

Terrorist press – Inspire magazine

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"Terorism is a product of freedom , particularity freedom of the press"
Brian Jenkins

Abstract

Mass media and terrorism are two intertwined phenomena which inevitably gave birth to a "marriage" from which both sides benefit. For several decades terrorist networks have learned to use media to induce fear or to attract new supporters and adherents. Innovative and open to change, terrorist groups have shifted part of their media in the virtual and online environment.

This paper is a qualitative and subjective analysis of the most successful terrorist publications in the Inspire magazine. Inspire magazine is a current online publication issued by the Al Malahen media foundation in 2010.

The main aim of this paper is to analyze how the objectives proposed by the editors are found throughout the content of the magazine. From the methodological point of view, this work is based on a content analysis tool through which we analyzed the ten issues of the magazine. In our analysis we took in consideration four indicators: the magazine sections, the authors, the images and the overall tone of the articles.

Keywords: terrorism, mass media, Inspire magazine, qualitative analysis.

The evolution and progress generated by the media and the advent and popularization of the Internet has led to changes in the way in which terrorist groups regard the media. Terrorists have observed that the mass media and the internet are fields of influence for every XXI st century individual so that they began to see it as a vehicle for achieving their

objectives. The importance of the media in this process is confirmed by the current leader of the terrorist network Al-Qaeda, Al Zawahiri, who estimated that more than half of the battle between believers and nonbelievers is taking place in a "battlefield" created by the media¹.

Glimpsing the interdependent and symbiotic relationship between them, terrorist organizations have learned to use the media to spread fear among a target group to attract and mobilize supporters or to undermine the ability of governments to ensure the safety of their citizens. "The marriage" between the two is translated in terms of advertising and audience: terrorists need publicity and the media needs viewers and, therefore, audience. The effects of this marriage are significantly positive. Through countless news articles about them, terrorist groups succeed to spread fear or sympathy in the audience.

The means by which terrorist organizations use the media are different. Whether they use newspapers, television or virtual environment interventions they reinforce once again the conclusion of the researcher Brian Jenkins who at a certain point said that "terrorism is a product of freedom, freedom of the press particularly".²

Based on these aspects, the present approach represents an analysis of one of the most successful publications promoted by terrorist networks- *Inspire magazine*. Inspire magazine is promoted under the auspices of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and since 2010 arrives in the hands of English readers from all over the world through the internet.

This paper is an analysis of how the objectives of the editors are found in the content. Through this approach we try to demonstrate once again that freedom of the press and the globalized world in which the Internet is a natural part of every individual's life, leads to the spread of radical ideas and also to the attraction of new supporters and followers for that group.

¹ The original quote is "more than a half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of media." Fawz GERGES, *The war enemy, why jihad went global*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 194 *apud* Transnational Terrorism Security & the Rule of law: *Terrorism and the Media*, available at <http://www.transnationalterrorism.eu/tekst/publications/WP4%20Del%206.pdf>, p 4.

² William BIERNATZK, "Terrorism and Mass Media" in *Communications Research Trends*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2002, p. 5. available http://cscs.scu.edu/trends/v21/v21_1.pdf, accessed in 28.08.2013.

Methodologically, our approach is built on a qualitative and subjective analysis based on the content analysis instrument. The ideas and findings that will be presented below are the result of the analysis of the ten numbers of the jihadist magazine, through four indicators. The magazine was analyzed considering the *magazine sections*, the *contributors/authors* that sign articles in the magazine, in terms of *the overall tone* of the article but also the *images* presented in the journal. We will track the frequency of certain sections, the origin of the authors (political leaders/religious leaders/supporters) to determine the legitimacy of the magazine in conjunction with the objectives it sets them. Assessment records (religious/motivational instigator/objective) in which the articles are written and the analysis of images (portrait/violent images/peaceful pictures), will be an important aspect of the analysis because it will show how the editors use everything they have in their hands to generate emotions and radical behaviours.

Inspire-and inspire the believers³

Through Al Malahen Media foundation, the terrorist group Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula succeeded since 2010, to spread online no more and no less than ten editions of Inspire magazine, turning it into a real success for the terrorist group and a veritable propaganda device for the ideals and goals of the group.

The purpose of this magazine is contained in the first page of the first editorial. The journal editors say that Inspire will be *a mean by which Muslims around the world will be brought together in the right path of Allah*; it will be an engine for *creating a more positive image for Salafi Islam* which is increasingly polluted by western media. Inspire magazine also aims to be *a platform for the most important events of the area* and an *environment of clear presentation of Islam*. By far, the most important goal proposed by the editors of the magazine is that it is meant to be a *source of inspiration for the warriors of Allah*, a catalyst for believers who have to fight in the name of Allah⁴. The editors of the magazine are encouraging

³ *Inspire-and inspires the Believers* is the motto that opens each issue of the magazine.

⁴ "Letter from the editor" in *Inspire*, Issue 1 1431, 2010, p.1.

the readers to contribute with articles to this approach, offering, at the end of each edition, a series of tips and addresses where anyone can submit a contribution.

A brief analysis of the ten issues of the magazine clearly reveals the attractiveness and complexity driven not only from the interactive template but also from its interesting topics. The magazine is unquestionably an anti-American, anti-Israeli magazine and a genuine device of propaganda, indoctrination and radicalization.

The objectives of this magazine are easily identifiable in the sections and the topics that it hosts. The most common and important sections will be discussed shortly below.

As a platform for events marking the Muslim world, Inspire magazine devotes one page of each edition to the section *Hear the World ... a collection of quotes from a friend and a foe*. People that are cited in this section are divided into two categories as the title states: the "friends" and "enemies" or heroes and antiheroes. In the enemies category the most common appearances are those of the U.S. President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former Vice President Joe Biden. Along with this, journalists and other officials of the United States security department are considered enemies. The heroes of the Muslim world are people more or less known who devote their lives to the spreading of the message of Allah. The great leaders of Al Qaeda are the most cited along with other fighters and clerics of Islam. Through this section, the magazine aims to accordingly inform the reader about major events that occurred in the Middle East region showing, in the same time, the real picture of Islam.

Another section of the magazine is the *Question we all should be asking!*. Within that section the readers have the opportunity to reflect on some questions that only have an anti American or anti-Israeli answer. The most frequently mentioned topics are related to the American presence in Iraq and Israel's position towards the Palestine situation. This section is a means by which those who stand behind it shall ensure that their perspective on important issues concerning the Muslim world is acquired in accordance with their vision.

Readers of the magazine have the chance to come in contact with the leading representatives of the Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula group. Using a

shaker register the great political and religious leaders are calling Muslims from all over the world to join an fight for jihad. The same speech is maintained in other sections of the magazine like *A Call to Islam* or *The call of the Quran* in which the clerics and some religious leaders explain the basic principles of Islam. Another interesting item that is present in almost every issue of the magazine is titled *Why do I Chose Al Qaeda*. It is based on the work of Sheikh Abu Musab al Awake, a work that deals extensively with no more than 46 reasons for choosing to be part of this famous organization. During several numbers of the magazine the author discussed several reasons why you should join te Al Qaeda. Some of those reasons are:

- Because it follows the path of Jihad
- Because the organization is strong enough to survive
- Because the religion of Abraham is directed against the infidels
- Is based on universal ways to achieve victory
- Jews and Christians hate Muslims

Other sections like *My Life in Jihad*, discuss some terrorists experiences and a great source of inspiration for every reader. Almost every issue of the magazine is having a series of reflections, poems or motivational quotes.

Besides the religious, the motivational and inspirational section the magazine has a practical component that aims to prepare its readers, future Jihadist fighters, in actual fighting techniques. In this regard, *Open Source Jihad*⁵ section includes a series of practical lessons, ideal for everyone who plans a terrorist attack. Open Source Jihad is designed as a handbook for those fighting against tyrants and it's considered to be "the American greatest nightmare." The Open Source Jihad section provides information about how to build a bomb (*Make a bomb in the kitchen of your mother*) about the security measures that a fighter must take, or a series of guerrilla tactics etc. The first lesson explains systematically what is the easiest way to

⁵ Notice the ironic similarity with the already known Open Source Intelligence (OSINT). The editors assign the concept of open to issues concerning educating readers in the direction of acquiring skills and competencies that can be used in physical combat against the enemy. It can be seen as the magazine opened its pages not only to theoretical, ideological and motivational issues but it also has a pragmatic part where, through the technical lessons the readers can apply what they learn.

manufacture a bomb⁶. In the same section, another issue of the magazine offers a number of tips for members who live in the U. S.⁷ or those who seek to destroy or burn buildings⁸. Another issue provides the leaders with the knowledge of how to produce Acetone Peroxide⁹, how to wield an AK¹⁰ or an ordinary pistol or what are the ways in which you can produce road accidents and then disappear quickly¹¹.

After evaluating how the content of the magazine is structured we can say that the goals proposed in the first editorial are achieved: the Jihad fighters stories are aimed to inspire and bring Muslims on the right path of Allah, the clerics' teachings promote the desired image of Islam, and the readers are provided with an x-ray accompanied by a range of perspectives on the most important events in the area.

Another indicator of the scale of analysis that we used refers to the authors of the materials present in the magazine. Based on the analysis, we have come to the conclusion that the contributors have the role to strengthen and give legitimacy to the magazine. The great leaders are not missing from the contributors list. Voices of Osama bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri are heard in the first pages of the magazine. In *The way to save the earth*, Osama bin Laden, the former leader of the network, draws attention not on things that should be taken to preserve the planet, but rather the causes that gave rise to these concerns. Highly researched, the article condemns the luxury and extravagance of western countries and accuses American industry and their corporations for damaging the environment. This article opens the first edition of *Inspire*. Another article signed by Osama Bin Laden encourages readers to punish Americans who have done so much harm to the Muslims¹². The interventions of the current leader of the network are also relevant.

⁶ "Make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom-a detailed yet short easy to read manual on how to make a bomb using kitchen ingredients" in *Inspire*, Issue 1, Summer 1431, 2010, p. 33

⁷ Tips for our brothers from United Snakes of America-from experience Yahya Ibrahim explains how to protect oneself from the enemy when conducting operation" in *Inspire*, Issue 2, Fall 1431, 2010, p. 55.

⁸ Destroying buildings" in *Inspire*, Issue 3, Winter 1431, 2010, p. 39.

⁹ "Makin Acetone Peroxide – Dr. Kateer has cooked up a fatal formula with ingredients widely available" in *Inspire*, Issue 6, Summer1432,2011, p. 39

¹⁰ "Training with an AK" in *Inspire*, Issue 5, Spring 1431, 2011, p. 24.

¹¹ "Causing road accidents" in *Inspire*, Issue 10, Spring1432, 2013, p. 52.

¹² "In order that they taste some of what we tasted" in *Inspire*, Issue 4, winter 1431, 2010, p. 18.

Immediately after the onset of the phenomenon known as the Arab Spring, Ayman Al Zawahiri comments on the situation and encourage the continued fight against the infidels¹³. Along with this, the magazine often hosts articles by Anwar al-Awlaki, Samir Khan and other political and religious leaders of the network. The weight they give to the magazine is undeniable. Their presence not only proves the legitimacy of the magazine but also the fact that the terrorist groups are aware that the fight against infidels can be taken not only on the battlefields.

Regarding the overall tone of the magazine articles, we found that almost none of the articles can be placed in an objective register, which again demonstrates the propagandistic character of the publication. Magazine articles can be separated in two categories: motivational-instigator and religious. Below we have selected some quotes that you can easily fit in a motivational/instigator register:

"And fight them until there is no more Fitnah (disbelief) and the religion will all be for Allah alone"

*"Jihad today! Jannah tomorrow!"*¹⁴

In this way the readers are urged to take part in Jihad, a fight that will eliminate all unbelievers and will guarantee them a place in Paradise. All ten issues of the magazine contain messages that inspire the desire to take part in combat and otherwise bring Muslims together in this direction. These messages are subtle, hidden in the stories of the martyrs, political and religious speeches or explicit as poetry.

Deeply religious references and a language that praises Allah is also embedded into the overall tone of the articles. As a true jihadist magazine, *Inspire* treats the issue of death in the name of Allah as gloriously and great. Each issue of the magazine treats those who resort to terrorism as heroes. Name of Allah or the Prophet Mohammed are very often invoked.

*"Nobody who enters Paradise like to go back to the world even if he got everything on the earth, expect a Mujahid who wishes to return to the world so that he may be martyred again because of the dignity he receives from Allah!!"*¹⁵

¹³ "The short and long-term plans after the protests" in *Inspire*, Issue 5, Spring 1431, 2011, p. 34.

¹⁴ *Inspire*, Issue 4, Winter 1431, 2010, p.60.

¹⁵ "O Martyr, you have illuminated" in *Inspire*, Issue 1, Summer 1431, 2010, p. 30.

The quote presented above shows how readers are encouraged to take actions that can bring them death, death which is the passport to Paradise. True martyrs are therefore those who would choose to leave paradise to return to earth to perform new works worthy of a martyr.

Such motivational, instigator messages motivated by deep religious reasons can convince readers to join the line of martyrs but can also generate a negative image of Islam. Even if editors do not realize the negative, violent image that they created to Islam, they promote a distorted image of Salafist Islam.

Leaving aside the content of the articles, Inspire manages to meet its objectives through the graphics and images presented in every issues of the magazine.



Portraits of leaders, clerics and enemies are present in almost every issue. The praised jihadist heroes are surprised in various poses.

The most common characters whose images appear in the magazine are Osama bin Laden, the current leader of Al Zawahiri Ayman network, the U. S. President Barack Obama and other leaders of the Muslim world (Anwar al-Awlaki etc.). Pictures of leaders like Osama bin Laden or Ayman Al Zawahiri are a catalyst and an impulse for all the Allah fighters. Put in contrast with American and Israeli enemies, portraits of Muslim leaders and clerics give legitimacy and substance to the journal content.

Violent images are also an important part of the media strategy to inspire readers to support jihadist ideals. The ten issues of the Inspire magazine are loaded with pictures of attacked places or soldiers ready to fight in a battle.





Beyond the images of brave jihadists or the damages caused by them, the editors resorted to a series of images that incite to violence.



Messages like "Yes we can"¹⁶ to "A bullet a day keeps the infidel away"¹⁷ encourages violent impulses while images titled "Your blood won't be wasted" ensure readers and potential martyrs that their deaths will not be in vain and that the blood which they will shed will benefit the community.

In addition to this category of images, in the magazine can be found an excellent set of explicit pictures for Open Source Jihad section. Technical guidance is accompanied by images that help the reader to better understand the way to build a bomb or the techniques to fight to survive.

An interesting edition of Inspire magazine is the issue of 2011 summer, issue which commemorates the death of the famous leader of the network. Killed by a Navy Seal team soldiers, Osama Bin Laden is praised

¹⁶ Those who made this poster certainly had in mind the famous campaign slogan of President Barack Obama.

¹⁷ *Inspire*, Issue 3, Winter 1431, 2010, p. 9.

and described with the most glorifying words. The day he died is considered a historic day, a day when he joined the caravan of the wise people. After a lifetime of effort, determination, patience, jihad, generosity, nobility, honesty, wisdom and tact the great leader died but his blood, his words, his spirit will stand out over generations.

The importance of the ninth issue of the magazine, for our research lies in the editorial that opens the magazine. The editors are explaining very clearly that the death of the great leader does not mean the death of the magazine and that's because Allah will continue to manifest, to enlighten and inspire the lives of many members of the organization.

Through articles and the authors that the magazine hosts, the tone of the letter and the images they promote, *Inspire* is a true 'soldier' in the fight against the so-called infidels. The attractiveness of the articles and the messages that they send cannot be challenged, which is why it can be a magnet for all those who sympathize with the terrorist network. Undoubtedly *Inspire* can be a contributing factor in the radicalization of individuals. Beyond all this, the magazine is a success of a fundamentalist Arab media, an anti American and anti Israeli flag and a reliable partner of the Al Qaeda and terrorism of any invoice.

Aware of the potential of the magazine, the Western world has more than once taken a strong position against the terrorist magazine. A U. S. official goes so far as he recognizes the quality and success of the magazine: *it is an unfortunately well done magazine and a virtual guide for becoming a terrorist*¹⁸. Daivid Gomez, an FBI counterterrorism agent from Seattle, believes the following: *we understand the absolute seriousness of the threat from an Al Qaeda inspired magazine* and promises a number of measures to minimize or reduce the maximum possible negative effects: *assist the individuals and protect themselves from changing their behavior and making them less of a target*¹⁹.

¹⁸ "Inspire reactions" in *Inspire*, Issue 4, winter 1431, 2010, p. 11.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

Conclusions

Returning to the idea of Brian Jenkins, throughout the article, we have seen how the terrorist magazine of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula strengthens the idea that the media can mobilize and inspire members and also attract new supporters for the network. Starting from the goal we set earlier we conclude by stating that the editors of Inspire magazine achieve, at least partially, objectives set forth: guidance of Muslims around the world on – what they call - the right path of Allah, building what they consider to be a real and positive image for Salafi Islam, inspiring and informing readers about important events in the area etc.

Sections of the magazine as: *My Life in Jihad*, *The Call of the Quran*, *Hear the World* and *Open Source Jihad*, sprinkled with articles signed by political or clerical leaders with a large load of legitimacy (Osama Bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri and others), discussed in glorifying, inflammatory and anti-American registers, outlines the profile of an attractive, anti-American and anti-Israeli magazine.

Considering these issues and others that were detailed in the pages above, we consider that the journal is a genuine terrorist propaganda device that can be a perfect tool in any radicalization process. As a conclusion we can say that Inspire represents a success in the context of marriage between terrorism and the media. Using the freedom of the press and the immensity of the virtual environment, Al Qaeda in Arab Peninsula is acting in its benefit. *Inspire* magazine is undoubtedly a "soldier" in the war against the "infidels".

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