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Online Terrorist Magazines

Preliminary Findings
November 2015

the
cyberterrorism
project

in collaboration with

CENTER FOR TERRORISM
AND SECURITY STUDIES

UMASS
LOWELL

About the Project

The Cyberterrorism Project is an international, interdisciplinary research network that was established by academics working across fields including Engineering, Law and Politics in 2011. The project has four primary objectives:

(1) To further understanding amongst the scientific community by engaging in original research on the concept, threat and possible responses to cyberterrorism.
(2) To facilitate global networking activities around this research theme.
(3) To engage with policymakers, opinion formers, citizens and other stakeholders at all stages of the research process, from data collection to dissemination.
(4) To do the above within a multidisciplinary and pluralist context that draws on expertise from the physical and social sciences.

Recent activities of the Cyberterrorism Project include hosting conferences in Birmingham (UK) and Swansea (UK), conducting a global survey of researchers, and constructing a database of news media coverage of cyberterrorism. Findings from these activities have been published in top international journals including Terrorism and Political Violence, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Perspectives on Terrorism, and Journal of Terrorism Research, and in books including Cyberterrorism: Understanding, Assessment and Response (Springer, 2014), Terrorism Online: Politics, Law and Technology (Routledge, 2015) and Violent Extremism Online: New Perspectives on Terrorism and the Internet (Routledge, forthcoming). Further information on the project, its members, and ongoing research activities is available via the project website: www.cyberterrorism-project.org.

For membership and media enquiries please contact the project directors (p. 20).

About the Research

This report stems from a research project on online terrorist magazines. The overarching objective of the project is to identify central narratives and themes, and to examine the communicative (language and images) devices used to advance these.

To qualify for inclusion in the study the publication had to: (1) meet our definition of a magazine; and, (2) have been published online. Online materials such as flyers, transcripts of speeches and manifestos therefore fell outside the scope of this study. For practical reasons, the study also focussed exclusively on English language magazines. In total, there were five titles which met these criteria for inclusion. All five were published by groups that follow a jihadist ideology. The magazines were: Azan (produced by the Taliban in Khorasan); Dabiq (produced by Islamic State); Gaidi Mtaani (produced by Al Shabaab); Inspire (produced by Al Qaeda); and Jihad Recollections (the forerunner to Inspire, also produced by Al Qaeda).

The study examined magazines that were published between 1 January 2009 and 30 June 2015.* Across the five titles there were a total of 38 issues that were published during this period.** These 38 issues contained a total of 861,360 words and 3794 images. The following table presents a breakdown of the 38 issues by title and year of publication.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015***
Azan					4	1	
Dabiq						6	3
Gaidi Mtaani				2	2	2	1
Inspire		4	4	1	2	2	
Jihad Recollections	4						
Total	4	4	4	3	8	11	4

* At the time of writing, a further five issues have been published in the second half of 2015: one issue of Inspire, one of Azan, two of Dabiq, and a first issue of a new magazine called Al-Risalah. This is published by Al-Nusra which is an Al Qaeda affiliate operating in Syria.

** We believe that there was a special issue of Azan published during this period, on the Boston bombings, but were unable to access a copy. As far as we are aware this is the only magazine that fits our criteria for inclusion that we have not been able to include.

*** To the end of June 2015.

Before commencing the research a variety of ethical issues were addressed, including the legality of the data collection, the storage of the data and the safety and welfare of the researchers. The project complied fully with the ethics policies and procedures of Swansea University.

This report provides a statistical overview of the dataset. These initial findings will be supplemented in due course by a series of publications containing further quantitative and in-depth qualitative analysis.

Please contact Dr Macdonald or Prof Lorenzo-Dus with any further enquiries on the project's methods and findings.

Acknowledgements

Suggested Citation

The project team that produced this report is based at Swansea University, UK. It consists of two full-time academic staff, one associate researcher, one postgraduate researcher and eight undergraduate interns:

- Dr Stuart Macdonald
- Prof Nuria Lorenzo-Dus
- Dr Matteo di Cristofaro
- David Mair
- Anina Kinzel
- Saffron Lee

- Nyasha Maravanyika
- David Nezri
- Jodie Parker
- Elliot Parry
- Kate Thomas
- Luke Walker

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Table of Contents

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Average length by pages and words

This chart shows the average length of each of the five magazines, by number of pages.
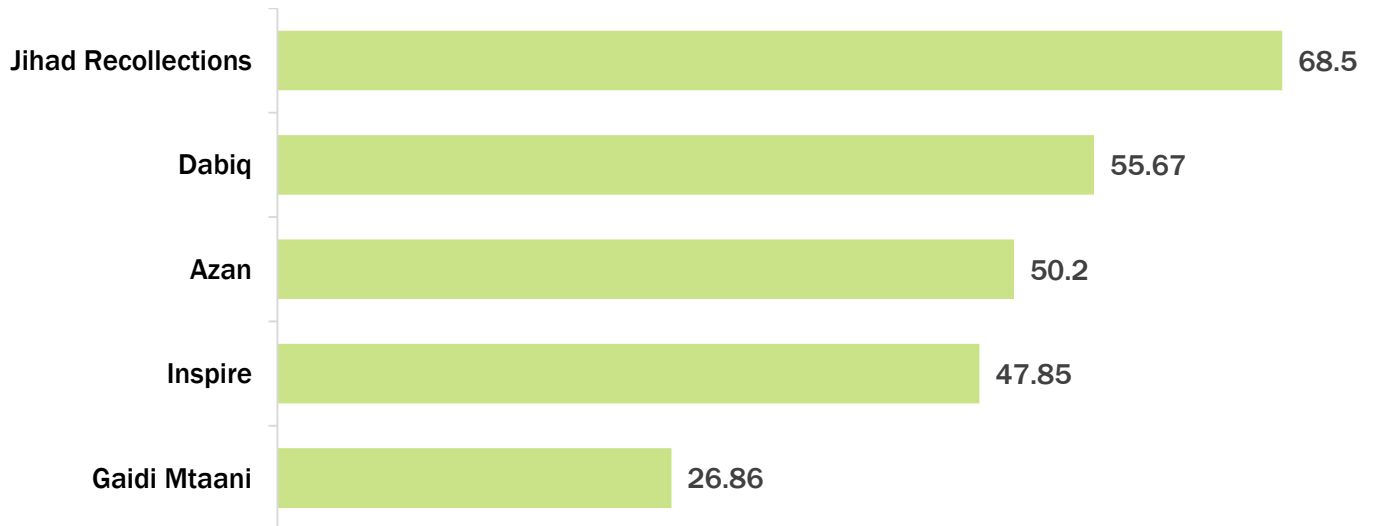
Magazine	Pages
Jihad Recollections	68.5
Dabiq	55.67
Azan	50.2
Inspire	47.85
Gaidi Mtaani	26.86

This chart shows the average length of each of the five magazines, by number of words.

Magazine	Words
Azan	36,217
Jihad Recollections	28,449
Inspire	23,372
Dabiq	20,415
Gaidi Mtaani	11,273
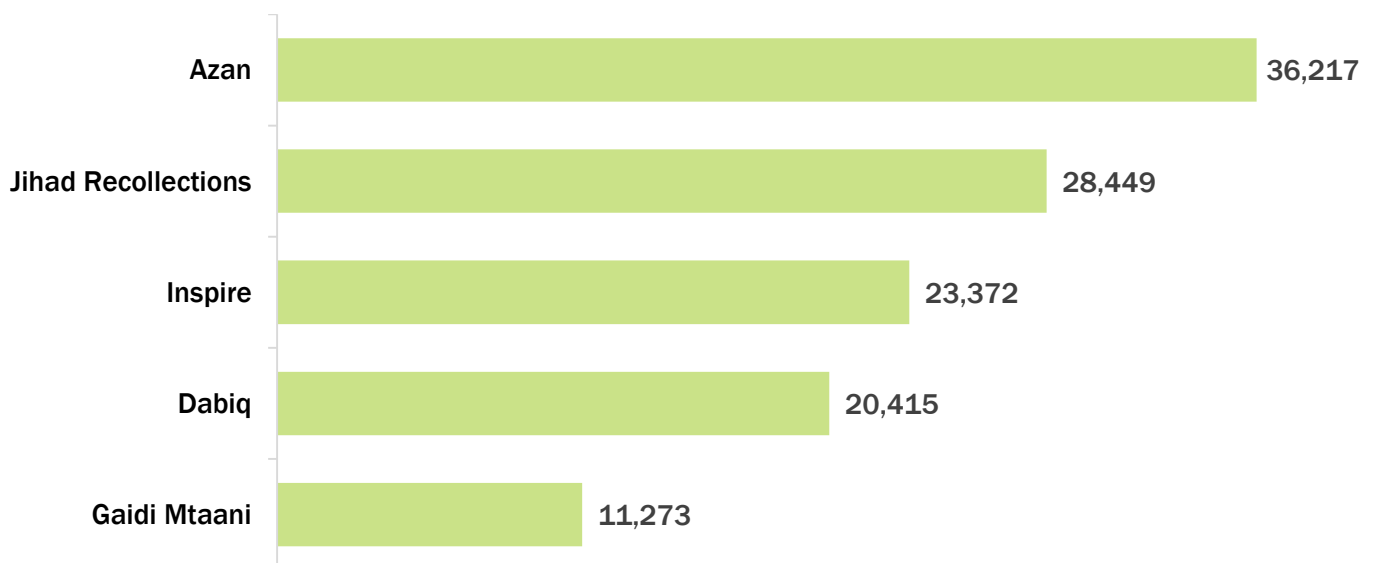
Average number of words per page

Building on the data presented on the previous page, this chart shows the average number of words per page for each of the five magazines.

Magazine	Words
Azan	721
Inspire	488
Gaidi Mtaani	420
Jihad Recollections	415
Dabiq	367

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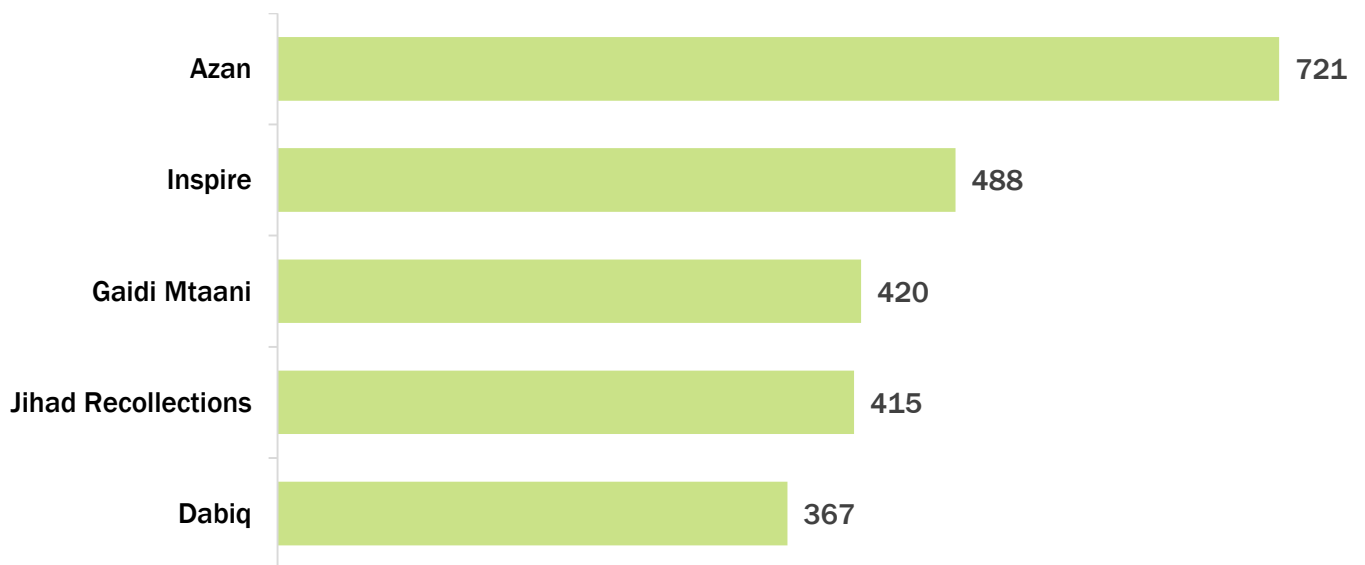
Average number of images by issue and by page

This chart shows the average number of images per issue for each of the five magazines.

Magazine	Value
Inspire	132
Jihad Recollections	128
Dabiq	84
Azan	84
Gaidi Mtaani	55
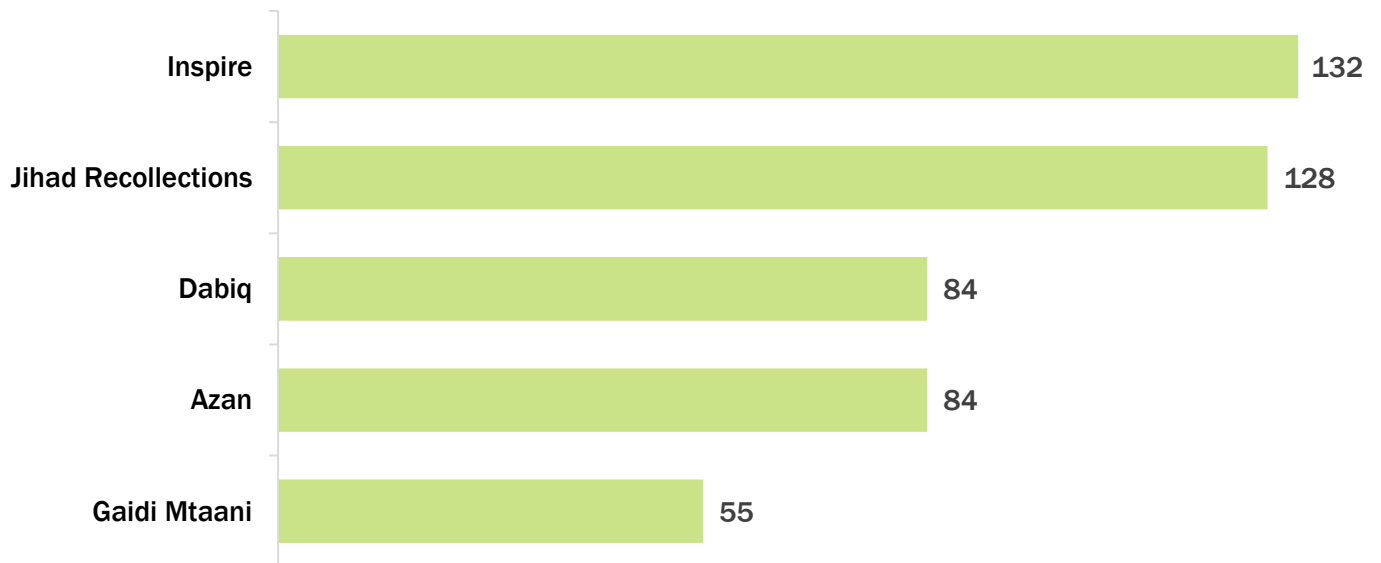
This chart shows the average number of images per page for each of the five magazines.

Magazine	Value
Inspire	2.76
Gaidi Mtaani	2.05
Jihad Recollections	1.86
Azan	1.67
Dabiq	1.52
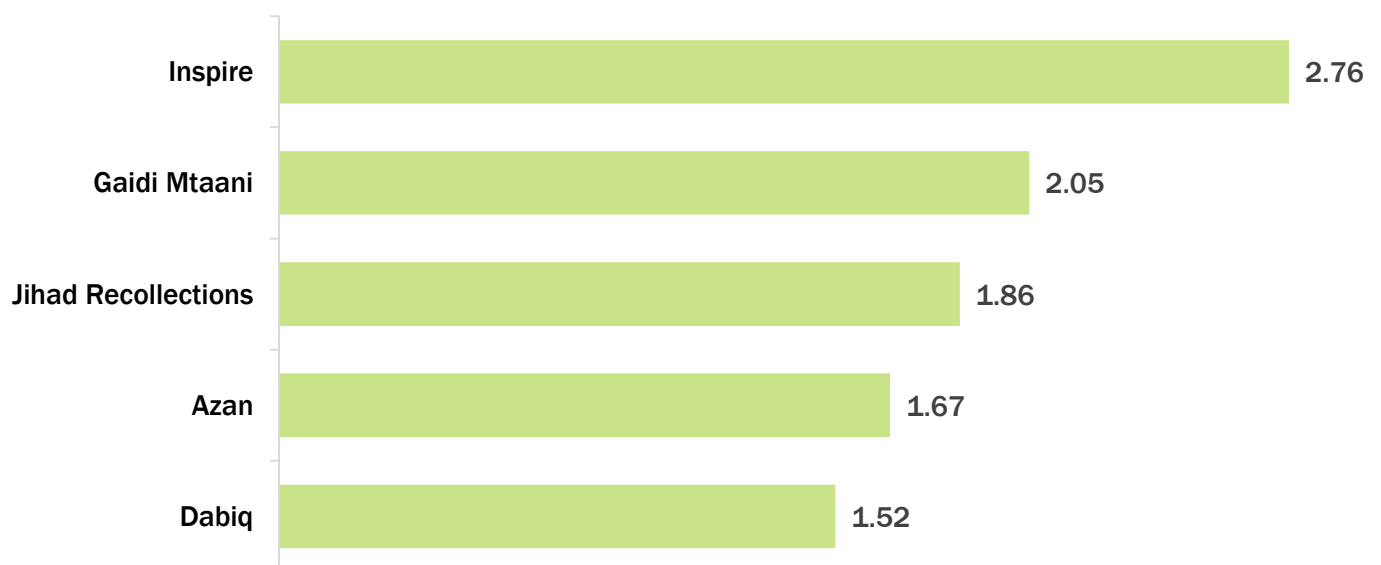
Front cover data

The following chart provides a breakdown of the main headings from the front page of each of the 38 issues.

Heading	Count
Threatening:	9
Religious:	8
Report/profile of event/person:	8
Unity/community:	6
Anti-enemy rhetoric:	6
Training:	0
N/A:*	1
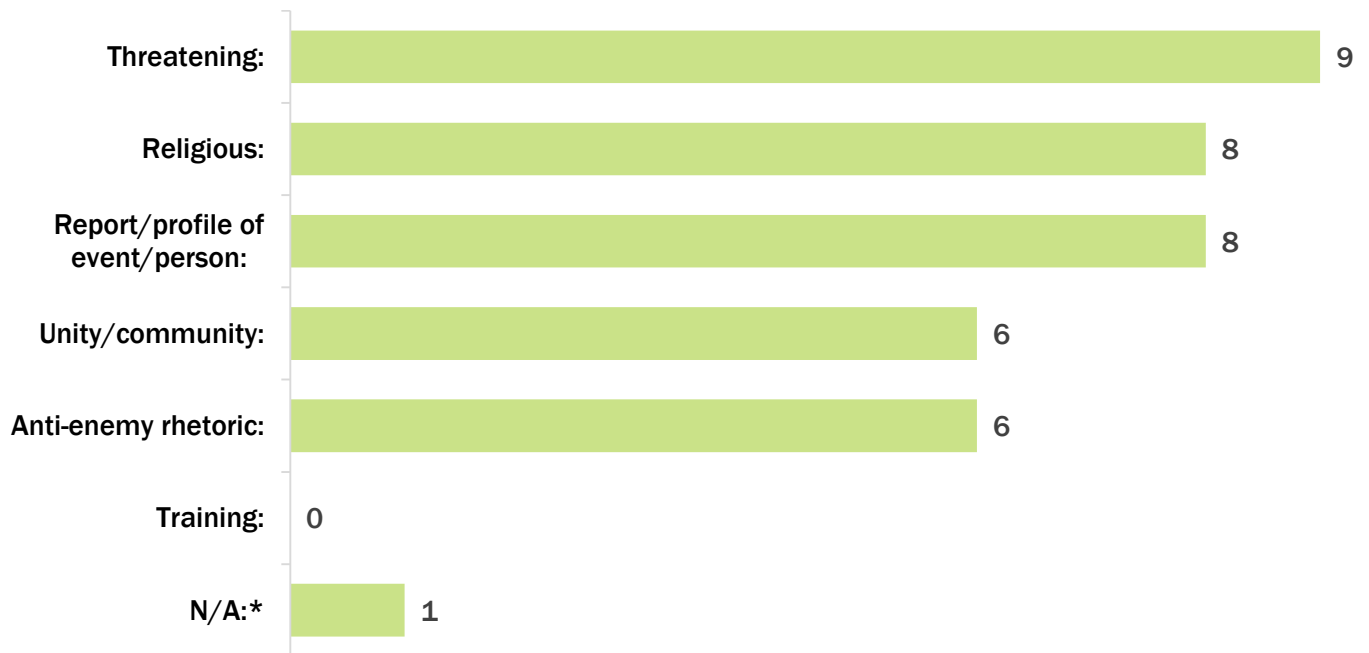
* One heading was not coded on the basis that it was not written in the English language.

The following chart provides a breakdown of the other headings from the 38 front pages.

Heading	Count
Report/profile of event/person:	25
Religious:	16
Anti-enemy rhetoric:	15
Training:	11
Unity/community:	10
Threatening:	6
N/A:**	7
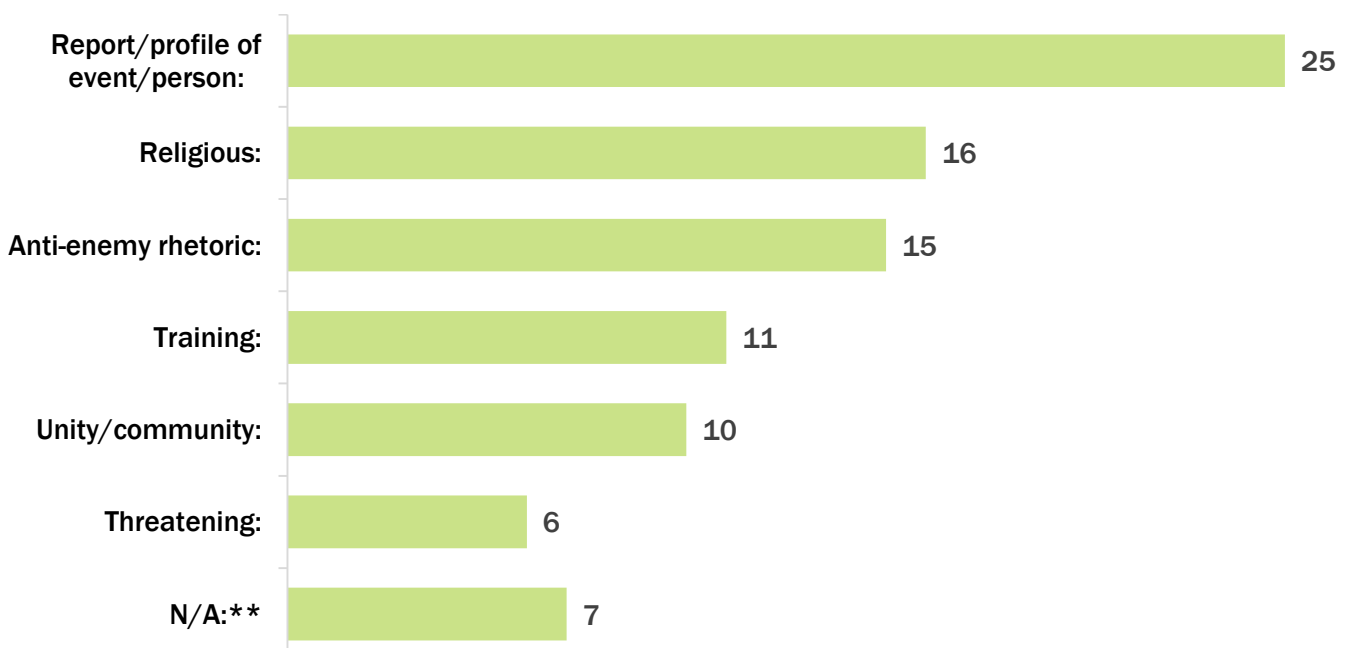
** Five headings were not coded on the basis that they were not written in the English language. The other two headings were too brief to be coded.

This chart shows the average number of headings on the front pages of each of the five magazines.

Magazine	Average
Jihad Recollections	4.5
Inspire	4.08
Azan	3.8
Gaidi Mtaani	2.57
Dabiq	2.22
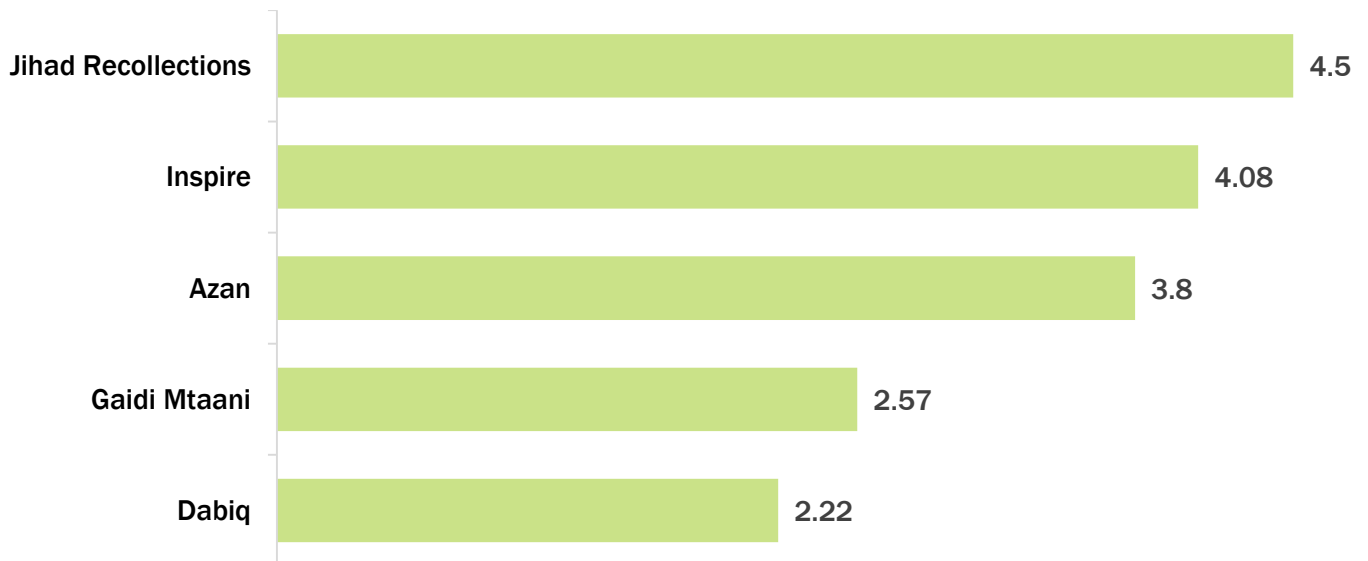
Types of textual item

Across all 38 issues the five magazines contained a total of 496 (English language) text-based items. The following table provides a breakdown, by type of item.

General Article	346
Step by step instruction	36
Editorial	35
Poem	25
Statement	24
Interview	17
Eulogy	13
Total	496

Dispersal of authorship

Number of items	
by a named author	334 (67%)
by an anonymous author	162 (33%)

The following chart show the number of items that were authored by each of the named authors, across all five magazines.

- 1 piece: 136
- 2 pieces: 20
- 3 pieces: 7
- 4 pieces: 5
- 5 pieces: 6
- 6 or more pieces: 8
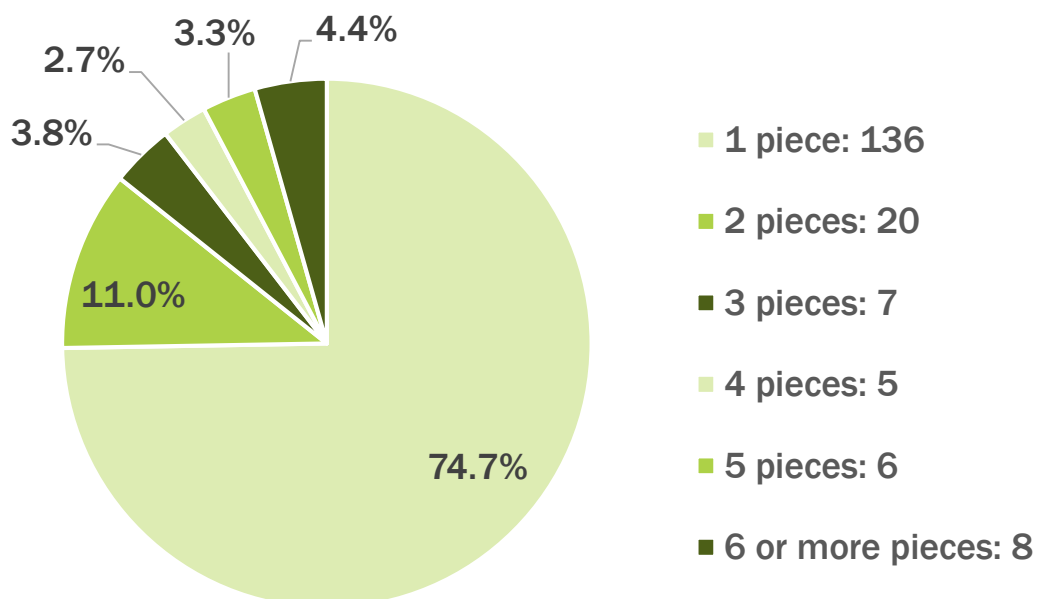
Most frequent authors

Name of author	Number of items authored
Sheykh Anwar al Awlaki	21
Yahya Ibrahim	16
Abu Mus'ab Al Suri	10
Shaykh Usama bin Laden	10
AQ Chef	9
Muhammad Qasim	8
Samir Khan	7
Shaykh abu yahya al-libi	6
Abu Abdullah as-Sayf	5
Ikrimah Anwar	5
Jaffer Hussein	5
John Cantlie	5
Maulana Asim Umar	5
Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri	5
Abu Rissas	4
Abu Saleh	4
Shaykh ibrahim al-Banna	4
Umm Ameenah	4
Abu Abdillah Almoravid	3
Abu Nuh	3
Abu Salamah Al-Muhajir	3
Adam yahiye Gadahn	3
Muhannad Jannah Seeker	3
Sheikh Ibrahim Ar-Rubaysh	3

Keywords by year (vs ordinary English corpus)

This table investigates the question 'Has the language of the magazines changed over the period examined in relation to general English language use?' It calculates the keywords* used across all the magazines each year vis-à-vis general English language use. The table shows the magazines' top five keywords by year when compared with the written section of the British National Corpus** (BNC).

		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015***
Keyness Rank	1	allah	allah	allah	allah	allah	allah	allah
	2	jihad	jihad	jihad	muslims	jihad	islamic	islamic
	3	muslims	allāh	qaeda	shaykh	mujahideen	allāh	abū
	4	mujahideen	muslims	mujahideen	mujahideen	muslims	muslims	alayhi
	5	muslim	muslim	muslims	somalia	muslim	muslim	sallallāhu

Keywords by year (vs other years as corpus)

Building on the data above, this table explores the question 'has the language of the magazines changed internally, that is, when comparing the keywords in one year with the keywords of the other years?'

		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015***
Keyness Rank	1	health	allāh	qaeda	kenyan	ra	allāh	abū
	2	flu	we	mujahidin	kenya	kuffar	indāh	factions
	3	united	file	al	somalia	taliban	tandhīm	sallahāhu
	4	saudi	islām	figure	trees	allah	state	sallam
	5	states	click	yemen	fires	khurasan	sheikh	khilāfah

* The 'keyness' of a word suggests its significance within a given corpus compared to a related reference corpus (see Scott, M. & Tribble, C. (2006) Textual Patterns: Key words and Corpus Analysis in Language Education, Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company).

** The BNC is a 100 million word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English from the late 20th century (http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/)

*** To the end of June 2015

Keywords by magazine (vs ordinary English corpus)

This table considers the question, 'Do the magazines use a distinctive vocabulary?' It compares the keywords in each of the magazines with general English language use. Each table shows the top-five keywords used by each magazine when compared with the BNC corpus (written) across the 7-year period examined.

Keyness Rank	Azan	Dabiq	Gaidi Mtaani	Inspire	Jihad recollections
1	allah	allah	allah	allah	allah
2	muslims	islamic	mujahideen	muslims	muslims
3	jihad	abū	somalia	allāh	mujahideen
4	islam	alayhi	kenyan	jihad	muslim
5	muslim	sallam	kenya	muslims	abu

Keywords by magazine (vs other magazines as corpus)

This table examines the question, 'Does each magazine exhibit idiosyncratic vocabulary features?' It compares the keywords of each magazine with those of the other magazines. The table shows the top-five keywords used by each magazine over the 7 year period vis-à-vis the other magazines.

Keyness Rank	Azan	Dabiq	Gaidi Mtaani	Inspire	Jihad recollections
1	ra	state	kenya	allāh	health
2	khurasan	sallam	kenyan	al-malahem	flu
3	shariah	sallallēhu	somalia	qaeda	united
4	taliban	abū	westgate	al	layth
5	dajjal	alayhi	amerika	we	saudi

Types of image

This chart presents a breakdown of the 3794 images, by type of image.

Type	Count
Photo (staged)	1,976
Photo (natural)	865
Digitally created image	488
Image of another context	374
Drawing/painting	53
Map:	31
Other	7
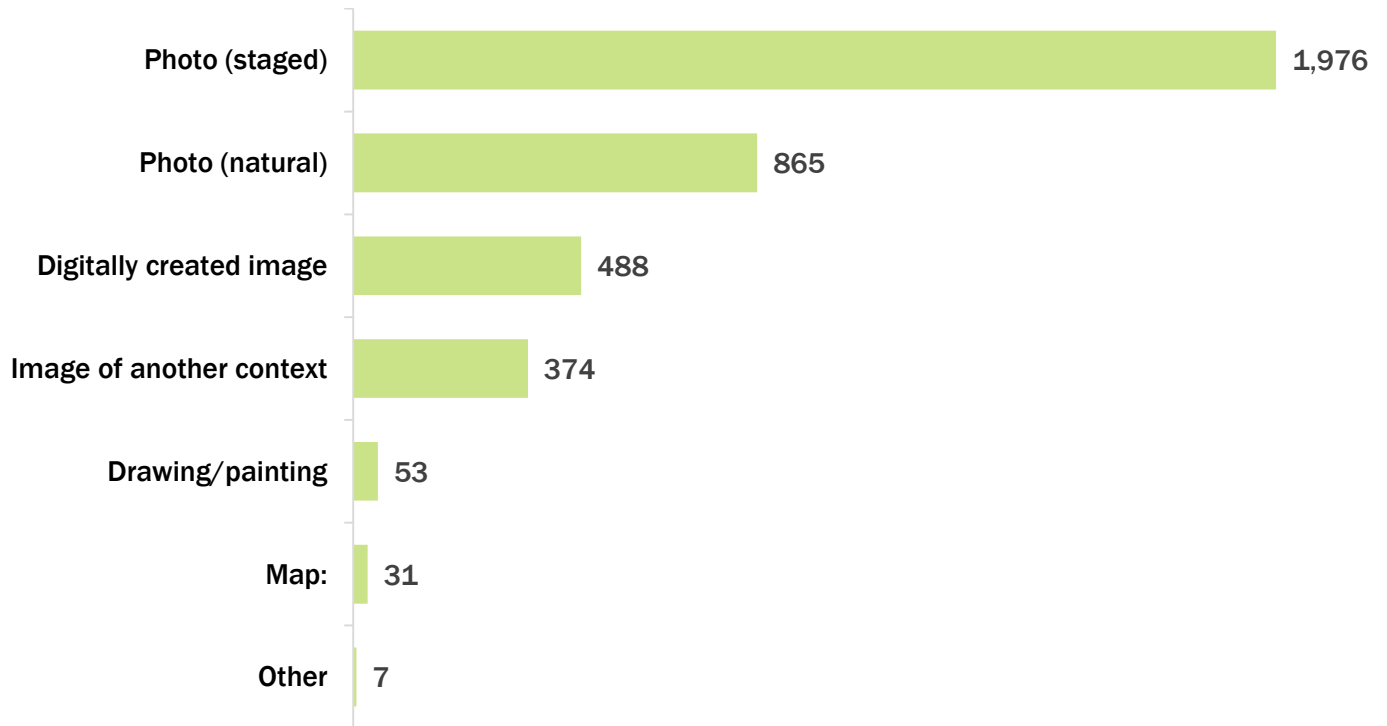
Content analysis of images

This chart presents a content analysis of the 3794 images, broken down into 18 categories (plus one miscellaneous category).

Category	Count
Jihadis	1,185
The "enemy"	492
Step-by-step instructions	362
Landscapes	221
Civilians	170
Corpses	141
Vehicles	137
Buildings/landmarks	130
Flags	119
Adverts/media	107
Weaponry	100
Religious	96
Symbolic images	71
Prisoners	56
Members of the military	42
Bystanders of attacks	27
Nature	25
Prisons	19
Miscellaneous	294
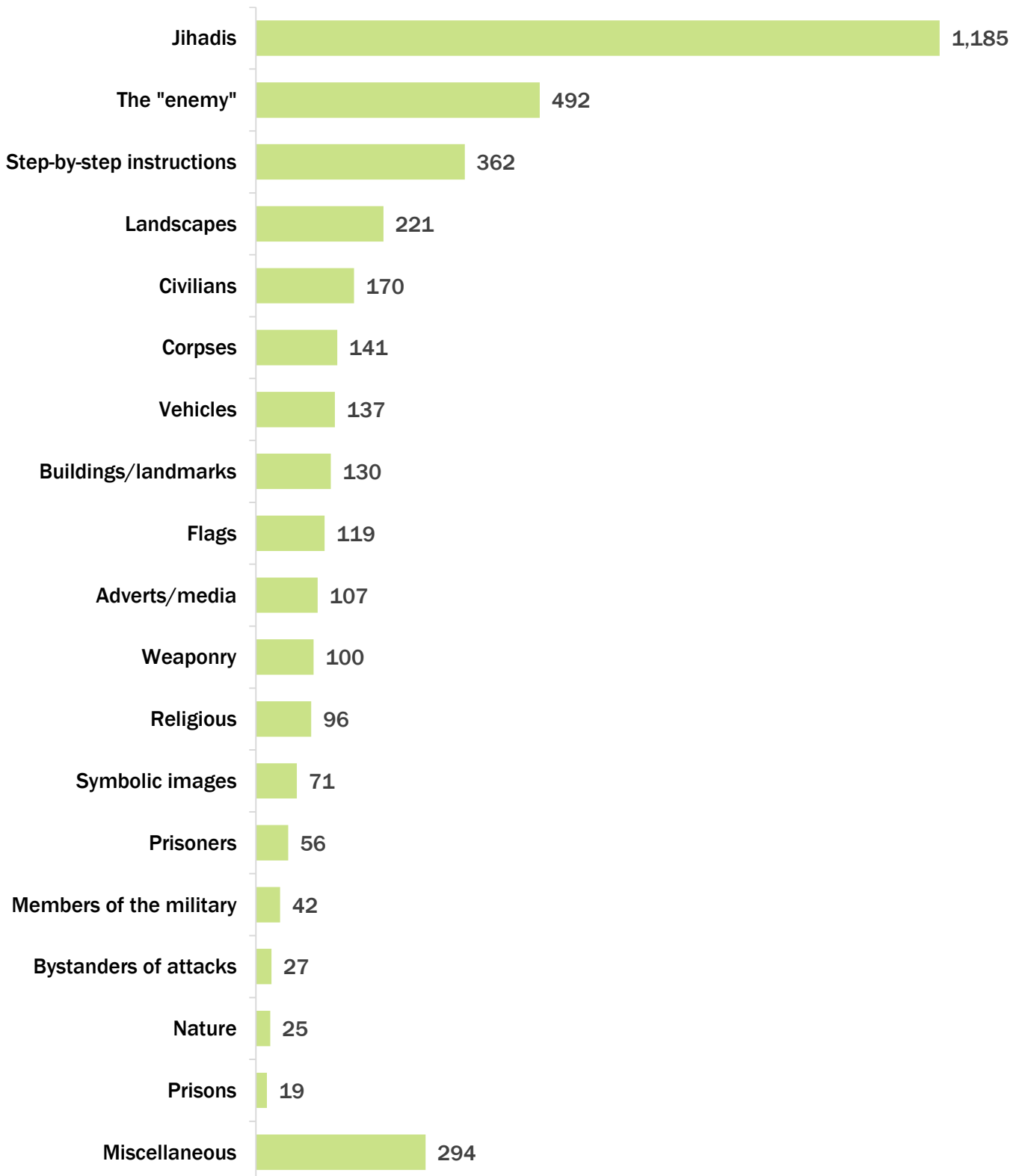
Images of jihadists

This table presents a breakdown of the 1185 images of jihadis, by whether the image was of a lone jihadist, a group of jihadists or a jihadist leader.

|	Lone jihadist	Group of jihadists	Jihadist leader
Inspire	305	114	17
Dabiq	102	150	38
Jihad Recollections	153	47	20
Azan	66	33	33
Gaidi Mtaani	68	32	7
Total	694	376	115

Images of the "enemy"

This table presents a breakdown of the 492 images of the "enemy", by whether the image was of a politician, an apostate, military/police, or some other figure.

|	Politicians	Apostates	Military/Police	Miscellaneous
Inspire	57	4	6	123
Dabiq	52	26	25	13
Gaidi Mtaani	19	0	48	12
Azan	30	0	22	11
Jihad Recollections	33	0	1	10
Total	191	30	102	169

Advertisements data

Across all five magazines there were a total of 289 advertisements. The following chart presents a breakdown of what these were advertising.

Category	Value
Support:*	120
Affiliates:	110
Video:	36
Audio:	14
Book:	9
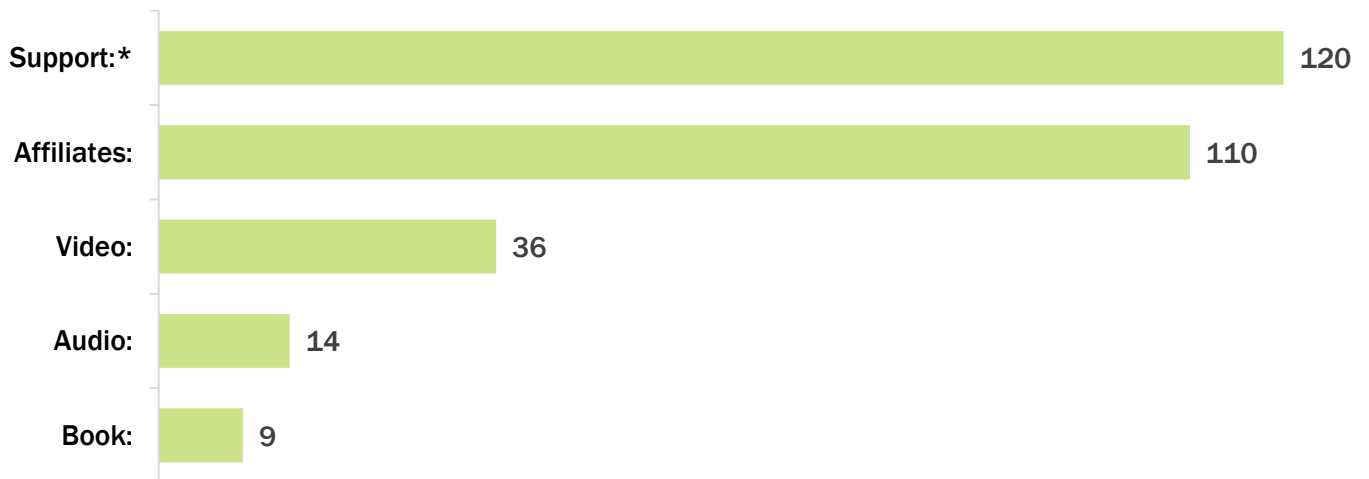
* Support was determined as expressing messages of support for a cause or group, or alternately, seeking some form of support from readers.

Some of the advertisements contained details of how to contact the advertiser. The following chart presents a breakdown of the means of contact that was specified.

Category	Value
Email:	20
Website:	19
Social media:	9
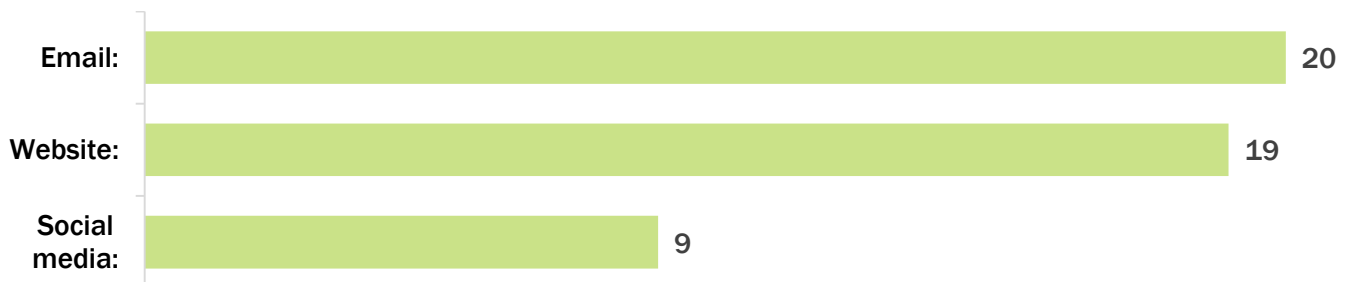
Data on provision of contact details

Of the 38 issues studied, a total of 20 (53%) provided readers with the publisher's contact details. The following table provides an overview of the means of contact specified, broken down by magazine.

	Number of issues providing email contact details	Number of issues providing social media contact details	Number of issues providing PGP* key	Number of issues with no contact details provided
Azan	5	0	5	0
Dabiq	1	0	1	8
Gaidi Mtaani	4	2	0	3
Inspire	10	0	10	3
Jihad Recollections	0	0	0	4
Total	20	2	16	18

* PGP (Pretty Good Privacy) is a complex system involving encryption and cryptography which allows users to exchange information in a secure and confidential way.

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Professor Thomas Chen is an expert in computer and network security. His previous research projects have explored Internet security, intrusion detection, attack modelling, malicious software and cybercrime, with support from various US agencies and companies. He is co-editor of *Broadband Mobile Multimedia: Techniques and Applications* (2008), *Mathematical Foundations for Signal Processing, Communications, and Networking* (2011), *Cyberterrorism: Understanding, Assessment and Response* (2014) and *Terrorism Online: Politics, Law and Technology* (2015), co-author of *ATM Switching Systems* (1995), and has published papers in a number of IEEE journals including *IEEE Computer*, *IEEE Security and Privacy*, *IEEE Internet Computing*, and *IEEE Transactions on Smart Grid*.

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Dr Lee Jarvis is Reader in International Security at the University of East Anglia (UK). His books include *Times of Terror: Discourse, Temporality and the War on Terror* (Palgrave, 2009); *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction* (Palgrave, 2011, with Richard Jackson, Jeroen Gunning and Marie Breen Smyth); *Cyberterrorism: Understanding, Assessment and Response* (Springer, 2014, co-edited with Tom Chen and Stuart Macdonald); and, *Counter-Radicalisation: Critical Perspectives* (Routledge, 2014, co-edited with Christopher Baker-Beall and Charlotte Heath-Kelly). His research on the politics of terrorism, counter-terrorism and security has been published in journals including *Security Dialogue*, *Political Studies*, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, *International Relations*, *Terrorism and Political Violence* and *Critical Studies on Terrorism*.

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Dr Stuart Macdonald is Associate Professor in Law at Swansea University (UK). He has written a number of articles on counterterrorism legislation and policy which have been published in leading international journals, including *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *Sydney Law Review*, *Criminal Law & Philosophy* and *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy*. He is co-editor (with Lee Jarvis and Tom Chen) of *Cyberterrorism: Understanding, Assessment and Response* (Springer, 2014) and *Terrorism Online: Politics, Law and Technology* (Routledge 2015). He has held visiting scholarships at Columbia University Law School, New York, and the Institute of Criminology at the University of Sydney. His project on security and liberty was funded by the British Academy.