



ReSeT Analysis Paper

**UN Sanctions and Islamic Terrorism:
An Association with Fatal Repercussions**

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is the aftermath that the association between terrorism and Islam has created within the UN's listing of designated terrorist organizations. First, we compare the religious background of the 26 terrorist organizations sanctioned under UNSCR's 1267 to 62 similarly 'sanctionable' terrorist organizations that were not sanctioned. Subsequently, for those organizations that were sanctioned we compare their death counts before and after being sanctioned, allowing us to draw some conclusions about the effects of UN sanctions on their targets.

In order to measure deadliness, we use data from the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) database. In order to establish whether a terrorist organization can be defined as 'sanctionable', we rely on the Sanctionable Offences Database. To establish the 'religious background' of each organization we rely on our own research.

All in all, the organisations that have been sanctioned under UNSCRs 1267 and 2253 in contrast to sanctionable organisations that have not been listed since 2001, we have exposed that the UN is not anti-Islam as such but rather against a creation of a new Islamic Caliphate by organisations that commit acts of terror as it poses a threat to the current international balance of power. In addition, it would appear that the UNSCR 1267 is unsuccessful in deterring further acts of terror after organisations have been listed, with a majority of organisations in fact having an increase in their overall deadliness over time.



UN SANCTIONS AND ISLAMIC TERRORISM: AN ASSOCIATION WITH FATAL REPERCUSSIONS

With the Black Swan event of 9/11¹, the definition of terrorism was met with a renewed association of Islam.² The world was called upon by the presidency of George W Bush to make a decision: “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists”³. In the aftermath of the attack, this invocation created a mass hysteria among the general population that has recently peaked once again with the emergence of ISIS and their attacks on Western countries. So what does this mean for the definition of terrorism? Firstly, the declaration that the US would undertake a “War on Terror” catapulted terrorism to the top of the international security agenda. As the world’s predominant power, the US led international affairs as it saw fit to its interests. Terrorism was seen as an immediate threat to the US because it displayed a weakness in its military capabilities. Thereafter, a campaign began to put an end to all forms of terrorism around the world.

The War on Terror made the task of defining terrorism of upmost importance so as to create clear rules in how it would be dealt with and most importantly, who it would encompass. For instance, in the 1960s the term ‘rebel’ and ‘guerrilla’ were employed on average ten times more often than the word ‘terrorist’ but since the 9/11 Islamic driven attack the use of the word ‘terrorist’ has seen a dramatic increase.⁴ This can be seen with it being used three times more often than the word ‘guerrilla’ and almost two times more often than the word ‘rebel’. Therefore, during the 21st century, the term ‘terrorism’ has been used to delegitimise organisations.⁵ It has blurred the line between political attacks against repressive governments

¹ The term Black Swan event comes from Nassim Nicholas Taleb, who uses the term to refer to unpredictable outlier events in history.

² Islam and terrorism first became most famously associated with the Nizari Ismailis at the end of the 11th century.

³ Bush: 'You Are Either With Us, Or With the Terrorists' - 2001-09-21, Voice of America

⁴ Based upon Google Ngram, a database that sifts through all books available on Google Books, the word “terrorist” was used in approximately 0.0001% of all English books available on the database. In 2004, this number had thirteen-folded to 0.0013%. On the other hand, the use of the words ‘guerrilla’ and ‘rebel’ have stayed relatively stable with around 0.0004% and 0.0008% respectively.

⁵ Hoffman, 1998



(which have historically been associated with the words ‘rebel’ and ‘guerrilla’) in contrast to ruthless attacks against unknowing civilians that have been associated with ‘terrorism’.

For what may seem unusual, the UN has yet to present a full definition of terrorism on which it bases its actions. Instead having only produced an interim draft definition in 2001 that reads “Resulting or likely to result in major economic loss, when the purpose of the conduct, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act.”⁶ Regrettably, this definition is insufficient as it primarily concentrates on economic loss and the intimidation resulting in terrorist acts. As such this paper will be based on the definition by LaFree, Dugan, and Mille, on which is established the Start Database⁷ : “The threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation”⁸. This definition illustrates the important aspect of the primary goal of the act of terrorism, be it political, social, economic, or religious. All the while acknowledging the objective of communication to a disproportionate amount of people compared to the act itself; as well as the illegality of it all. The latter definition is one that rings true in our current state of affairs but this would not have been the case in the aftermath of World War II (WWII), when many groups were labelled rebels or freedom fighters. Since the end of WWII, acts of terrorism have greatly evolved, especially in what concerns the said objectives and targets of the attacks. At the time, with a political vacuum engulfing a large part of the world as the European powers crumbled, terrorism appeared as a movement of nationalism for the former colonies that were fighting to break their chains and obtain both independence and self governance. Many groups that emerged from the struggle of sovereignty are as relevant today as they were then.

The debate around the definition of terrorism leads us to our current study, which is the prosecution of acts of terrorism through UNSCR 1267. At its core, the UN affirms the right for all to fight oppressive leadership. Being branded as a terrorist immediately de-legitimises the cause being fought for and thus eliminates such a right. Hence, this explains why an organisation committing acts of terror will never agree to being labelled as terrorists. As previously noted, the labelling of terrorists is highly politicised and is imbedded in the creation

⁶ UN Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism, 2001

⁷ START Global Terrorism Database – Codebook 2016

⁸ LaFree, Dugan & Miller, 2015, Page 27



of the UNSCR 1267. This resolution, put in place on the 6th of October 2001, serves its purpose as a sanction regime directly targeting the activities of Al Qaeda and its affiliates.⁹

During the Cold War, Afghan Mujahadeen were firmly backed by the US in their fight against the USSR. This alliance disintegrated with the fall of the USSR as a proxy war against a defeated opponent was no longer in Western interests. With the retreat of Western protection, a power void rapidly led to utter chaos and a bloody civil war that left the Taliban in power. At first glance the implementation of the sanctions condemned the Taliban's violations of human rights, opium production, and most importantly the harbouring of terrorists such as Bin Laden. Nevertheless, under scrutiny the UNSCR 1267 appears to be most prominently aimed at extraditing Bin Laden from Afghanistan rather than targeting the Taliban's regime as demonstrated by the requirements to lift sanctions.¹⁰ This was clearly a US led proposition with US representative Nancy Soderberg sending a message to Osama Bin Laden and after the US embassy bombings of the previous year: "You can run, you can hide, but you will be brought to justice."¹¹

Hence, it starts to become apparent that the the UNSC effectively parallels the institutional framework set up by the US' War on Terror to combat terrorism in all corners of the world. Particularly, the UN and the US appear to remain in perfect sync when prosecuting and sanctioning organisations that have committed acts of terror. Therefore, since Islamic terrorism under Bin Laden's network of Al Qaeda became a threat to the US' precedently untouchable power, it also catapulted its way to the top of the international security agenda. From this finding we will begin to ask ourselves whether there exists a bias against Islam inside the institutional framework of the UNSC sanctioning regime, in simpler terms: are UN sanctions in response to terrorism anti-Islamic? We will then further that research by delving into the aftermath of the latter sanctions, more specifically investigating how the listing of an organisation affects the overall number of individuals killed during terrorist attacks.

⁹ It is important to note that in 2015 a new resolution was adopted unanimously by the UNSC with UNSCR 2253, created exclusively to deal with the emergence of ISIL and thus splitting up 1267. For the sake of this argument we will keep on referring to the 1267 regime, although in reality there are two separate committees.

¹⁰ Kruiper, 2017

¹¹ UNSC 4051st Meeting, 15 October 1999



THE 1267 LIST AND ISLAM

If one selects the organisations that have committed the deadliest attacks since 2001, 88 organisations come forth as potentially “sanctionable”. In other words, these organisations deserve as much a place in the category of the UNSCR 1267 as the 26 organisations already listed. The 88 organisations were singled out as they fit in to the above definition of terrorism by LaFree, Dugan, and Miller as well as having committed an attack considered “deadliest”. At this point the reader will notice the use of quotation marks over both the word “sanctionable” and “deadliest”. The main reason behind this is because there still remains an important aspect of subjectivity to these terms and thus should not be used lightly or unexplained. For instance, how can we consider one attack to be deadlier than another if individual’s lives are lost? Based upon the research of the Sanctionable Offenses Database, an organization is considered to be ‘sanctionable’ if it has killed more than 100 people since 2001.¹² Furthermore, the total of individuals killed during a terrorist attack is a variable that hereafter will be referred to as the Number Killed (Nkill).

Out of the 26 organisations today sanctioned under UNSCR 1267, 100% of them can be characterised as an Islamic organisation. So how are organisations linked to Al Qaeda? In the simplest of terms, a fundamental way in which organisations that commit acts of terror are associated with Al Qaeda is on the basis of Islam as a religion. Inevitably this is a grey area as religion is underlying a social construct and thus a product of interpretation. In the case of Islam, this is even more apparent as different schools of thought have arisen from the interpretation of the Qur’an, the principle source of Islamic Law, followed by the Hadith and the Sunna, which is used to help to explain the Qur’an. Although Islam is not a religion that evolves over time, its application is. Hence, does the interpretation of Islam play a part in the listing of organisations under UNSCR 1267? As Al Qaeda is the basis of the latter sanction, it is only logical that we look at the school of thought that the organisation adheres to. Al Qaeda belongs to the school of Salafism but more specifically Salafi-Jihadism. It is important to make this distinction due to the fact that Salafism is not inherently violent, instead a Salafist is a

¹² It must be taken in to account that this is an arbitrary threshold. The threshold for defining ‘armed conflict’ lies at 1000 deaths, while the least deadly terrorist organization that was nevertheless sanctioned under UNSCR 1267 (Egyptian Islamic Jihad) had an Nkill of only 23 at the time of listing.



Muslim who claims to be like the “al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ”¹³. Furthermore, Jihad, like Salafism is not innately violent.¹⁴ From the teachings of Prophet Mohammed and the Qu’ran, one can observe that Jihad means the external and internal effort to be a good Muslim as well as informing others about your faith. Thus when referring to Salafi-Jihadism we are implicitly referring to extreme Salafism and violent Jihad.

Even though the organisations sanctioned under the UNSCR 1267 do not all adhere to the Salafist interpretation of Islam, there still remains underlying similarities in their end goal. While looking at the 26 organisations sanctioned by the UNSCR 1267, fifteen firmly adhere to Salafi-Jihadism and thus makes up the dominating school of thought within this grouping of organisations.¹⁵ Out of the remaining organisations listed, four are characterised as Deobandi Sunnis (Harkatul Jihad-e-Islami, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and the Taliban.) The third most prominent school is Wahhabism, which is a religious reformation of Islam founded by Ibn Abd al-Wahhad with the goal of reviving the original principles of the Qur’an and the Sunna.¹⁶ The groups that heed to Wahhabism within the UNSCR 1267 are the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR), Jemaah Islamiya (JI), Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs.¹⁷

All in all, the majority of organisations belong to the three schools of Salafism, Deobandism, and Wahhabism. The remaining adhere to Djazarism (Armed Islamic Group), Ahle-Hadith (Lashkar-e-Taiba), and Sunni Islamism (Ansar al-Sharia and Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement). Interestingly, an underlying theme seems to emerge within all of these organisations. The end goal is to bring the bygone era of the Prophet into the modern world. Instinctively, this professes that the organisations do not agree with the way the religion of Islam is directed today. Islam is more than just a religion that should remain within the private spirituality of an individual and was created to apply to all aspects of a Muslim’s life, including

¹³ “Al salaf al- ṣāliḥ” refers to the first three generations that followed Prophet Mohammed and who asserted that these generations were the “best of my community” (khayr ummatī)

¹⁴ Wagemakers, 2017

¹⁵ As previously noted, religion is not a theme that can be easily categorised and many of the schools of thought have influenced one another and thus overlap.

¹⁶ In some texts, Salafism and Wahhabism appear to be used as synonyms but should be employed distinctively.

¹⁷ It would appear that Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs in fact adopted Wahhabism and global Jihad as a way to obtain financing from Al Qaeda rather than on its beliefs but it is worth mentioning nonetheless.



its politics. As this appears to be less and less the case in contemporary Statehood, these organisations all aspire to create a Caliphate where political Islam would reign.

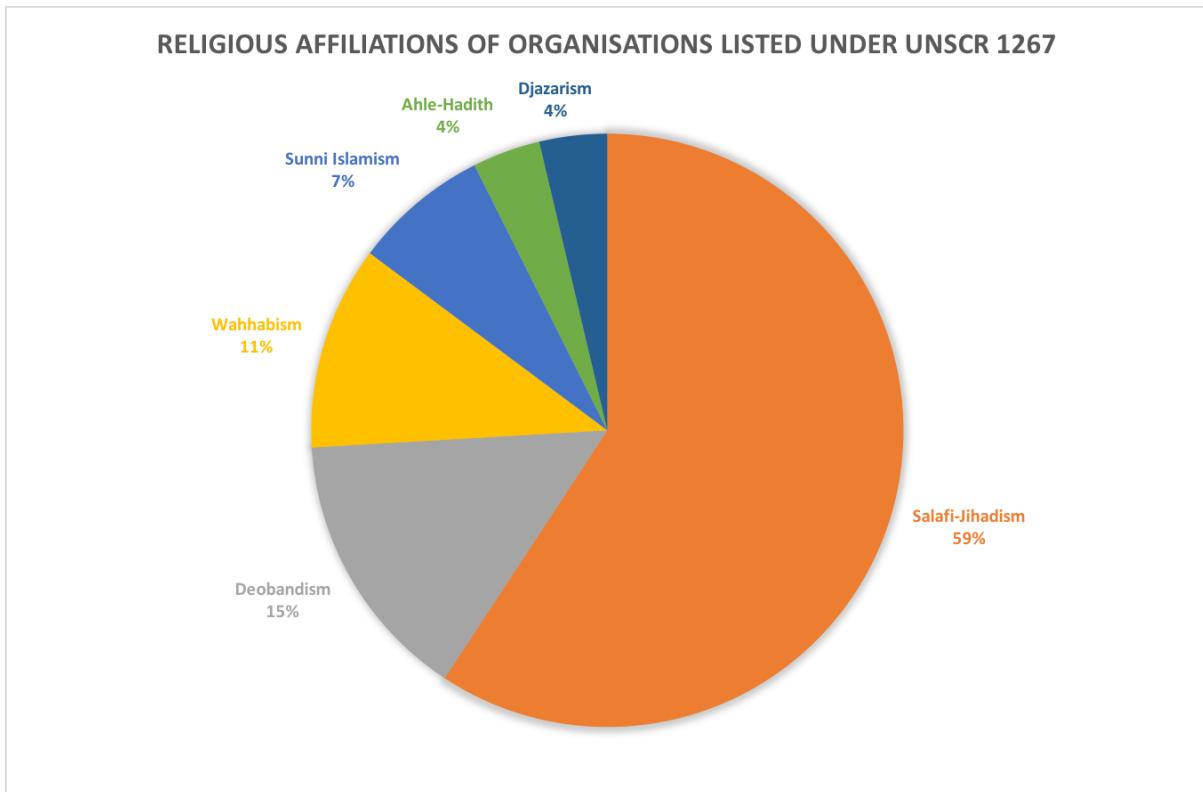


Figure 1: The majority of organisations sanctioned by UNSCR 1267 adhere to Salafi-Jihadism.

In comparison, although the majority of organisations that commit acts of terror from the SOD are Islamic organisations, their final goal is not to create a new Islamic Caliphate. One of the principle analysis of this paper is to look at why they have not been sanctioned in comparison to the organisations above. In terms of religion, out of SOD’s total organisations, a majority of them exhibit characteristics of an Islamic organisation. On the other hand, said organisations appear to have a different approach to Islam than those sanctioned. There appear to exist three broad lines that can characterise the Islamic organisations in the SOD. Firstly, organisations such as the Al Naqshabandi Army, the Hezbollah, and the Military Council of the Tribal Revolutionaries do not appear to promote the creation of a new exclusive Islamic Caliphate. The Al Naqshabandi Army advocate for the tolerance of all major religions, while the Military



Council of the Tribal Revolutionaries do not agree with a strict implementation of Islam as can be seen today with the Islamic State. In the controversial case of the Hezbollah that have been listed by all major international Arab institutions such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation; the organisation shifted their ideology in 2009 by proclaiming that an Islamic governance was not the only option for Lebanon. The other two broad outlines are that the remaining organisations are either nationalists or separatists. In the case of the nationalist organisations, this constitutes organisations such as but not limited to Ansar Al-Sunna, the Chechen Rebels, and the Mujahadeen Ansar. On the other hand, the Chechen Rebels appeared to have changed their ideology as of late to the promotion of global jihad but would appear to be a similar case of needing financing as the Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs mentioned above. Finally, the separatists include the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that are both fighting to separate from the Philippines to create a state for the oppressed Muslim minority of the nation. All in all, the decision to define the latter organisations by these three broad outlines lies in their relationship to the international arena. Unlike the organisations sanctioned by the UNSCR 1267, these organisations do not appear to be any kind of threat to the international balance of power that the UN is keen to uphold.

At this point, it is important to note that these three lines do not incorporate all organisations of the SOD database. This mainly due to the fact that the remaining organisations do not adhere to these outlines or because of lack of unspecified information. In terms of exceptions, this would include the Hamas whose controversial status deserves to remain distinct from the other organisations altogether. The remaining organisations such as the Allied Democratic Forces, among others, do not seem to have a coherent ideology to be able to place them in one box or another. This part on religion has been solely based on Stanford's Mapping Militant Organisations research and was chosen for its consistency, even though as demonstrated, some information is lacking about specific organisations. Hence the reader is encouraged (very much so), to look further into the subject matter while using various sources as a way of bettering on-going research.



The 1267 list and terror deaths

From an outside point of view, the amount of individuals that an organisation has killed during their practice of terrorism should play a fundamental role in deciding whether or not an organisation is listed by the UNSC sanction regime. Emphasis on the “should” as this is certainly not the case under UNSCR 1267. There is absolutely no correlation between how many people an organisation has killed, through acts of terror, and the UN sanctioning of the latter organisation. Counter-intuitively, we will demonstrate how the UN’s listing in fact overall increases the number of individuals killed (Nkill) by an organisation, thus not fulfilling the principle purpose of a UN listing, that being the deterrence of further acts of terror.¹⁸

Following the aftermath of 9/11, 8 organisations were rapidly sanctioned on the 6th of October 2001 by the new regime of UNSCR 1267. This included the Taliban, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Fighting, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, Armed Islamic Group, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Abu Sayyaf, and of course the organisation which created this snowball effect: Al Qaeda. All the latter organisations were sanctioned for either unquestionably being Al Qaeda or one of its affiliates, thus becoming branded as terrorist organisations by the international institution of the UN. At the time, Al Qaeda had a staggering Nkill of 3253, mostly as a consequence of 9/11. After Al Qaeda’s listing, the organisation did not see much of an increase in its Nkill, coming to a total of 353 additional Nkill by 2015. This should be the consequence of all listings but unfortunately is far from being the case. Out of the 8 listed organisations in 2001, half saw a significant increase in their Nkill value. Surprisingly, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb and the Eastern Turkish Islamic Movement had no known attacks under their name at the time that they were sanctioned. Thereafter, their Nkill increased to 786 and 113, respectively. The other two organisations were the Salafist Group for Preaching and Fighting and the Taliban. The Salafist Group for Preaching and Fighting committed acts of terror after their listing which resulted in an additional Nkill of 495 while the Taliban went from a Nkill of 50 to an unimaginable Nkill value of 19,315.

¹⁸ All of the following numbers concerning the Nkill of the stated organisations is based solely upon the research of the START Database, unless stated otherwise.



Furthermore, this negative consequence of increased Nkill within the organisations listed by UNSCR 1267 only got worse over time. While looking into the Nkill of the remaining organisations, a staggering 12 of them saw an overall increase in their Nkill value, a much higher majority than the original 8. Half of these 12 organisations saw their Nkill value increase by over a 1000 from the date they were sanctioned to 2015. This included Al Qaeda in Iraq that went from an Nkill value of 0 to 4357, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula realised an increase of 3154 individuals killed, Al Shabaab’s Nkill that saw an increase of 5198 as well as Boko Haram’s Nkill which grew by 10,689; while the Islamic State in Iraq and Islamic State of Iraq the Levant’s Nkill escalated from 0 to 1720 and 19,315 respectively. Overall, by adding together the total value of the increased Nkill values for the 6 aforementioned organisations we come to a staggering total of 44,433 individuals killed post the UNSCR 1267 listing.

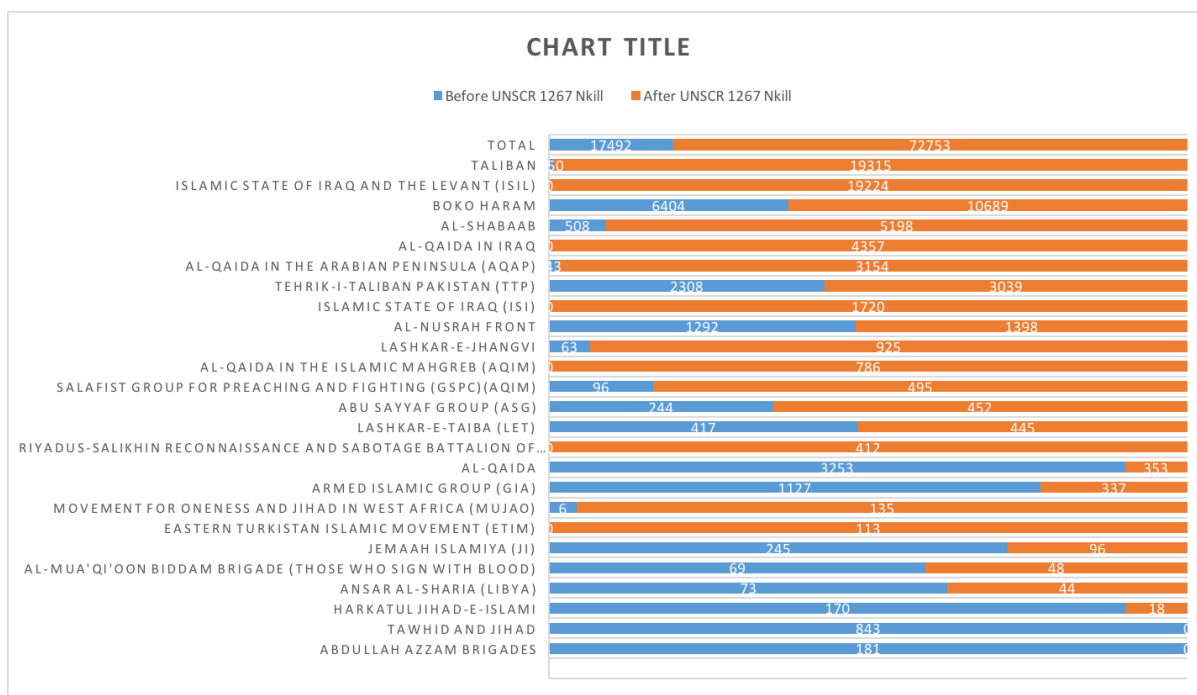


Figure 2: The majority of the organisations increased their Nkill total post UNSCR 1267.

In contrast, out of the organisations of the SOD, in other words the organisations that have not been sanctioned, there exists a large part that have committed more acts of terror, resulting in an equally high Nkill as the organisations under UNSCR 1267. Out of the 57 SOD



organisations that have committed acts of terror, 10 have a Nkill superior to 1000, reaching its peak with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam at an unbelievable 8,735. In total all of the organisations sanctioned under UNSCR 1267 amount to a Nkill total of approximately 53,000. In contrast, counting all organisations from the SOD amounts to a staggering Nkill total of approximately 80,000, meaning that one third of all Nkills related to organisations. In other words, around 27,000 lives are not accounted for under any UN sanction regime.

So why is it so easy to get listed for some organizations and so hard for others? Apparently, the moment an organization is even minimally related to Al-Qaida or ISIL, anyone who has an interest in placing them on the lists and officially hands in a proposal to the 1267 committee gets their way. The fact that some organisations had yet to commit any attacks or that some organizations had an Nkill that in the grand scheme of things would not have upset the balance of power doesn't seem to matter much. Meanwhile, other organisations that commit quantitatively graver acts of terror go unsanctioned because they can't be linked to Al-Qaida or ISIL.

The principal reason for the listing of relatively harmless organisations seems to be both symbolic and political. It is a way to show organisations that all links to Al Qaeda will not be tolerated by the significant powers of the world, most notably by the US. Whether this message is very effective is however doubtful. The numbers demonstrate that sanctioning insignificant groups only appear to have had a reverse effect. One can speculate that with the sanctioning of the above organisations, it may have in fact only brought the organisations closer together. By branding them as terrorists, the UNSCR could have in fact given life to a new wave of sympathy for the organisations, not only bringing into light the inefficiency of the sanction regime but also its counter productivity.

CONCLUSIONS

All in all, this research's primary goal was to investigate if the UNSC retained a coherent and comprehensive sanction regime of organisations that commit acts of terror. More specifically, to investigate the hypothesis that there is a bias against Islamic organisations within this sanctioning. Our findings suggest that there in fact does exist discrepancies and a bias against



Islam at the core of the UN. It would appear that the central reason why the organisations listed by UNSCR 1267 were grouped together was due to their similar religious ideologies. In fact, their religious status as an organisation appears to take precedent over their past activities or in other words how they attempted to attain their end goal of creating an Islamic Caliphate.

Furthermore, it would appear that after listing, organisations continue to commit acts of terror. Additionally, it has also been demonstrated that the sanctioning of organisations creates the reverse desired effect by not dissuading organisations that commit acts of terror, rather resulting in an increase in their overall Nkill. This brings into light the intensely negative side of grouping organisations together under one large sanction regime as it may bind them in ways that advances their causes.

From this, some may argue that the UN's part in global governance has become futile as it does not fully fulfil its purpose in deterring terrorism. On the contrary, this research is not about the UN's place in the future but rather illustrates how within the present framework there does not exist a specific enough UNSC sanction regime which would prevent the latter problems from occurring. This means that the UN should promote advanced investigations into why a country may propose the sanctioning of a specific organisation and what said country may gain from the sanctioning of the latter. In addition, if the UN is to retain the same framework, it must alter the way that it groups organisations together.

As we have seen above, listing terrorist organizations based primarily on religion and perceived violence among the listed groups does not work well. The bias towards sanctioning Islamic groups is not only counterproductive in terms of deterring future attacks, but also in the sense that it unfairly punishes Islamic terrorists harder than non-Islamic ones. If the UN wishes to retain its image of an advocate for human security worldwide, it must demonstrate so in its action against terrorism in a manner that is perceived as non-discriminative. If it were to live up to its own definition of terrorism, it should consider the act, not the actor.