre-commitment on the part of the operative and creating an incentive for the operative to achieve their own celebrity status after their attack.

Conclusion

Junaid Hussain represents the culmination of the technological and cultural shifts that enabled Awlaki to gain celebrity status. Awlaki spoke to the broad masses of English-

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[354] Justin Huggler, "Isil jihadists 'offered teenager $25,000 to carry out bombings in Vienna'," *The Telegraph*, October 30, 2014, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11199628/Boy-14-who-planned-Vienna-bombings-was-recruited-on-internet-by-Isil.html

[355] Zammit, "The Role of Virtual Planners," 43-4.

[356] Prucha, "IS and the Jihadist Information Highway, 54.

[357] United States v. Justin Nojan Sullivan, 15.

[358] Idem, 15.

speaking Muslims through his sermons and writings. Yet he directly communicated with a handful of people and only occasionally actually incited violence and engaged in operational planning. In contrast, Hussain was directly linked to at least nine plots and plausibly recruited many more individuals to travel to Syria. He was constantly available on encrypted chat platforms. Hussain, who grew up with the early platforms, was communicating with many young people like him who were comfortable with quick digital communication and expected it. This communication amongst digital natives meant that Hussain was a more easily accessible celebrity. His celebrity status may have been narrower than Awlaki's, but changes in culture and technology allowed for more frequent strategic interaction with followers. Yet this celebrity status also had a limit: once Hussain was killed, those interactions disappeared and he could be replaced by another planner. Thus, Hussain's celebrity did not live on in the same way as Awlaki's martyrdom.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Anwar al Awlaki to Junaid Hussain: The Evolution of Micro-Celebrity

While Anwar al Awlaki and Junaid Hussain both practiced micro-celebrity, they approached online branding and interaction in distinct ways. With his early use of social media, Awlaki opened the door for terrorists like Hussain, who engage in the mainstream online micro-celebrity culture. This section analyzes the previous two case studies and identifies key findings from both, as well as comparing and contrasting the celebrity mannerisms of both men.

Personal Branding

Awlaki and Hussain had several similarities in their personal branding. Both targeted English-speaking Muslims living in the West. As former residents of the United States and United Kingdom, respectively, the two were able to relate to the experiences of those still living there. Both maintained brands online and ensured that their output was consistently on-brand. Awlaki started this with his blog, Facebook page, and *Inspire* articles. Hussain, in turn, maintained his brand on Twitter and private communications.

However, while there is overlap between the populations the two were recruiting, Hussain's personal brand was narrower. He was specifically marketing himself as a member of the Islamic State, while Awlaki leaned on his theological persona and ability to make jihad more accessible. Another difference is the organizational context in which the two were operating. As the primary spokesperson for AQAP, Awlaki served as the public face of the group. In contrast, by setting out to attract recruits from around the world, the Islamic State ended up with one or two micro-celebrities from each country with a sizable foreign fighter contingent. In turn, each virtual planner was responsible for recruiting from their country of

origin or from a country where they spoke the language. Thus, the celebrity burden was dispersed among the many foreign fighters rather than being concentrated in a single figure.

Micro-celebrity Practices

With his blog and YouTube videos, Awlaki opened the door for Hussain by participating fully in the micro-celebrity culture of marketing a branded persona through online media. Hussain then expanded with frequent Twitter postings and personal chats with supporters. Technology had changed in two important ways. First, Awlaki was operating in the early stages of social media. By the time Hussain joined the Islamic State, social media platforms were more mature and more mainstream, so there was a larger pool of regular users with whom Hussain could interact. Secondly, encryption became much more common. Hussain no longer needed to use the convoluted four-step encryption process implemented by Awlaki and the Karim brothers. Rather, Hussain could merely tell any potential recruit to download a messaging app with built-in end-to-end encryption (SureSpot being Hussain's platform of choice), and the two could have a secure conversation.

Awlaki also opened the door for Hussain in terms of operational planning. He demonstrated that, for the first time, an unaffiliated individual could reach out and ask someone famous in a terrorist organization for permission to conduct an attack. Yet Awlaki largely did not engage in operational planning. He only planned one attack in person (Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab) and attempted one virtual plot (Rajib Karim). Many of Awlaki's interactions with supporters were limited to Awlaki giving his blessing for an action or explaining the theological rationale, without trying to recruit and train a follower or plan an attack.

Hussain took this and greatly expanded it with his nine virtually planned plots and attacks. Hussain and the rest of the virtual planners fully operationalized micro-celebrity by recruiting some of the people they met online and assisting them in planning attacks around the world. As a baseline, the virtual planners were more accessible than Awlaki with new digital platforms available, but they also chose to engage more in personal interactions with followers. Thus, while they did have public postings on Twitter to advertise their personal brands, Hussain and the virtual planners differed from Awlaki in that they focused heavily on interacting with followers and strengthening their brand with each follower through personal communication.

Martyrdom

A stark difference between Awlaki and Hussain is their post-mortem celebrity status. While AQAP deliberately maintained Awlaki's celebrity status as a martyr, there are no clear signs of martyrdom status for Hussain. A comparison to Anwar al-Awlaki's martyrdom helps to illustrate this point. The Islamic State has not fronted Hussain's image or deeds as AQAP and AQ did for Awlaki. Whereas Awlaki was continually referenced in AQAP's magazine, Hussain made no appearances in the Islamic State's two online English-language magazines, *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*.

The reasons for this discrepancy can be found in the different ways in which Awlaki and Hussain operated. Hussain was involved in jihadist terrorism for a much shorter period of time, and spent only two years in Syria. Additionally, Hussain did not have nearly as large a public profile as Awlaki. But this is because Hussain operated much differently. Rather than having a large presence (such as Awlaki's persona that was widely disseminated through video and audio lectures), Hussain used one-on-one interpersonal interactions. This

made his celebrity much narrower, but also allowed for a greater feeling of intimacy because that narrow audience had access to constant contact with their celebrity figure. Without the broader status, Hussain could not as easily or as effectively be martyred as Awlaki was.

Additionally, Hussain's main methods of raising his profile were through large actions (hacking) and direct communications (Twitter DMs and encrypted chat). Once Hussain was killed, he could no longer conduct a large hacking operation, post on Twitter, or chat one-on-one with someone. Not only did he lose his ability to maintain celebrity, but there is largely no trace left of his actions: his Twitter was taken down and he was not alive to create a new account, his hacks have been forgotten, and he is unable to recruit anymore. This lack of an extant posthumous body of work helps explain why Hussain was less suited for martyrdom than Awlaki.

Yet one question still remains about the organization's role. Why did AQAP purposefully maintain Awlaki's martyr status while IS does not appear to have done much at all with regards to Hussain? With the exception perhaps of his hacking skills, Hussain was dispensable. The Islamic State had gained a whole cadre of micro-celebrities who could serve as virtual planners. In one case, Hussain told a recruit to contact another member of the Raqqa 12 via Twitter if anything happened.[359] Even though Hussain's high profile was key to drawing in supporters, his role as a facilitator and planner could be easily passed off to another individual. In contrast, there was only one Awlaki who served as the voice and face of AQAP to the Western world. Thus, AQAP made the conscious decision to keep Awlaki's image alive as a martyr.

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[359] Meleagrou-Hitchens and Hughes, "The Threat to the United States," 4.

Shifting Norms in Terrorist Celebrity

There has been an evolution in terrorist celebrity, first from the broad-based and external media-dependent traditional celebrity to, after that, the martyrdom status created by the organization to target the local community, and, finally, over the last fifteen years, to the terrorist internet micro-celebrity, who maintains a specific personal brand and cultivates a following through content consistent with the brand. Yet it is important to delineate which of these shifts are due to new technology and which are due to changes in celebrity and consumption culture.

Technological Changes

The overall technological changes were identified in chapter two; namely, the shift from traditional print media to live television, then to home video, and then to the internet. The clearest technological shift within the last two decades has been the rapidly evolving types of social media. The early social media platforms have improved greatly and a host of additional platforms and startups have emerged. The ease of communication provided by direct messaging on Twitter allowed Islamic State foreign fighters to connect with sympathizers around the world. And the ease of switching over to an encrypted chat application made it simple to keep up those conversations. Both of those factors combined to make it easier to have personal and protected conversations, which in turn creates a sense of intimacy with the celebrity in question. In short, terrorist celebrities are more accessible than ever.

Cultural Changes

In terms of cultural changes, the conception of celebrity has changed over time. Celebrity in general, particularly because of internet micro-celebrity practice, is becoming

more narrowly focused. This clearly held in the case of terrorist celebrity with the evolution from the traditional celebrity that spoke to a wide audience to the micro-celebrity who speaks largely only to a small group of potential recruits.

One trend observed is that authenticity has become more important in personal branding. In 2015, Hussain conversed with North Carolina resident Justin Sullivan about a potential shooting mass-casualty attack. In his statement to federal agents, Sullivan stated that he knew who Hussain was and that he was a British national who had been jailed but now lived in Syria.[360] This stands in stark contrast to earlier terrorist micro-celebrities. For example, "Irhabi007" was a pseudonym because Younes Tsouli needed to protect his identity. Yet in this case, Hussain's real, authentic identity was a key part of his personal brand. Hussain may have been using a kunya but his face was visible on his profile and it was integral that followers like Sullivan knew that Hussain was a foreign fighter with the Islamic State. Part of this trend in using real identities is that individuals such as Awlaki and Hussain were in safe havens and were thus free to share their identities, while Tsouli lived in east London and needed discretion. Yet it still shows an important shift. Sharing one's real identity creates authenticity in the personal brand. Individuals connected with Awlaki because they knew of his experience as a Muslim in the West and with Hussain because they knew he was a foreign fighter with the Islamic State; that was not the case for Tsouli, who proved his worth through feats done under the cover of anonymity.

Lastly, there is an atomization of celebrity. As mentioned, the transition from Awlaki to the virtual planners shows the dispersion of celebrity from one individual to many. This is a natural extension of increasing celebrity consumption culture. If Gabler's model of

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[360] United States v. Justin Nojan Sullivan, 13.

celebrity supply and demand is applied, there was an increase in the diversity of terrorist celebrities because of greater demand: the Islamic State attracted a worldwide following and needed individuals to represent that diversity and appeal to the demand in each country of origin for a relatable figurehead. Yet this atomization also leads to less martyrdom, because each smaller celebrity is less well-known and can be replaced by someone with a similar profile.

Overlap Between Technology and Culture

There are also effects resulting from a confluence of changes in both technology and culture. Overall, there is less reliance on traditional media. It is much easier to post one's own content now (enabled by technology) and consumer expectations have changed about where to get content (a change in culture). Thus, there has been a transition from celebrity status created by the mainstream media to one created by the organization (martyrs, as well as partially for Awlaki and the Islamic State fighters featured in propaganda videos) to a celebrity status created by the individual (Hussain and the Islamic State virtual planners).

Additionally, many terrorist recruits today are digital natives. Terrorism has always largely attracted young recruits, and this held true in the wave of foreign terrorist fighters to the Syrian conflict.[361] This generation grew up with the internet and digital communications, and is comfortable with meeting others online. Not only are terrorist celebrities more accessible due to new technology, there is also a group of young people who grew up expecting this kind of accessibility. This sense of intimacy from constant contact is created

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[361] Hamed el-Said and Richard Barrett, "Enhancing the Understanding of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Phenomenon in Syria," United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, July 2017, 3, http://www.un.org/en/counterterrorism/assets/img/Report_Final_20170727.pdf.

through both the technology that facilitates it and the culture that leads young people to expect and crave it.[362]

Lastly, terrorist celebrities are largely no longer speaking to an audience, but rather engaging with communities. This denotes the difference between unidirectional and multidirectional communication. In the traditional terrorist celebrity type, Osama bin Laden (and his successor Ayman al Zawahiri) would release video statements that spoke to both supporters and detractors. However, due to both the change in technology with the advent of social media and the shift in cultural norms around celebrity, today's terrorist micro-celebrities are regularly engaging with the radical milieu to find and converse with potential recruits. The comments section of Awlaki's blog became a place for followers around the world to converse and connect.

Moreover, the interpersonal interaction itself helps to build the celebrity profile. For example, take the case of the 2016 Indonesian Presidential Palace Plot.[363] The Indonesian virtual planner Bahrun Naim first worked with cell leader Muhammad Nur Solikin and urged him to recruit several others. Once Solikin had built a cell, Naim then conversed with the rest of the group through one-on-one and group chat messages.[364] And in a telling example of the allure of online celebrity profiles, Solikin had tried for six months to get into contact with Naim.[365]

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[362] Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria Books, 2017), 49-68.
[363] Cragin and Weil, ""Virtual Planners,"" 304-312.
[364] Idem, 304.
[365] Idem, 304-5.

Future Directions in Terrorist Celebrity

What will terrorist celebrity look like next? One important factor to acknowledge is the overlap between the organization and the individual. For both Awlaki and Hussain, their individual celebrity was, to some extent, building off of the popularity of the organization. In both cases, the organization was the most prominent in the transnational jihad movement at the time, AQAP in 2009-2011 and the Islamic State from 2013-2017. This contributed not only to their celebrity status, but also to what type of celebrity they became. Both AQAP's regional focus and AQ's focus on attacking the US were well-suited to a central figurehead targeting English speakers. The Islamic State's truly global recruitment effort lent itself to decentralized micro-celebrities targeting various constituencies with matching personal brands. Thus, the next phase of terrorist celebrity may depend entirely on which jihadi organization emerges as most prominent after the Islamic State.

On that note, several analysts have identified a resurgent Al Qaeda in the aftermath of global counterterrorism efforts focused on the Islamic State over the last four years.[366] And Al Qaeda may have a ready-made celebrity in the wings: Hamza bin Laden, Osama's favored son.[367] This could lead to a form of inherited celebrity, based on name recognition. It is likely that Hamza would seek to build on and remain consistent with his father's brand. This may manifest itself in a return to a traditional type of celebrity, where statements are released to mass media outlets. Or Hamza's celebrity could appear much like Awlaki's, through speeches and writings released by the terrorist organization itself. Al Qaeda is aware of this

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[366] Bruce Hoffman, "Al Qaeda's Resurrection," Council on Foreign Relations, Expert Brief, March 6, 2018, https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/al-qaedas-resurrection. Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark, "Al-Qaeda Has Rebuilt Itself—With Iran's Help," *The Atlantic*, November 11, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/11/al-qaeda-iran-cia/545576/.
[367] Ali Soufan, "Hamza bin Ladin: From Steadfast Son to Al-Qa`ida's Leader in Waiting," *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 8 (September 2018): 1-7.

potential; Soufan points to the fact that Hamza "has been featured in al-Qa`ida propaganda from a very young age," often focusing on his close relationship with Osama.[368]

Regardless, it remains clear that mainstream technological and cultural shifts drive changes in mainstream celebrity, and by extension (albeit with a lag time), terrorist celebrity. For those interested in what will happen next, they need only look to the micro-celebrity practitioners of the coming decade to see how terrorist celebrity will evolve.

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[368] Idem, 5.

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