RADICAL ISLAMIST ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ONLINE MAGAZINES: RESEARCH GUIDE, STRATEGIC INSIGHTS, AND POLICY RESPONSE

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Radical Islamist online magazines first appeared in November 2003 with the publication of *Sawt al-Jihad* (Voice of Jihad) in Arabic. This magazine discontinued publication in April 2005 after 29 issues, having been shut down by the Saudi security services. The magazine was produced by the Saudi branch of al-Qaeda that later evolved into al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). It called upon other al-Qaeda groups to develop and franchise their own magazines. Besides the plethora of radical Islamist online magazines in Arabic that has been produced since 2003—along with those in many other languages including Urdu, Russian, German, French, and Turkish—English-language editions have been in existence since April-May 2007. There have been a number of these magazines published at varying dates and for varying periods of time. Some, such as *Al Rashideen* and *Ihya-e-Khilafat*, were initiated but fell by the wayside, victim to a lack of audience, the capture or death of an editor, or their initiating group's evolution. In the cases of al-Qaeda's *Inspire* and Islamic State's *Dabiq* magazines, the publications have been ongoing—until very recently with the demise of *Dabiq*—with over a dozen issues each, and have notably been cited in relation to terrorism cases by law enforcement. Beyond their propaganda potentials, each magazine can be said to promote a specific jihadi culture, to be embraced in total by followers of the particular group in question in order to achieve its desired utopian vision. Toward that end, components of these online magazines address the group's successes and legitimacy, offer a vision of a desirable end state, encourage recruitment into their ranks, direct violent action against stated enemies, and provide instructional materials and advice with regards to its enaction.

The fact that an online magazine-style format has been used across groups over a notable period of time and the availability of a comprehensive data set of the issues of these magazines, both current and archived, is believed to provide a unique opportunity for evaluation of the nature of the threat these organizations potentially pose. It is not surprising, then, that the appearance and ongoing publication of English-language based magazines have caught the attention of scholars and counterterrorism researchers who have analyzed the better-known series of these magazines in numerous manuscripts, reports, and articles. Where useful, these works have been cited in the magazine database that follows. In reviewing the work done to date on radical Islamist English-language online magazines, however, efforts toward the analysis of online radical jihadist media in general—and online English-language magazines in particular—have been piecemeal. The results fall into three main categories: single magazine generalizations, comparisons between magazines, and those—largely popular media—pieces connecting these magazines to violent action.

In investigating these radical Islamist English-language online magazines and the body of work surrounding them, the authors determined that there was no document available in open-source form providing a comprehensive overview of this magazine genre, along with their predecessors and offshoot English-language periodicals. In addition, none of the existing studies provided a thorough look at the entire contents of *Inspire* and *Dabiq*—as the two then-primary ongoing publications—in a way that would be useful to U.S. military and governmental researchers and policymakers.

The focused analysis of these magazines in this book, both chronologically and comparatively in their entirety, has not been done before, and provides essential insights into both the development and ebb and flow of the publications themselves, as well as how the narratives related to the important aspects of these terrorist groups have differed, overlapped, and adapted over time. In the following sections, the authors have provided a broad in-depth overview and analysis of the subject matter that they believe will provide invaluable information to researchers as well as useful insights to policymakers in this area. First, the authors have

constructed an informational database of the radical Islamist English-language online magazine genre. In it, they have identified a wide breadth of precursor works that exist in a magazine or similar format to the online English-language magazines in question along with more tactically focused works of these or similar groups. The authors then present a profile of each magazine in terms of its editor, contributors, the region of publication, target group, length, and dates and numbers of issues. Information on each specific issue of a particular magazine, including its stated topic, date, length, and main articles, as well as offshoot documents, is also included. Next, the authors undertake an in-depth analysis identifying the basic narratives found among and between issues of the two main radical Islamist English-language magazines—*Inspire* and *Dabiq*—with regard to four primary topics: the desired end state of the group; the "enemy" relevant to that particular issue; statements made related to recruitment strategies; and any particular tactics, techniques, and procedures advocated—along with the narratives supporting them within each magazine data set by issue and as a whole. They further determined what specific themes arose per issue and between groups along with changes and trends over time. Finally, the authors provide preliminary recommendations toward an appropriate U.S. policy response given those trends that have been identified within. In addition, a glossary of all Arabic terms used in *Inspire* and *Dabiq*, plus appendices containing a master listing of all radical Islamist English-language online magazines, and a listing of those magazines' allegiance and foreign terrorist organization (FTO) affiliation are provided.

Two strategic insights can be readily gained from the research and analysis conducted on radical Islamist English-language online magazines. First, such magazines exist in distinct clusters or groupings, revolving around either al-Qaeda or the Islamic State terrorist organizations. Second, these competing terrorist organizations have very different strategic approaches that they are promoting in their core magazines *Inspire* and *Dabiq*, respectively. Some of the narratives related to these differing strategic approaches were analyzed in this book; however, some additional narratives can also be tentatively surmised.

The strategic approaches related to these terrorist organizations and promoted in their supporting online magazine clusters are presented in table form in this book. This table represents an extension of the four themes—pertaining to end state, enemy, recruitment, and tactics—found in the *Inspire* and *Dabiq* datasets analyzed earlier. To this table has been added a wide range of additional attributes related to the differing strategic approaches of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. These additional attributes have been deduced by means of a close reading of the magazine datasets as well as the other magazines and eBooks in their respective English-language publication clusters.

A suggested generic policy response to the emergence of radical Islamist English-language magazines has been provided in this manuscript. It draws upon a targeting schema that identifies five stages in the magazine life-cycle process: **environmental motivators**, **production**, **end product**, **distribution**, and **outcomes**. Each of these life-cycle stages represents target sets that can be influenced by the U.S. Army, joint force, intelligence community, and ultimately whole-of-government response activities. These magazine life-cycle stages, as well as the desired response end state and the response measures required to achieve that response end state, are highlighted in a table provided in the book. Given the research project boundaries of this book, only a generalized response template and analytical discussion will be provided. Further, a "Blue Sky" response measures approach has been taken so as not to initially narrow the policy options that may be explored. There is hope that these elements will provide a form of "intellectual program starter" upon which U.S. agencies can build in order to respond to the emergence of Islamist English-language online magazines. Of course, for implementation purposes, two distinct programs—one focused on the *Inspire* (al-Qaeda) and the other focused on the *Dabiq* (Islamic State) magazine clusters and the inherent differences in their strategic approaches—must be specifically developed in order to respond to their emergence effectively.

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