Spoiling Power

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1 * This paper is based on research conducted by the authors in 2015 on the scope and frequency of domestic terrorism in Egypt after June 30, 2013. Allison Hodgkins is an Assistant Professor of Security Studies and Conflict Management in the Department of Public Policy and Administration. Kamal Eldin Salah is a graduate of the Master’s Program in Global Affairs who is currently serving in the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This paper was written in the context of research done at AUC, and prior to the second author’s graduation. The research and conclusions herein do not reflect the official views of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Public Policy and Administration or the School of Global Affairs, nor was the research conducted on behalf of, at the request of, or in consultation with any of the aforementioned institutions. Any questions or comments related to this working paper may be sent to ahodgkins@aucegypt.
Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the strategic logic behind a yearlong campaign of sabotage on electrical infrastructure in Egypt. This campaign, which ran from April 2014 through August 2015, was reported to have damaged “hundreds” of high-tension towers, substations and power transformers, and caused upwards of $60 million in economic losses. The government arrested suspects affiliated with the now banned Moslem Brotherhood. Although the group denied involvement, the campaign displayed a high degree of operational consistency, range, and internal discipline consistent with the Islamist movement. In any case, the purpose of this campaign is puzzling. Why would an organized group absorb the costs of a sustained campaign of political violence without claiming responsibility or exacting punishing costs on their rivals? Although there is no peace process to scuttle, we argue this campaign was a highly sophisticated example of spoiling: using violence to undermine the credibility of the perpetrator’s rival by casting doubts on their capacity to deliver. Toppling electrical towers and causing power-outages undermined efforts of the government to uphold its promise to solve Egypt’s persistent energy crisis. More importantly, the campaign's objective was to foment discontent with the government, without accepting culpability for harm to their target constituents. This case study suggests a need to revisit the assumptions of extremes in rationalists' explanations of terrorism.
On April 17, 2014, an IED exploded on the base of an electricity pylon in a remote area of the Faiyum governorate in central Egypt. The blast caused power outages in several neighboring villages, but no injuries or fatalities. Although there was no claim of responsibility or explanation for the attack, the transitional government had announced its intention to raise tariffs on domestic electricity consumption the day before. Given the surge of terrorist incidents in the country at the time of this attack, it is likely that this single, unclaimed incident would have been forgotten if another wave of similar attacks had not started a few weeks after the inauguration of President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi, on June 8, 2014, and continued for approximately 14 months. According to government reports in the local media, this campaign of sabotage damaged hundreds of high-tension towers, substations, and local transformers across the country and caused upwards of $60 million in economic losses. The now-banned Moslem Brotherhood was blamed and alleged suspects affiliated with the organization were arrested. The Brotherhood continued to insist it had nothing to do with the attacks and that it is committed to non-violence. It also took no responsibility for the hundreds of other incidents, lethal and non-lethal alike during the same period. In early August 2015, after diverting electricity from industry and manufacturing to ensure continuous domestic consumption during the hot-summer months, the government declared the power crisis solved. A few weeks later, the attacks stopped.

In terms of expected patterns of terrorist violence, these attacks are puzzling. They were far too operationally consistent and sustained to be random, yet the campaign began and ended without a clear claim of responsibility or exacting an obvious or lasting cost on the people or the government. Although the Moslem Brotherhood denied involvement in the attacks, the wide geographic range of the incidents, their frequency, and disciplined silence suggests the campaign was directed by a group with significant organizational depth and high levels of internal control. The specificity of the target selection also suggests there was a message behind the attacks: but what was it? It is also difficult to explain why any terrorist organization would direct their members to drive into the desert with some homemade IED’s and risk arrest only to topple a high tension tower the government would repair in a matter of weeks if not days? Even more perplexing, why go to all this effort and absorb the costs of executing this campaign without bothering to tell anyone you did it and why?

On the basis of existing theories of terrorist violence, particularly Walter and Kydd’s (2006) seminal typology of strategies and goals of extremist groups, this campaign appears somewhat illogical or difficult to categorize on the basis means and ends. The attacks neither cause enough pain to qualify as an example of attrition, nor couple that pain with a message of intimidation. Was the government supposed to stop supplying power? The people stop using it, paying for it, or demand an alternative? How can one tell? These incidents did provoke the government into increasing security measures, against members of the Moslem Brotherhood, but security forces were already on high alert before such incidents started. Even though the terrorist market place was swollen with a raft of new entrants competing for the hearts, minds, and dignity of the Egyptian people, it is difficult to describe these attacks in terms of outbidding given the fact they were anonymous and utterly devoid of shock and awe. Were the perpetrators
silent about these incidents because so many of the homemade IED’s failed to explode, or to avoid repercussions on their followers?

Finally, without a peace process to derail or a moderate faction to discredit, there seems little reason to consider a strategy of spoiling label unless the contextual constraints are dropped and the core logic of the strategy is extrapolated onto the political context in Egypt. At its essence, spoiling is about using violence to cast doubts on the credibility of the perpetrator’s rivals. Addressing Egypt’s persistent “power crisis” was both a key failure of the Morsi regime and a prominent promise made by president Abdel Fatah el-Sisi during his election campaign. The attacks on electrical infrastructure kept public attention on the problem, and made it harder for the government to carry-out difficult measures like lifting subsidies or raising tariffs. It also drove the government to take tough steps, like diverting electricity away from industry and manufacturing to individual households in order to deal with the hot summer months. More importantly, while these attacks tried to question the performance of the government, they did not implicate in the economic and political consequences that followed. In addition, we do believe the campaign also served to differentiate the perpetrators from more violent, transnational groups like various ISIL and al-Qaeda offshoots who were becoming more active during this time.

By relaxing assumptions of extreme violence and credit claiming, which undergird the major theories of terrorist strategy, and dropping the contextual constraint of a peace process or imminent election, we argue this campaign of sabotage was a highly sophisticated strategy of spoiling the current government’s credibility while preserving the credibility of the perpetrators through anonymity and strategic restraint. While the primary objective of this paper is to explain this puzzling campaign of anonymous, non-lethal terrorism within the context of a surge in political violence in Egypt, we also believe our findings raise questions regarding three of the core assumptions underlying rationalists explanations for terrorism: extreme violence, extreme goals, and credit claiming. This campaign of sabotage demonstrates that acts of terrorism can contribute to an identifiable political objective without extreme pain, even when the identity of the perpetrators remains anonymous and the purpose of the violence undefined. Moreover, this campaign suggests that strategic restraint may serve to signal a group is less extreme than emergent rivals with the same political objective, which in this case was almost certainly regime change. In other words, this campaign of sabotage could be classified as a strategic use of less extreme violence to spoil the credibility of a current government, while positioning themselves as the more moderate faction among a competitive field of violent, opposition groups.

This article will proceed as follows. The first section will demonstrate how the handful of cases used to develop rationalist explanations of terrorism have created a series of core assumptions around the nature of the violence, the groups that utilize it, and how the political objectives are communicated to the target audience. We will then build on Walter and Kydd’s seminal typology of terrorist strategy to develop a framework for assessing the strategic logic of anonymous, non-lethal terrorism. This framework will utilize initial expansions made to this framework by studies of claiming behavior, particularly Min’s (2013) exploration of the strategic logic of uncertainty. We will apply this framework to assess the variegated terrorist
landscape in Egypt since the June 30, 2013 deposal of Mohammad Morsi, which includes large numbers of claimed, unclaimed, lethal and nonlethal incidents. We will conclude with a discussion of possible policy implications and areas for further research on strategic restraint. While this paper is limited to a single case, we argue that overall trends in terrorism suggest this type of strategic restraint may be a broader phenomenon than the current research allows. Our findings also suggest that the assumption of extremism, both in word and deed, may be obviating a more variegated terrorist landscape and closing off options for engagement that may prevent further fragmentation or escalation to extremes.

Rationalist formulations of terrorist strategy and the logic of extremes

Despite the visceral irrationality of many, high profile acts of terrorism, rationalist theories contend that even incomprehensible acts like suicide bombings in public buses or hotel lobbies betray a strategic logic and are committed in pursuit of a discernible, political objective. Like insurgents, terrorists compensate for deficiencies in power by using targeted acts of violence to provoke a reaction or compel a policy decision consistent with their goals. The violence, however extreme, is symbolic and meant to communicate a precise message to those with the capacity to deliver, whether it is the opposing government, the group’s rivals, or local or global opinion. Identifying the strategic logic driving these acts, is therefore key to understanding the phenomenon and formulating effective counter-terrorist strategies.

In what is widely accepted as the most comprehensive theory of terrorist strategy, Walter and Kydd (2006) argue that terrorism is ultimately a costly signal of commitment to recognizable political goals. By drawing on earlier theories of terrorist strategy by Crenshaw (2007), and Thorton, Fromkin, as well as inferences from high profile cases, they contend that acts of terrorism consistently fall into five, recognizable categories: attrition, intimidation, provocations, outbidding, and spoiling. Although these strategies are often interchangeable, the key differences between the categories relate to who the violence is meant to persuade and what aspect of the adversary’s credibility the violence is meant to undermine. For example attrition relies on sustained campaign of pain to persuade the target government of their inferior resolve. Outbidding, on the other hand, is meant to convince prospective followers that the perpetrators have superior power, while spoiling cast doubts on the trustworthiness of the moderate rivals in the context of a negotiated settlement or in advance of a pivotal election (Walter and Kydd 2003, 2006; Braithwaite, Foster, & Sobek, 2010). Walter and Kydd contend these strategies are employed in pursuit of five typical goals: regime change, territorial change, policy change, social control or preservation of the status quo.

While this typology has considerably utility and has demonstrated empirical salience in multiple qualitative and quantitative studies of terrorism, it is also contains some core assumptions that exclude many forms of terrorist violence (Kearns, Conlon, & Young 2014). First, as Kearns, Conlon & Young (2014) have demonstrated, the logic of terrorism as a form of signaling assumes the act will be followed by a claim of responsibility. As propaganda of the deed, part of the message is the manifesto accompanying the act in which the groups aims are
spelled out for the target audience, and the world at large (Jenkins 1987, Min 2013). While this logic is sound and manifest in the legacy of claims issued by the PFLP, the Weather Underground, and now ISIL, recent studies have demonstrated that this behavior is actually atypical. In fact, several studies have presented data indicating that the majority of terrorist incidents since 1970 have been anonymous and the rate of unclaimed attacks have been increasing over time. During the 1970s, more than 60% of attacks were claimed, whereas only 12.4 of terrorist attacks between 1998 and 2011 were followed by a claim of responsibility (Kearns, Conlon, & Young 2014).

Pluchinsky (1997), Rapport (1997), Min (2013), and Kearns, Colon, and Young (2014), have offered various explanations for why groups may avoid claiming responsibility for their operations. Groups with a particular ideology may seek to avoid claims (Hoffman 2010, Jenkins), particularly if the consequences of that act may generate a public backlash (Pluchinsky 1997). For this reason, groups are likely to deny involvement in incidents with high levels of civilian casualties, unless they are in a highly competitive environment or the victims are on the opposing side (Hoffman 2010, Min 2013, Kearns, Conlon, & Young 2014). For example, al Jamaa Al Islamiyah denied responsibility for the infamous 1997 Luxor massacre as it became clear the Egyptian public took affront to what was perceived as an attack on the country’s reputation and major industry. ² Alternatively, it is possible that groups deny responsibility for attacks that have failed.

However, it is also possible that groups avoid credit claiming because uncertainty amplifies the strategic impact of the attack. In a large N study of claiming behavior, Min (2013) demonstrates that groups pursuing strategies like intimidation, provocation, or spoiling will refrain from issuing claims of responsibility because fear and anxiety play a key role in the effectiveness of those strategies. Uncertainty over the identity of large scale attacks like the 9/11 attacks also serve to foment panic and increase pressure on the government to respond in ways that might support the terrorists long term objectives (Kearns, Conlon, & Young 2014).

Embedded in these studies of credit claiming, however, is the implicit connection between anonymity and lethality. Whether groups deny responsibility to avoid a backlash or to amplify fear, the decision to deny responsibility is implicitly linked to higher levels of violence. In fact, Hoffman (1999) argues that the decline in claiming behavior may be indicating a shift towards more violent, lethal forms of terrorism, where violence is less symbolic and more about demonstrating the capacity to inflict pain (Hoffman B 1999, Walter and Kydd 1999, Kearns, Conlon, & Young 2014).

The only problem with this reasoning is that it is unsupported by the data. While there have been several high profile attacks since 9/11, the majority of attacks over the last forty years have failed to kill anyone. According to a recent study of patterns in terrorist attacks by Kluch and Vaux (2016), only 47% of attacks committed between 1970 and 2013 caused one or more fatalities. Incidents causing ten or more fatalities were less than 1.5% of all terror attacks in this

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same period and 11.5% of attacks only caused damage to property.3 Suicide bombings, which have been demonstrated to be more lethal than other types of bombing, are also more likely to be claimed than other types of attacks (Hoffman 2010, Min 2013).

Moreover, suicide attacks are only 2.25% of all incidents in the last four decades.4 In fact, cursory calculations show that 94% of unclaimed attacks in the GTD had no fatalities, while only 39% of claimed incidents were non-lethal. The empirically reality of upwards of 70,000 unclaimed, non-lethal attacks, some 80% of all incidents in the GTD, raises some critical questions for our understanding of terrorist violence. While much of the important work over the last two decades has forged a consensus around the strategic logic in committing and claiming extreme acts of political violence, those theories may only apply to a small, percentage of incidents worldwide.

While it is likely that a significant number of unclaimed, non-lethal attacks are simply random, isolated acts of sabotage, or embarrassing failures in execution, the sheer number of unclaimed, non-lethal attacks makes it improbable they are all non-strategic. On the contrary, the data suggests there are probably many cases where terrorists are deliberately exercising restraint in the execution of attacks as well as keeping silent. The unstated key question is why a group would make this dual choice? On the basis of the debate around claiming behavior, it is reasonable to expect that groups who are sensitive to audience costs would refrain from using lethal force in pursuit of their objectives. There is anecdotal evidence for this contention. The IRA was known to call in warnings before their bombings, particularly those that were likely to cause civilian casualties. Similarly, operatives for the PFLP were instructed to take pains to avoid harming hostages during their infamous hijackings to avoid diluting the message. ELF, PETA and various eco-terrorist groups also limited their operations to acts of sabotage. However, these incidents were all claimed and the limited violence clearly connected to expressed political aims. Unless the act can be immediately understood from context, a non-lethal attack is likely to be misunderstood or completely overlooked without an accompanying claim of responsibility or published manifesto. This is risky and costly for the perpetrators given that even non-lethal operations require resources and expose the operatives to detection or arrest. Therefore, while audience costs can explain the desire for strategic restraint, coupling that with anonymity requires further consideration.

The Strategic Logic of Silence and Restraint

Revisiting Walter and Kydd’s (2006) typology, adapted to include Min’s (2013) predictions for claiming behavior, allows for a reconsideration of how the core logic of the principal strategies relates to anticipated levels of violence. In formulating the typology, the examples Walter and Kydd reference are almost exclusively extreme. Hamas’ 1990s campaign of suicide bombing features prominently in the discussion of attrition, outbidding and spoiling,

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4 Min 2013 - unfortunately, there are no studies of attacks were attribution is “presumed” meaning the culprits are known even if the act is unclaimed.
and provocation and intimidation were illustrated with references to the 9/11 attacks or beheadings committed by the Taliban. The operative question, is whether those strategies would be effective without extreme levels of violence and if those could be less deadly would also be enhanced by anonymity.

As table one illustrates, only the strategies of attrition and intimidation appear to require extreme violence. Attrition is described as a test of wills, or a contest to determine which side is capable of inflicting and absorbing the most pain. As such, a successful strategy of attrition depends on the ability of the perpetrators to exact painful costs on the target as well as the willingness to absorb them. Similarly, although intimidation entails a more targeted application of pain, steep costs are central to the logic of the strategy. A credible threat of intense pain is required to compel the target to cease or initiate particular policies. However, on neither provocation, outbidding, nor even spoiling require extremes fulfill the principal objectives of the strategy. Provocation only requires enough violence to prod the government into carrying out a disproportionate response. In fact, if the goal of provocation is to drive a wedge between the population and the incumbent regime, lower intensity attacks may actually enhance the strategy as it would make the government’s response seem that much more disproportional. Similarly, a group keen on attracting followers away from groups confining their activities to conventional politics might pursue a strategy of outbidding through non-lethal sabotage. The violence must simply be sufficient to demonstrate more resolve than the rivals.

The more difficult category is spoiling given its connection to the implementation of negotiated settlements. There is a clear consensus in the scholarly literature that post-settlement violence is toxic to the viability of a peace agreement. Therefore, it is logical that groups threatened by the terms of settlement would use extreme violence to derail its implementation (Stedman 1997, Walter and Kydd 2003). However, in the abstract, spoiling is fundamentally about using violence to create doubts over an actor’s ability to honor their commitments. The campaign of suicide bombing pursued by Hamas was an effective way to discredit Fatah precisely because they agreement they signed contained an explicit commitment to end all violence in the occupied territories and punish violators.5 Moreover, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, attacks on Israeli civilians were less likely to cause a backlash among Hamas’ constituents. It is worth noting that the first incidents of succeed bombings in April 1994 targeted two bus-stops known to be crowded with soldiers returning to their bases after weekend leaves.

It is therefore conceivable that spoiling, provocation, and outbidding could be accomplished without extreme violence and, depending on the context, even non-lethal acts of violence. The next question is which of these strategies overlap with those that are enhanced by anonymity. For example, outbidding would be next to impossible without attribution. Regardless of the level of intensity, potential followers would need to know the group was responsible in order to cast their lot behind the perpetrators. Returning to table 1, Min (2013) findings demonstrate that groups are less likely to claim credit when uncertainty enhances the strategic

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impact of the violence. His findings indicate that claiming is among groups pursuing a campaign of intimidation, provocation, or spoiling because creating fear and anxiety is essential to the effectiveness of those strategies. Since intimidation requires more costly displays of violence, provocation and spoiling appear the only strategies that could be executed anonymously and without extreme levels of violence.

The next challenge is finding empirical support for this expanded typology. While there are large numbers of unclaimed, non-lethal attacks, it is difficult to differentiate which ones show evidence of strategy from those that are merely random. Presumably strategic attacks would show evidence planning, operational consistency, and be aimed at targets connected to a recognizable rival, policy, or sect. They are also likely to be sustained over a period of time, and occur in the context of a political contest that is either stalemated or tipped into violence. Determining such patterns in a global dataset would be exceedingly difficult as many of the indicators, such as timing and target selection, are inherently contextual. A symbolic target in one location may have no salience in another context, despite being coded as an attack on the same target category. More importantly, non-lethality assumes a level of intention that is difficult to discern from rows of data. Certain combinations of targets and attack types strongly suggest an intention of harm, such as a public bus, but restrain is much harder to identify. Was the school bombed at night because the perpetrators wanted to avoid fatalities or because it failed to detonate while classes were in session?

In light of these challenges, a rigorous case study is the best method to begin an exploration of the strategic logic of non-lethal, anonymous attacks. A case study allows for the incorporation of political context into the evaluation of the targets and timing of unclaimed, non-lethal attacks to infer possible goals and plausible perpetrators. In addition, a case study enables comparison with claimed non-lethal attacks or unclaimed lethal attacks to evaluate the influence of competition. Egypt is an ideal case for consideration as there have been a large number of incidents of varying intensity and claiming behavior since the political transition on June 30, 2013. On the basis of published studies, it is evident that overall attack patterns are commensurate with global trends, most attacks are unclaimed and non-lethal. However, there are also a large number of claimed attacks and evidence of multiple actors competing for the attention and loyalty of the public. In addition, with the exception of those groups operating in the Northern Sinai, all these actors are facing sustained pressure from the incumbent government and arguably share the same overriding goal of regime change regardless of which strategies they pursue.

According to data collected from local news reports and compiled by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, there have been more than 2,500 terrorist incidents in Egypt since June 30, 2013. Attacks have taken place in every governorate, and have involved many types of terrorist violence: bombings, armed assaults, assassinations, hostage taking, and at least two possible suicide bombings. At its peak, in spring 2015, the frequency of attacks reached four per day. However, in line with global trends, most attacks are unclaimed and without fatalities. The scale of domestic terrorism in the country has not been seen since the 1990s, when the government faced a sustained Islamist insurgency waged by Al Jamaa Al Islamiyah, al-Jihad and
a series of smaller militant organizations (Blaydes & Rubin 2008). While challenging for the
country, the situation in Egypt offers a unique environment to examine the relevance of
prevailing theories of terrorist strategies, as there has been a wide range of attack types, differing
target selections and a growing number of factions announcing their presence on social media
and taking responsibility for different types of attacks.

**Amid the noise and competition: a quiet campaign of sabotage**

In order to examine the trends in Egypt for evidence of strategic restraint among
unclaimed attacks, we collected data on terrorist incidents from local news reports and coded
them for location, attack type, target selection, casualties, and other basic data included in the
Global Terrorism Data Base. However, we modified several categories to fit the local context,
such as differentiating between attacks on mosques and churches, and adding discrete categories
for diffused bombs, security fatalities, and dates of significance within a two-week period of the
attack.  

Clamping patterns were higher than global trends, with a published claim of
responsibility identified for 38% of all attacks between June 30, 2013 and July 1, 2016 claimed.  

However, 38% of claimed attacks in Northern Sinai were claimed by Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis,
which rebranded itself as Wilayat Sinai; the Sinai Province of the Islamic State, and reportedly
pledge allegiance to the al-Qaeda rival in Iraq and Syria.  

Outside of Sinai, only 28% of attacks were claimed. Finally, although there have been some notable high casualty events, including the
downing of MetroJet 9268, which killed all 241 on board, most attacks have caused no fatalities
and minimal injuries. In fact, the overall number of civilians killed is low: 549 of which 241
were killed in the MetroJet incident.  

Nevertheless, 28% of attacks did have fatalities, which is
also higher than the global average.

Most claimed, lethal attacks occurred in the Northern Sinai and appear to be part of a
strategy of attrition aimed at inflicting sustained costs on the Egyptian Armed Services. For
example, Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis and its successor Wilayat Sinai claimed 112 of the 642
incidents with fatalities, however 92 involved the deaths of military or security personnel as
opposed to civilians. The group’s rhetorical justifications, such as the video released after the
July 2015 attack on Sheikh Zuwaydín which the self-proclaimed “soldiers of the caliphate”
herald their victory and their pledge to continue their campaign against the “infidel”
government until the end, are consistent with an attrition strategy. Proclamations by a group called the
Revolutionary Punishment also promised pain, in the form of targeted assaults on judges,
security officials and police, would continue until “the revolution was restored.”  

However, there were also a fair number of claimed, lethal attacks that resonated more with a strategy of

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6 This dataset began as an independent project in March 2015, however, in June 2016, we merged our data with data
collected by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy in hopes of creating a more comprehensive dataset.
Reproduction data and code book is available on request.

7 This calculation has dropped diffused bombs from the data.

8 Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis announced their affiliation to the Islamic State in October 2014

9 Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis claimed responsibility for the attack 18 days after the incident took place. However, at the
time of writing, investigations have not yet finished in order to substantiate the claim made by Ansar Bayt Al-
Maqdis.

10 https://www.facebook.com/BelowAshes This facebook page is attributed to the Allied Resistance, which appears
to be a clearing house for loosely affiliated cells to advertise their exploits.
intimidation, such as the claims issued by Wilyat Sinai after the crash of MetroJet 9268, which specifically referenced Russian bombing raids on ISIL targets in Syria,\textsuperscript{11} or two car bombings of security headquarters in December 2013 and January 2014, which were claimed by Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis.

Some of the claiming behavior indicates an effort to distance groups from civilian fatalities (Kearn and Young, 2013). After series of attacks around Cairo University in October 2014, in which several civilians were injured, Ajnad Misr issued a statement declaring the bombs had been placed to minimize harm to civilians and clarified the targets were the police. In addition, when excluding the 275 civilian fatalities from the October 2015 MetroJet incident, nearly 90\% of civilian fatalities occurred in unclaimed attacks. There is a handful of unclaimed lethal attacks that resonate with Min’s (2013) assertion that anonymity can heighten the impact of an attack by creating uncertainty over the source of the pain. The June 29, 2015 assassination of state prosecutor Hisham Barakat, which was perpetrated by a massive car bomb in an upscale and well-policed neighborhood of Cairo, was unclaimed.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, some 78\% of all police fatalities occurred in unclaimed attacks, most of which involved drive through shootings. However, 62\% of unclaimed attacks are non-lethal and 67\% of unclaimed attacks had neither fatalities or injuries. This could be a consequence of large number of incidents being the side-effects of protests or random acts of vandalism without political intent. For example, there was a March 2015 report of an IED explosion in front of a metro station, which turned out to be a raft of firecrackers.\textsuperscript{13} However, in other cases unclaimed, non-lethal attacks appeared to be coordinated, such as five separate IEDs attacks on metro stations across Cairo in June 2014. These incidents occurred during a week of planned protests advertised through channels and social media platforms associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. While the location and the weapon type suggested there was either an intent or disregard for causing harm to civilians, the devices were also described as “sound bombs” in the media and only three individuals were reported to have suffered minor injuries, which is remarkable considering the location.\textsuperscript{14}

In fact, there are multiple unclaimed, non-lethal attacks that similarly appear to target civilian targets with indiscriminate weapons, particularly IEDs. Such attacks are puzzling because it is difficult to discern if they were unclaimed because the devices failed to cause intended casualties or if they were neither intended to be lethal, nor claimed. For example, there were over 300 reported incidents of bomb disposals since 2013; incidents where devices were located and diffused. Most were discovered by civilians and were often in demonstrably civilian targets such as behind schools, in train stations or public areas. In some cases unclaimed, non-lethal incidents coincided with other incidents that were claimed, and were consistent with the

\textsuperscript{11} ISIL. Claim 31 October 2015, Arabic text
\textsuperscript{12} Official investigations into the assassination of the attorney general, Hisham Barakat have concluded there is evidence of involvement by Muslim Brotherhood elements, as well as members of Hamas. Most notably Dr. Yehia Moussa a Muslim Brotherhood leader currently residing in Turkey. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/06/world/middleeast/egypts-interior-minister-survives-attack.html
\textsuperscript{13} http://www.bldnaalyoom.com/81934
\textsuperscript{14} http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/508616.aspx
stated objective of the claimed attacks in target selection. For example, on the eve of the government’s planned conference for international investors in March 2015, there were three bombings in a Cairo neighborhood with a high number of expatriate residents, including the expatriate managers of several important multi-national firms. The devices were placed near a school and a shopping mall, but detonated at a time when those areas were largely empty.\textsuperscript{15} In the same week, the Allied Popular Resistance Movement had claimed several incendiary attacks on ATMs, Vodafone storefronts and KFC branches in the capital that were explicitly stated to be warnings to any international firms planning to participate in the conference. While it is likely the Maadi bombings were connected to the same campaign, it is impossible to draw conclusions from a single incident.

However, there is a sub-group of unclaimed, non-lethal attacks on electrical infrastructure that were both operationally similar and sustained over a long period of time and geographic reach. These incidents began in April 2014 with an attack in Faiyum, which brought down a 500 volt high tension tower and continued through the summer of 2015. The last incident was near Bilbeis in the Sharqiyyah governorate on August 24, 2015.\textsuperscript{16} Based on data collected for this project from local news sources, both English and Arabic, we have identified 105 attacks on electrical infrastructure, across all but two Egyptian governorates in this period (see figure 1). However, statements by government officials indicated the total was arguably much higher.\textsuperscript{17} Of the 105 incidents were identified through news reports, 91 targeted high-tension towers, and involved IEDs being attached to the legs of the towers in a way that would cause them to fall after detonation. Only one of these 91 incidents was claimed, by a group known as Revolutionary Punishment in Giza near the capital on April 13, 2015.\textsuperscript{18} In addition to being sustained and widespread, the remoteness of the attacks suggests a deliberate effort to avoid civilian casualties. Only one attack took place near a residential area, which was the single incident claimed by the Revolutionary Punishment. The rest were off desert highways or in agricultural fields far away from civilian dwellings. Out of all 105 electricity related incidents, there were only seven with reports of casualties. Outside of a single incident in Sinai, where two electrical workers were killed by unexploded devices they discovered in a sub-station near Sheikh Zuwayd\textsuperscript{19}, the only reported fatalities connected to these attacks appear to be two alleged perpetrators who died when the devices they were planting under a high tension tower in Beheira governorate exploded prematurely.\textsuperscript{20}

Despite the anonymity, these attacks have all the hallmarks of an organized campaign. They were sustained over a 14 month period and executed over a wide geographic range using

\textsuperscript{15} eyewitness account, March 13, 2015
\textsuperscript{16} http://24.com.eg/general/215570.html
\textsuperscript{17} For example, Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb stated there had been 300 incidents of vandalism to electrical infrastructure in July 2014. We only identified nine discrete incidents.
\textsuperscript{18} There were four arson attacks on transformers in Minya by a group calling itself the Allied Popular Resistance Movement on January 25, 2015. g
\textsuperscript{19} http://www.janes.com/article/52807/IED-attack-kills-two-electricity-company-employees-in-Egypt-S-NorthSinai;
http://www.el-bulad.com/1431631
\textsuperscript{20} Jan 25 (Aswat Masriya) Two "terrorists" were killed in Beheira when an explosive device they were planting below an electric pylon exploded, the ministry of interior said.
similar methods. The attacks also displayed a level of operational sophistication that suggests coordination and advanced planning. Unlike dropping a bomb from a bridge or tossing a Molotov cocktail into a passing train, toppling a 500kg volt, high tension tower requires individuals with different skill-sets and resources; including someone with the skills to construct the explosive devices and rig them with a timer or remote detonator, someone with knowledge of where the towers were located, and someone with a vehicle to reach the location without detection. In addition, the perpetrators needed the discipline to maintain anonymity. Although there were no consistent claims for these incidents, it is widely believed they were linked to the Moslem Brotherhood. First of all the groups operating in Egypt, only the Moslem Brotherhood is known for having the organizational depth, discipline and, geographical reach evidenced in these attacks. Local sources and in general discussions of the campaign also point to the high frequency of incidents in governorates like Fayoum and Sharqiah, which are known Brotherhood strongholds, and the impression that there were large numbers of members employed in the Ministry of Electricity and the National Power Company. However, regardless of whether it was the Moslem Brotherhood, a splinter faction or another group altogether, the more important question is why any group would invest such significant resources in a campaign that caused minimal damage without offering an explanation? Outside the domestic context, these attacks make little sense. However, as the next section will discuss, within the framework of the recent power transitions, it is possible to discern a coherent logic behind the campaign.

**Spoiling Power**

Power and electricity have long been a contentious issue in Egyptian politics, due to the high costs of fuel needed to power the country’s aging generators, which are exacerbated by the deep subsidies on the price of electricity. Egypt is known for having some of the least expensive fuel and electricity prices in the world, reportedly selling electricity for half of what it costs in production.\(^{21}\) Although cheap power fuel the countries development, it also accelerated demand, and ran the cost of subsidies up to 20% of the state budget in 2012. While these costs were straining the country’s finances when most of the fuel for electricity was sourced from native reserves, Egypt became a net importer of natural gas in 2013.\(^{22}\) Although most analysts say reserves had been dwindling for years and the crisis had long been in the making, the timing meant the economic and social repercussions were quickly pinned on the Moslem Brotherhood candidate, Mohammad Morsi. Rolling blackouts, the prospect of price increases, and some public relations disasters - such as Prime Minister Hesham Qandil’s suggestion the public wear lighter clothes and only run the air conditioner in one room, contributed to the perception that the Morsi government was incompetent and unable to handle the power-crisis.\(^{23}\) Soon there were campaigns on facebook calling for the public to boycott payment until service improved, and

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http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/625344;


\(^{23}\) [http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/africa/power-outages-add-to-egypts-woes](http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/africa/power-outages-add-to-egypts-woes)
Power cuts became more severe in the weeks running up to the June 30, 2013 protests, and a defensive Morsi accused Mubarak sympathizers of hiring people to cut power lines, in order to manufacture the crisis. Nevertheless, the power crisis continued after Morsi’s deposition. The transitional government discussed regulation of imported air-conditions and other measures to rationalize consumption, as well as approving the import of lower-cost coal. In early April, transitional Planning Minister Ashraf al-Araby commented that he expected electricity tariffs would be raised by fall. President Abdel Fatah el Sisi at the time had made several references to the need for austerity during his campaign.25 On July 3, 2014, just four weeks after el-Sisi’s inauguration as president, electricity minister Mohammad Shaker held a press conference announcing increased tariffs on electricity, which would take effect immediately.26 The next day there were reports of sabotage on electrical infrastructure in Alexandria and Port Said, and four days another tower was brought down outside a small village in Menufiya. Although we only identified nine specific attacks on electrical infrastructure in July 2014, government officials indicated the number was arguably much higher. According to Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb, the attacks had caused a 10-15% decrease in generating capacity. However, he also acknowledged that frequent outages were also related to aging and poorly maintained infrastructure, and the fact the country had switched to less expensive, but poorer grade fuel in order to meet demand.27 Around the same time as the press conference, the ministry of interior announced it had uncovered six Moslem Brotherhood affiliated cells in six separate governorates, which were implicated in the attacks on high-tension towers and that 40 suspects had been arrested.28

However, the attacks on electrical infrastructure continue to increase in scope and frequency throughout the fall and winter of 2014 before peaking in March 2015. Then, as suddenly as they had began, these particular attacks ceased. Aside from sporadic reports of fires in localized transformers, the last reported attack on an electricity pylon was in August, 2015; the same month that President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi declared the energy crisis solved. During the summer of 2015, the government decided to avoid rolling blackouts by shutting off power to industry and manufacturing. While domestic supply was stable during hot-summer months some manufacturers reported losses due to power-cuts.29

It is important to remember that when Abdel Fatah el-Sisi was elected president in May 2014, not only did he enjoy the support of a population exhausted by years of tumult, the

29 Egypt Sisi says to cooperate with Russia in jet crash, tackles domestic affairs BBC Monitoring Middle East – Political Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring November 1, 2015 Sunday
Moslem Brotherhood had been widely discredited by its own poor performance in government. Calls by the so-called “anti-coup alliance” for perpetual protests and boycotts of the regime had largely fizzled out before the first acts of sabotage occurred. While it is unlikely any government could have solved Egypt’s endemic problems within a year’s time, the attacks on the towers made it exceedingly difficult for the government to carry out difficult measures like cutting subsidies or raising prices. By focusing on electrical infrastructure, the perpetrators were able to force questions about the country’s economy and its reform in the spotlight. The attacks tried to use the Although the attacks caused some power outages, they did not cause them all and continually forced a discussions of fuel shortages, insufficient capacity and the state of the country’s infrastructure. The decision to divert fuel to individual households during the summer underscores the extent to which the government was attempting to show its calls for austerity and shared burden were being matched with improved services.

The most vital aspect of the campaign of sabotaging electrical towers is its strategic logic. Spoiling the ability of the newly elected president to demonstrate it was the solution to Egypt’s persistent energy crisis and to foment doubts over the government’s performance and renewed concerns over the direction of the country.

If a tower falls in the desert and no one claims responsibility......

There is little question that the Brotherhood’s rapid fall from power has raised questions among the rank and file regarding the merits of politics and peaceful protest. Despite its common conflation with Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiyyah and Tanzim al-Jihad, two extremist factions who were at the forefront of the Islamist insurgency that raged in the 1990s, the Brotherhood swore off violence during the rule of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Despite intense restriction after Sadat’s assassination, and during the 1990s, most scholars contend the group kept a firm separation from its violent offshoots. Going back on that promise now would certainly damage the group’s credibility, particularly after routine pledges to the contrary. In addition, leaders of the group would certainly remember the backlash against Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiyyah in particular, after the 1997 Luxor Massacre. The incident, in which scores of foreign tourists were killed in an ambush at the historic temple of Hatshepsut, caused considerable damage to Egypt’s tourist industry and led to massive job losses. It is worth noting that there have only been four incidents targeting tourists since June 2013, one of which was in the Sinai, another a failed suicide bombing in Luxor, and two armed assaults on police kiosks near the Giza pyramids. On the other hand, the advertised response to Morsi’s deposition was failing and the group was at risk of losing its younger membership to the more extremist factions cropping up across the country or infiltrating across its borders. After months of security operations against the brotherhood, the organization was in disarray and facing a full blown revolt between those who wanted to stay the course of conventional politics and those who wanted to confront the government with force. Evidence of the internal schism was manifest in the appointment of a younger, more radical spokesperson in the fall of 2014 and his removal a year later(Carneige Paper). 30 A 2014 video

30 Official investigations into the assassination of the attorney general, Hisham Barakat, stated there was evidence Muslim Brotherhood elements, as well as members of Hamas, were involved in the planning and execution of the attack, most notably Dr. Yehia Moussa a brotherhood leader currently residing in Turkey. Other theories stress
clip by the short lived “Helwan Brigades,” which featured a motley crew of aspiring militants in ill-fitting balaclavas and improperly gripped Kalashnikovs, encapsulated the movement’s dilemma as the spokesman railed against the ministry of interior and declared his band fed-up with the peaceful methods of the Brotherhood.

Similarly, several small groups were established that are widely believed to be forefronts to the Brotherhood, including “Hasm”, “Popular Resistance Movement” and “Lewaa Al-Thawra”. In addition, when a group of 159 Islamic scholars joined to condemn Egyptian authorities and called for the use of violence against them in a statement called “Nidaa Al-Kanana”, the Muslim Brotherhood supported the statement and thanked the scholars for “explaining the religious duty in resisting the coup”. A July 2015 interview with Ashraf Abdul Ghaffar, the senior leader in the Moslem Brotherhood intimated that “all degrees without murder” can be considered peaceful, including civil disobedience, stopping trains, and toppling electricity towers. He then clarified this statement was “not an endorsement of those acts, merely a distinction between such acts and the violent repression practiced by the regime”. While this single statement is hardly a smoking gun, it illustrates how anonymous strategic restraint could thread the needle between abandoning non-violence or ceding the marketplace to more radical entrants. By concomitantly refraining from lethal against citizens or their livelihoods, the perpetrators also tried to differentiate themselves from the more extremists groups operating in the country.

The irony of the 2014-2015 campaign of spoiling is that it both confirms the logical foundations of rationalist theories of terrorist violence at the same time it calls their core assumptions into question. By engaging in a highly disciplined campaign of anonymous and non-lethal violence, the perpetrators tried to discredit the incumbent government at the same time they put distance between themselves and more extreme challengers. Silence was about deniability, but deniability specific to the legacy of the probable perpetrators and their desire to maintain their credibility in the eyes of a public that had largely abandoned them after the June 30, 2013 protests. In addition to highlighting the problematic assumptions of extreme violence, this article also reaffirms the importance of context in the study of terrorism, particularly in discerning the motivations that drive perpetrators of political violence to adopt and extreme, or less extreme course of action.

similarities between the Barakat assassination and the attempted assassination of former Interior Minister Mohamad Ibrahim in 2013, which was eventually claimed by the then Al-Qaeda linked Ansar Beit al-Maqdis. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/06/world/middleeast/egypt-interior-minister-survives-attack.html  
32 http://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2015/05/29/egypt-kenana-ikhwan  
33 http://www.al-omah.com/policy/1/117976-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%81-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A9%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%89-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-
References


### Table 1 Instrumental Components of Terrorist Strategies (related text page 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Operational objective</th>
<th>Information signaled (who and what)</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Goals served (ranked)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attrition</td>
<td>Impose sustained costs</td>
<td><em>We are strong and committed</em></td>
<td>Enemy (adversary)</td>
<td>Territorial change Status quo maintenance Policy change Regime change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimidation</td>
<td>Impose targeted costs</td>
<td><em>We are strong and committed enough to punish you</em></td>
<td>Constituent population/ or enemy (adversary)</td>
<td>Policy Change Social Control Status quo maintenance Regime change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outbidding</td>
<td>Impose greater or more frequent costs than rivals</td>
<td><em>We are STRONGER and MORE committed than others; join us</em></td>
<td>Constituent population</td>
<td>Intermediate: recruit followers to support ultimate goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provocation</td>
<td>Provoke a counter reaction</td>
<td><em>They are indiscriminate (and untrustworthy)</em></td>
<td>Constituent population</td>
<td>Regime change Territorial Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoiling</td>
<td>Provoke a political reaction</td>
<td><em>The moderates (our rivals) are incapable (and untrustworthy)</em></td>
<td>Moderates on the enemies side/ enemies constituent population</td>
<td>Intermediate: prevent implementation of a peace agreement that threatens ultimate goal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2: Trends in Terrorist Attacks: Egypt 1981-2013 GTD 2015 (related text page 9)

Figure 2 shows limited impact of terrorism in Egypt with the exception of the Islamist Insurgency in the 1990s and the period between June 30, 2013 and August 2015.

![Graph showing trends in terrorist attacks in Egypt from 1981 to 2013.]

Figure 3: Trends in Terrorist Attacks: Egypt June 2013 – August 2015, TIMEP (related text page 9)

Figure 3 illustrates the pattern of terrorist violence after the deposition of Mohammad Morsi in June, 2013. The first spike, June through August 2013, consists almost exclusively of incidents in Northern Sinai, whereas the second spike is marked by low intensity incidents in the mainland.

![Graph showing trends in terrorist attacks in Egypt from June 2013 to June 2015.]

Figure 3 Trends June 2013 - June 2015
Figure 4: Fatalities in Terrorist Attacks: Egypt June 2013 – August 2015, TIMEP (related text page 9)

As illustrated by figure 4, fatalities also picked up after 2013, although not at the same pace or frequency as the overall number of incidents.

Figure 4 Fatalities by Month June 2013 July 2014

Figure 5: Terrorist Attacks versus Sabotage Attacks: Egypt June 2013 – August 2015, TIMEP (related text page 12)

Figure 5 illustrates the trend in sabotage attacks on electrical infrastructure as compared to all attacks between June 2013 and August 2015.
Figure 6 illustrates the geographic range of sabotage attacks on electricity pylons.