

# Rethinking How the War on Terror Misjudges Terrorism in Liquid Modernity

Written by Tianyang Liu

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## Rethinking How the War on Terror Misjudges Terrorism in Liquid Modernity

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TIANYANG LIU, JUL 29 2016

### To See a World in a Grain of Sand:

#### Rethinking How the War on Terror Misjudges Terrorism in Liquid Modernity

There are reasons in today's world to 'consider "fluidity" or "liquidity" as fitting metaphors with which to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways *novel*, phase in the history of modernity' (Bauman 2000: 2). In the 'liquid-modern' world, capital 'becomes exterritorial, light, unencumbered and disembedded to an unprecedented extent, and ... is in most cases quite sufficient to blackmail territory-bound political agencies into submission' (ibid 149-50). "Fluid" modernity is the epoch of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape and hopeless chase. In "liquid" modernity, it is the most elusive, those free to move without notice, who rule' (ibid 38). The emergence of fluid power privileges terrorism with the new ability to rapidly move, transform and transmute, breaking the boundary of sovereign power. As Pillar (2004:104) observes, the terrorist threat facing contemporary societies has been transformed into a new pattern characterized by its fluidity and decentralization after the severe undermining and weakening of al Qaeda by the US and other international counter-terrorism forces since mid-1990s. However, the dominant understanding of terrorism cultivated in modern political context has not been radically changed to cope with the new 'reality' of terrorism in liquid modernity. Thus, the gap between the dominant understanding of terrorism in political discourse and actual operation of terrorism in liquid modernity is enlarged, which constitutes the nature of the strategic and operational failure of the War on Terror<sup>1</sup>.

This gap that hinders the way to grasp the 'real' of terrorism raises serious concern: do we really know our 'enemy'? If not, then how do we really achieve a genuine understanding? To this end, the author of this paper intends to re-think our existing understanding and strategies in the War on Terror from the dimension of the decentralized terrorism. John Urry in *The Global Complexities of September 11<sup>th</sup>* (2002) uses 'sand' as an alternative metaphor to describe the fluid power that 'increasingly detached from specific territory or space' in the increasingly complex modernity. Delighted by this metaphor, the author displaces the meanings of William Blake's famous verse—"to see a world in a grain of sand"—in the title of this paper: to mediate this war on terrorism from the fluid nature of terror in liquid modernity. But when the change of terrorism in liquid modernity is used to apprehend its new power relation with the state in this War on Terror, an untested premise underpinning the existing theoretical narrative is brought to light. The examination of this premise is critical to understand the dilemma of the global counter-terrorist conflict.

#### *Juxtaposition between Fluid and Solid Power*

In liquid modernity, decentralized and fragmented terrorism is no longer a visible or hard power; rather, it operates through a new form of power, a power of dis-engagement and dis-embedment, breaking the bond to escape traditional power dependency unilaterally between the dominant and dominated, the rulers and the ruled, the governing and the governed, administrators and the administrated, managers and managed (Bauman 2001:140). Power in its decentralized form is 'built of speed and slowness, of freedom to move and immobility' (ibid). This fluid power enables terrorism to transform and transmute incessantly, disappears and reappears unexpectedly. One example is the 'boomerang pattern', which is to 'describe the process by which local activists can bypass the blocked



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institutions of a state, and directly connect with transnational networks located in other states as a means of pursuing their political goals' (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 13, cited by Adamson, 2005: 37). This pattern of movement presents the non-linear route of radicalization in which the liquid form of power operated through protraction, convolution and contortion disables the territory-based strategy used in the War on Terror. The radical movement in such unpredictable and irreversible transformations is like 'sand that may stay resolutely in place, forming clear and bounded shapes with a distinct spatial topology, or it may turn into an avalanche and race away, sweeping over much else in its wake' (Urry 2002: 61).

In contrast, the political understanding of terrorist threat in the War on Terror is dominated by a mentality of geographical confrontation that presumes a sanctuary or safe haven of terrorism in geographical sense. The geographical rhetoric is often used in the US governmental language in describing terrorism and its counterterrorist strategy. Just four days after 11 September 2001, President George W. Bush set the tone for his counterterrorism policy in his speech at Camp David: 'we will smoke them [al Qaeda] out of their holes; we will get them running and we'll bring them to justice. We will not only deal with those who dare attack America, we will deal with those who harbor them and feed them and house them' (*September 11, 2001: Attack on America*, 2001). The War on Terror 'deliberately merges archaic notions of heroic armed struggles between states' with 'a state of war readiness in which armed confrontation is subordinate to the ideological convictions that sustain it (such as the Cold War, the "war on drugs," the "war on crime," and so on)' (Innes 2008:253). However, according to Burke (2004:18), the Islamic terrorism is a chaotic movement that does not always have clear connections to what constituted al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda has dispersed into cells, 'operating independently of each other, and never report to a central headquarter or single leader for direction or instruction, as those who belong to typical pyramid organization' (Beam, 1992, in Stern 2003:27). Therefore, the label of al Qaeda as a monolithic institutional or geographical presence should be dismissed. Shaul Mishal and Maoz Rosenthal (2005:285) further identify the operation of al Qaeda post-9/11 as a Dune movement; i.e., it 'acts in a dynamics of a fast-moving entity that associates and dissociates itself with local elements', 'moving from one territory to another, affecting each territory, changing its characteristics and moves on to the next destination'.

The contrasting narratives between dominant political understanding of terrorism and the critical observation on the change of nature of terrorism in existing academic literature suggest an incompatibility between conventional solid power of national security and fluid power of terrorism in new social conditions. The incompatibility and juxtaposition between these two heterogeneous powers project a form of geographical confrontation onto the power relation between terrorism and the state in liquid modernity. In other words, it reveals a demarcating process that leads to boundary erection between fluid and solid power in understanding the relation between terrorism and counter-terrorism. More fundamentally, the predisposition of demarcation reveals a premise in the dominant literature of counter-terrorism studies: the decentralization of terrorism and the solid power used by the state in the War on Terror are embedded in a structure of juxtaposition with identifiable boundaries re-erecting between the two heterogeneous forces. This thesis of juxtaposition of heterogeneous powers constitutes the foundation on which the interpretation about the cause of the failure of the War on Terror is built. However, although the thesis of juxtaposition in the existing literature elucidates some failures of the War on Terror to cope with the change of power construct, it lacks further elaboration and examination of how fluid and solid power operate and interact under the structure of juxtaposition. Therefore, the author of this paper will examine the legitimacy of the thesis of juxtaposition by investigating the interactive process of the two forms of power in the War on Terror. Moreover, to understand the failure of the War on Terror through power relation prioritizes the external structure of the phenomenon of terrorism over the internal structure of selfhood. To rectify this defect in the analysis of the War on Terror, a new approach has been developed which focuses more on the internal development of subjectivity of terrorism.

## *Terrorism as Internal Trajectories of Radicalization*

The most significant feature of the new approach is the detachment of the radicalization process from the notion of terrorism. Moghaddam's research (2005) draws on the approach of cognitive development to construct a staircase model illuminating the formation process of terrorism at the individual psychological level. The radicalization of subjectivity involves the sequential perception of fraternal deprivation, the perceived absence of procedural justice, the displacement of aggression onto out-groups, and the moral disengagement and re-engagement, in which the



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alternative options to redress or overcome individual negative emotions are constantly narrowed to the point in which the terrorism becomes the unique legitimate solution, or the means to rescue the internal world (Moghaddam 2005). Terrorism, in this sense, cannot be seen as a 'monolithic entity or meaningful psychological construct with identifiable properties' (Kruglanski and Fishman 2007: 194); rather, terrorism is more like a tool, a pathway, a means to an end, a tactic which is potentially open to everyone. It is the whole process of radicalization leading to the terrorist act, which constitutes particular developmental trajectory and psychological makes-up of terrorism, in other words, the substance of terrorism. Hence, terrorism is instrumental, rather than intrinsic. In other words, what terrorism produces is only the 'outlet for the basic existential desires that cannot find expression through legitimate channels', and, more fundamentally, a transformative mechanism to convert the negative emotions to positive emotions, to regain an 'elevated experience of their lives' (Cottee and Hayward 2011: 963, 975). The notion of terrorism is de-essentialized in this tool view, becoming a concept without substance, a signifier without signified. Therefore, the War on Terror attempting to essentialize and territorialize terrorism with explicit geographical affiliation and imminent institutional presence fails to recognize terrorism as developmental trajectories of subjectivity, or in other words, the processes of radicalization leading to the final conduct of terrorism. For instance, the FBI dubbed the loosely linked group of activists that Osama bin Laden and his aides had formed as al Qaeda, a presumed identifiable organizational source of terrorism, partly because the FBI had to apply conventional antiterrorism laws to this unconventional adversary (Burke 2004: 18). However, al Qaeda in reality, as a presumed institutional representation of terrorism, functions more like a spiritual pathway, a particular form of worldview that enables the individual to self-radicalize. Thus, the main direction of the War on Terror should be shifted to the radicalization process of subjectivity rather than particular geographical or institutional presence of terrorism. However, there are three limitations in understanding terrorism as subjective trajectories of radicalization. First, there is the lack of a more thorough exploration of the construction of terrorism from the aspect of the audience. Secondly, the tool view of terrorism ignores the conceptual possibility of terrorism as a particular tactic of violence oriented to its own end. Thirdly, while the psychoanalytical understanding views terrorism more as an individual subjective appeal, less attention has been paid to terrorism on the group psychological level<sup>[2]</sup>.

## Examining the Thesis of Juxtaposition

The co-existence of solid and liquid power is not embedded in a relation of geographical juxtaposition; rather, fluid power engenders de-territorialization processes and constant deconstruction inside the conventional power relation. The contemporary world reflects multiple-power realities, in which conventional hard power is juxtaposed and interplayed with the dispersed liquid power. This power configuration in the absence of a more thorough re-examination potentially generates an image in which the boundaries are re-erected between the solid and liquid power, thereby re-territorializing the world into a separation of powers. This imaginary separation of power is manifested in the excessive dependency of Bush's administration on the frontier mentality in the War on Terror. As Innes (2008: 257) argues, Bush's approach to the War on Terror assumes that the dispersed terrorist sanctuaries are cultivated within the structures of the state; they are geographical phenomena, both isolated and accessible, lawless and remote. By separating and re-territorializing the decentralized terrorism into the opposite, hostile other, the elusively chaotic power of terrorism becomes externally identifiable, locatable, traceable and thus defeatable. Thus, the fluid and unpredictable threat of terrorism is objectified and represented through a definite and controllable battlefield, which can be readily dealt with in traditional military terms (Innes 2008: 259). Therefore, the basic logic underpinning the War on Terror is that in spite of terrorists' employment of diffuse power it is ultimately external to the conventional power relation so that there are still possibilities to grasp and eradicate it. However, this logic that legitimates the territory-based approach of the War on Terror is a misunderstanding of how dispersed power operates in liquid modernity, since the fluid power, the force of disengaging and disembedding, is fundamentally internal rather than external to the solid power, born inside rather than outside dependency. The conventional mutual dependency is not the peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis, but rather a violent hierarchy or opposition between dominant and dominated, governing and governed, administrators and administrated (Bauman 2001: 140). The power with lightness and weightless in liquid modernity is a force of persistent deconstruction which operates inside the conventional mutual dependency, to erode opposition, to de-territorialize, to constantly re-shape the boundaries or break them down. In this deconstruction and de-territorialization process, the frontier mentality in the War on Terror can never be successful in combating terrorism as there is no territoriality in the chaotic movement of power. For instance, although during the War on Terror bin Laden has been killed and the al Qaeda forces have



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been severely undermined and weakened, 'the security problem will shift, not disappear' (Byman 2004:16). In other words, the disappearance of terrorism within a given geographical constraint does not mean the elimination of terrorism; the fluid power will drive terrorism to continuously flow, transmute, convolute and contort, disappear and reappear into other interrelated phenomena like money laundering, the drug trade, urban crime, asylum-seeking, people smuggling, slave trading and urban terrorism or self-radicalization in democratic society.

To further clarify this phenomenon, two tendencies of terrorism operation can be noticed—transformation of terrorist violence from 'remote'<sup>[3]</sup> areas such as Afghanistan or Iraq into domestic and individual domain, and the transmutation of transnational terrorism into regional criminal activities. Eight years after George W. Bush formally announced the War on Terror, the rise of domestic urban terrorism in dominant western societies appears to be one of the major security challenges for many democratic regimes of western societies in spite of the decline of some dominant terrorist organizations and the deaths of influential extremist figures in Afghanistan. From May 2009 through December 2012, arrests were made for 42 homegrown, jihadist-inspired terrorist plots by American citizens or legal permanent residents of the United States (Bjelopera 2013). The virtual community fostered by the Internet induces the audience to view themselves as a broader imaginative movement of jihadism. According to Kirby (2007), the Internet activity has been central to the development of a 'self-starter' phenomenon as groups that lack ties to major international terrorist networks and do not receive orders from such organizations, and thus offers would-be violent jihadists what has been described as a "de-formalized" radicalization experience. Self-radicalization and self-starters signify that terrorism has reappeared in some dominant western states as a highly individualized or private transformation of subjectivity. What is more terrifying about this phenomenon from political understanding is its increased power to disrupt or delegitimize the political system and social order from the inside. The other trend of terrorism which is worth discussing here is the transformation of political terrorism into organized crime. Alani (2006) argues that, 'during the last few years, and more precisely since the 9/11 attacks, a new phenomenon has drawn the attention of counter-terrorism and law enforcement authorities, that is the presumed institutionalized cooperation or alliance between "narcotics terrorism" and "political terrorism" or "ideological terrorism"'. The extension of political terrorism into other forms of criminality such as organized crime fostered by their political, commercial and social interest convergence indicates the tremendous transformative or re-constructive power of terrorism. The evidence examined in many researches (for example, Hudson, 2003; Makarenko, 2004; Shelley *et al* 2005) suggests that terrorist organizations like al Qaeda suppressed within particular territories during the war on terrorism have been diverted into other forms of organized criminal groups.

The thesis of juxtaposition could be examined through analyzing not only the operation of the fluid power of terrorism but also the psychological effect produced by the decentralized threat of terrorism. As Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2001:14) argue, the terrorist threat is fundamentally epistemological, which tends to be about disruption more than destruction. For instance, drawing on global media as its amplifier, a single attack of terrorism with very limited damage will create a much broader atmosphere of horror at the regional or even the global level. Horror is the 'perception of the precariousness of human identity, to the perception that it may be lost or invaded' (Asad, 2007: 5). The traumatic images of a terrorist attack disseminated through the media are bound up with an uncertainty or anxiety concerning the meaning of objects or attitudes (ibid). This anxiety or insecurity on the ontological level of the audience is fundamentally diffuse, free-floating, lacking a specific object (Giddens 1991: 44). This disruptive effect or uncertainty on the psychological and ontological level of the general population produces internal rather than external threats to the role of sovereign state as primary provider of security to its population. Therefore, fluid and decentralized terrorism essentially operates as an internalized chaotic power which challenges the legitimacy of traditional power relation established under the structure of sovereign state through generating an epistemologically disruptive effect on the target population. Thus, terrorism operating through the subjectivity and spontaneity of its audience is no longer a geographically juxtaposed phenomenon but an internal disruption in the traditional power structure of the sovereign state.

The War on Terror fails to control and eliminate the epistemologically disruptive effect of terrorism. The approach adopted by the state in the War in Terror to dispel the psychological insecurity created by terrorism and re-legitimate its role as primary provider of security is through fixing, or in more accurate terms, creating the meaning beneath the uncertain signs of terrorism, thereby restoring the meaning of community and securing the identity of individuals. The technique used to eliminate uncertainty or to manufacture a new certainty by sovereign power is embedded in the



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form of official hermeneutics. Official hermeneutics is an official form of pre-supposition that 'what appears on the surface is not the truth and seeks to control what lies beneath – through interpretation it converts absences into signs' (Asad 2007: 31). For instance, the Ford Hood shooting in 2009 appeared to be a typical case of lone-wolf terrorism. The shooting created highly disruptive and chaotic effect, which produced fear in American society about the internal crisis of military system and American political community. But, following the investigation by the FBI, the government attempted to establish evidence to prove the external affiliation of Nidal to Islamic Jihadi movements through his contact with US-born militant Moslem cleric Anwar al-Awlaki. Therefore, the mortal threat from Islamic extremist and Jihadi ideology, and its presence in the American community, emerge as the ultimate reading of events, which overlooks the actual cause and course of Nidal's radicalization.

## Internalization of the Fluid Power

The thesis of geographical confrontation between solid and fluid power assumes decentralized terrorism as a de-territorialized, elusive and heterogeneous power that constantly disrupts and erodes the traditional political system. From this theoretical predisposition, terrorism has been examined more as an externalized power that fails the strategic and operational attempts of the War on Terror, which devalues or constrains the analytical meanings of terrorism from an internal dimension of power; in other words, the analysis on the effectiveness of the War on Terror could be shifted from a focus on power conflict to how the fluid power of terrorism is internalized to generate an impact on individual subjectivity or to change the formation process of self-identity. To this end, part A of this chapter seeks to revitalize the fluid nature of self-identity as a result of internalization of fluid power and to use this phenomenon of fluid identity to re-interpret the dilemma of the War on Terror. Part B will examine the impact produced by terrorism on individual subjectivity of its audience, a means by which to re-assess the War on Terror.

### *Understanding the Dilemma of the War on Terror from Fluid Identity*

The dispersion of conventional power produces an interdependent relation between identity and individual freedom, which leads to a profound dilemma for the War on Terror in eliminating the threat of terrorism. As mentioned in part II, liquid power is a power of decentralization, operating through convolution and contortion, conversion and mutation, disappearance and reappearance. When the community as collective recognition of selfhood has collapsed, the force of self-recognition is not destroyed with the perished community framework; rather, it is continuously fragmented, transmuted and re-created through the never-ending transformation of power. Just as community collapses, identity is invented and reinvented through the self-transformation of power (Young 1999: 64). Fluid power, in this sense, is internalized, which is transformed into a re-creative power of subjectivity, generating constantly productive impact on self-understanding. Thus, instead of locking the self into particular category of self-recognition, the internalization of fluid power makes the formation of individual identity a never-ending process of self-creation. This process of self-creation manifests itself in the duality of identity in liquid modernity: identity, on the one hand, will tend to make a person 'feel he is somebody' and thus 'there is reason for one's life'; on the other, identity will constantly be deconstructed and reconstructed, differentiated and distanced (Becker 1997: 87). In other words, identity becomes self-built prisons for the ontological certainty and security on the one hand; it will be simultaneously driven by the compulsion to flow, evolve and be emancipated from the self-made prison on the other. This dynamic and permanently unfinished interaction between freedom and identity, perpetual differentiation and ontological certainty, reveals the fluid nature of identity.

The fluid nature of identity-making of terrorism presents an unprecedented challenge to the War on Terror since the attempt to eliminate the radicalized identity will increase the probabilities of formation and radicalization of new identity. One of the main intellectual tasks in the War on Terror is to distinguish, isolate and diagnose particular identities as the source of radicalization. Venkatraman (2007: 229) asserts that 'Islamic violence threatens to persist in a region because of the extremities inherent to the Quranic and Revivalist ideology causing violent Jihad.' The predisposition to extremities or radicalization is seen as an 'inherent' or 'intrinsic' element in the religious identities fostered by Quranic and Revivalist ideology. The identification of the source of terrorism sometimes expands its border to produce more generalized categories of identity with the 'inherent' element of radicalization. Jessica Stern (2003: 260) claims that 'by September 11, 2001, between 70,000 and 110,000 radical Muslims had graduated from Al Qaeda training camps'. She (2003: xxxii) also argues, 'religious terrorist groups are more violent than their secular



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counterparts and are probably more likely to use weapons of mass destruction'. However, to objectify and isolate particular group identities as a 'real' threat to western civilization and political legitimacy and then mobilize force to eradicate them would always be counterproductive for the War on Terror to eliminate the source of terrorism. Let me take the fluid and ever-changing nature of Jihadist identity as one example to explain why targeting a particular identity as source of terrorism decreases the effectiveness of the War on Terror. What is striking as the result of the War on Terror in Afghanistan is that, in spite of the severe weakening of the organizational presence of Jihadists like al Qaeda, the years of military operations in Afghanistan has increased the battlefield experience of Jihadists and transformed their domestic-oriented identity into a truly globalized self-recognition (Bergen and Reynold 2005: 4). 'From al Qaeda to the Algerian to the Filipino group Abu Sayyaf', the globalized Jihadist identity is constantly transmuted, renewed and re-identified (ibid). The Afghan war severely weakened the Jihadist organizations but Jihadist fighters started to arrive in Iraq even before Saddam's regime fell in the Iraq War and have conducted most of the suicide bombings leading to the withdrawal of the UN and most international aid organizations (ibid). Therefore, the War on Terror to eliminate particular identity group results in unexpected productive effect that cultivates and facilitates the growth of transmuted radical identity.

## *Terrorism Is a Force of Enabling*

Moreover, the fluid nature of identity transforms terrorism into an enabling process of subjectivity, which leads to unintended consequences for the War on Terror. Power in liquid modernity is all about speed, lightness and weightlessness, the capacity to move and run, which functions like attractors to exert a gravity-effect on the trajectories of systems to generate a range of possibilities (Urry 2002: 61). Therefore, these attractors with their unique transmuting capacity do not only structure or shape the trajectories of systems but also enable them to reconstruct and re-invent their movements. Al Qaeda is an attractor, which plays more as a radical internationalist ideology that has adherents among many individuals and groups but few of whom are linked in any substantial way to bin Laden (Burke 2004:18). The models and methods provided by al Qaeda does not merely guide the influenced individuals or groups but also enable them to design their own trajectories and identity. Thus, terrorism is both constraint and enabling, passive and productive, in which each person, as an individual, is constructing his or her own choices, and define his or her own existence – in short, act as a subject (Wieviorka 2004: 289). Terrorism enables individuals or groups to enjoy and obtain symbolic markers in the place of impossible or unsatisfied participation, to construct meaning to their lives and actively rescue their self-identities and integrate them into modernity (ibid). Therefore, the self is not simply structured by the attractor of radicalization, but provides positive feedback to the attractor by actively re-constructing his or her own identity. However, the War on Terror understands terrorism as a linear process of radicalization: destroying the attractor will get rid of the source of terrorism, thereby preventing further acts of terrorism<sup>[4]</sup>. This approach ignores the enabling structure of terrorism, the self's capacity to create positive feedback to contort and de-equilibrate the linear logic employed by the War on Terror. To destroy the apparent attractor does not mean the end of the radicalization process; rather, it will catalyze the process of self-selection, in which some members in the original group will increase their commitment and escalate their action against the military pressure (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008: 425). In other words, the War on Terror creates a cycle of condensation and radicalization, an unintended escalation. The severe undermining of al Qaeda during and after the Afghan War condensed the Jihadist groups into more radicalized extremist groups that go underground as diffuse terrorist cells to combat the counterinsurgency operations in the Iraq War.

## **Limitations in Revitalizing the subjectivity of Terrorist**

This paper has criticized the understanding of the juxtaposition of fluid and solid power as a structural opposition by revealing how fluid power is internalized as epistemological de-territorialized power to produce disruptive effects inside the existing dominant power relation. The observation on the internalizing process of fluid power helps shift the analytical focus from external power conflict to the existential level of terrorism, in which terrorism retrieves its meanings as subjectivity in intellectual understanding. This chapter is designed to overcome the analytical limitations in existing literature viewing terrorism as a subjective trajectory of radicalization: terrorism is not merely an existential pathway to radicalization in individual level but also a psychological phenomenon produced by its audience, a particular tactics of violence oriented to its own end, and a group psychological mechanism. The War on Terror is incapable of fully realizing its strategic drawbacks without understanding its limitations.



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## *The Representation of Terrorism through the Psychological Mechanism of its Audience*

The public understanding of the problem of terrorism has been built on a subjective representation of terrorism produced by the defensive mechanism of the self rather than complex 'realities' of terrorism. The phenomenon of terrorism is always reproduced by the individual subjectivity that has been shocked or traumatized by the events of terror to restore the ontological security and certainty. The notion of ontological security, in phenomenological terms, is embedded in a process of bracketing out or blocking off the existential negative feelings, the anxieties and thus carries 'the individual through transitions, crises and circumstances of high risk' (Giddens 1991: 138). Anxiety, from a psychoanalytical perspective, as a generalized state of emotions of the individual disregards the object, which is diffuse, free-floating in the internal world of the cosmic experience of the self-identity (ibid). To defend against the attacks from anxiety, the basic security system of selfhood creates and develops a defensive psychological mechanism which operates through the learning of what is not-me, the constructing of otherness, the cultivating of a sense of being through non-being (ibid). In other words, the defensive process of selfhood constitutes the origin of self-identity, forming a protective cocoon for ontological security through the creation of an out-group or an object, or, more fundamentally, through objectification and externalization of the self, of the existential anxieties inside individual. Therefore, what the internal protective mechanism or the security system of self attempts to bracket out or block off is not something completely opposed to 'I', not an object, but abject, the externalized and objectified 'I' or the negative emotions that would threaten the psychological integrity of the agent. Abject, as Kristeva (1982: 1-2, 4) argues, is not an ob-ject to facing me, is inside me but what excludes me, what disturbs my identity, system and order. Terrorism, in this sense, is never a singular phenomenon of objectivity; it is an abject, which is always re-created by multiple narratives produced by the audience of terrorist atrocity through their existential mechanism of ontological security. Therefore, in terms of this psychological mechanism, the War on Terror has two inescapable problems: it is important for the War on Terror to develop capabilities to discern or distinguish between the 'real' problem of terrorism constructed by complex social and political conditions, and the re-created terrorism by subjectivity; it also needs to develop strategy to eliminate terrorism and manage the subjective representation.

Let me give an example to elaborate how public discourse in the War on Terror fails to distinguish between terrorism and its subjectified representation. After the shooting Fort Hood Shootings in 2009, the public reaction attempted to classify Major Hasan into 'a particular type or particular profile', which makes him act 'in a way much differently than we did' (Hanson and Nomani 2009). As Nomani (2009) observed in her interview, Hasan wore his pants higher than normal, which is seen as part of interpretation of Islam<sup>[5]</sup>. Major Hasan's act is profiled by his audience into particular pattern as al-Qaidistic, individual, lone-wolf type (Hanson and Nomani 2009). By profiling or attaching a particular pattern on the particular object and to an extent labeling it as terrorist, the abject or traumatic feelings of the audience can be excreted out of bodily and psychological experience, to be objectified on this external construction. Therefore, to identify Major Hasan as a terrorist is to abnormalize and differentiate him from 'us', to make him the 'real' source of the terror in the object-world, so as to eliminate this externalized and concretized source of trauma and then to restore the ontological security of the audience. The FBI's investigation also attempts to establish links between Nidal Hasan and international radical Islamic movement by collecting his correspondence with radical Islamic figures like Anwar al-Awlaki. By so doing, Nidal Hasan's terrorist act is explained or labeled as an exogenous act, a result of long-term indoctrination by international jihadist ideology, so that the disruptive meanings of the terrorist act to the domestic community can be externalized and dispelled. However, the interpretation based on this relationship between terrorism labeling and the audience presumes that there is an identifiable property or concrete psychological or ideological construct reflected in the behavior of terrorists, which ignores the dimensions from social environment and psychological development. For years before the shooting, Major Nidal had been 'increasingly disenchanted with army life'. Since al Qaida's attacks on 9/11, Nidal Malik Hasan had faced growing hostility and harassment from within the military over his Middle Eastern ethnicity, combined with his deepening depression and anger at the continued conflict in the Middle East, which locked him into a consistent negative mental status (Miller 2009; McGreal 2009). That is, as his former colleagues described, Major Nidal became a loner, isolated, frustrated, detached and aloof (Hanson and Nomani 2009). These observations complicate the story of Fort Hood shooting, and recovering the subjectivity and social grievances of Major Nidal means that terrorism should be understood as a dynamic developing process of subjectivity in ever-changing social conditions. The public understanding of the terrorist act has not realized the gap produced by individual or collective consciousness between subjective representation of terrorism and its social complexity in reality. The subjective representation of terrorism will redirect



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the War on Terror into its own imagination rather than the 'real' source of radicalization if it holds sway over the strategic rationality of counter-terrorism.

## *The Intrinsic Properties of Terrorism*

Although terrorism has been elucidated as a psychological tool or pathway for both potential terrorists and the audience of a terrorist atrocity, it possesses not just instrumental but also substantive value that the War on Terror fails to provide an alternative. As this paper has pointed out in part B of the literature review, terrorism is a tool, a tactic potentially open to everyone. This tool perspective focuses on the instrumentality of terrorism while ignoring the intrinsic qualities of terrorism. The author of this paper intends to reveal three intrinsic qualities of terrorism. First is communitivity. Terrorism is the employment of a particular form of violence whose logic is primarily about expression and performance, oriented to achieve particular existentially meaningful ends. According to Juergensmeyer (2001), performance violence refers to public and highly theatrical acts of political violence whose logic is primarily expressive and communicative, not strategic. In terrorist activities, the immediate human victims of violence from the target population are merely used as message generators, that is, an expressive means to communicate with the audiences and to intimidate and manipulate the main target (Schmid and Jongman 1988: 28). Therefore, terrorism is essentially characterized by its particular form of communication or, in other words, its communitivity. This attribute of terrorism enables users of terrorism to communicate a range of existential meanings about the selfhood of the terrorists themselves. Secondly, terrorism delivers to the powerless amplified feelings of power. As Kruglanski and Fishman observed (2006:208), users of terrorism can be strongly committed to terrorism because of its intrinsic properties, such as the sense of power it bestows or the appeal of violence. According to DeNardo's research (1985 cited by Kruglanski and Fishman 2006: 208), to resort to terrorist violence is a powerful compensation for small organizations for what they lack in numbers. The effect of a single attack of terrorism can be amplified and expanded onto global scale through the mediated power of a globalized communicative network. Terrorism, in this sense, is not a purely conceptual or psychological construction, but possesses intrinsic properties that serve as a great equalizer for the dominated and oppressed, the powerless and minorities. Thirdly, terrorism is an answer to the most deeply felt passions and longings people experience about life and their being-in-the-world (Cottee and Hayward 2011: 979). Devji (2008: 49-55) explains that suicide bombers are engaged in an ethical politics to demonstrate their courage and fearlessness by way of sacrificing themselves, and, in so doing, they are enabled to manifest humanity as an active agent and transform people into the full realization of a pure shared humanity. Killing oneself is not just an instrumental means; it is a righteous end in its own right (Ahmad 2010: 497). By blowing himself or herself up in public place the suicide bombers are enabled to sublimate his or her existential meanings, and represents Islam as humanity at large.

These three intrinsic properties of terrorism—communitivity, amplification of power, sublimation of existential experience—are three of the most fundamental and complex factors contributing to radicalization. But just because of the complexity and difficulty to engender immediate change in combating terrorism, these three problems of terrorism are always overlooked in the design and implementation of counter-terrorism policy. Let me give the first example to elucidate how the counter-terrorism initiatives after 9/11 intensified the need to resort to terrorism as means to communicate meanings of the suppressed identity on global scale. Alsultany (2013) argues that the positive representations of Arabs and Muslims after 9/11 help form a new kind of racism, one that, on the one hand, challenges or complicates earlier stereotypes yet contributes to a multicultural or post-race illusion, and, on the other hand, uses the sympathetic portrayals of the 'other' to produce the logics and affects necessary to legitimize racist policies and practices. Use of native informants is one of major tactics often employed in the post-9/11 positive representation in news reporting. The voice of the oppressed Muslim woman has been strategically used in the battle of counter-terrorism to construct an 'objective' and 'apolitical' view operated to justify withholding sympathy for the patriarchic society of Muslim, shed light on why Arabs/Muslims are terrorists, and thus advance US imperialism (Alsultany 2013:167). This misrepresentation of Muslim identity in the media hinders the way in which Muslims reconcile their identity to the dominant western societies. Therefore, the need for Muslim society to boost a genuine communication between undistorted Islamic identity and other cultural identities on international level is intensified in order to restore representing power for their own identity. Along with the escalated suppression of identity recognition, the demand to re-gain the communicative power on a global level through terrorism becomes more urgent. This increasing demand to communicate and represent their own identity catalyzes the racialization process



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in an Islamic community.

The next example this paper intends to elaborate is the second intrinsic property of terrorism as symbolic amplifier of marginalized power. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (2003) observes that hate crimes targeting Arabs and Muslims multiplied by 1,600 percent from 2000 to 2001. In just the first months after 9/11, the Council on American-Islamic Relations and other organizations documented hundreds of violent incidents experienced by Arab and Muslim Americans and people mistaken for Arabs or Muslims, including several murders (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee 2003). These data indicate that vulnerability and marginalization of Arabian or Muslim communities in the US has increased exponentially since the War on Terror has begun. The passing of such legislation as the USA PATRIOT Act that legalized the suspension of constitutional rights potentially translates Islamic communities as 'risks' to the dominant social orders and norms, thereby dispelling them into sheer vulnerability. As the options to retrieve their social and political position are increasingly narrowed for Arabs and Muslims under post 9/11 counter-terrorism policy, terrorism as an amplifier of power is becoming more and more attractive for them to re-gain their voice in society.

The War on Terror also fails to tackle terrorism as a sublime experience of life and remedy to humiliation. Islamic militants who are helplessly witnessing atrocities and injustice meted out to Muslims in different parts of the world are deeply rooted in the feelings of humiliation (Ahmad 2010: 495). For them, Islam thus symbolises humanity in its status as a global victim (ibid). Terrorist acts such as suicide bombings in public places engender sublime ideals of courage and sacrifice, transforming people into a sheer humanity, and in so doing overcoming the specific humiliating experience of globalization. The War on Terror organized through the existing world order sustained by nation-state, territorial sovereignty and conceptual modalities is radically out of consonance with globalized vision of humanity produced by the traumatic or victimized experience of Muslims in globalization. In Richard Jackson's (2005) examination of post-9/11 discursive investment in the war on terrorism, the public interpretation of terrorism is manipulated to create a myth of exceptional grievance that legitimates and perpetuates Americans as primary victims of terrorism. By demarcating and categorizing America and her potential targets in the War on Terror into victims and perpetrators, civilization and barbarism, democracy and evil, the specific humiliated experience of Muslims is suppressed and concealed by the excessive and distorted interpretations. The loss of voice to express their feelings of humiliation as victims of globalization disseminates the seeds for radicalization. Terrorism becomes, to an extent, at least a rational and effective means to victimized Muslims to overcome their existential predicament.

## *Terrorism on Group Psychology*

Terrorism is not only an individual psychological appeal but also a phenomenon of group psychology; overlooking the latter dimension in the War on Terror escalates rather than alleviates the conflict. According to Kruglanski and Fishman's research (2006: 209), terrorist organizations such as Hamas or Hizballah, whose base of support has derived substantially from the local populations, may be reciprocally affected by the goals of those populations, whose neglect might undermine their support for the organizations in question. 'The populations' support for organizations like Hamas and Hizballah may translate into political prowess, presenting these groups with alternative goals (of political stewardship) to which terrorism may be inimical' (Kruglanski and Fishman 2006: 209). In terms of this dynamic interaction between terrorist group and its social base, terrorist groups with different supportive bases will form different tendencies and trajectories in their process of organizational development. The small extremist groups with relatively weak population support will be more likely to choose terrorism, in other words, to adopt the expressive form of violence, the great equalizer to magnify the importance of its claims. However, when the population support increases and gradually becomes the most crucial part of the supportive base, organizations will become more public-sensitive, and have increased and diversified means in their disposal such as diplomacy, social campaigns and media as well as more diversified goals from political to social domain affected by the populations. These 'alternative goals (political leadership), or alternative means (e.g., negotiations) deemed more appropriate than terrorism to advance such goals' (ibid 209), decrease the level of radicalization, which makes the groups more moderate and less extremist. In short, the increase in population support leads to diversification of means and goals, which often helps alleviate the level of violence. This causality may to an extent at least be over-simplified but it is useful tool to illuminate the dilemma of the War on Terror in combating terrorist groups. The attention paid to the psychological rationale of terrorism in group level is not sufficient in the strategic design of counter-terrorism



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operation. For instance, in order to compromise Hizballah, the US operations attempt to first target its supportive forces that widely disseminate in general population. But what is unintended as the actual consequence of this operation is that Hizballah stepped up its terrorism campaign around the world followed by growing members who chose to participate in its large-scale international criminal activity (*The Counter Jihad Report* 2012). Hence, to use hard power to contain the population support of terrorist groups will sometimes result in unintended consequences wherein the groups are made more likely to choose radicalized or violent means and goals; however, a paradox has appeared, that is, if the population support for terrorist groups is not effectively contained the political status of population-supportive terrorist group will be perpetuated.

## Conclusion

Terrorism studies have long been dominated by the language of security studies. This domination obscures our understanding of the counter-terrorist war in a more critical and democratic way. That is, to see it as 'a social process constructed through language, discourse and inter-subjective practices' (Jackson 2007: 246). Penetrating the ostensible operations of the War on Terror to reveal its deeply seated foundation of social construction where a range of beliefs, premises and conditions are developed is the central motive of this paper. Motivated by this critical thinking, the author of this paper shed light on the premise underpinning the strategic understanding of terrorism by the US government in the war on terrorism by reviewing existing literature of terrorism in the cotemporary context of liquid modernity. It pointed out the problematique in the thesis of juxtaposition in explaining the structural relation between fluid terrorism and governmental counter-terrorism force. Then, the paper elaborated its own arguments on the structural relation between terrorism and the state and provided some critical responses to the limitations in the existing literature in three separate chapters. It argued that terrorism reflects a de-territorializing and disruptive process from the inside of conventional power relation. Next, it elaborated how fluid power of terrorism is internalized onto individual existential level and the dynamic psychological impact engendered by the internalization on individual identity. After that, it gradually transformed its emphasis of analysis to understand the internal or existential meanings of terrorism, which involves psychological effect from the audience of the terrorist atrocity, the intrinsic property of terrorism and the dynamics in its organizational operation. By so doing, it explained how fundamentally conflicts between governmental or public understanding of terrorism and actual peculiarities of terrorism in liquid modernity contribute to the strategic dilemma of the War on Terror.

Now, people can say with some certainty that terrorism with its unprecedented fluidity and the centralized counter-terrorism forces have been put into a particular relation that resembles no previous conflict. The hierarchical opposition between domination and dominated legitimating the traditional power structure of governance has been eroded from inside by the disruptive forces of decentralized terrorism. What cannot be neglected from this age of terrorism is that the certainty seems to slip away when we are facing the decline of traditional power relations and mediating new forms of governance that have not been strong enough to emerge as a new global order. Understanding what this transitory stage means from old corrupted system of human security to new way of thinking terrorism represents a major challenge for researchers seeking to improve the efficacy of the human security strategy in the contemporary globalized context.

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## Footnotes

[1] On 20 September 2001, during a televised joint session of congress, Bush (2001) stated that, the "'war on terror' begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated". Although the 'War on Terror' first appeared in political discourse in 2001, the term in this paper is not limited to particular military operations and campaigns led by the US, the UK and their allies against organizations and regimes identified by them as terrorist since 2001. As Jackson argues (2005), the War on Terror is 'simultaneously a set of actual practices—wars, covert operations, agencies, and institutions—and an accompanying series of assumptions, beliefs, justifications, and narratives—it is an entire language or discourse'. The author of this paper intends to examine *the entire language and discourse of the war on terrorism in new social conditions*.

[2] This survey of literature is purposive, not exhaustive. Given the booming industry that terrorism has become—one new book on terrorism is being published every six hours (Silke 2008:28)—my selection of literature is admittedly limited and purposive to the argument I make in this paper.

[3] The term *remote* used here does not only refer to the geographical remoteness but also, more importantly, the psychological and socially imaginative distance with the 'other'.

[4] In *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (2003) released by Bush administration, some strategic objectives of counter-terrorism have been prioritized in the framework of the War on Terror, including to target and defeat terrorists such as bin Laden, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and demolish their organizations, to identify, locate and deny the sponsorship and sanctuary to terrorists, etc. These 'attractors' such as bin Laden and his organizations are presumed to be the origin and catalyst of international terrorist movement in the War on Terror so that to strategically prioritize them as primary targets to be eliminated is like to cut off the polluted upstream of river to prevent its effect on downstream. However, the author of this paper attempts to argue that the flow and reproduction of terrorism are not embedded in a linear structure suggested in the metaphor of upstream-downstream. The decentralized radicalization on individual level is enabled by the attractor to self-transformation to generate new existential meanings on identity.

[5] 'And that is part of an interpretation of Islam that says that the Prophet Muhammad wore his pants high and that's the way we have to do it today' (Hanson and Nomani 2009). Whether this assertion is or is not validated from further Islamic investigation is not the focus of this research. This subjective interpretation of Hasan's behavior reflects the labeling and differentiation process in the subjective representation of terrorism.

Written by: Tianyang Liu



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Written by Tianyang Liu

*Written at: University of Monash*

*Written for: Waleed Aly*

*Date written: September 2012*