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### The Art of Terror: Iconoclasm in Modern Radical Islamic Terrorism

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TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF...

THE ART OF TERROR:  
ICONOCLASM IN MODERN RADICAL  
ISLAMIC TERRORISM

*Christopher Hall*

*Mentor: Lee Epstein*

Contemporary terrorism has received a great deal of attention in the news media and academia. These analyses tend to focus on the political and economic motivations of terrorists which, while important, are missing a significant aspect of modern terrorism. Looking at major terrorist actions from 2000 to 2017 I find an observable pattern of iconoclasm in modern radical Islamic terrorism. I define iconoclasm as the purposeful destruction of objects of perceived value, symbolism, or cultural unity for political ends. I find this strategy of iconoclasm to arise from a combination of economic and political grievances among Arab populations as well as the allure of Western culture. Those looking to position themselves in opposition to the West realize that Western cultural or “soft” power is a powerful draw for mainstream Arabs, and thus seek to destroy objects that symbolize this power. In so doing, these radical Islamists are seeking to deny Arab populations alternative visions for the future of the Middle East, thereby strengthening their claims to legitimacy. These findings further our understanding of the motivations and strategies of modern radical Islamic terrorism, and in so doing shed light on the strategies required to effectively combat this phenomenon.