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Inspire Magazine: A Critical Analysis of its Significance and Potential Impact Through the Lens of the Information, Motivation, and Behavioral Skills Model

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Abstract:

This paper presents an analysis of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's English language

publication _Inspire_ that was conceptualized and conducted on the basis of the Information-

Motivation-Behavioral Skills (IMB) framework. The IMB model has been widely tested,

validated, and applied across a range of behavior change interventions, and provides both a

conceptual and analytic framework to examine the range and quality of content featured across

the 11 issues of Inspire that were published and distributed online starting in July of 2010.

Inspire has been implicated in multiple instances of terrorism cases in the U.S. and its impact and

potential can be analyzed on the extent to which it effectively targets core attitudes, perceptions

of social normative support for violence, and its regular featuring of behavioral skills such as

bomb making, weapons training, and emphasizing a creative and do-it-yourself ethos.

***Inspire* Magazine: A critical analysis of its significance and potential impact through the
lens of the Information, Motivation, and Behavioral Skills model.**

On April 15, 2013 two bombs were detonated at the Boston Marathon, killing 3 and
wounding nearly 300.[1] In the aftermath, the two suspects, brothers Tamerlan, 26, and Dzhokhar
Tsarnaev, 19, led police on a citywide manhunt, shutting down Boston and the surrounding areas
for a day at an economic cost initially estimated to be in the in the hundreds of millions of
dollars.[2] While Tamerlan was killed in a shootout with police, a severely injured Dzhokhar was
captured, and he reportedly revealed to interrogators that the brothers learned how to make the
pressure cooker bombs from the pages of *Inspire*. In the course of the investigation, new reports
identified that the *Inspire* magazine was also found on the computer of Tamerlan Tsaernev's
wife, Katherine Russell.[3] While the investigation into the Boston Marathon attack is ongoing at
the time of writing, the renewed focus on *Inspire* by counterterrorism professionals and the news
media reflects an ongoing interest in its relevance and influence, both in the Boston attacks and
for homegrown al-Qaeda motivated terrorism more widely. In the current paper, we examine the
constituent elements of *Inspire* through the lens of the Information, Motivation, and Behavioral
Skills (IMB) model of behavior change, a model that has been both empirically validated and
widely applied across a range of behavior change interventions.[4][5] While the current analysis is
largely descriptive, it is guided by the hypothesis that the elements contained in Inspire largely
correspond with the overarching IMB constructs, which we will demonstrate in the current
paper. Thus, our goal is to provide a compelling theoretical framework through which we may
more accurately analyze the radicalizing and mobilizing mechanics of the *Inspire* series.

The background, context, and ongoing debate around the significance of *Inspire*

In the Summer of 2010, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) published the first issue of its English-language publication *Inspire* to the Internet. The appearance of this 67-page online magazine quickly garnered attention across online jihadist discussion forums, the law enforcement and intelligence communities, and the National news media. Although it has been dismissed by some as a fleeting novelty, or just old wine in new bottles, AQAP has published a total of 11 issues to date, all of which are widely available online. The e-magazines have been viewed and downloaded thousands of times, and authorities in the United States, Britain, and Australia have found it in the possession of more than a dozen terrorism suspects.[6]

With its slick production values and graphics, *Inspire* is characterized by a streamlined and seamless fusion of ideologically-driven material with pragmatic instructional and skill-building content. Taken together, these elements are intended simultaneously to increase motivation and lower the barriers of entry to terrorism, with the aim of fostering a do-it-yourself ethos resulting in terrorist behaviors. While not entirely new in its approach, *Inspire* has refined the formula more effectively than perhaps any previous al-Qaeda propaganda product. Despite those advancements, public debate remains over whether and how reading an online magazine can move an individual to commit an act of terrorism.

Inspire was developed with significant editorial input by Samir Khan and Anwar al-Awlaki, both US citizens, and both killed on September 30, 2011 by an American drone strike in Yemen. The tone and focus of the magazine closely mirrored that of a previous publication spearheaded by Khan, entitled *Jihad Recollections.* After years of trying to make a name for

himself through posts to online jihadist discussion forums and his own jihadist focused blog, Khan launched his own al-Qaeda styled media outlet, Al Fursan Media, and used it to publish this magazine series.

According to the first issue of *Jihad Recollections*, which Khan self-published in April 2009, the magazine series would be directed at "English speaking Muslims who are interested in gaining heights in their religious, political, economical, social, technological, strategic, historical, biographical and health awareness." The magazine would attempt to level the uneven playing field between quality jihadist publications being published in Arabic versus English. The *Jihad Recollections* series, Khan explained, would:

> *1. Tackle issues that are not only happening abroad in the Muslim world, but also focus on domestic issues pertinent to the Muslim community in the West; 2. To clean the image of the Mujahideen; 3. Present well-researched and thought-out articles on relevant issues of interest.*

Khan's first magazine series seemed to position itself as a publication for the informed, reading elite within the English-speaking jihadist community. With in-depth political commentary and analysis, in-depth biographies of key al-Qaeda leaders, self-help advice and ideological discussions, the magazine was not meant to be read lightly. At first, many on the jihadist Internet forums struggled to make sense of the point of Khan's efforts. Responding to a question from username, "mujahideenryder"--who asked, "What is the REAL purpose for the english magazine? To get more english-speaking people more aware? Or for the non-Muslims to

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read?"--another online participant, "Abu Irsaad", answered, "It's apparently for the Muslims. There are tens of jihadi magazines in Arabic; this is the first attempt to have one in English."[7]

The online jihadist community quickly embraced the series, tallying thousands of views and downloads for each magazine Khan published. Much of the feedback posted to the forums, however, highlighted the desire by online participants for more information on the doing of terrorism, not just the politics motivating it. Take "AnsarSunnah01," for example, who posted to a prominent English-language jihadist web forum on April 5, 2009, "Very intresting [*sic*] magazine…esspesially [*sic*] the military info."[8] Another forum user, "guest32011," praised the magazine editors on August 12, 2009, for their coverage of new technology that can triangulate a sniper's position based on the sound from the rifle, posting, "Good job on writing about the mobile shooter detection system... alot [*sic*] of people are unaware of this technology."[9]

Khan and his team published their fourth and final issue of *Jihad Recollections* in September 2009 to great acclaim. Soon after, Khan slipped out of the United States and ventured to Yemen, where he made contact with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and his hero, Shaykh Anwar al-Awlaki. If *Jihad Recollections* did anything, it was to help force English-speaking jihadist community to feel guilty about inactivity. Passive praise for al-Qaeda could no longer satisfy the demand for action and preparation that Khan's publication lay at the feet of every Western Muslim. Comments and questions such as the one posted by user "imranhk786" on June 30, 2010 had become common in the forums: , "is there any way i can help the mujahideens ..i myself cant go for phycal jihad coz i have old parents to look after." [10] [*sic*]. The problem was that, although *Jihad Recollections* offered general religious, ideological, and political advice for

the aspiring mujahid, it lacked specific behavioral directives. Instead, responses like this one

from an anonymous user could only point to a popular publication by Anwar al-Awlaki that

offered specific ideas for how to help support the jihadist movement: "Brother, you should read

the article below and also try to spread it. May Allah swt help you in your efforts. 44 Ways of

Supporting Jihad by Sheikh Anwar al Awlaqi" [*sic*].

Enter *Inspire.*

Inspire's first issue, published in July 2010, suggested that Khan, under the direct

supervision of al-Awlaki, had retooled his approach from *Jihad Recollections. Inspire* appears to

be aimed at a less informed and intellectually engaged audience. Most notably, rather than

concentrating on shaping the ideas of its readers, *Inspire* focuses more on driving them to action.

One especially interesting development in *Inspire* that sets it apart from other examples of al

Qaeda propaganda is that it targets an English-speaking readership and emphasizes a do-it-

yourself ethos, publishing in each issue a section called "Open Source Jihad."[11] It is in this

section, for example, that one can find directions on building a homemade bomb or cleaning a

Kalashnikov rifle. Taken separately, the bits of information and do-it-yourself directions are

nothing new. The grievances *Inspire* presents against the West are well-known, and one has long

been able to search the Internet for ways to make homemade weapons. However, what makes

Inspire an especially potent piece of propaganda is that it packages all these components together

in one modern-looking format, presented in colloquial language replete with Americanisms.[12]

The counterterrorism community and national news media struggled at first to find

common analytical ground about the authenticity and threat that the magazine posed. For

example, in the article, "5 Reasons to Doubt Al-Qaeda Magazine's Authenticity," which appeared in *The Atlantic* soon after *Inspire*'s first release, Max Fisher argued that the *Inspire* was likely a hoax.[13] One of the reasons Fisher came to that conclusion was *Inspire*'s irreverent tone-- sometimes light-hearted, even snarky. As Fisher writes:

> "The language of Inspire, such as 'Make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom,' reflects either a poor command of English or a light-hearted sense of self-parody. AQAP is not known for either. Awlaki, whose location in Yemen makes his participation very plausible, is a native, fluent, and very articulate English speaker. His fiery English-language sermons are not funny."

Fisher's analysis zeroes in on the fact that *Inspire*'s style and tone was not al-Awlaki's – it was Khan's. On a website Khan posted on while still living in his parents' home in North Carolina, he included a file called "United States of Losers."[14]

However, Fisher was not the only one to suspect that *Inspire* was a fake. In fact, many jihadist discussion forum participants approached the magazine skeptically, thinking perhaps they were being baited by an intelligence agency. Consider how user "mujahid_moonsighter" questioned the magazine in a prominent jihadist discussion forum:

> "This article about the truck with blades welded on really causes me to doubt the validity of "Inspire Magazine" coming from real Mujahideen. I truly don't see this as the thinking and words of a true Mujahid. I don't question the articles like the one from Shiekh Anwar Awlaki or others but this just doesn't ring true to me. In fact it seems more like something the kuffar would dream up to misguide people away from the obligation…"[15]

Thus, questions about the authenticity of the magazine were voiced by both sides. Concerns about authenticity however did not stop intelligence agencies such as Great Britain's MI6 from taking an active interest in, and even working actively to disrupt, the distribution of *Inspire* through corrupting the file containing the magazine.[16]

In the RAND Corporation study by Brian Michael Jenkins on terrorism and terrorist recruitment, *Inspire* is again the only publication featured. In this study Jenkins showed that terrorist suspects in the US tend to be young, male, and Muslim which appears to be the demographic that *Inspire* targets. As Jenkins writes, "Some of the articles in *Inspire* remind one of those in earlier men's adventure magazines such as Argosy and Saga, while the how-to pieces recall Carlos Marighella's Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla and the Anarchist's Cookbook."[17]

One of the features that set *Inspire* apart from more conventional al Qaeda propaganda was how comfortable the editors seemed to be interweaving pop culture references and humor into the magazine, such as in the reoccurring section called "A Cold Diss." In issue 4, for instance, this section featured a distressed-looking Barack Obama and a caption reading, "Lemme guess, you're UPS'd?," and below in smaller type it reads, "This ad brought to you by a Cold Diss." The ad makes reference to two AQAP bombing plots, dubbed 'operation hemorrhage', on United Parcel Service (UPS) cargo planes. As this example illustrates, the tone that *Inspire* used became an important part of its overall identity and voice. After Khan was killed in a CIA drone strike in September 2011, the new editor has attempted to strike the same tone as Khan.[18] However, as Scott Stewart wrote of the issues 8-10: "Inspire seems to be more serious and less edgy that when Khan was in charge."[19] Despite its critics, the issues published in

the aftermath of al-Awlaki's and Khan's death continue to be read, downloaded and discussed in jihadi cyberspace.

Inspire magazine's influence extending into the 'real' world

At the time of writing, news reports show that the *Inspire* magazine series has been cited, if not directly implicated, in a series of terrorism plots and at least one successful attack over the past two years. Jose Pimentel was arrested by the New York City Police Department on November 19, 2011 before the bomb he was making became operational.[20] According to a US government criminal complaint, Pimentel maintained a website where he posted the article "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom." Additionally, along with a confidential informant (CI) with the New York Police Department, Pimentel used that article as a guide in buying and assembling the components for a pipe bomb. As the complaint states, Pimentel bought a clock because it looked like the one featured in the article. He also bought the other materials featured in the how-to article, including work gloves, elbow piping, and Christmas lights.

The detective writes in the complaint, "I have reviewed video recording from on or about November 4, 2011, at the CI's apartment, showing the defendant following precisely the instructions from the *Inspire* Magazine article by (i) scraping the heads from the matches and collecting the incendiary powder in a bowl; and (ii) connecting a Christmas tree light to the battery using wiring to create an ignition device."[21] Pimentel also gave the informant a flash drive containing six issues of *Inspire* magazine, the *Inspire* article on bomb making mentioned above, and two other manuals, the "Organic Chemistry of Explosives," and "The Preparatory

Manual of Explosives." This particular example highlights the ways in which other online resources may complement the skills that are cultivated in the pages of *Inspire*.

Naser Jason Abdo, a soldier who had gone AWOL from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, was arrested in possession of the article "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom," along with a .40 caliber handgun, ammunition, and bomb making materials. His plans were to bomb a restaurant frequented by soldiers from Fort Hood, Texas and then shoot any survivors as they left the restaurant. A gun store clerk alerted the police after Abdo bought smokeless gun powder and ammunition, while asking questions the clerk thought suspicious.[22] On August 10, 2012, he was sentenced in Waco, Texas to two consecutive life terms for attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction and for possession of a weapons intended for use in a federal crime.[23]

Before Quazi Mohammad Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis attempted to carry out an attack on the New York Federal Reserve Bank, he wrote an article he believed would be published by *Inspire*. According to the criminal complaint, he delivered it to an informant he thought was an al-Qaeda member, using the article to explain his motives. He was arrested on October 17, 2012 after triggering a detonator to what he thought was a 1,000-pound truck bomb in front of the Bank.[24]

Brothers Raees Alam Qazi and Sheheryar Alam Qazi also aimed to target New York City, according to the Justice Department.[25] Arrested in November 2012, prosecutors at their detention hearing alleged they read Inspire and had been influenced by the lectures of Awlaki.[26] Adel Daoud plotted and attempted to bomb a bar in downtown Chicago. The bomb, however, was a fake, planted by a FBI agent posing as a co-conspirator. As the US government's criminal

complaint contends, Daoud was an avid reader of *Inspire* and had "remarked that he may use instructions from the magazine to carry out an attack."[27]

In Luton, Britain, four men planned on building a bomb with the instructions found in "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom," rigging it to a remote-controlled car, and exploding it at a Territorial Army base.[28] They were arrested in September 2011 and have since been sentenced to prison. Several people have also been convicted for being in possession of *Inspire* in Britain, where any publication of material that could be used for terrorism is classified as a crime. *Inspire* has also been cited by British authorities in more serious cases. In October 2012, Irfan Naseer, Irfan Khalid, and Ashik Ali were arrested for planning a terrorist attack. One of their ideas was to weld butcher knives to a large truck and plow into a crowd of civilians--an idea that came directly from *Inspire* issue 2, the "Ultimate Mowing Machine." In December 2010, investigators found two issues of *Inspire* in the possession of nine men plotting to bomb symbolic targets in the UK, including Big Ben, the London Stock Exchange, and the US embassy in London.[29]

The magazine's influence has been seen in Australia too, where in April 2013 Adnan Karabegovic was found with a USB drive and two computers with "numerous editions" of *Inspire*.[30] As in Britain, Australia considers it illegal to possess the magazine, and Karabegovic has been charged with 12 counts of collecting and possessing documents to assist in committing terrorism.[31]

Along with these cases, a rash of forest fires in Europe in 2012 have been attributed to al Qaeda by the Russian Security Service chief, Alexander Bortnikov.[32] Whether or not this is true,

Bortnikov's suspicions ostensibly derive from an article in issue 9, "It Is of Your Freedom to Ignite a Firebomb," giving instructions on how to set forest fires.[33] Bortnikov said, "One should note that setting fires to forests in the countries of the European Union is a new tendency in al-Qaeda's strategy of a 'thousand cuts.'"[34] The tenth and most recent issue advises followers to burn parked cars and pour oil on roads to cause car accidents, and its practical influence (if any) is yet to be seen.

The Information, Motivation, Behavioral Skills Model as a framework for behavior change

Of fundamental concern for the present analysis is what in particular about this magazine has given it such traction? This paper posits that its content has components that may be especially persuasive in getting individuals to modify their behavior, and that those components fall into the categories that comprise the Information-Motivation-Behavioral Skills (IMB) model. In fact, by using an empirically established and widely applied model of behavioral change to analyze *Inspire*, we can leverage the literature on how effective behavioral change interventions can be developed and optimized to change individuals' behavior regarding their health. Through this theoretical lens, we can see what sets this particular magazine apart from other persuasive communications that have been a constant fixture of the jihadist movement. In developing the IMB model, Fisher and Fisher posited that behavioral change was the result of having information related to a particular target behavior, but that information was not sufficient in instantiating behavioral change.[35] In addition to information, people needed to be sufficiently motivated to engage in a particular behavior. In the IMB framework, motivation has both personal and social components and is operationally defined as attitudes toward a target

behavior, perceived social normative support for engaging in a particular behavior (i.e., whether others who are important to me think that I should engage in a particular behavior), and perception of vulnerability and susceptibility to consequences that the target behavior is positioned to mitigate. However, information and motivation may not result in actual behavior change unless someone has the skill set that enables them to successfully enact (and sustain) a given behavior. For the purposes of the present analysis, this is an especially important contribution.

Figure 1. The Information, Motivation, Behavioral Skills Model of Behavior Change
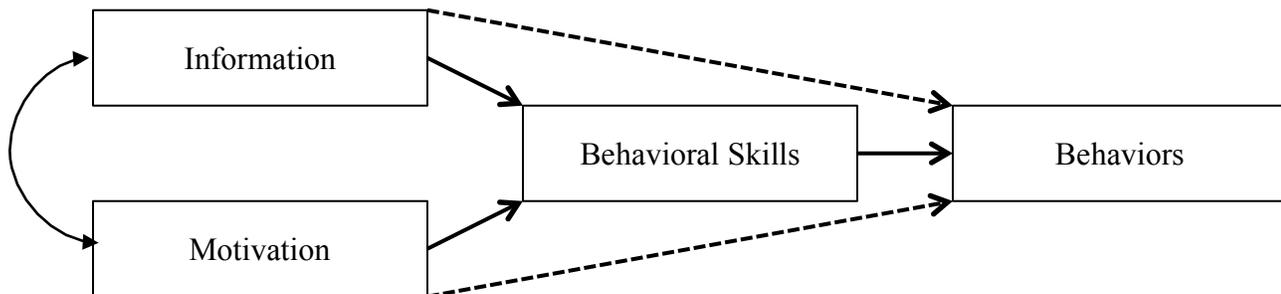
Thus, Fisher and Fisher argue that people will change their behavior the more informed they are about the benefits of that change, the more motivated they are to achieve the change, and the more skills and sense of self-efficacy they have in respect in performing the behavior.[36] For instance, Fisher et al. used the model to address factors that influence adherence to a highly active antiretroviral treatment regimen (HAART), the most effective way to treat HIV. As Fisher et al. write, "To the extent that individuals are poorly informed, unmotivated to act, and lack the behavioral skills required to act effectively, they will be unlikely to adhere to HAART over time or to experience its health benefits."[37]

Interventions that have been based on the IMB framework have received empirical support, and the IMB model has been extensively tested and validated,[38] which positions it well to serve as a framework for analyzing the content of *Inspire* magazine. One of the main critiques of the IMB model regards its application in cross-cultural contexts. But in the case of *Inspire*, the magazine selects issues that are directly relevant to the target audience, and presents them in ways that are both culturally and contextually relevant. Ironically, *Inspire's* techniques of persuasion to engender behavior change toward terrorism (in terms of the underlying dimensions that are addressed) are remarkably consistent with those found in many successful campaigns and interventions to change a wide range of health behaviors.

Information

Inspire magazine uses a variety of informational sources to educate its readership on the history, meaning, and value of waging jihad. *Inspire* makes a concerted effort to place its 'facts' as part of a consensus opinion on issues ranging from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to the right of Muslim women to wear the burqa in France. It clarifies the point of view of AQAP (e.g., what is it that they are paying attention to?), its advocates, and its opponents throughout the magazine's ten issues to date, which has provided US intelligence needed insight into the group's outlook. As *The Washington Post* reporter Greg Miller wrote after the death of Khan and al-Awlaki, "U.S. intelligence analysts miss the publication, too, at least to the extent that it provided a window into the thinking of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, as the Yemen-based group is known."[39] A U.S. defense official tracking AQAP told Miller "[*Inspire*] was something that helped us gain insight into the group."[40]

As al Qaeda's senior leadership sought to gain favor with Western audiences by incorporating the statements of American politicians, journalists, and counter-terrorism analysts into their propaganda, *Inspire* similarly employed this tactic in the reoccurring section, "Hear the World...A Collection of Quotes from Friend and Foe" (in issues 7-10, this section was relabeled "@heartheworld: A Collection of Quotes from Friend and Foe"). In this section, the editorial team clipped the words of Western 'experts' to weave together a tapestry of 'proof' about the corruption and hypocrisy of the 'West'. For instance, in the Fall 2010 issue, this section featured quotes from Barack Obama, Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, and Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad, among others. The section seems to pay particular attention to those in the West who are critical of American and Israeli foreign policy, giving the impression that AQAP's perspective on current affairs provides timely and accurate information. For example, the "Friend and Foe" section of the Winter 2010 issue quoted Daniel Ellsberg, former Pentagon analyst and source of the Pentagon Papers, as saying the coalition forces had no legitimate basis for killing those resisting the occupation of Iraq.[41] The Fall 2010 issue quotes an anti-war protestor, Richard Boyd Barrett, at a Tony Blair book signing in Ireland:

> "There are countless tens of thousands of Iraqis and Afghanis who died as a result of the wars he launched, and the lies he told to the world, and indeed the Palestinian people continue to suffer at the hands of Israel where Tony Blair's EU Middle East envoy does nothing to restrain or sanction Israel, in fact it commends Israel for its actions."[42]

In sum, this section provided basic information about who friends and foes actually were, which is a basic element of information.

In an article attributed to Osama bin Laden in the first issue, "The Way to Save the Earth,"[43] bin Laden writes, "Noam Chomsky was right when he pointed to a similarity between American policies and the policies of Mafia gangs."[44] However, bin Laden's focus was not American foreign policy, but the environmental and human cost of climate change.[45] He cites an expert from the West to make his case:

> "In the same year in which James E. Hansen, NASA's senior expert, confirmed the seriousness of global warming, 140,000 died and 24 million were displaced in floods in Bangladesh alone; and the caravan of victims of climate change hasn't stopped since, so those behind it must be identified and a way of dealing with them specified."[46]

Another example of how *Inspire* attempts to contextualize and verify the information that it presents by citing Western sources is found in issue four, where journalist Phil Rees is quoted as arguing that Osama bin Laden had constructed a coherent philosophical alternative to global capitalism.[47] While the magazine carefully culls and selects excerpts about bin Laden to give the appearance of the leader as an intellectual figure, it often rips opponents' statements from press conferences or other public forums without any concern for the original context in order to crystalize points of disagreement. For instance, it quotes Vice President Joe Biden stridently supporting Israel and King Hussain of Jordan on the virtues of religious acceptance.[48] This shows AQAP is not only conscious of the political debates going on in the West, but that it is also deeply concerned with its image and legitimacy in the West. Thus, AQAP uses the magazine as a vehicle to explain its position in matter-of-fact detail, to both its enemies and potential recruits.

It is also clear AQAP is quite aware that terrorism presents an ethical barrier to entry for potential recruits, an obstacle it tries to overcome by providing information on the justice and necessity of terror. On the justice of terror as a method, *Inspire* references the Quran and Muslim scholars to make its case. In the article "Targeting the Populations of Countries that are at War with the Muslims," Anwar al-Awlaki notes that Muslim scholars are divided on whether non-combatants can be justly targeted and that it is the most frequently asked question by *Inspire* readers. [49] Given the substance of the article, the analysis evokes a two-sided argument, which is an especially effective persuasive style with engaged and informed audiences. This approach of providing information that appears to 'see both sides' on the surface strikes a reasonable tone – absent is the histrionic style characterizing much of the magazine's treatment of current affairs.

While al-Awlaki admits there are *hadith* forbidding the killing of non-combatants, he writes, "But [scholars] all agree that if women, the elderly, farmers, merchants or slaves participate in the war effort against Muslims either by actual participation in fighting, financial contribution or opinion, they become legitimate targets."[50] To further legitimize terrorism, the magazine's authors often argue the method is necessary to effectively fight enemies such as America and Israel, where it is not possible to engage in a more symmetric style of conflict. In the opening to a story on the great success of the 9/11 attacks "The Greatest Special Operation of All Time," the author writes: "The operations of 9/11 came as a result of decades of American aggression. They follow half a century of American support for the state of Israel."[51]

While AQAP is a relatively small and embattled group based in Yemen, *Inspire* is keen to make it appear large in importance. One way that it attempts to do this is to provide

information that establishes the topics on which terrorism-related attitudes and perceptions of social normative support can be based. Also, while the magazine details in shocking, controversial methods, it simultaneously tries to appear as a legitimate alternative to the mainstream of opinion on both current affairs and tactics. *Inspire* magazine informs readers on its demands too, again attempting to present itself as the reasonable party, and relentlessly portrays Americans and Israelis as uncompromising violators of innocent Muslim lives. In the article commemorating bin Laden after his death, "Sadness, Contentment & Aspiration, Samir Khan writes, "[Osama bin Laden's] death will only bring them misery and it will be a curse for them until they leave our lands."[52] In other words, al-Awlaki implicitly suggests that AQAP and jihadists more generally might stop violence, if only its enemies would only make the required concessions. Thus, the editors are evidently attempting to provide information that makes the magazine appear to be reasonable and accurate, with positions that are rooted in fact.

Motivation

Inspire's first issue contained a Letter from the Editor that introduced the reader not only to the magazine, but also to the thought that was placed into the magazine's title. Referencing the Quranic verse, "And inspire the believers to fight" [al-Anfāl: 65],[53] the editor explains that in the word "inspire" in that surah is being translated from the Arabic, "ĥariđ," which comes from the adjective ĥāriđ, meaning "a person or a being that is perishing." Therefore, according to the editor, by "inspiring" their readers towards certain actions by using the verb ĥariđ, they are saying that unless the reader does what they are being inspired to do, they will perish. This

approach, of structuring the nature of the threat for the reader and attaching spiritual

consequences, was a novel advancement of al Qaeda's motivational literature.

In the context of the IMB framework, motivation is defined as being comprised of

attitudes, perceptions of social norms, and perceptions of vulnerability and susceptibility to

consequences of problems (e.g., the threat of perishing, as indicated in the title of the magazine,

and the general emphasis on a purported global conspiracy to attack Islam). In addition, the

magazine routinely features stories and images of martyrs, who serve as powerful normative

examples for readers to emulate.

Motivation, as defined by the IMB model,[54] contains both personal and social aspects.

Personal motivation includes attitudes and beliefs about the effectiveness that an action may

have on the acting individual. For example, in the context of HIV prevention, the domain in

which the IMB model was initially developed and tested, personal motivation for condom use

may involve the how clearly the individual perceives the benefits of this action, and how

positively the individual evaluates those benefits. More generally, "favorable beliefs about the

effects [of an action]…and positive evaluations of these outcomes…are assumed to be associated

with adherence [to a type of action]."[55] Social motivation, on the other hand, "rests on the

individual's perceptions of social support from significant others for adhering to his or her

regimen and the individual's motivation to comply with these referent others."[56] In sum, those

who are effectively motivated will feel that the action to be taken is both in their own self-

interest, and also in line with the interests and norms of his cultural or social setting.

For example, in the "Hear the World" section in issue 1, NYC Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad is quoted as follows:

It is with no doubt that we Muslims...are attacked and occupied by foreign infidel forces. The Crusade has already started...Peaceful protests have achieved nothing. A fighter who gives his life to Allah can never disobey His commands; friends with peaceful protest, can you tell me a way to save the oppressed? You would have to agree to the fact that there's a force out there that's fighting the West, and is defeating them.

This passage includes a series of motivational factors that address both personal and social components. First, there is the claim that the battle against Islam is already in progress; in other words, the threat is not distant and abstract but eminent and concrete (which directly touches on the perceived severity of the threat). Second, Shahzad notes that Muslims have an obligation to obey Allah's commands, and implies that part of His commands include fighting against threats to Islamic lands and ideals (which directly touches on social normative support). Finally, there is the claim that resistance fighters are already succeeding in large part, so potential fighters are given the sense that they will be joining a winning effort (which again reinforces social normative support). Quotes like this occur frequently in the "Hear the World" section of *Inspire*.[57]

In addition, entire articles are also devoted to instilling in readers a sense of urgency and obligation. One such article, entitled "Know That Jihad is Your Duty," occurs in issue 4. Its author, Adam Gadahn, implores those readers "residing in the states of the Zio-Crusader

coalition [i.e., non-Muslim states]" to recognize that "jihad is your duty as well, and that you

have an opportunity to strike the leaders of *kufr* [disbelief] and retaliate against them on their

own soil." Later, Gadahn offers further motivation, claiming that true believers "must get ready

to perform [their] vital role in the global jihad."[58] In closing, one final plea is made to those who

have already participated in jihad:

> So, my beloved brothers: remember your responsibility before Allah and what it is He
>
> has purchased, and respond once again to the call, and return to your stations, and finish
>
> what you started, and aid your religion and ummah, and be with your brothers the
>
> mujahidin, until victory while strengthened or martyrdom while on the advance.[59]

We can see numerous instances of motivation in this one-page article. First, Gadahn attempts to

motivate those who reside in Westernized parts of the world, such as the "lone wolf" terrorists in

the U.S., by claiming that they have a certain obligation or duty as Muslims. Second, he aims to

instigate jihadi veterans to rise up and attack again. The author targets the readers' attitudes (in

this case, negative attitudes toward the 'West") by evoking images of the enemy. There is a sense

of urgency in Gadahn's "call to arms." The role of the potential jihadi is presented as both "vital"

and a "duty," rather than something which can be casually considered.

Additionally, this article targets the perceived social norms of his readers (i.e., what does

and does not count as acceptable behavior). Terrorist actions are presented as "responsibilities,"

not mere possibilities, giving the reader a feeling that violent actions are not only acceptable, but

obligatory. Finally, the author hones in on a third motivational component: the perceived severity

of the threat. Notice that the author describes terrorist acts as "retaliations" for past wrong

doings. Those in the westernized world are also described as "Crusaders," indicating that the

enemy has already committed a trespass against Islam. In other words, the danger to Islam looms

large and therefore requires immediate retaliatory action.

Consider the following examples from an early issue of *Inspire* (taken from the article,

"Obama's Ploy and the Peak of Islam"):

> Jihad is the peak of Islam and the operation that the mujahidin performed on the 11th of
>
> September represents a virtuous act. The mujahidin performed their duty against
>
> American oppression. The mujahidin by the will of Allah will carry on jihad to establish
>
> justice between mankind and to remove American oppression and tyranny. America is
>
> arrogantly corrupting on earth and has killed innocent women and children in
>
> Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen through their bombings. America has killed more
>
> than a million and a half Iraqi children during their ten-year embargo on that nation.
>
> We invite you to read our holy book and to believe in it to be saved from the punishment
>
> of Allah on the Day of Judgment.[60]

These paragraphs contain both personal and social motivational elements that are consistent with

those described in the context of the IMB model. First, there are appeals to the personal benefits

of terrorist actions. Readers are invited to "be saved from the punishment of Allah." Here, the

type of motivation here is largely personal; participating in certain terrorist acts will prevent you

from suffering punishment. Yet there is also social motivation present. The actions of the

mujahidin are described as "duties." The next sentence describes jihad as being consistent with

the "will of Allah." Both statements operate to normalize terrorist acts. Duties are not simply

actions that one can perform. Rather, they are actions that one is responsible for performing –

they are, in short, *obligations*. Finally, the aims of the mujahidin are categorized as reactions

against "American oppression and tyranny," a tyrant that involves the killing of "innocent

women in children" throughout the Middle East. This serves a similar normalizing function to

that just described. Aggression, especially unprovoked aggression, is not easy to justify.

Defending against aggression, on the other hand, is positioned as much more easily defensible –

if not wholly justified. Indeed, one may often think of defending one's people/land from foreign

aggressors as a duty or obligation. At any rate, what these selections of text exemplify is the

social aspect of motivation. When actions are presented as being consistent with societal norms

and obligations, potential actors are more likely swayed to engage in the action.

Another example is taken from issue 6, in an article titled "It is either jihad or disgrace,

so choose!" which looks at a series of Quran passages, plus a set of interpretations thereof

(offered in part by Abu Dawud, a Persian Quran scholar). The aim of the analyses is to justify

jihad by reference to the scriptures. The choice outlined is between jihad or "disgrace." The

article paints the decision to join jihad as a simple binary; there are no "in-between" jihadis.

Thus, "it is either jihad or disgrace."

> When you enter into a transaction, hold the tails of oxen, are pleased with agriculture, and
> give up conducting jihad, Allah will make disgrace prevail over you, and will not
> withdraw it until you return to your [original] religion.[61]

Insofar as disgrace is a social phenomenon – we are disgraced by others or in front of others – this is another clear instance of social motivation at work.

This article also references the reactive/defensive character of the jihad, and, by extension, the aggressive character of Western policies and actions: "the disbelieving enemy…imposes its mastery over the land of the Muslims."[62] Later on, jihad is described as "repelling the disbelievers and protecting the lands and the religion of the Muslims."[63] All of the "jihad is the legitimate gateway for matters to be righted and brought back to their original condition so that the religion is honored, *kufr* [infidel] is dishonored, Islam is spread and *shirk* [idolatry] is restrained."[64]

Behavioral Skills and The Real Impact of Inspire Magazine

The IMB model posits that in order for information and motivation to influence actual behaviors, there must be a sufficient level of behavioral skills to allow someone to perform the behavior in question. This point is emphasized across all issues of *Inspire* magazine, and has proven to be a critical part of its overall formula. The first portions of every issue are largely dedicated to providing information and motivational supports as have been previously discussed. However, the 'open source jihad' section serves to provide practical technical skills as well as a wide range of ideas – ranging from the oft-cited bomb making instructions, to the more far-fetched plans to weld-blades to the side of a truck, or build incendiary devices that can start forest fires, or triggers that can be used to detonate explosives.

Those interventions that provide specific behavioral alternatives – and the skill set necessary to achieve them – are the most likely to be successful at initiating and potentially

maintaining behaviors over a longer term. An effective intervention to encourage exercise does not advise someone to "exercise more," but gives concrete, measurable, and achievable goals like "jog 30 minutes four times a week." Interventions that give clear behavioral steps also can boost self-efficacy (the sense that an individual has regarding their ability to perform a given behavior), which is essential for an individual to make behavioral changes. As Armitage and Conner note, individuals are more likely to behave in ways they feel are achievable.[65] *Inspire* appears to have an implicit understanding of these insights. The authors seem to understand many would-be terrorists never move beyond fantasizing about taking action, despite their motivations to do so. The idea of moving to Afghanistan to fight Americans or to Yemen to join AQAP may strike potential recruits as a romantic but unrealizable possibility. *Inspire* taps into this potential with its "Open Source Jihad" section, the purpose of which is to "allows Muslims to train at home instead of risking a dangerous travel abroad." "Open Source Jihad" moves beyond any general plea to kill – it sets out a series of more achievable steps to achieve this objective. Further, it encourages a level of entrepreneurship in the kinds of activities that one could engage in by positing a wide range of possibilities as exemplars.

While the section covers bomb making, firearm training, killing pedestrians with weaponized vehicles, and burning parked cars, nowhere does it encourage creating a cell or a team. Indeed, the authors of *Inspire* appear to be especially interested in turning the isolation and lack of physical and network connectedness of its target audience into a strength. This very much reflects the do-it-yourself ethos, and reflects the intended target audience:

25

"It is becoming obvious to many that the concept of individual jihad which features have begun to appear recently has been called for by the leaders of jihad. It is briefly that one individual carries out the entire jihadi operation."[66]

Conclusion

In order to accurately assess why and how *Inspire* magazine may be influential, and to further gauge its potential impact, we have argued that it is important to have an underlying theoretical framework to analyze and situate its content. In the present paper, we have leveraged the IMB framework to parse the various elements of behavior change that are included in its pages. Indeed, if one were to explicitly attempt to design a behavioral change intervention, the elements that are contained in various forms across all of the issues of *Inspire* would be included. Whether the inclusion of these information, motivation, and skills elements was deliberately and intentionally informed by the attitude and behavior change literatures by the creators of *Inspire* is doubtful. However, given our analysis, it is clear that these elements are in fact present across all issues. Taken together, these elements significantly enhance the potential efficacy of *Inspire* to engender terrorism.

In early May 2013, a posting advertising the launch of a new English-language magazine appeared on jihadist online discussion forums. The magazine, attributed only to "Mujahideen brothers from Khurasan, was titled, *Azan,* and is almost an exact clone of the *Inspire* magazine, albeit with slightly less sophisticated graphics and layout design. The magazine's opening editorial reflects its similar global jihadist agenda and call for individual level action, explaining that:

"Azan aims to invite mankind towards to [*sic*]. It is a call to end oppression, evil and corruption from the earth. It is not a message restricted to a particular race, land or nation; rather, it is the message of salvation for the entire mankind.[67]"

With articles praising convicted American jihadists and calling for the assassination of American President Barack Obama, the magazine has generated buzz in the Western media. Curiously, though, its reception thus far across the English jihadist forums has been lukewarm, as compared to *Inspire*. It may well grow in popularity, particularly if it can find a charismatic advocate, but for now it seems relegated to the margins of online jihadist propaganda.

We caution against exaggerating the significance of *Inspire*. It almost certainly does not work alone in influencing would-be jihadis to move from rhetoric to action. In fact, it is in the milieu of a broader online environment where a publication like *Inspire* can truly maximize its reach and impact. Other forms of propaganda and communication are, and will certainly continue to be, critical components of the online jihadi landscape. In particular, the impact of discussion forums and chatrooms, videos on YouTube and elsewhere, as well as music videos (Rap, Nasheed, etc.) are also part of that broader picture. However, one of the things that appears to make *Inspire* a significant addition to this landscape is its ability to pull together so many elements that provide both the influence (information, attitudinal and normative components) and the skills (behavioral skills and technical abilities) for a do-it-yourself jihadist to plan and execute a successful attack.

Going forward, research in this domain should further examine the imagery used in *Inspire* in a more detailed and systematic manner, to examine the types of themes that are

recurrent and to examine how those appear in other online jihadist contexts. Additionally, one can examine the extent to which Inspire functions in a 'stand-alone' manner, versus the extent to which, and how, it converges with other aspects of online activities in the context of radicalization and tactical aspects of terrorism. Despite the difficulties with the distribution of issue 11[68], and its apparently rushed production to venerate the Boston Marathon Attacks which resulted in a lack of any meaningful behavioral skills training, *Inspire* will most likely continue to be an influential publication. Therefore, having a framework to analyze and evaluate it – such as the IMB model as we have documented here – will help to provide a more "right-sized" analysis of its impact and the potential impact of future jihadist publications.

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[1] Deborah Kotz, "Injury Toll from Marathon Bombings Rises," *The Boston Globe*, April 23, 2013.

[2] Brad Plumer, "The Entire City of Boston has Shut Down. How Much Will This Cost?" *Wonkblog, The Washington Post*, April 19, 2013.

[3] Lydia Warren and Snejana Farberov, "Al Qaeda magazine found on laptop of bomber's widow" *The Daily Mail*, May 4, 2013

[4] Additional behavior formation and change models can be applied to inform this analysis including the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Madden, 1986; also see / cite emerging theories chapter). We have carefully considered each of these models and note that they are primarily focused on factors that were incorporated into the motivational component of the IMB model. The IMB model was selected because it explicitly references the fundamental importance of behavioral skills, which are one of Inspire magazines key contributions

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[6] Scott Stewart, "Assessing Inspire Magazine's 10th Edition," *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, March 21, 2013.

[7] Abu Irsaad, April 7, 2009, comment on Ansar Al-Mujahideen English Forum (http://ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=2970&highlight=fursan&page=2).

[8] AnsarSunnah01, April 5, 2009, comment on Ansar Al-Mujahideen English Forum (http://ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=2970).

[9] guest32011, August 12, 2009, comment on Ansar Al-Mujahideen English Forum (http://ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=11107&highlight=fursan).

[10] imranhk786, June 30, 2010, comment on Ansar Al-Mujahideen English Forum (http://ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=23781).

[11] Anthony Lemieux, "Inspire Magazine and the Rise of the Do-It-Yourself Jihadist," *Dangerous Minds, Psychology Today*, accessed at http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/dangerous-minds/201206/inspire-magazine-and-the-rise-the-do-it-yourself-jihadist

[12] Ibid.

[13] Max Fisher, "Five Reasons Why to Doubt Al-Qaeda Magazine's Authenticity," *The Atlantic*, June 1, 2010.

[14] Michael Moss and Souad Mekhennet, "An Internet Jihad Aims at U.S. Viewers," *The New York Times*, October 15, 2007.

[15] mujahid_moonsighter, October 24, 2010, comment on. "INSPIRE Magazine: Issue #2 has been released," Islamic Awakening Forums, (http://forums.islamicawakening.com/f18/inspire-magazine-issue-2-has-been-released-39002/) (accessed May 1, 2013).

[16] Manuel R. Torres Soriano (2012) The Vulnerabilities of Online Terrorism, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 35:4, 263-277, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2012.656345

[17] Jenkins, "Stray Dogs," 16.

[18] Scott Stewart, "Assessing Inspire Magazine's 10th Edition," *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, March 21, 2013.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] The People of the State of New York against Jose Pimentel AKA Muhammad Yusuf.

[22] "AWOL GI Wanted 'Retaliation,' Talked of Attacks," *CBS News*, July 28, 2011.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Stewart, *op. cit.*.

[25] Lizette Alvarez, "Details Are Revealed in Brothers' Terror Case," *The New York Times*, December 18, 2012.

[26] Jason Ryan and Pierre Thomas, "Florida Terrorism Suspect Planned New York Attack, Feds say," ABC News, December 18, 2012.

[27] United States v. Abel Daoud, 12.

[28] Arthur Martin, "Home grown terrorists who plotted to blow up Territorial Army base with bomb mounted on a remote control car jailed for 44 years," Mail Online, April 18, 2013.

[29] Sandra Laville, "Al-Qaeda-Inspired Plotters Planned Attacks on High-Profile London Targets, *The Guardian*, February 1, 2012.

[30] Shannon Deery "Melbourne Man Accused of Terrorism-Related Charges, Including How to Make a Bomb to Spark a Bushfire, Court Hears," *Herald Sun*, April 8, 2013.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Jill Reilly, "Russia's Secret Service Says al-Qaeda are Behind Spate of Forest Fires Across Europe," *The Daily Mail*, October 5, 2012.

[33] Issue 9, 30.

[34] Ibid.

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[39] Greg Miller, "As al-Qaeda Magazine Goes Quiet, Intelligence Analysts lose a Valuable Resource," *The Washington Post*, February 9, 2012.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Issue 4, 8-9.

[42] Issue 2, 5.

[43] Issue 1, 8-10.

[44] Issue 1, 9.

[45] This article appears to be a copy of Al-Jazeera's transcription of an audio tape of a message from Osama bin Laden – not an article bin Laden prepared for the magazine. In fact, there is no evidence bin Laden directly collaborated with *Inspire*. To the contrary, among the documents found in bin Laden's compound after his death was a statement of disapproval over an *Inspire* article ("The Ultimate Mowing Machine") urging readers to mow down pedestrians with trucks on which butcher knives had been welded to the front bumpers.

[46] Issue 1, 8.

[47] Issue 4, 9.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Issue 8, 40-47.

[50] Issue 8, 41.

[51] Issue 7, 13.

[52] Issue 6, 47.

[53] The verse is Surah 8. Al-Anfal, Ayah 65, cited in Inspire Issue 1, 2.

[54] Fisher et al.

[55] Fisher et al., 464.

[56] Ibid.

[57] See, e.g., Issue 1: "I love Usamah bin Ladin, I... Walahi... I love him... pfft... like I can't begin to tell you" (from the former Emir of Revolution Muslim, Yousef al-Khattab, as shown on CNN's "American al-Qaeda" documentary); in Issue 2: "We'll have no part in the democracy and elections. We'll carry on the fight and we'll never negotiate. I wear clothes of explosives. I'm heading out to kill disbelievers. I'm a martyr, I'm an earthquake that shakes the palace built on pride" (Mohammed Younis Jihad Mal, Taliban singer); and Issue 6: "It took the Americans 11 years to kill Usama, but for us it's easy: we will take our revenge in less than a few months" (Umer Khalid, Pakistan Taliban Commander, from an al-Jazeerah exclusive).

[58] Issue 4, 17.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Issue 2, 23.

[61] Issue 6, 55.

[62] Issue 6, 56.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

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[66] Issue 9, 28.

[67] Comment on Ansar Al-Mujahideen English Forum [posted: http://ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=45924 on 6 May 2013]

[68] Paul Cruickshank. New Issue of al Qaeda Magazine May Have Been Hacked. http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2013/05/16/new-issue-of-al-qaeda-magazine-may-have-been-hacked/ May 16, 2013