



DAESH INFORMATION CAMPAIGN AND ITS INFLUENCE

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

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DAESH INFORMATION CAMPAIGN
AND ITS INFLUENCE

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FOREWORD

‘Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.’¹ Today one cannot imagine a successful operation without clearly defined and efficient strategic communication. The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom COE) became functional in January 2014. The same year, seven member-states joined the Centre as sponsoring nations.² The Centre received NATO accreditation on 1 September 2014, thereby officially becoming a multinational collaborative organisation tasked with research and education concerning Strategic Communications.

The Polish Ministry of National Defence requested that the Centre conduct research into the information strategy of the terrorist organisation known as ‘Daesh’ in order to find practical solutions to the current challenges in the Middle East. The request was approved by the Steering Committee in 2014 and became one of the main projects in The StratCom CoE Program of Work for 2015, under title ‘The DAESH Information Campaign and its influence on NATO countries’ societies’.

The main concern for many countries around the globe is the recruitment and radicalisation of potential terrorists. However, StratCom COE research into Daesh communication strategy shows that the scope of the strategy is much greater than recruitment and radicalisation alone.

This report provides a short history of the development of the terrorist organisation and its various names, its present structure, at both the global and provincial levels, and a short description of its objectives. An analysis of the Daesh information strategy; its core message, narrative themes, lines of effort, and target audiences follow. The report further describes the communication tools and influence techniques Daesh uses regionally and globally.

¹ The Constitution of UNESCO, signed on 16 November 1945, came into force on 4 November 1946 after ratification by twenty countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, France, Greece, India, Lebanon, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

² Estonia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the United Kingdom.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The terrorist organization, Daesh, also known as the so-called 'Islamic State/IS/ISIS/ISIL', has launched an extremely sophisticated information campaign targeting a wide range of audiences around the world to gain support for its expansion in the Middle East. Daesh first strategic success was the public address of self-styled Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaiming the existence of a renewed Islamic Caliphate. The speech drew immediate and lasting attention.

The NATO StratCom COE was asked to conduct research into Daesh information strategy in order to gain a better understanding of how the Daesh information campaign is managed, and to propose practical solutions concerning the situation in the Middle East.

The methodology for analysing Daesh information strategy included examining the issue from a number of aspects related to strategic communications such as social psychology, communication, and social media analysis. The work was done in collaboration with experts and advisors from NATO member states in order to achieve the best result.

StratCom COE research into Daesh information strategy shows that the spectrum of the problem is much greater than only recruitment and radicalization alone.

Roots

- Fifteen years of insurgency, including the experience of the former soldiers of Saddam Hussein's regime and foreign fighters from all over the world, have given the group a deep understanding of how to effectively shape the information environment.
- The proclamation of 'the Caliphate' and the release of a propaganda publication entitled This is the Promise of Allah by the Alhayat Media Centre provide information about the future plans of the organisation and give an indication of goals of the Daesh information strategy.
- One year after Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's speech, many organizations have pledged allegiance or offered their support to Daesh. This support is instrumental, not only for conducting terrorist attacks, but also for amplifying the Daesh Information Strategy globally.

Structure

- Daesh is divided into specialised councils and departments at both the global and regional levels. A specific group within the structure is responsible for shaping the information environment by disseminating different kinds of messages, however, each department plays an important role and contributes to the effectiveness of their information strategy.

Information Strategy

- The name of the organization represents the core message of the group. The group wants to be described by westerners as ‘the Islamic State’, and by Middle Eastern audiences as ‘ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah’, ‘ad-Dawlah al-Caliphate’ or ‘the Caliphate’.
- Daesh narratives can be divided into three main themes: Political, Religious, and Social.
- The main efforts of the information strategy can be divided into four types of messages or Lines of Effort (LOE)—to Unite, Frighten, Support, and Inform.
- The most effective LOE for western audiences from the point of view of the organization is the one spreading information about success of the group. The group seems to be aware of this, since informative messaging has increased significantly since the beginning of the information campaign.
- Various tools, including social media propaganda, direct physical actions, and computer network operations are used to access or target potential audiences.
- Twitter is used as an umbrella media platform that connects various media sources into one easily browsable and searchable information index.
- Daesh uses the Twitter community structure as a defensive structure against account deletion and suspension. The structure is able to recover quickly by organizing in a number of small communities and some larger ones.

Conclusions

- The effectiveness has its roots in what was done at the beginning. Proclamation of the Caliphate, speech of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and strategic guidance for future plans made the group strong enough to draw attention of different countries, media and terrorist organizations.
- Various audiences perceive the name of the organization differently. Since ‘perception is reality’, the choice of name used for communication purposes is crucial.
- Religion underpins Middle Eastern societies. Daesh uses the radical interpretation of religion for its most effective communication.
- Recruitment campaign, done internally and externally by group members has incredible meaning in overall Daesh campaign and at the same time it is the main concern of many countries around the globe.
- Actions speak louder than words. Daesh knows that it is more important to take action than to merely declare intentions. In other words, Daesh is aware of the importance of avoiding ‘say-do gaps’.
- Daesh is well versed in persuasion techniques that manipulate not only its adversaries, but also its own members and supporters. By paying close attention to the basic principles of influence we can identify the ways in which the group implements its strategy and the reasons its information strategies are so effective.

Recommendations

- It is necessary for all countries to understand Daesh's strategic goals and how they formulate their messages. The key to success in countering Daesh at every level and building resistance to Daesh messages through the education of home audiences, is understanding how the structure works and who the potential target audiences are.
- Language and terminology matter. Therefore, the words used to spread information and counter messaging should be carefully chosen.
- A unified linguistic and strategic approach is needed to disrupt the networking Daesh does through various social media platforms.
- It is essential to encourage Muslim authorities—recognized moderate religious and community leaders—to explain the radicalism in Daesh messages, and to rebut and refute the organization's erroneous interpretations of Islam.
- From the psychological point of view, intimidation or ridicule will not be effective counter narrative strategies. Illustrating how Daesh propaganda actually works to reach its audiences and pointing out its manipulative nature will undermine the credibility of Daesh and provide a much more productive strategy.
- Testimonials from disaffected and critical foreign fighters (defectors) or supporters, can be used to reveal the true face of the terrorist group. The strategy will be much more effective if the messages come from the Middle East instead of Western countries—'don't come here' is a much stronger message than 'don't go there'.
- When communicating to the outside world, emphasis should be placed on the effectiveness of a global coalition, as well as on every loss and defeat suffered by Daesh.
- It is necessary to understand the principles of influence, which draw out specific behaviours, so that countries can protect their own societies from Daesh information strategies, including recruitment and the process of radicalization. Each country, society, and audience needs to have its own specialised and comprehensive approach based on local demographics and psychographics.
- Since every country has its own intelligence system, which focuses on those aspects of the situation that are closest to that country, wider information sharing about Daesh actions, techniques, and strategies will benefit everyone. Security Institutions of various countries should cooperate in order to share resources.

METHODOLOGY

This report seeks to provide information about the communication tools and persuasion techniques used by the terrorist group, as well as give an overview of the structure of the organisation, so that the scope of Daesh information campaign and the way in which structural units support the campaign can be properly appreciated.

The Centre studied Daesh information strategy from a number of different perspectives including social psychology, communication, and social media analysis. Six approaches were employed to reveal the essence of Daesh information strategy:

- Source, Content, Audience, Media, and Effect analysis (SCAME)
- Brainstorming in Syndicates
- Visual Framing
- Eye Tracking
- Applied Persuasive Techniques
- Social Media Analysis

SCAME—Daesh media products were analysed in terms of source, content, audience, media, and effect, a method of analysis commonly used in psychological operations. Sources are examined for credibility; content is explored to identify the objectives of the message and lines of persuasion used; this allows us to theorise about which audiences are targeted and why; the media used as a delivery system is also taken into consideration to get a better overall picture of the effects the author of

the message wants to achieve. Based on this process, our analysts were able to create a picture of the information strategy currently in use by Daesh. It is important for us to have knowledge of the desired behaviour of Daesh target audiences, or ‘individuals or groups selected for influence or attack by means of psychological operations or actions taken’.³ Only by understanding the objectives of the terrorist organisation can we make effective recommendations for counter measures.

BRAINSTORMING IN SYNDICATES—In June 2015 the Centre organised a seminar on ‘*The IS/ISIL/ISIS/DAESH Information Campaign and its influence on NATO countries’ societies*’. Over eighty advisors from a wide range of military headquarters and civilian institutions participated by sharing their knowledge of the situation. Participants were grouped into syndicates, which then engaged in broad discussions about Daesh current information strategy and what should be done to prevent the spreading of terrorist messages in western societies. In conclusion, a senior officer or civilian expert in terrorism and/or information strategy from each syndicate debriefed the entire group about the outcome of their discussion. Many valuable ideas were brought forward as a result of the seminar.

³ Definition of ‘target audience’ AJP-3.10.1, Allied Joint Doctrine for Psychological Operations, September 2014.

VISUAL FRAMING—To study the tactics used in Daesh media products roughly five hundred images were selected for analysis from eleven issues of *Dabiq*, Daesh flagship online magazine, a sophisticated and well-produced magazine that clearly targets global audiences.

The analysis conducted in the project ‘Visual framing in the Islamic State’ grouped the images published in the magazine into four lines of effort. Lines of effort are defined ‘in the context of joint operation planning, using the purpose (cause and effect) to focus efforts toward establishing operational and strategic conditions by linking multiple tasks and missions’.⁴ By categorising the images according to lines of effort it was possible to see how the organisation has adapted their messaging since the beginning of the online campaign, presumably in response to their own audience analysis.⁵

EYE TRACKING—*Dabiq* visual materials were also used in an eye tracking experiment conducted in Poland using a selected sample group of Muslims, mainly from Syria and Lebanon, who agreed to take part in the experiment. ‘Eye tracking is the process of measuring either the point of gaze (where one is looking) or the motion of an eye relative to the head. An eye tracker is a device for measuring eye positions and eye movement. Eye trackers are used in research on the visual system, in psychology, in psycholinguistics, marketing, as an input device for human computer interaction, and in product design.’⁶ Stationary eye tracking equipment (SMI RED250) together with *MI*

Experiment Centre and SMI BeGaze was software used for the experiment ‘Daesh propaganda in eyes of the Syrian minority in Poland’.⁷

APPLIED PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES—Each line of effort will have more or less persuasive power across the range of possible audiences. A socio-psychological approach was used in the project ‘Applied persuasive strategies and their influence on message effectiveness’ to discover which type of messaging in connection with specific line of effort was most influential for Western audiences and most often viewed in Europe and the US.⁸

SOCIAL MEDIA, WEAPONISED—Since social media platforms now play a vital role in Daesh information campaign, especially in reaching young people susceptible to recruitment and radicalisation, the Centre conducted research into ‘Daesh detrimental use of social media and specifically from an information warfare perspective’ to show how Daesh is using adaptive networks to respond to allied efforts of curbing propaganda dissemination worldwide.⁹

⁴ <https://www.militarydictionary.org/term/line-of-effort>

⁵ Ph. D. Shahira Fahmy, ‘Visual framing in the Islamic State’, NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, Riga, November 2015.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eye_tracking

⁷ Ph. D. Tomasz Grzyb, ‘Propaganda Daesh oczami mniejszości syryjskiej w Polsce. Raport z badań Eyetrackingowych.’, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Wrocław Branch, July 2015.

⁸ Ph.D. Tomasz Grzyb, ‘Report on empirical research into Daesh communication in social media’, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Wrocław Branch, May 2015.

⁹ , ‘Network of Terror: How DAESH Uses Adaptive Social Networks to Spread its Message’, The NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, Riga, October 2015.

INTRODUCTION

WHY DAESH?

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

1.

The Salafi terrorist organisation Daesh, also known as the 'Islamic State/IS/ISIS/ISIL', is currently engaged in direct military actions in Syria, Iraq, and Libya, has announced that it wants to establish a global Caliphate and annihilate all opposition. Daesh has launched an extremely sophisticated information campaign targeting a wide range of audiences around the world to gain support for its expansion in the Middle East. The NATO StratCom COE was asked to conduct research into Daesh information strategy in order to gain a better understanding of how the Daesh information campaign is managed, and to propose practical solutions concerning the situation in the Middle East.

1.1. WHY DAESH?

'Daesh' is an acronym of ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī 'l-'Irāq wa-sh-Shām, one of the names used by the organisation. Depending on how it is conjugated in Arabic, the acronym 'Daesh' sounds like Arabic word that can have several shades of meaning from 'to trample down and crush' to 'a bigot who imposes his view on others'.¹⁰ Westerners may be unfamiliar with it, but this particular name carries weight with Middle East audiences and Arabic speaking minorities in Europe and elsewhere around the globe.

Some argue that by adding epithets such as 'the so-called Islamic State' is insulting to the organisation. Using pejorative epithets is one option for dealing the problem of what to call the terrorist organisation in the media. It would avoid confusion, yet still indicate a lack of support for what the organisation stands for. However, we argue that the use of the term Daesh is much more undermining to the organisation than the use of their chosen

name, 'Islamic State/IS/ISIS/ISIL', together with an epithet. Several residents in Mosul told Associated Press reporters that militants had threatened to cut out the tongue of anyone who publicly used the name 'Daesh' instead of referring to the group by its full name. In their eyes, to use the name 'Daesh' shows defiance and disrespect of the organisation.¹¹ Increasing the use of the name Daesh in the public media will send a clear message to the terrorists about the overwhelming majority of people worldwide that do not support their campaign of violence to achieve their goals.

On 18 December 2014, army Lt Gen James L. Terry used the name 'Daesh' repeatedly during a 30-minute news conference. When asked why he was no longer using the name 'Islamic State' he explained that partner nations in the Middle East had asked him not to use that name or any of its related acronyms, ISIS and ISIL, out of concern that doing so legitimises the militants' aspiration to establish a caliphate, a sovereign Islamic sphere that would replace existing governments and borders.¹² French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius also made an announcement about the name and concluded, *'This is a terrorist group and not a state... the term Islamic State blurs the lines between Islam, Muslims, and Islamists.'*¹³ The minister was amongst the first few who avoided calling the group with the name 'Islamic State' and put effort on calling them the acronym 'Daesh'. Consequently, in January 2015, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott joined French

¹⁰ Ben Wedeman *'The name ISIS hates to be called'*, CNN, published 22 February 2015, retrieved 01 October 2015.

¹¹ Vivian Salama, *'Islamic State group name raises objection'*, Associated Press, published 12 September 2014, retrieved 01 October 2015.

¹² Video Channels, World, *'Yet another name for Islamic State militants'*. The Washington Post, published 18 December 2014, retrieved 01 October 2015.

¹³ Wassim Nasr *'French govt to use Arabic 'Daesh' for Islamic State group'*. France24, published 17 September 2014

and United States leaders in referring to the terrorist group using the pejorative term 'Daesh' saying, *'Daesh hates being referred to by this term and what they don't like has an instinctive appeal to me. I absolutely refuse to refer to it by the title that it claims for itself, because I think this is a perversion of religion and a travesty of governance. I would strongly counsel people against ever using the presumptuous title that they have given themselves'*.¹⁴

1.2. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Not everybody wants to follow suggestions made by state and religious leaders. The Director General of the BBC refused to stop using 'the Islamic State' in their broadcasts, but accepted the idea that using the name on its own could be misleading and insisted the BBC would 'redouble [their] efforts' to use caveats such as 'the so-called Islamic State group'.¹⁵

By using the name 'the Islamic State' chosen by the terrorists themselves, news agencies participate in Daesh propaganda campaign. It may seem easier to collaborate in the self-branding project of the terrorists for the sake of simplicity, than to stop and consider how using the terrorist propaganda machine as a source aids and abets their cause. Qualitative research on Twitter shows that the name 'Daesh' is mainly used by opponents of the organisation, while 'the State of the Caliphate' was used by its supporters.¹⁶ One Internet Agency recently published an article with the headline:

'Islamic State Army suffers severe losses'.¹⁷ Should Daesh fighters, or fighters in any terrorist organisation be considered soldiers in an army? This article caused heated discussions among newsreaders. Reader comments emphasised that describing terrorists as an army incorrectly legitimises the idea of the 'Islamic State'. The discussion continued when another news agency published a first page with the title 'The leader of a country has been killed in Syria'.¹⁸ This title manufactured the need for readers to find out who was killed and from which country. Again, the message was misleading because the article was about a Tunisian national working within the Daesh structure, so a Daesh-functionary, not the leader of a country.

As a loosely coordinated network of state and international security agencies, the global coalition against the terrorists is playing catch-up in the push to introduce Daesh as the name to use to undermine the credibility of the terrorists. Although there is a lag in the participation of media outlets, the Internet also works in our favour and members of the public readership are acting independently to clarify terms. The continued discussion shows the savvy of the Daesh information strategy and the effectiveness of its messaging campaign. It is clear that their choice of name has a strategic outcome that not only declares the aspirations of the organisation and exemplifies their core message, but also frames the question of Daesh credibility as a high-stakes win-lose proposition. As of today there is no global consensus about which name should be used. However, several countries have already decided to use this name, solving both the problem of legitimacy and the problem of semantically flawed translations. The Global Coalition against this terrorist group currently uses the acronym Daesh.

¹⁴ Jonathan Pearlman, *"Tony Abbott urges leaders to refer to ISIL as Daesh because 'they hate the term'"*, The Telegraph, published 12 January 2015, retrieved 01 October 2015.

¹⁵ Matt Dathan *'The BBC must be fair to Isis: Head of broadcaster rejects calls to stop using term Islamic State'*. The Independent, published 2 July 2015, retrieved 01 October 2015.

¹⁶ Experimentation done by Joseph Shaheen, The NATO StratCom COE, Riga, Aug-Sept 2015.

¹⁷ *'Dotkliwa strata armii Państwa Islamskiego'*, Onet (22 August 2015), Retrieved 24 August 2015.

¹⁸ *'W Syrii zginął jeden z liderów Państwa'*, Wirtualna Polska (3.07. 2015), Retrieved 24.08.2015.

HISTORY

ROOTS

MOSUL BATTLE

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE CALIPHATE

CURRENT SITUATION

2.

2.1. ROOTS

The group originated as *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* in 1999, which pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2004.¹⁹ The leader of this group was a Jordanian national named Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The group contributed to the Iraqi insurgency, which followed on the heels of the Coalition military engagement in Iraq in March of 2003. During the international involvement in Iraq, *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* faced not only direct military action, but also information warfare. This group realised that they needed to adapt and engage in the information environment.

In January 2006, the group joined together with other Sunni insurgent groups to form the *Mujahideen Shura Council*, which declared the formation of the 'Islamic State of Iraq' in October 2006. During the Coalition campaign in Iraq, the new organisation emulated their adversaries and learned how to effectively conduct organised information activities.

On 2011, when Civil War broke out in Syria, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the organisation at that time, together with his counsellors decided to send their representatives to Syria to establish a visible presence in Sunni majority regions. The main areas of interest for them were the *Raqqa, Idlib, Deir ez-Zor, and Aleppo* provinces. In order to emphasise and advertise their efforts, al-Baghdadi released an audio statement in which he announced that the *Jabhat an-Nusra li-Ahli ash-Sham*²⁰ (al-Nusra Front) had been established, financed, and supported by 'the Islamic State of Iraq', and that the two groups had been merged under the new name the 'Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham'. The leader of the al-Nusra Front, Abu Mohammad Al-Julani, and al-Qaida leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, issued a statement denying the merger, stating that neither they, nor anyone else in al-Nusra's leadership, had been consulted. By issuing this statement both al-Qaeda and the al-Nusra Front, the insurgent group already operating in Syria, cut all connections with al-Baghdadi's organisation.

¹⁹ The English translation is 'the Organization of Monotheism and Jihad'.

²⁰ The English translation is "The Support Front for the People of Al-Sham".

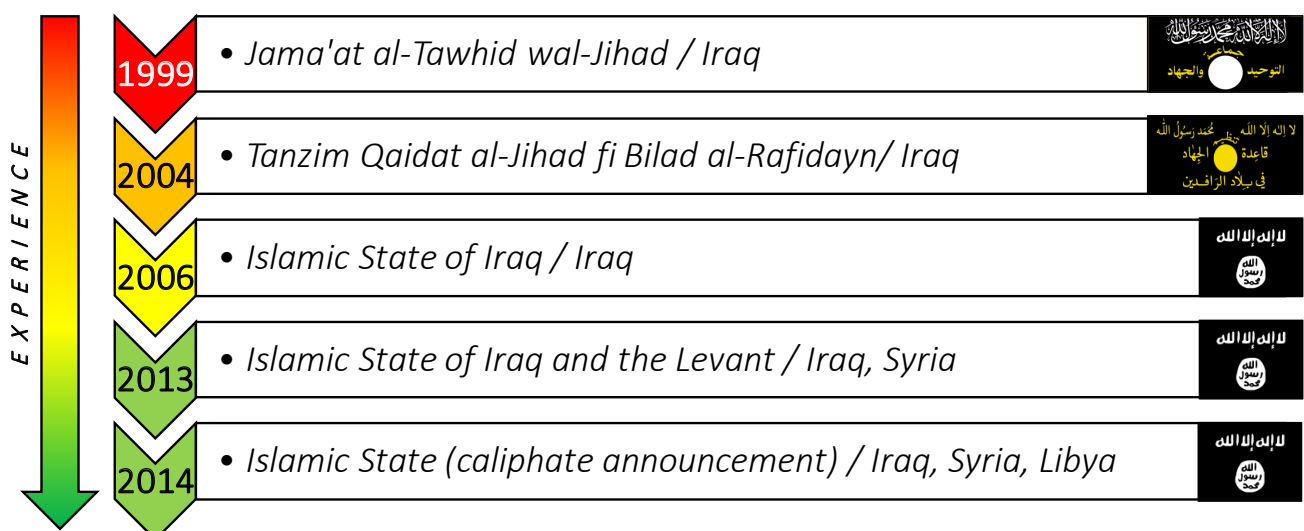


Figure 1. The emergence of the 'Islamic State' over time.

In 2013, the group expanded into Syria and adopted the name ‘the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham’. The changing names of the organisation are commonly abbreviated in English as ISIL or ISIS, there being no consensus about which of these acronyms should be used. By renaming their organisation, the group drew attention to their effectiveness in the region, highlighting their expansion in the Middle East. The new name also improved the image of the organisation with their supporters and sent a message about their future plans.

2.2. MOSUL BATTLE

The organisation had plans for conquering the biggest cities in Iraq located in the northern part of the country. One of them was Mosul, informally the political and economic capital of Sunni Iraq and second largest city in the country. The city of 1,8 million had a Sunni Arab majority that included more than 7,000 former Saddam-era officers and more than 100,000 other former soldiers, many of whom were removed from service by de-Baathification—the purging of Hussein’s supporters when he was deposed in 2003.²¹ The location of the city had great importance from a military perspective, because of the support of the population and of the accessibility of future logistical support from the eastern part of Syria. The attack on Mosul was foreseen, and was not a surprise for the Iraqi Security Forces. The aim of Daesh action was to achieve control of the Iraqi part of the Tigris Valley to create a connection with the terrain in western part of the Anbar province Daesh had seized earlier, inhabited by a Sunni majority.

In preparation for the expected attack, the Iraqi government sent tactical units detached from four divisions of the Army, Police, and Special Forces to Ninawa province. It is worth mentioning that the majority of the Iraqi Security Forces were Shia Muslims from the south of Iraq, and were perceived as a threat by local Sunnis. On the other hand, the Iraqi Security Forces mistrusted the locals because of the high rate of insurgency within the population.

Preceding their military operation, Daesh engaged in information warfare that significantly influenced the success of their imminent military activities. During the propaganda campaign, which was carried out over the course of several weeks preceding the attack on Mosul, social and mass media tools were used to frighten the Iraqi army and other religious minorities (including Shia, Christians, Yazidis, and others). The main message of this campaign was that ‘*...disbelievers and apostates who do not flee from the city will be killed...*’. Such messages were broadcast in local markets and repeated by religious leaders in Mosques during prayer services. These information activities were supported by displaying pictures and videos showing the brutal execution of Iraqi and Syrian soldiers who were taken as captives by Daesh. The organisation expanded their propaganda campaign to include terrorising all religious factions other than the Sunni. Many thousands of people fled Mosul just before the main military operation was launched as a result of the terror campaign. These actions heightened the tension and caused a significant reduction in morale within the Iraqi Security Forces. The resulting fear and tension gave the terrorists a psychological advantage during their frontal attack on Mosul.

Daesh offensive tactics were simple and directly connected to the recently launched propaganda campaign. Daesh attacked in groups, not aiming to break through their opponents’ defences, but rather to exert psychological pressure on the enemy, keeping

²¹Michael Knights, “Battle for Mosul: Critical test ahead for Iraq”. BBC News, published 11 June 2014, retrieved 01 September 2015

them in a heightened state of battle-readiness to deplete their energy and morale. Iraqi defences were not sufficient to stop the terrorists. Each time Daesh captured members of the Iraqi Security Forces, the soldiers were publicly hanged, burned, or crucified. Daesh members recorded each action as a part of their strategy and shared their accomplishments through the Internet. These terror activities demoralised the Iraqi Security Forces that were deployed in Mosul and its suburbs, as well as the local non-Sunni populations.

The activities of Daesh information war in Mosul were based on fear, terror, and the exploitation of the poor decision-making processes at every level of the Iraqi Government. In addition to group battle raids, Daesh organised a network of small undercover groups responsible for suicide bomb attacks on specifically chosen targets. On 9 July, after a few days of combined attacks, Daesh decided to orchestrate a major attack on Iraqi positions that led them to victory. During the night of 10 July, the entire city along with whatever property and goods remained was in the possession of Daesh.

Every person who had proven or possible connections with government structures, including former city clerks and their families, relatives of soldiers or police officers, members of the Shia and other religious minorities, were assassinated. After few hours of chaos management, the Christians seemed to be in a better situation than the Shia. They were given the option of either converting to Islam or leaving the Daesh-controlled city. The few Christians, who wanted to stay and not to be converted, were burdened with Jizya, an extraordinary tax.²²

²²Jizya—a special tax levied by a Muslim state on non-Muslim subjects permanently residing in Muslim lands under Islamic law. In Mosul the rate of taxation was from 20 to 80 percent, based on the decision of the local religious authorities.

2.3. THE PROCLAMATION OF THE CALIPHATE

The idea of the Caliphate bears no special meaning for the average Westerner, but it has a very important meaning for pious Muslims. According to Salafi clerics, their Caliph is required to rule in every sense of the word—control the physical territory, preside over the judicial system, and lead the people spiritually. After conquering Mosul and taking large areas of Iraq and Syria into their possession, Daesh considered themselves to be well on their way to fulfilling these requirements.²³ On Friday 27 June 2014, during a Ramadan prayer service in the Mosul's Great Mosque, Daesh leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, spoke from the balcony. He claimed to be the Messenger of the Prophet Mohammad and announced himself to be 'the leader who presides over you'. He urged all faithful Muslims to join the Caliphate and pledge their allegiance to Daesh.²⁴ Al-Baghdadi included many messages designed specifically for the different audiences he meant to address: He called for global jihad. According to Daesh jihad is obligatory for all true Muslims. Al-Baghdadi quoted scripture to explain that the reason for fighting disbelievers and apostates is that they are the enemies of Islam, who wish them to abandon their religion. This message was not only intended for the true believers, but also for non-Muslim audiences to let them know that it would only be a matter of time until they would be targeted and defeated.

²³However, many religious leaders claim for the Caliphate establishing, acceptance from all Muslim world is needed.

²⁴Hannah Strange, "Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi addresses Muslims in Mosul", The Telegraph, published 05 July 2014, retrieved 19 October 2015.

He emphasised his conviction that true Islam is not religion of peace, but rather ‘a religion of war’. He called those Arab and other Islamic countries that cooperate with Western countries ‘slaves of the western powers, used in order to oppress the Muslim peoples’.

He announced the need for Iraqi Sunnis from the Anbar Province to return to their lands and to embrace the rule of the Islamic State and Sharia Law.

He also included a message for Daesh ‘soldiers’, telling them to be strong and to persist in their fighting.

From the moment of proclamation, Daesh began calling its leader ‘Caliph Ibrahim’, ‘Caliph of all Muslims and the Leader of the Believers’. That was another message intended for global consumption to emphasise that all Muslims must follow the path of righteousness and that ‘the legality of all emirates, groups, states and organisations becomes null by the expansion of the caliph’s authority and the arrival of its troops to their areas’.²⁵

The organisation officially renamed itself, dropping the last two words, to show that the new Caliphate had been established globally, not only as a local entity in Iraq and Syria.

Al-Baghdadi’s speech was recorded and released together with a propaganda publication entitled *This is the Promise of Allah* via the Internet on 29 June 2014. This date is considered to be the date of the ‘Proclamation of the Caliphate’.²⁶ Both the speech and the proclamation of the Caliphate were tremendously important for Daesh from the point of view of strategic

communication, and greatly increased Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s credibility at that time.

2.4. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Now, one year after Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s announcement, Daesh freedom of movement and lines of communication have been disrupted. However, Daesh is still in control of most of the terrain they were able to seize in 2014. Research shows that one year ago Daesh was widely supported in northern Iraq and in northern Syria, where they controlled the lines of communication.²⁷ Daesh attack zones are currently focused on central Iraq around the capital, and in the northern part of Syria. Daesh military operations in this region are supported by their information campaign that primarily targets the indigenous population to assert both physical and psychological regional dominance.

Daesh plans to continue its efforts under their current campaign ‘*Remain and expand*’ by grabbing more terrain. Seizing major cities and encouraging the disintegration of Iraq, would be the next strategic steps to undertake.

To understand why Daesh is so effective it is necessary to consider the fact that their strategic communication operates far outside the borders of the terrain they control, waging a propaganda offensive to attract Muslims and converts to their global virtual Caliphate.

Daesh claims that it is incumbent upon all Muslims to pledge allegiance to Caliph Ibrahim and to support him. Since 29 June 2014 many radical organisations from around the world have shown their acceptance of Daesh and its self-styled leader and have begun pledging their allegiance to the organisation.

²⁵ ‘*This is the promise of Allah*’, Alhayat Media Centre, last accessed 23 September 2015.

²⁶ Al Arabiya News, ‘*ISIS jihadists declare Islamic caliphate*’, published 29 June 2014, last accessed 15 October 2015.

²⁷ Institute for the Study of War, ‘*ISIS Sanctuary Map*’, September 2014 – August 2015

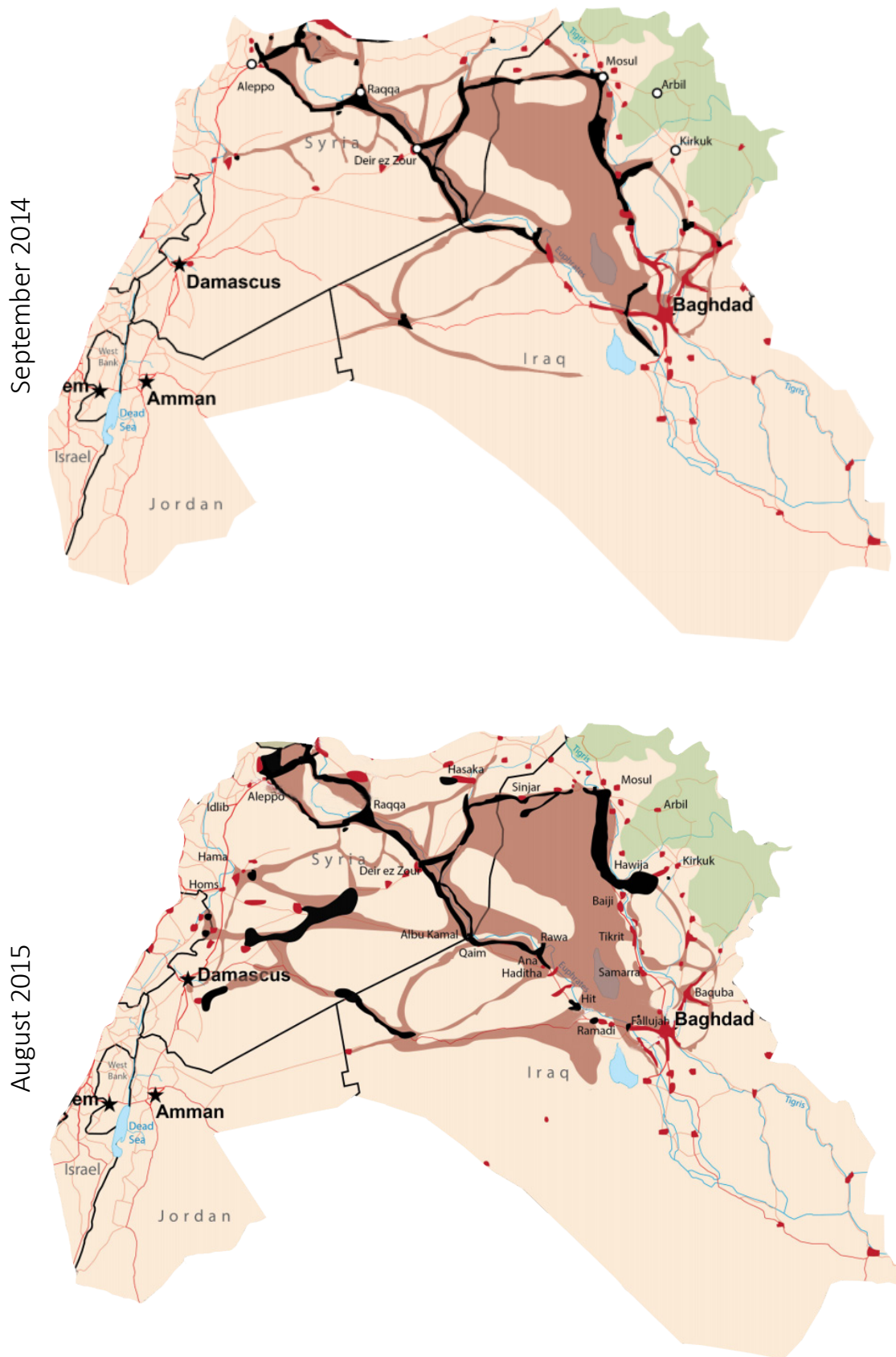


Figure 2. ISIS Sanctuary Maps for September 2014 and August 2015 created by the Institute for the Study of War [Map Key: black = Daesh-controlled area, brown = pro-Daesh area, red = area currently under siege].

Table 1. Organisations that have pledged allegiance to Daesh

No	Name	Country	Date of statement
1	Ansar al-Khilafah	Philippines	14/08/2014
2	Ansar al-Tawhid in India	India	4/10/ 2014
3	al-Huda Battalion in Maghreb of Islam	Algeria	30/06/ 2014
4	Heroes of Islam Brigade in Khorasan	Afghanistan	30/09/2014
5	The Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria	Algeria	30/09/2014
6	Jaish al-Sahabah in the Levant	Syria	1/07/2014
7	Faction of Katibat al-Imam Bukhari	Syria	29/10/2014
8	Jamaat Ansar Bait al-Maqdis	Egypt	30/06/2014
9	Jund al-Khilafah in Egypt	Egypt	23/09/2014
10	Liwa Ahrar al-Sunna in Baalbek	Lebanon	30/06/2014
11	Islamic State Libya	Libya	9/11/2014
12	Lions of Libya	Libya	24/09/2014
13	Shura Council of Shabab al-Islam Darnah	Libya	6/10/2014
14	Mujahideen Indonesia Timor	Indonesia	1/07/2014
15	Tehreek-e-Khilafat	Pakistan	9/07/2014
16	Mujahideen of Yemen	Yemen	10/11/2014
17	Supporters for the Islamic State in Yemen	Yemen	4/09/2014
18	al-Tawheed Brigade in Khorasan	Afghanistan	23/09/2014
19	Ansar al-Islam	Iraq	8/01/2015

20	Leaders of the Mujahid in Khorasan	Pakistan	10/01/2015
21	Boko Haram	Nigeria	7/03/2015
22	Jund al-Khilafah in Tunisia	Tunisia	31/03/2015
23	Jemaah Islamiyah	Philippines	27/04/2015
24	al-Murabitoun	Mali	14/05/2015
25	Mujahideen of Tunisia of Kairouan	Tunisia	18/05/2015

Table 2. Organisations that offer their support for Daesh

No	Name	Country	Date of statement
1	al-I'tisam of the Koran and Sunnah	Sudan	1/08/2014
2	Abu Sayyaf Group	Philippines	25/06/2014
3	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters	Philippines	13/08/2014
4	Bangsmoro Justice Movement	Philippines	11/09/2014
5	Jundullah	Pakistan	17/11/2014
6	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	Pakistan	12/09/2014
7	Islamic Youth Shura Council	Libya	22/06/2014
8	Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem	Egypt	1/10/2014
9	Okba Ibn Nafaa Battalion	Tunisia	20/09/2014
10	Supporters of the Islamic State in the Land of the Two Holy Mosques	Saudi Arabia	2/12/2014

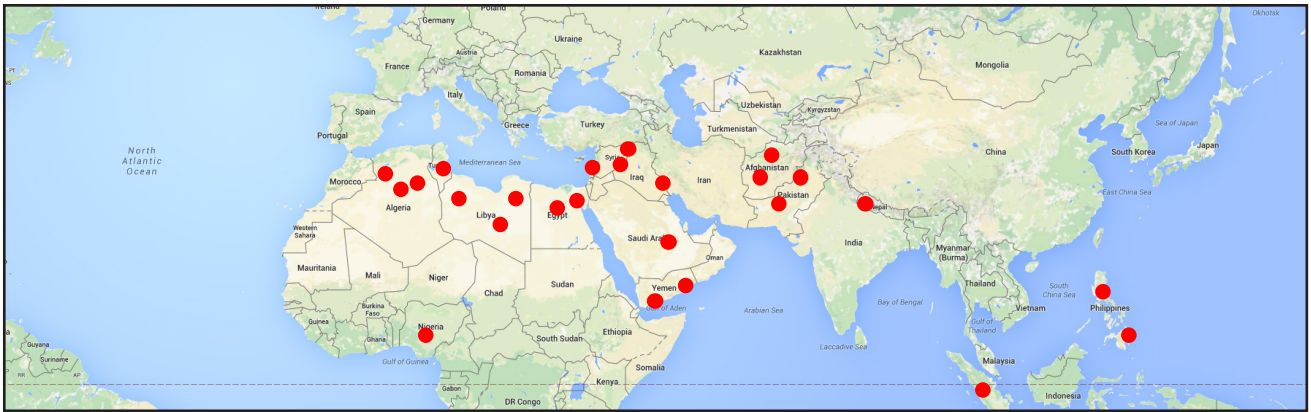
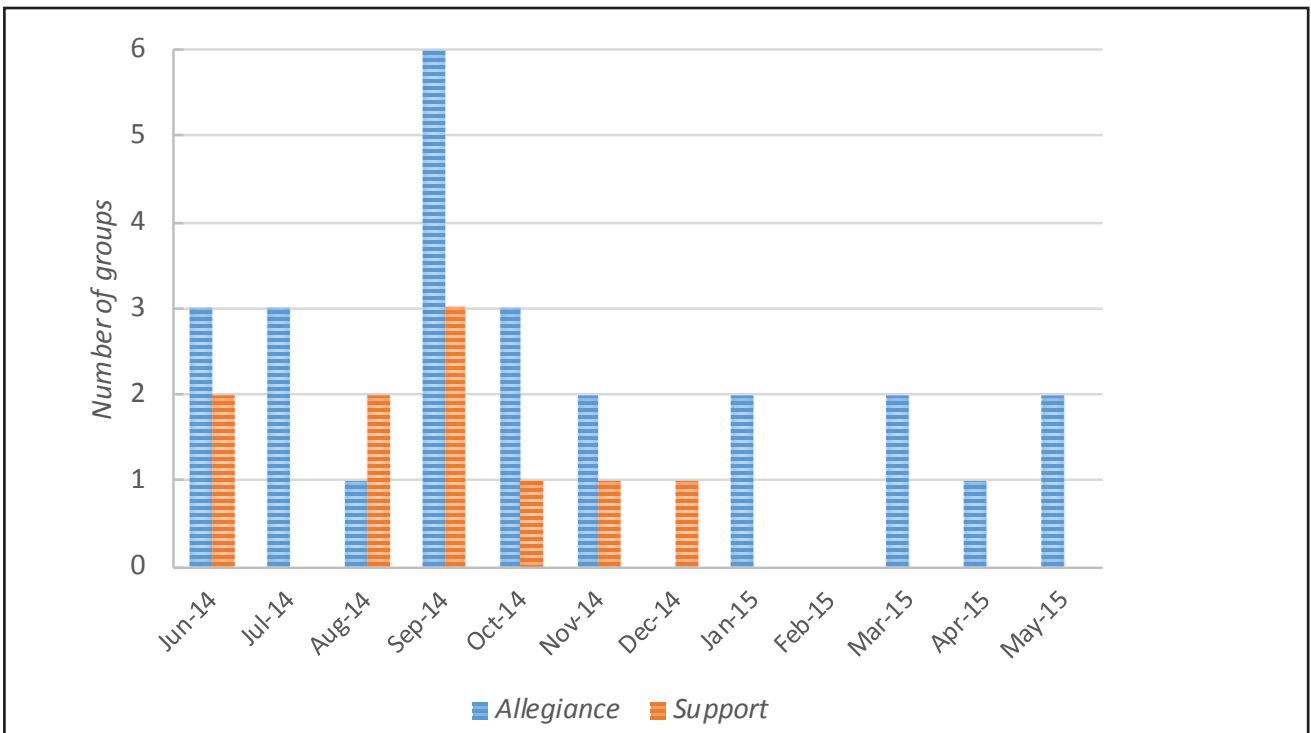


Figure 3. Map of groups pledging allegiance/support to Daesh, IntelCenter. Source: <http://bit.ly/1JoGWFq>.



Graph 1. The number of organisations that have pledged allegiance or offered support to Daesh over the last year.

According to the most recent data, twenty-five organisations have pledged their allegiance to Daesh and ten more offer global support.²⁸

The largest surge in declarations of allegiance and support happened just after the proclamation of the Caliphate in September 2014. Daesh uses their allies to extend the reach of their direct terrorism

activities and to amplify their information campaign. Members of these organisations have already been operating locally in their own countries for some time, and they have intimate knowledge of the beliefs, apprehensions, and attitudes of the people living there. Under the guidance of Daesh, these organisations can exploit the current vulnerabilities and susceptibilities of potential target audiences in the regions they are most familiar with, where they can easily wield their influence to help Daesh achieve their desired objectives.

²⁸Groups pledging support to Daesh: Information credited to IntelCenter, last accessed 23 September 2015

THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF DAESH

GLOBAL STRUCTURE
PROVINCIAL STRUCTURE

3.

3.1 GLOBAL STRUCTURE

The Daesh organisation is divided into a number of councils and departments. **The Media Council** is responsible for mass communication, including both traditional and Internet media. However, an effective information campaign would not be possible if other aspects of the organisation did not take part in the overall campaign. **The Intelligence Council** is constantly collecting information about Daesh adversaries, potential target audiences, and the information environment. **The Military Council** shows the attitude of the organisation by the presence of its members on the battlefield, and works to provide territorial gains that can be announced as battlefield successes. **The Fighter Assistance Council** works as a gateway organisation for the orientation of foreign fighters, highlighting the importance of new recruits. Foreign fighters are also used as messengers that reach out to their domestic audiences and attract them to Daesh ideology. **The Leadership, Security, and Legal Councils** draft Sharia laws and key policies that apply to the occupied territories. Those who do not follow these directives are immediately under investigation by the **Legal Council**, which gives its recommendations to the **Security Council** for executions and

punishments. These examples are, of course, recorded and disseminated as HDTV movies, by word of mouth, or by means of a variety of other media products used for strategic communication. Finally, as 17th century Italian military commander Raimondo Montecuccoli said, ‘For war you need three things: 1. Money. 2. Money. 3. Money.’ **The Financial Council** collects and spends money to plan, support, and inform about Daesh activities. Once all of these functions are taken into account, it is clear that each aspect of the organisation carries out tasks that are vital to strategic communications.

The Media Council is characterised as a highly efficient structure that leads the information campaign. Daesh is one of many extreme jihadi organisations that rely on the Internet and other mass communication channels to spread their propaganda. However, Daesh exploits the value of these channels for reaching young people and capturing their interest much more fully than any of the other extremists have been able to. Analysing the work done by the **Media Council** is crucial to our understanding of the Daesh information campaign. We can easily recognise which groups are responsible for the production and distribution of their main message by looking at the media products they produce.

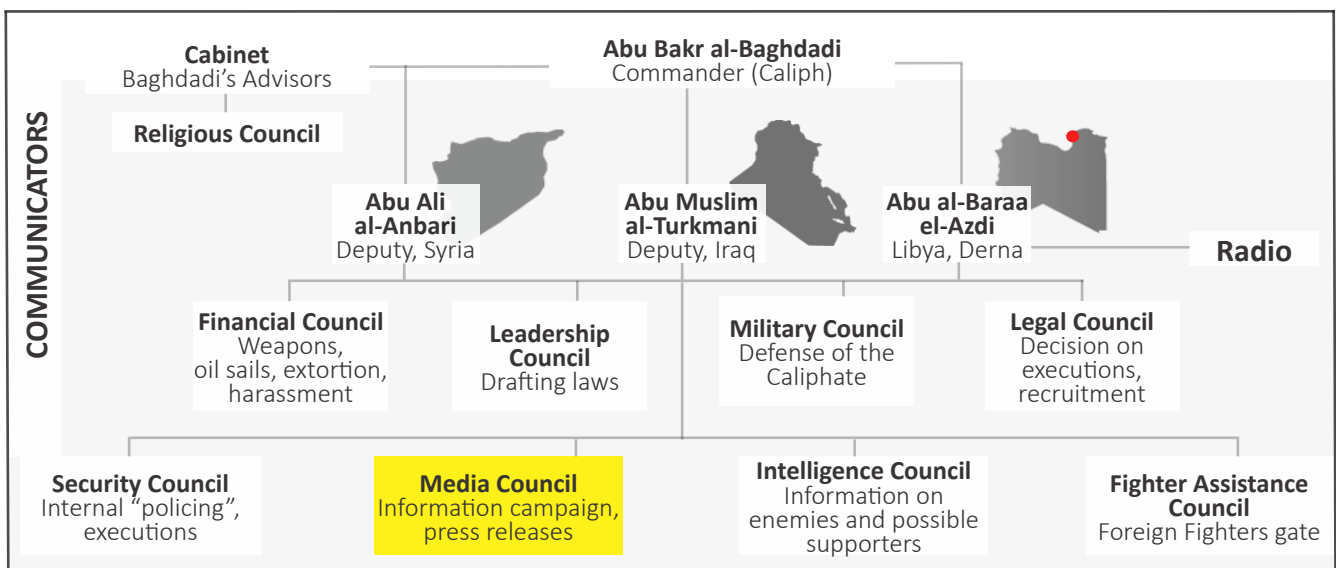


Figure 4. Daesh global structure.

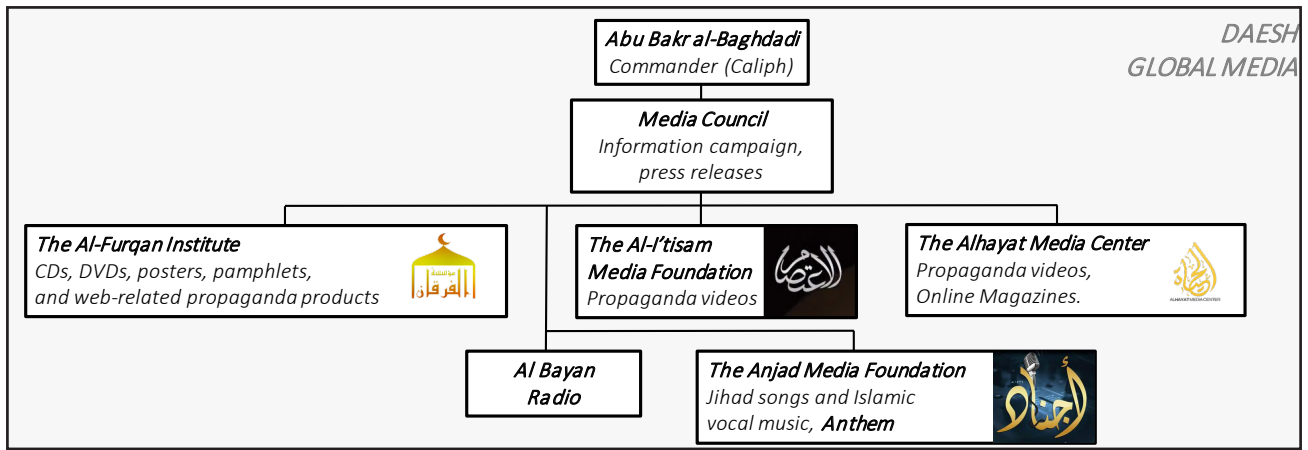


Figure 5. Daesh global media structure.

The Al-Furqan Institute is Daesh oldest media branch having been established in 2006. *The Al-Furqan Institute* created the first published video of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi delivering a sermon in a mosque in Mosul and is responsible for the production of all types of media, especially printed and web-related propaganda products.

From a strategic point of view, the second most important media centre is the *Alhayat Media Centre*. *The Alhayat Media Centre* is a relatively new organisation that is used to target global audiences by disseminating highly professional video clips and online magazines, including *Dabiq*, *the Islamic State News*, *the Islamic State Report*, *Dar al-Islam*, and *ICTOK*. These magazines are published online in several different languages, including English, Turkish, Russian, and French.

The *Al-I'tisam Media Foundation* has produced and distributed many propaganda videos for Daesh over the past years. *The Al-I'tisam Media Foundation* specialises in broadcasting jihadi songs and Islamic vocal music. This media outlet released a song called *Dawlat al-Islam Qamat*, which became very popular and is considered the unofficial 'state anthem' of the caliphate.²⁹

Al Bayan Radio, which is owned by Daesh and operates in Iraq, is also worth mentioning. The

station offers its listeners a variety programs including music, language lessons, interviews, and field reports from *Al Bayan Radio* correspondents in Iraq and Syria.³⁰

Daesh is aware of the importance of attracting a global audience, so most of their media products are published in a variety of local native languages or have subtitles, so that they can be easily accessed by many different target audiences worldwide.³¹

The media offensive is an attempt to create a 'virtual caliphate' in addition to the physical structure of territory and leadership.



Figure 6. Daesh online magazines prepared by the *Alhayat Media Centre*.

³⁰The Telegraph, 'Islamic State launches English-language radio news bulletins', published 07 April 2015.

³¹Translations: English, Arabic, German, Albanian, Hindi, Turkish, Urdu, Russian, French, Indonesian, Tamil and other (up to 20 all together).

This does not mean that global involvement is only at the level of Social Media and the Internet space. Daesh wants to nurture a global sense of belonging for the supporters of their organisation without having to have a physical presence everywhere their supporters live. Even when the group is not able to claim or hold terrain, its fans can still operate and spread their messages through the support community.

3.2 PROVINCIAL STRUCTURE

Global engagement must be complemented by local support to maintain control of the seized territories. Therefore they use a provincial structure that parallels their global information campaign to spread their influence at the regional level. The regional structure is much more detailed than the global structure, because it also includes an administrative structure. Each administrative department has a specific set of tasks to accomplish; this is necessary for the organisation to be seen as leading local society in the style of a state. Their effectiveness bolsters Daesh claims that they have established an excellent state structure and are competent to lead it. Based on statements and products created for local consumption, we can conclude that the group has departments responsible for security, development, education, legal issues, and healthcare. The organisation has also established regional media departments for keeping people updated on the information Daesh wishes to disseminate.

We can take Raqqa Wilayat³² as an example: research shows that the province is divided into four sectors and thirteen departments. Three departments are concerned with regional security: **The Public Security**

³²A *wilayat* is an administrative division, usually translated as 'province', and occasionally also as 'governorate'.

Department was established to safeguard the Muslims' way of life (as interpreted by Daesh), and to detect infiltrators from the Shia and other intelligence services. **The Army Department** is responsible for regional security. According to Daesh press releases, the Army Department consists of several battalions with soldiers from various military disciplines who are responsible for attacking adversaries and protecting the province and its people. **The Police Department** provides security across the province, mainly by establishing checkpoints, sending out patrols, hunting thieves, and solving disputes between citizens. Two departments manage disputes: **The Tribes and Public Relations Department** is a structure designed for smoothing enmities and restoring connections between local tribes and the **Judiciary Court and Public Complaint Department** is responsible for responding to complaints brought to the Sharia courts.

Seven departments have been created to fulfil the basic functions of state governance. These are important to the Daesh strategic information campaign because the successful operation of these administrative departments creates the sense that the inhabitants of the Raqqa Wilayat enjoy the benefits of being part of a successfully run 'Islamic State'. **The Public Service Department** is an administrative structure responsible for all types of public utilities, including such services as home water delivery, the maintenance of electrical network, etc. Zakat is an obligatory tax in Islam that all Muslims donate as a function of their faith.

The Zakat Department is the regional tax-collection department that collects from everyone, including shopkeepers and farmers producing agricultural crops and livestock. These taxes are later distributed to those in need including poor Muslims, new converts to Islam, the Islamic clergy, those fighting for Islamic causes, and others.

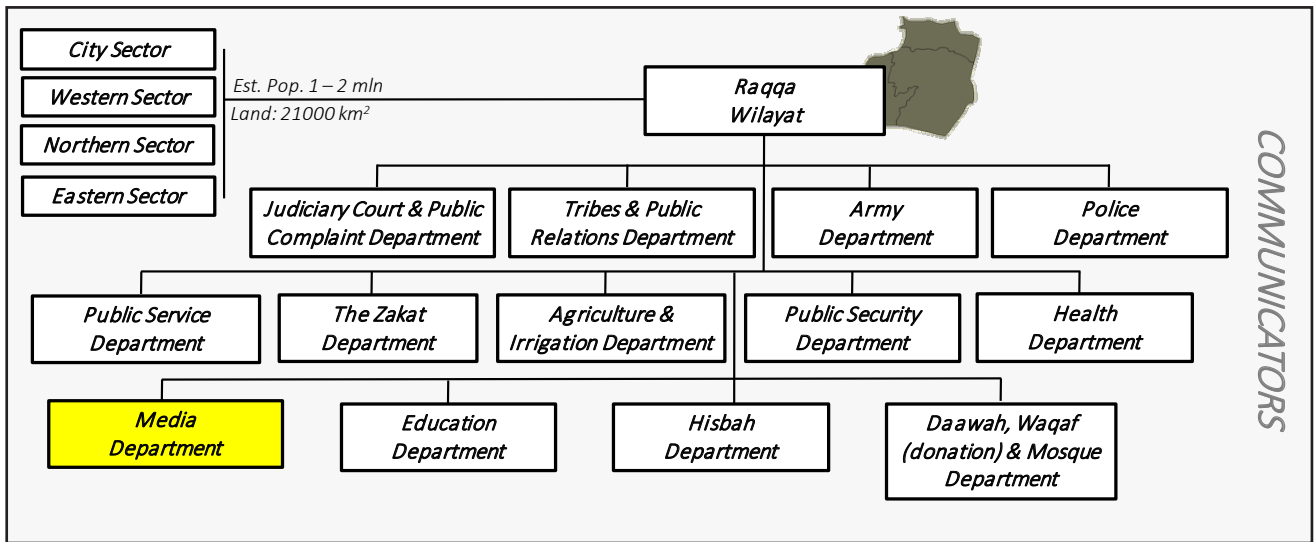


Figure 7. Daesh provincial structure (Raqqa Wilayat).

The responsibilities of **The Hisbah Department**³³ and **The Dawah Donation and Mosque Department** are also based in religious beliefs.³⁴ **The Hisbah Department** ‘enjoins the good and forbids the evil in the Wilayah, people are encouraged to pray the Salah and pay the Zakat, etc., and are forbidden the smoking of cannabis, theft and drinking wine’.³⁵ **The Dawah Donation and Mosque Department** is responsible for providing religious teachings, especially encouraging all Muslims to preach their religion, take care of the mosques, and participate in missions to reconstruct mosques. The Agriculture and Irrigation Department is responsible for everything related to farming including

trade between the province and local farmers, the distribution of goods such as flour for baking, and the supervision of work on dams and irrigation streams. It is also responsible for upholding its image at the provincial level by making positive public announcements concerning agriculture. **The Education Department** is responsible for the local educational system, and **The Health Department** provides medical services and manages hospitals.

For propaganda purposes, Daesh communicates not only as ‘the Islamic State’ (the State of the Caliphate), but also as a province.

³³ *Hisbah* is an Islamic doctrine that says that the duty of the ruler is to keep everything in order according to Sharia law; to let the people enjoy what is good and to forbid and punish for what is wrong, e.g. drinking alcohol, smoking, using drugs, etc. Daesh suggests that *Hisbah* is the sacred duty of all of its members.

³⁴ *Dawah* means the way of proselytizing or preaching of Islam. The term literally means ‘making an invitation’.

³⁵ ‘A Detailed Report in English—Wilaayat Raqqa Thrives Under The Islamic Khilafah’. Daesh propaganda—Ansarukhilafah Blog, published 11 May 2015, retrieved 30 September 2015.

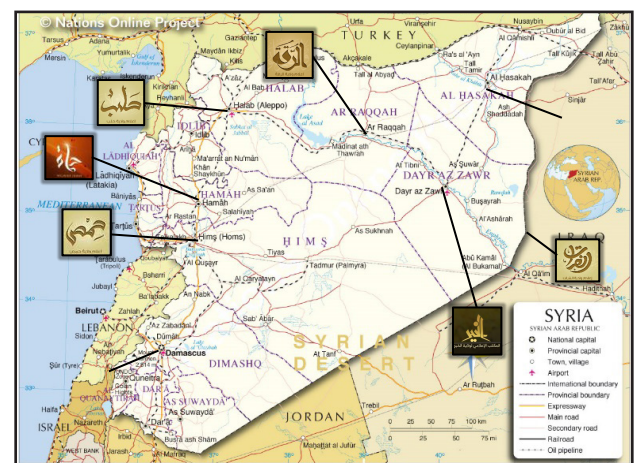


Figure 8. The distribution of Regional Media Departments in Libya.



Figure 9. The distribution of Regional Media Departments in Iraq.

They wish to show their efficacy at all levels of governance, in contrast to the inefficiency of the Iraqi government. Any information concerning the local structure is also designed as strategic messaging for global dissemination because a positive image of a well-functioning province strengthens the claim that Daesh is successfully running a legitimate state.

Daesh has local departments that are mainly responsible for collecting information, preparing news products, and disseminating these products among their regional audiences. **The Media Department** in the Raqqa province distributes information about events, military engagements, and the activities of the other departments.

We can easily recognise products originating in Raqqa and other provinces and countries where local organisations have pledged their allegiance to Daesh. Every message bears its own logo in addition to the official Daesh



Figure 10. The distribution of Regional Media Departments in Syria.

flag. These logos are a kind of branding that ensure recognition and enhance the regional credibility of the media products.

Although Daesh global councils and regional departments manage a wide variety of activities, in some sense every management cell is an important player in the communication strategy. The organisation communicates both vertically and horizontally to achieve their objectives at the regional level. Regional activities support the overall campaign and help achieve desired effects at the strategic level.

OBJECTIVES

4.

Daesh’s communications strategy contains clearly stated short- and long-term objectives. The first short-term objective was achieved at the end of June 2014 when Daesh seized Mosul and proclaimed the **formation of the new Caliphate**. This was also a trigger point in Daesh global advertising to recruit and radicalize potential fighters for future actions. From a strategic communications point of view, achieving the first objective was a tremendous coup that could be exploited in the organisation’s propaganda materials, spreading information about the effectiveness of the group and indicating what might be expected from the newly declared state in the future.

The proclamation of the Caliphate drew attention not only from the Middle East, but from Western countries as well, giving the group the opportunity to open new channels of communication via social media, to spread their message about ‘the newly established state’ and revolution concerning breaking old, ‘artificially made agreements’ which divided Muslim society.

The next objective is **deterrence**. The group widely distributes news about their brutality in order to raise public awareness, intensify feelings about their conscious cruelty, and

convince their enemies of the impossibility of defeating them. This objective is supported by messages and actions aiming to weaken their opponents’ will to engage Daesh directly.

Daesh simultaneously continues to **fight their internal adversaries**, physically and psychologically, expelling religious minorities and the secular population from the territory they control. Daesh targets its internal enemies and publicises footage showing the destruction of ancient heritage sites, as well as beheadings and killings, in order to create a sense of fear and to spread information among their adversaries about their future plans. This shows the group’s regional aspiration to be an important player and change-maker in the Middle East.

Almost every issue of Dabiq, contains something about their ultimate long-term objective, **winning ‘the Final Battle’**. If we consider the way this idea is linked to their religious messaging, this goal plays an important role in driving the Daesh information strategy. By framing their activities in terms of the ‘Final Battle’, any deployment of Western or non-Sunni forces against Daesh in this region plays into fulfilling the prophecy, attracting both domestic and foreign fighters who support the cause.

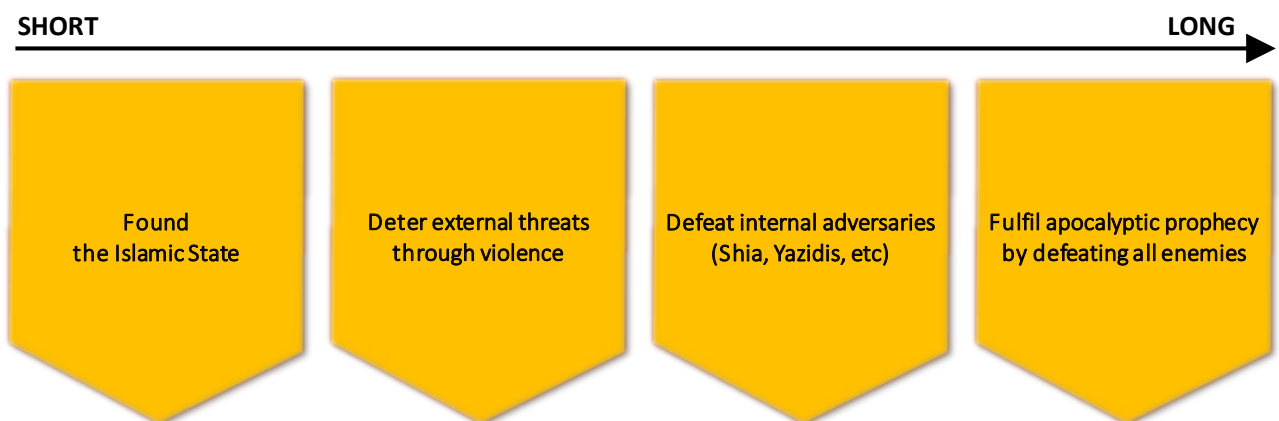


Figure 11. Short- and long-term communications objectives of Daesh.

INFORMATION STRATEGY

CORE MESSAGE

NARRATIVE THEMES

LINES OF EFFORT AND TARGET AUDIENCES

ANALYSIS OF VISUAL FRAMING AND
APPLIED PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES

5.

This terrorist organisation has come up with a unique value proposition, unifying the Muslim world in order to experience a better way of life as a part of the Ummah of the newly declared state. By articulating these benefits, Daesh has been able to capture the attention and interest of specific target audiences. In addition to advertising their good organisational structure, a major part of their information strategy consists of reporting actions taken during their expansion across the Middle East and declarations of support from various organisations. The information strategy can be broken down into the core message, narrative themes, and lines of effort.

5.1. CORE MESSAGE

In the search to identify Daesh core message, NATO StratCom COE researchers began with al-Baghdadi's proclamation speech because it contained strong messages indicating the future aims of the organisation. The 'Proclamation of the Caliphate' was a trigger point in the global campaign. The name chosen by the terrorist organisation is simultaneously their name and an assertion of their goals and identity.

Some say that the difference between using DAESH or ISIS is unimportant; both acronyms mean the same thing, one in Arabic and one in English translation. Insofar as intelligence agencies will track a terrorist organisation no matter what its members choose to call themselves, this is true. However, by explicitly choosing a name that simultaneously declares their intention, they terrorists achieve a tremendous advantage in communication. By using this name, the group is claiming to represent all Muslims everywhere as a legitimate state. The successful introduction of the name 'Islamic State' (or any of its several abbreviations) into western media circulation can be considered a public relations coup for

the organisation. Moreover, in the Middle East and among Muslim audiences globally, the name 'Islamic State' is a declaration of the will of the organisation to unite 'true Muslims' under their newly established 'Caliphate'. Therefore, the name 'the Islamic State' or '*al-Dawla al-Islamiya*'³⁶ should be considered to contain the core message of the terrorist organisation.

5.2. NARRATIVE THEMES

Daesh narratives can be grouped into three main themes.

The first narrative theme tells about Daesh political aspirations—Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, self-proclaimed Caliph Ibrahim, is the founder of the State of the Caliphate and Muhammad's successor. He is the Messenger of the Prophet, and only he holds the true vision for the Caliphate. The Caliphate is the place where all true Muslims can live in peace as members of the Ummah (the historical name of the Muslim community) and be supported by the state as the Prophet Mohammad taught. According to this narrative, Western powers have been colluding for centuries to oppress Muslims. They have undermined local leadership and established false borders. Only Daesh can rebuild what has been lost and bring peace to the region. The Caliphate is intended to become a global state that unites Muslims around the world in the fight to end Jahiliyya or ignorance, a fight that, according to prophecy, the 'Islamic State' will inevitably win.³⁷ To further shape the perception target audiences have about 'the Islamic State', the Daesh flag, emblem, and a song that is perceived as a national anthem, are used extensively.

.....
³⁶The English translation is 'The Islamic State'.

³⁷Alhayat Media Center The End of Sykes-Picot, Daesh propaganda video.

THE ISLAMIC STATE
(The State of the Caliphate)

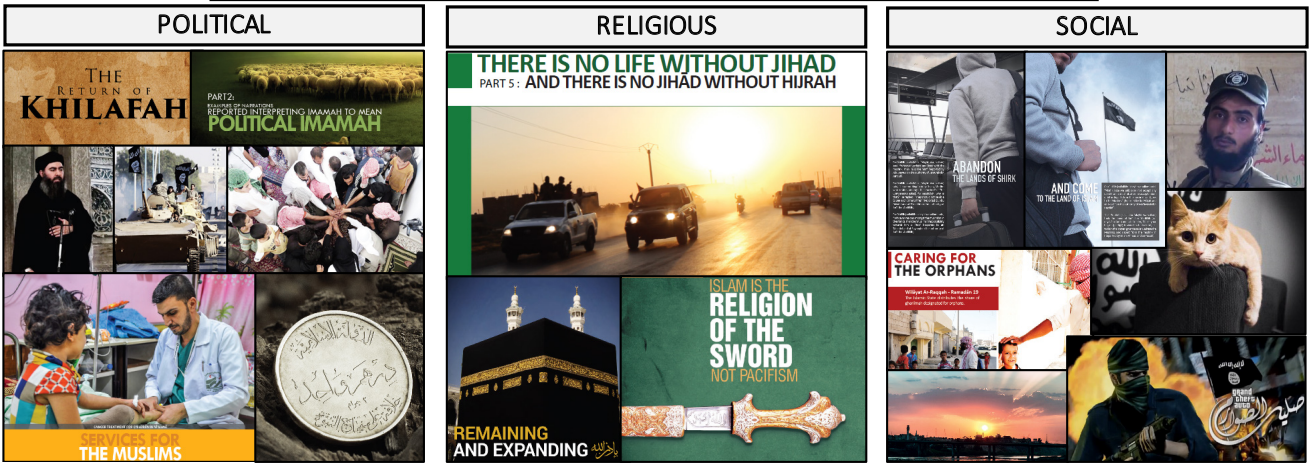
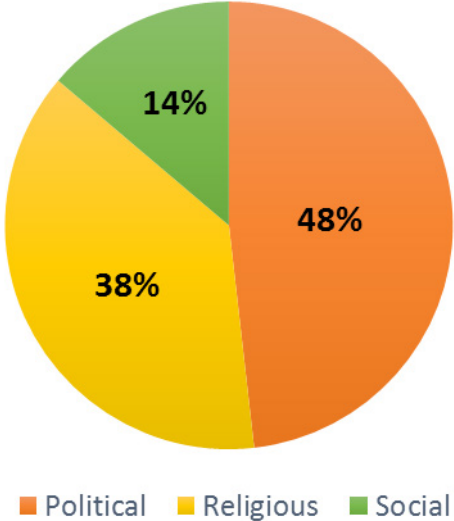


Figure 12. Daesh narratives categorised into three main themes.

Visual images show that the ‘Islamic State’ is well managed by depicting scenes of prosperity, services provided for the community, and the security forces that protect the Ummah. Images that glorify Daesh successes on the battlefield can also be considered to belong to the political narrative, since they support the assertion that the ‘state’ is expanding.

The most commonly appearing slogans refer to the creation of the ‘Islamic State’ as a new home for Muslims, and the perception that Sunni Muslims are treated unjustly by the kuffars, or unbelievers, and continue to face oppression everywhere they live.³⁸ Research shows that political messaging accounted for 48% of all of the visual propaganda published over the last year.³⁹



Graph 2. The representation of Daesh narrative themes in images used in the online magazine Dabiq, (July 2014 to September 2015), research conducted by Ph.D. Shahira Fahmy, NATO StratCom COE, Riga

The second narrative theme centers on religious issues—jihad is considered to be the religious duty of all Muslims; jihad is what Muslims must engage in to maintain their faith.

By itself, the word jihad means ‘to strive or to struggle’. Many Muslim scholars have expressed the view that jihad should be perceived as an inner spiritual struggle

³⁸The English translation is Kafir, an Arabic term used in an Islamic doctrinal sense, usually translated as ‘unbeliever’, ‘disbeliever’ or ‘infidel’, term employed by proponents of Islam against non-Muslims, particularly westerners.

³⁹Ph. D. Shahira Fahmy, „Visual framing...”, op. cit., p. 15.

and that Islam is a religion of peace. But for Daesh, 'Islam is the religion of sword' and 'deviants claim[...] that Islam equals peace' 'Allah also sent down iron alongside the revelation to consolidate His religion by the sword forged with iron.'⁴⁰ Salafi jihadists are adamant that the word Islam does not come from the word *salām*, or peace, but rather from words meaning submission and sincerity sharing the same root. For them, peace will only come when all enemies of Islam have been defeated. Since there is no consensus about the meaning of jihad, it can be successfully exploited by pro-violence organisations, including Daesh. In their eyes, global military engagement is necessary in order to defend 'true Islam'. They believe that the 'Islamic State' will soon defeat everyone who is against the Caliphate, fulfilling the prophecy as it is written in the Qur'an.⁴¹ For Daesh, jihad is a way of life. If you feel the call of the Caliphate, and want to enjoy the life of peace and community that it represents, then you must also be willing to engage in jihad, as it is necessary to maintain the purity of the faith, in other words, life without jihad is a useless life.

Susceptible young men interpret the call to jihad as a call to support the so-called Caliphate by direct action and terrorism. However, women are also targeted. According to Daesh propaganda, women play an important role in state building. They can travel to Syria and Iraq and join the organization as female jihadists, which is strongly recommended, but a woman

can also play an important role off the battlefield.⁴² Propaganda statements commonly used to represent this narrative theme include carefully chosen quotations from the Qur'an and references to many Hadith, accompanied by Daesh interpretations. These quotations are intended to prove the contention that Daesh is the only state that follows the true path of Allah and his Messenger. The slogans used in the messages corresponding to this narrative theme repeat the idea that 'only honourable people fight in Jihad'⁴³ and 'there is no life without Jihad'.⁴⁴ Every 'true Muslim' or those who feel the call to convert to 'true Islam', must join, pledge allegiance, or provide support to the Caliphate. The same idea is used to motivate Christians to convert to Islam, because '*there is still time to join the right side*'.⁴⁵ 38% of Daesh visual propaganda in 2014/2015 shows images of Daesh following the path of Allah and his Messenger, Daesh fighting to defend Islam, Muslims supporting Daesh, Christians converting to the light of Islam, and non-believers dying.⁴⁶

The third narrative theme is concerned with social issues. The organisation knows very well, that the promise of a better life can be used to influence young people who feel neglected or unappreciated in their home countries. By addressing social issues in their

⁴⁰Alhayat Media Center 'Islam is the religion of sword, not pacifism', Dabiq issue no 7, Daesh Online Magazine, page no. 20, January/February 2015.

⁴¹Ryan Mauro, 'The Islamic State Seeks the Battle of the Apocalypse', the Clarion Project, published 18 November 2014.

⁴²Daesh Manual 'Sister's Role in Jihad', Daesh Propaganda, Retrieved 05 October 2015, Source: <https://archive.org/details/SistersRoleInJihad>.

⁴³Alhayat Media Center 'There Is No life Without Jihad', Daesh recruitment video.

⁴⁴Alhayat Media Center 'There is no life without Jihad and there is no Jihad without Hijrah', Dabiq issue no 3, Daesh Online Magazine, page no. 31, July/August 2014.

⁴⁵al-Barakah Province Media, 'A Christian From the Darkness to the Light of Islam', propaganda video released on 23 March 2015.

⁴⁶Ph. D. Shahira Fahmy, 'Visual framing...', op. cit., p. 15.

information strategy, Daesh shows that they provide an attractive option for young people who feel abandoned in Western countries and have neither personal nor financial prospects. The organisation claims that their members are regular people who have feelings, love poetry, and are sensitive to beauty. Daesh pretends to be a place for like-minded people who have faced problems due to the lack of support they experience in their countries of origin. The social narratives are designed to encourage audiences to feel as though they can play a role in something significant, that joining Daesh could help them to develop themselves and to fully express their beliefs through a certain way of life. Images of family life, children playing or being taught in school, are used to emphasize the normality of the Daesh way of life.

Social messaging only accounted for 14% of Dabiq visual propaganda; however, if the research were to include social media platforms the percentage would be much higher. Social media has proven to provide an extremely effective channel for capturing the interest of those who are not radicalized, young people who want to live differently and to experience adventure, but are blind to the reality of what Daesh is actually doing.

5.3. LINES OF EFFORT AND TARGET AUDIENCES

The information strategy is split into four lines of effort, which are determined and supported by the core message and subsequent strategic narratives.

First, Daesh is looking for **support**, both personal (fighters, announcements of support, etc.) and financial. Second, the group wants to **unite** all Sunnis in their information strategy and engagement on the battlefield. Third, Daesh wants to **frighten** its adversaries, both

internal and external, and fourth, they want to **inform** a broad range of target audiences of the effectiveness of the organisation, its achievements and direct action.

The first line of effort is to gain supporters.

For Daesh to increase support for their cause means that they must work on radicalisation and recruitment. Audiences can be attracted to Daesh social messaging without necessarily being fully radicalised. The radicalisation can come later on, when preparing for specific tasks. The major aims of this line of effort are to attract local or foreign fighters, to garner support through public statement of allegiance, esp. from influential leaders, to receive financial support, to find personnel who can take part in the Daesh management structure.

Daesh messages seek to target individuals who could take on a variety of positions no matter where they are located—take part in direct battle in the Middle East, act as a foreign fighter in his/her home country, act as cyber-supporter by advertising the organisation globally, or training and educating to increase the exposure of others to the radicalisation process, undisputedly a part of Daesh youth education. Additionally, this line of effort includes soliciting statements of allegiance to Daesh from the leaders of other terrorist groups.

The second line of effort is to unify. Daesh is working to unite Sunni Muslims by articulating their drive to establish the Caliphate. Daesh propaganda products and public statements advertise the 'Islamic State' as the only place for every true Muslim. Disbelievers and apostates will not be tolerated. The efficacy of Daesh in this line of effort partially depends on undermining other Islamic organisations and portraying them as weak. The organisation emphasises its grounding in Sharia Law, the basic Islamic legal system derived from the religious precepts of Islam, particularly the



Figure 13. Four lines of efforts in the Daesh information strategy.

Qur'an and the Hadith. Therefore this line of effort is supported by psychological actions such as public executions, punishments, and the statements of various leaders about importance of the legal system. References to the Qur'an play a key role. Daesh follows a radical interpretation of the Qur'an and amplifies its importance by using carefully selected, de-contextualised quotations from the central religious text of Islam. Any westerner or Christian who agrees to participate in direct engagement in land operations strengthens Daesh's claim about fulfilling the prophecy. These small individual victories are continuously emphasised in the hope that they will lead to greater unification of the group's supporters.

A second aim of unification is to establish an active reporting system to collect information about the adversaries of the Caliphate. Target audiences are persuaded to recognise enemies of the 'Islamic State' and to report them to the designated council or department, or to take independent action to eliminate them.

The aim of the third line of effort is to frighten both internal and external adversaries. Here the same strategy has two effects. First, by portraying the organisation as extremely brutal, they want to break the will of their regional adversaries. The message being that it is senseless to fight, better to run from the

battlefield in the face of such a dominating enemy. This strategy was used effectively in preparation for the battle for Mosul.

The second effect is to divide western societies in their resolve to fight Daesh. By showing the ruthlessness and brutality of the organisation they advertise that the Middle East is no place for Westerners who want to help their enemies. Any captured opponents are likely to suffer punishment, beheading, execution. This approach attracts those who want to consider themselves 'true believers' and deters all but the most determined opponents from becoming involved in the battle against Daesh. Audiences can watch public executions in real time or when video materials are released online as propaganda. However, Daesh counts on some Westerners to fund the needs of the organisation, so messages must be carefully calibrated to appeal to the right people at the right time. Countries that do not currently face the problem of foreign fighters and radicalisation are also vulnerable to this type of messaging because, if they feel the problem does not affect them, they will be less likely to support their country in spending money and manpower to fight Daesh.

The aim of the fourth line of effort is to spread information about the effectiveness and achievements of the Caliphate and to counter the claims of their opponents.

Public statements by opinion leaders are widely shared through various channels of communication to support this goal. Providing positive information about the excellent administration of the state and improved life in the region including images of a healthy agricultural system, flourishing trade, a proper education system, social care, etc., falls under this category, as do land grabs, achievements on the battlefield, and all media products that create the image of an undefeated, state-building Caliphate.

A secondary aim is to spread information about the global campaign against the Caliphate and the Islamic world. This is a driving factor for certain audiences who see themselves as a part of the Daesh information campaign and believe that the west publishes false information about the Caliphate. They track the claims of Daesh opponents, 'fact check' them, and immediately publicise 'proof' debunking the claims of their enemies. This makes it extremely difficult for anyone apart from those directly involved to differentiate between the truth and lies.

5.4. ANALYSIS OF VISUAL FRAMING AND APPLIED PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES

Analysis has shown that the most effective line of effort for western audiences was spreading information about the group's successes.⁴⁷ The research also shows that the use of informative messages has increased significantly since the beginning of information campaign.⁴⁸ This could mean that Daesh is also tracking the effectiveness of their information strategy.

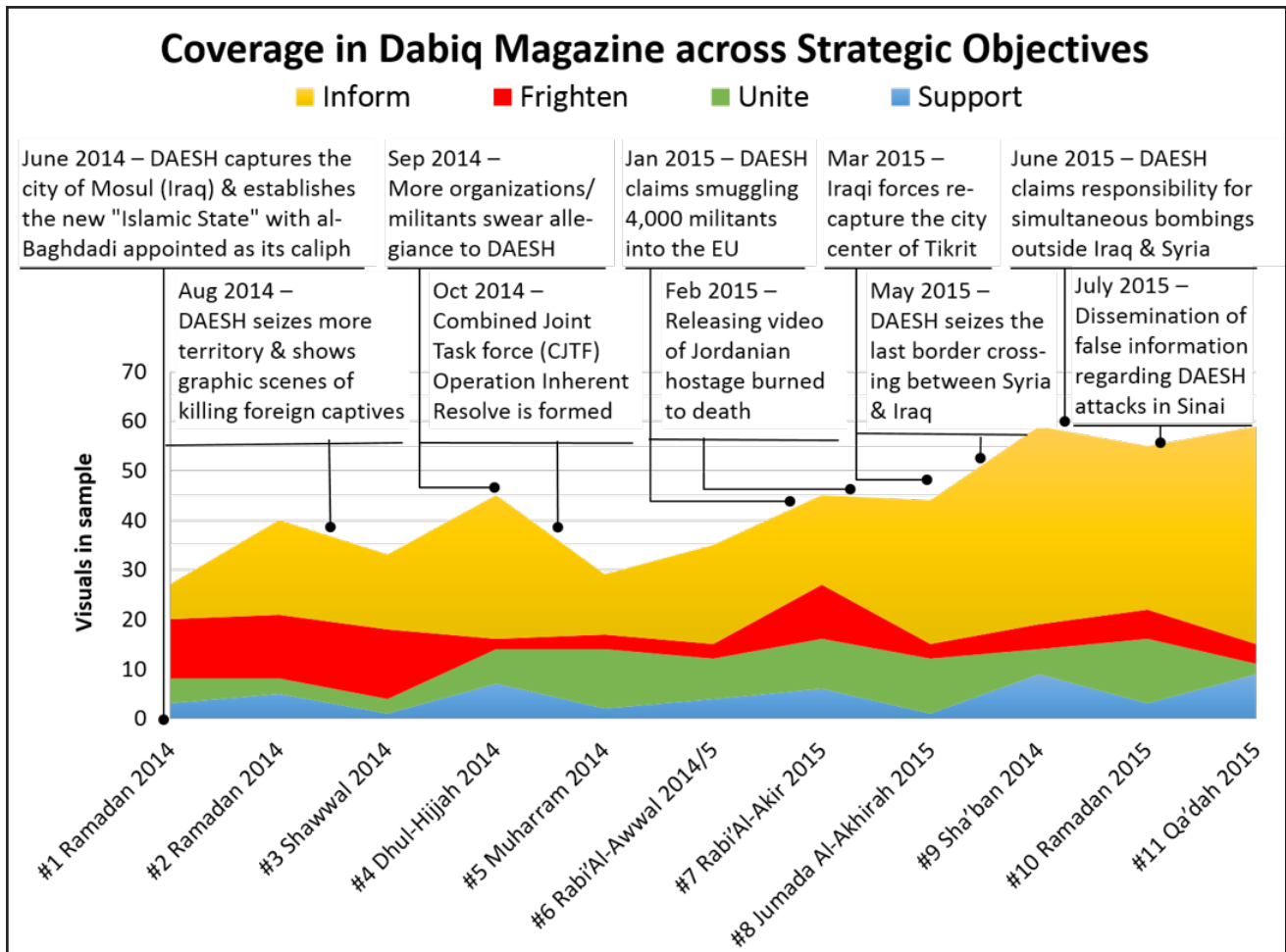
⁴⁷Ph.D. Tomasz Grzyb, 'Report on empirical research into Daesh communication in social media', University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Wrocław Branch, May 2015.

⁴⁸Ph. D. Shahira Fahmy, 'Visual framing...', op. cit., p. 16.

From the western point of view, the least important line of effort is messaging about the cruel behaviour and acts of violence perpetrated by Daesh. While most audiences are vulnerable to images of beheadings and acts of cruelty, this type of message is perceived as manipulative in the West and does not encourage Western audiences to seek for more information. Moreover, the messages refer mainly to events that either have or will take place in Daesh-controlled territory. Audiences outside the region may consider these messages of terror as relatively non-threatening, however, violent messages can significantly influence the behaviour of the local population.

It is worth mentioning that the messages focusing on the depravity of the west as a motivation for the unification of the Sunnis have a relatively high effectiveness. More highly educated respondents indicated a growing criticism of mass culture phenomena in Europe and the United States. Better-educated audiences may be more sensitive to arguments that refer to values and community. However, western audiences show a very low level of response to messages encouraging support for the organization.

In order to prepare and disseminate effective media products, Daesh needs reliable knowledge about the needs, beliefs, and concerns of the population. Their media products make use of the basic principles of influence. Based on what we know about the desired effects and objectives of the information strategy, it is clear that Daesh is aiming at multiple target audiences. We can differentiate possible audiences by their vulnerabilities (motivation, demographics, and psychographics), current susceptibility, and potential channels of delivery by correlating them with the times and places where actions and events take place.



Graph 3. Analysis of messages in the online magazine Dabiq into four lines of effort. Research conducted by Dr. Shahira Fahmy, NATO StratCom COE, Riga 2015.

Line of Effort	Target Audience
SUPPORT	Westerners, Muslims from countries other than Iraq and Syria, disengaged and disenfranchised youth populations, radicalised Muslims, children of radicalised parents, young people in close contacts with radicalism, children under fifteen, children of the ethnic and religious minorities, gamers, prisoners, virtual recruiters, girls aged 16-24 (possible future recruiters and/or wives), wives of foreign fighters, internet users of dating sites, Middle Eastern refugees
UNITE	Muslim youth from western countries, regional Sunni Muslims, Sunni Muslims in other countries, wives of foreign fighters, Middle Eastern refugees
FRIGHTEN	Western society, political dissidents from other countries, parents, Shia Muslim and other religion minorities, other terrorist organisations operating in Syria and Iraq, anti-Daesh coalition countries, Shia militias, Iraqi Government Forces, anti-Daesh Sunni tribesmen
INFORM	Supporters, fighters (domestic and foreign), western society, terrorist organisation leaders, Sunni Muslims, religious minorities, Middle Eastern refugees

Table 3. Daesh Target Audiences extrapolated from the lines of effort.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION
GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION

6.

The tools and techniques Daesh uses to implement their information strategy are specially designed for informing and influencing in different information environments. These tools are synchronized in time and space in connection with the religious calendar, battlefield successes, and other important events. Efficient implementation and coordination of messages has a strong impact on the overall information strategy, giving Daesh an important advantage in modern information warfare. The group does not work on the delivery of product one at a time, but rather plans and implements a series of products that build a story and create expectations in their target audiences about what will happen next.⁴⁹

Daesh carefully chooses their target audiences and refine their messages to address the specific range of concerns each audience holds, whether that audience is regional or global. Their products are specifically tailored to take advantage of the vulnerabilities of each target audience and delivered using the best tools to gain access to targeted groups and achieve a positive result.

6.1. REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

One of the tools used at the regional level is direct communication. Daesh members communicate their narratives through both words and deeds, increasing the credibility of their communication. It is more effective to immediately follow a message with a supporting action, e.g. a crowd is gathered to hear the reason for an execution or punishment, and then the deed is carried

out right there in front of the people. Printed or audio-visual materials are often disseminated during direct engagement actions to capitalise on each situation. Every action taken is recorded by a member of their media council for future use in media products or for intelligence purposes.



Figure 14. Example of the dissemination of printed products⁵⁰

Daesh-controlled territory is littered with visual communication tools, such as stationary billboards or graffiti on public walls.⁵¹



Figure 15. Example of billboard from Ninawa province 'Together we cultivate the tree of the Caliphate', used for 'Unite Line of Effort' This slogan has also been used on different products in Syria.⁵²

⁴⁹Good example are series of products about fighting with the enemy made by al-Barakah Province Media 'Client of the Enemy' and 'Lion of the Battlefield', or the series prepared and coordinated by global media about congratulation for pledging allegiance and involvement in the global fight, or products showed how people celebrate religious holidays in different cities under the control of the 'so-called Caliphate'.

⁵⁰Ninawa Province Media 'Irritation of the Infidels With the Return of the Dinar', propaganda video released on 09 July 2015.

⁵¹Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, 'The Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham Billboards in Raqqa', 22 October 2013 and 'The Islamic State Billboards of Raqqa', 13 November 2014.

⁵²Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, 'The Islamic State Billboards and Murals of Tel Afar and Mosul', 7 January 2015, fig. 3.



Figure 16. Example of murals ‘The Islamic State (Ninawa Province; Locality of Tel Afar) Welcomes you’, used for ‘Inform Line of Effort’.⁵³



Figure 17. Example of a billboard from Raqqa city, used for ‘Unite Line of Effort’. The message is ‘We will be victorious despite the Global Alliance’.⁵⁴

The Raqqa Media Department, for example, works on products that relate to the problems of the people who live in that specific area based on information received from others in the region.



Figure 18. A Media Department at the provincial level.

⁵³Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, ‘The Islamic State Billboards and Murals of Tel Afar and Mosul’, 7 January 2015, fig. 2

⁵⁴ibid

The organisation claims to have established numerous information points, where citizens can deliver all types of information and receive their daily news.



Figure 19. Information point established in Raqqa province with advertising billboard.

An information point is a drop-off and pick-up centre for the collection of information and the distribution of publications, but these information points do not necessarily function as offices, since production can take place anywhere where people are able to work. The billboard in the photograph advertises the Raqqa province media cell as a provider of audio-visual files containing Daesh news, recitations of the Qur’an, quotations, and poetry. According to the billboard, people from the media branch are responsible for the preparation of media CD’s.

6.2. GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION

Daesh is well known for their mastery of social media, which in many ways has superseded more traditional communications platforms. Their skilful audience analysis and juggling of the messages and platforms gives the group an enormous advantage in the efficacy of their global communications. Before these tools gained popularity, the flow of information was dependent on one-way mass media platforms and face-to-face communication. Today the speed at which information can be spread

has become an important factor for many organizations. Likewise, when any organization or country decides to use social media, there are no longer any restraints concerning dissemination, because information can be accessed anywhere the Internet is available. This is a reality of modern day information warfare. Any information product can be uploaded to the Internet and shared with others almost simultaneously.

Daesh uses Twitter as an umbrella platform that connects the various sources into one easily searchable, browsable information index. Daesh has a flexible, responsive network capable of incorporating previously learned lessons with great speed. Their network activity represents a highly complex self-repairing and self-reinforcing web.

Daesh exploits Twitter as an organisational index for disseminating information by adopting the use of regional hashtags. This allows Daesh members to check the latest news in their region at any time. What is extraordinary in Daesh Twitter usage is that the group uses Twitter's community structure as a defensive structure against account deletion and suspension. Daesh is able to recover quickly from any attacks on their information network by organising in a number of small and large communities. When one account is taken down, a new account is soon created to replace it. The new account can be shared or followed by the same community members almost immediately.

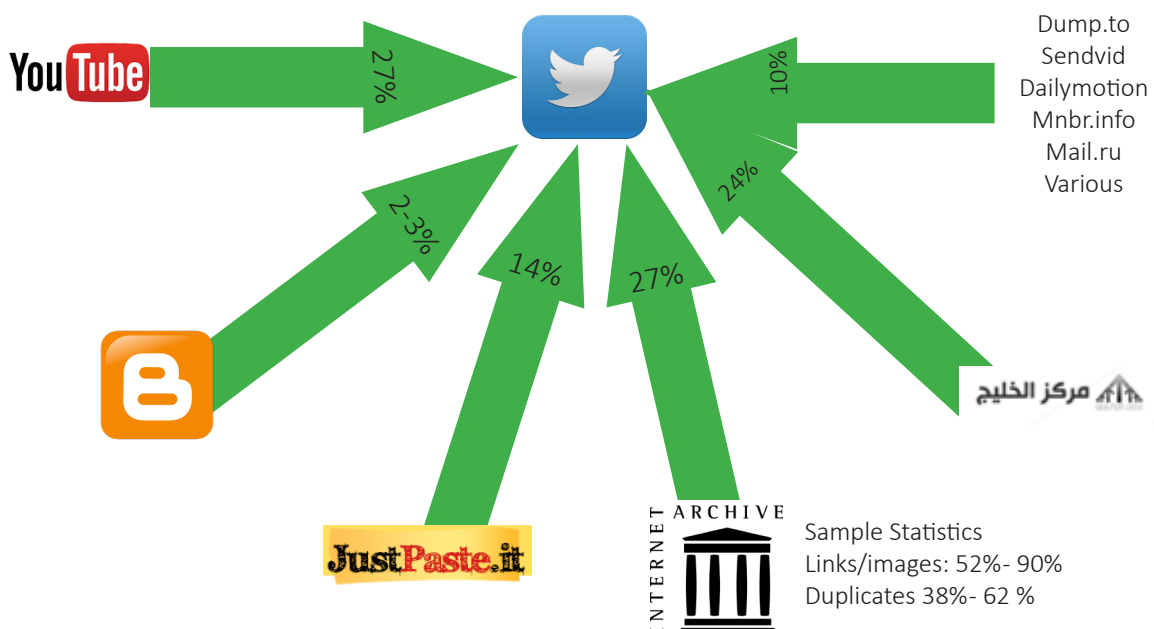


Figure 20. Detrimental Use of Social Media by Daesh. An Information Warfare Perspective. Source: Joseph Shasheen, 'Detrimental Use of Social Media and the Case of Daesh: An Information Warfare Perspective', Riga Strategic Communication Dialogue: Perception Matters, August 2015.

INFLUENCE TECHNIQUES

PRINCIPLES OF INFLUENCE

7.

Daesh makes use of persuasion techniques to manipulate not only their adversaries, but their own members and supporters as well. By analysing Daesh media products in the light of Cialdini's Principles of Influence, we can identify the persuasion techniques used to manipulate their audiences.⁵⁵

The Principle of Reciprocity states that *'people by nature feel obliged to provide either discounts or concessions to others if they have received favours from those others'*. By nature people do not want to feel indebted. Daesh makes use of the psychology of this principle by promoting their efforts in building the Caliphate, for example restoring basic services to the local population,⁵⁶ providing education for children⁵⁷, expressing their concern for elders and orphans, etc. Target audiences are continuously reminded of what has been done for the people of the region after many years of instability. The intended message is: *'We have done so much for you, show your appreciation by being an active part of the state. Let's fight together and support the rise of the Caliphate!' or 'We are reconstructing what was destroyed by the crusaders' false agreement; all of this is done by the Islamic State for you!'*

The Principle of Reciprocity arises from the moral imperative most people feel, that it is right to give something in return for a benefit received. However, Daesh also uses this principle in the negative by showing images

of dead Muslims, killed in attacks by different Muslim fractions or global coalition forces, and by calling for support in order to take revenge on its adversaries. In such cases they seem to be invoking 'an eye for an eye' retributive justice, replacing reciprocity with retaliation.⁵⁸

The Principle of Social Proof states that *'people do what they observe other people doing'*. We generally accept the patterns of behaviour we observe within our social groups. The Principle of Social Proof draws on the idea of social cohesion. When we share values and beliefs, we are more likely to uncritically follow the example of others in our social group. Daesh propagandists work to manipulate their target audiences into copying the behaviour of people within their social groups who act in ways that are beneficial for Daesh.

A common example of Daesh invoking the Principle of Social Proof is their media interviews with people living a 'normal life under rule of the Islamic State'. Many Daesh media products show people expressing their views on various subjects such as the proper administration of the state, returning to the golden dinar,⁵⁹ the execution of adversaries,⁶⁰ etc. The power of this principle lies in the social imperative to trust those in our social group and the safety we feel in following proven examples.

When opinion leaders pledge their allegiance or give thanks to Daesh, it helps manufacture the sense that what Daesh is doing is normal,

⁵⁵Robert Cialdini, 'Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion, Revised Edition', ISBN: 9780061241895, Published on 4 August 2009.

⁵⁶Fallujah Province Media "The Services Center: Relighting the Streets and Markets in the Province", propaganda video released on 24 February 2015.

⁵⁷Raqqa Province Media, "Education in the Shadow of the Caliphate", propaganda video released on 05 March 2015.

⁵⁸Alhayat Media Center „Regime Targets ar-Raqqah“, Dabiq issue no 1, Daesh Online Magazine, page no. 42, June/July 2014.

⁵⁹Dijlah Province Media 'Joy of the Muslims With the Return of the Golden Dinar', propaganda video released on 11 September 2015.

⁶⁰Homs Province Media, 'Views of the Muslims on the Burning of the Jordanian Pilot', propaganda video released on 16 February 2015.

natural, and necessary. This provides proof of the choices leaders have made, showing the people what they should do.

To strengthen the effectiveness of the Principle of Social Proof, Daesh avoids using translated materials whenever possible. Daesh creates different media products in which they record foreign fighters speaking in their native languages. For instance, a propaganda videos created to engage youth support in the fight against Daesh adversaries will use young men who speak English,⁶¹ French, Russian,⁶² German, etc. to communicate with their target audiences in their respective languages. One video targeting the English speaking audience used native speakers from the United Kingdom and Australia. In the video, British citizen Abu Muthanna al Yemeni says, *'We have brothers from Bangladesh, Iraq, Cambodia, Australia, UK... We have people from all over the world...'* Another Daesh-supporter, Abu Bara al Hindi from Britain announces, *'all my brothers who are living in the west... the cure for depression is the jihadism... all my brothers come to the jihad'*. These videos draw the attention of foreign fighters needed by the organisation for military purposes.

One of the most powerful principles of influence is the **Principle of Authority**. People have a tendency to obey authority figures, especially in the Middle East where religion is incorporated into the social fabric of daily life. That is why Daesh frequently uses quotations from the Qur'an and the Hadith, invoking the name of the Prophet and involving religious leaders in its propaganda products.

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⁶¹Alhayat Media Centre, *'There Is No Life Without Jihad'*, propaganda video released on 19 June 2014.

⁶²Qawqaz Media, *'Message From the Mujāhidin'*, propaganda video released on 29 September 2014.

By claiming that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is the Caliph and Mohammed's successor, Daesh uses the Principle of Authority to great advantage in their information strategy.

The Principle of Commitment and Consistency states that if somebody has publicly committed to something or someone, then it is necessary to behave consistently in line with that commitment. Daesh information strategy never wavers from its core message that they have established the Caliphate and will not stop fighting until it has spread globally. Once this goal has been accepted, it becomes part of the self-image of Daesh-supporters who then accept uncritically every atrocity committed by the organisation.

Travel to Syria to help build the Caliphate is widely promoted. Supporters are encouraged to engage in common activities, basic to any normal society, such as agriculture, education, medical care, etc. so that people know they can help, not only as fighters, but also by taking care of the victims of wrongful regimes, educating the youth, etc. By exploiting the commitment of their followers, Daesh is following the rule 'give them an inch and they will take a mile'. They engage the support of people willing to join them doing common tasks, but having once pledged their support, tasks they would not normally agree to may later be asked of them.

The Daesh information strategy also incorporates the **Principle of Liking**. Cialdini's theory tells us that *'the more you like someone, the more you will be persuaded by him'*. The principle is based on emphasising the connections between target audiences and those they like, or are familiar to them for one reason or another. As previously mentioned, regional level media operations and direct actions are vital to the organisation strategy. Through

this type of engagement, audiences can interact with people they know and like where they are, and so become a part of the broader strategy.

One of the less frequently used principles in the Daesh strategy is the **Principle of Scarcity**. However in the recently released issue of Dabiq, the group used this principle when reporting about hostages from Norway and China. The Dabiq article claimed that ‘they were abandoned by their governments, which did not do their utmost to purchase their freedom’,⁶³ ‘whoever would like to pay ransom for their release or transfer’ could contact the number indicated in the magazine. The article concluded with the statement ‘this is a limited time offer’. From a psychological perspective, attention is drawn to the issue because the captured hostages have hope of being released for a limited time only.

Often target audiences are addressed as part of the state. This is an example of Cialdini’s seventh principle—**The Power of We**.⁶⁴ The use of this type of messaging shows the importance of cooperation for the building of the Caliphate, giving those addressed a sense of their significance for the overall campaign. Such messages help build strong relationships both inside and outside of the organisation.

Another theory of social influence describes the **Alpha and Omega Strategies**.⁶⁵ While Alpha strategies have the effect of making a story more attractive, the Omega strategies focus on minimising resistance to the story being told or the offer being made.

When an individual is confronted with a choice, there is a clash between two opposing tendencies—desire and avoidance. Even in the midst of making decisions, people hesitate, fearing mistakes. By targeting one or the other of those feelings, we can work to either increase or decrease resistance. In a series of products titled ‘In the words of the Enemy’, Daesh proves their awareness of the effectiveness of the Omega strategy.⁶⁶ ‘Traditional’ propaganda would ignore the words of the enemy rather than quote them, but Daesh does exactly the opposite. They quote counter-propaganda and/or different statements in order to invalidate it. Individuals searching for information from various sources do not treat these sources in the same manner. Daesh quotes its enemies, ‘proves’ them wrong, and so enhances their own credibility. Those who counter Daesh messaging and strive to prove acts of violence committed by its members employ the same strategy. Reported information is tracked and, if found to be false, Daesh supporters reveal the truth in the series called *‘Debunked Lies Against The Islamic State’*.⁶⁷ These strategies increase the credibility and effectiveness of Daesh.

⁶³Alhayat Media Center ‘Prisoners for sale’, Dabiq issue no 11, Daesh Online Magazine, page no. 64-65, August/September 2015.

⁶⁴R. Cialdini.

⁶⁵Knowles, E. S., & Linn, J. A., ‘Alpha and Omega Strategies for Change. Resistance and persuasion’, 2004.

⁶⁶The series can be seen in each Dabiq magazine and on some visual products.

⁶⁷Example of series, Source: http://justpaste.it/ISIS_Debunk, retrieved on 14 October 2015.

CONCLUSIONS

Celebrated circus man P. T. Barnum has a reputation as a master psychological manipulator and is often quoted as having said, 'We have something for everyone!' Although he spoke in sweeping generalities, his audiences felt as if he were speaking directly to their deepest emotions. Subsequently his shows were very popular and Barnum was a great business success.

Daesh employs similar tactics of subjective validation. By publishing sweeping statements that reflect essential human realities, they appeal especially to the disengaged and disenfranchised. Daesh propaganda products are designed to create the feeling that it is the organisation that best understands what is missing in their lives. Not only do they provide a path forward to improving their lives, but they also provide a purpose larger than the individual, the excitement that comes from doing something valuable.

For Daesh to continue to uphold such an effective information strategy, the internal organisation and communication between structural departments must also be nurtured. The success of the internal communication practices within the organisation has consequences for the overall outcome of the efforts of the organisation.

WHY DAESH IS EFFECTIVE?

Experience gained during fifteen years of insurgency, exploitation of influence techniques and appropriate media usage made Daesh effective. Its current effectiveness

stems also from the foundations laid in al-Baghdadi's speech and the accompanying statement released by the Alhayat Media Centre. These together provide the strategic guidelines for the organisation, and were powerful enough to draw immediate and lasting attention. While large international organisations, military alliances, and national military structures invest a great deal of time and energy preparing detailed guidelines for strategic communications at each level, even for simple operations, Daesh announced their plans once and ever since they have been following their leader.

The name chosen by Daesh is not only a moniker for identification, but also expresses their core message and aspirations. In a polarised world, perception is determined by worldview, values, and access to information and education. While one side clearly perceives Daesh as a terrorist organisation, the other side see them as fighters in the name of freedom, providing a way forward out of chaos and poverty.

Perception becomes reality and drives behaviour. By now, many organisations, public individuals, leaders and politicians are using the name Daesh; this signals their belonging to those who consider Daesh to be a terrorist organisation that should not be granted consideration as a legitimate state because of their use of violence to achieve their goals. Even though the use of this name is beginning to catch on, there is still plenty of room for improvement. As long as politicians, opinion leaders, and the media are inconsistent

in the way they talk about the terrorists, misunderstandings persist and the terrorists gain credibility at our expense.

Religion underpins Middle Eastern societies. Daesh uses the radical interpretation of religion for its most effective communication. In the delicate work of interpreting religious texts, Daesh carefully chooses passages and quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith that allow for radical interpretation. All announcements made by their leaders, and quotations used in their media products promote extremist interpretations of the religious texts that Muslims around the world follow. They are unwavering in this approach. Their will and conviction is powerful and attracts those who want more power in their own lives.

However, the group could not be so effective, if it did not have the support of a broader audience. Therefore, Daesh has a multi-pronged recruitment and re-education program, managed internally and externally by group members, that has great importance for the overall success of the strategic campaign. Activities include replacing science and literature texts in schools on Daesh-controlled territory; indoctrinating and radicalising the young, running military camps to train and educate fighters and structural leaders. The organisation targets potential supporters as young as possible to seed them with hatred of their enemies and to prepare them to believe in the radical interpretations of the group so that the young people would be willing to commit acts of terrorism and give their lives for the organisation.

Daesh knows that actions speak louder than words. Alongside their information campaign, they consistently work on direct action to prove that they not only have aspirations and intentions, but also are capable of following through on what they say. Not allowing for 'say-do gaps' greatly increases the effectiveness

of any strategic communications campaign. Deeds provide proof and, in the eyes of their supporters, increase the likelihood that they will be able to fully implement their strategy. Direct action, military engagement, and propaganda products are easily picked up by different media platforms and redistributed as news. When that happens, news outlets further disseminate the messages of 'the Islamic State'.

Daesh leaders use self-sustaining social media platforms for sharing information. Although they cannot operate in complete freedom, the group has established a community network that is resistant to disruption. Because these platforms are organised in large and small communities, if one account is reported for suspensions, another accounts is quickly introduced to replace it.⁶⁸ Followers know how the strategy works. For the West the digital information campaign is like a many-headed hydra that grows a new head as soon as one is cut off. For Daesh-supporters, the constant fight for freedom of expression gives credibility to the claim that there is a global conspiracy to subjugate Muslims.

WHAT WE SHOULD KNOW

It is important to understand that not every Islamic organisation supports Daesh and follows its directives. Many Muslims and Muslim leaders emphasise that acts of violence have nothing in common with true Islam, that the so-called 'Caliphate' is false. Moreover, many Muslim organisations oppose Daesh radical interpretation of the Qur'an to diminish its influence. These organisations are supported by the global coalition against Daesh that was established at the end of 2014.

⁶⁸ Joseph Shaheen, 'Network of Terror: How DAESH Uses Adaptive Social Networks to Spread its Message', The NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, Riga, October 2015.

The coalition consists of sixty partners, including several Arab countries. Coalition partners have reaffirmed their commitment to work together under a common, multifaceted, and long-term strategy to degrade and defeat Daesh. Participants have decided that the efforts of the Global Coalition should focus on multiple lines of effort⁶⁹:

- Supporting military operations, capacity building, and training
- Stopping the flow of foreign terrorist fighters
- Cutting off Daesh access to financing and funding
- Addressing associated humanitarian relief and crises
- Exposing the true nature of Daesh, or ideological delegitimation

The flow of foreign fighters to Syria has been disrupted by the coalition. Each country has its own intelligence system and security agencies that track suspected fighters as they make their way back to their own countries. This means that for those who want to join Daesh as foreign fighters, freedom of movement will be curtailed.

The global refugee crisis is also becoming a crisis for Daesh. Many Syrians reject the group's claim that the so-called 'Caliphate' offers a safe haven, opting instead to become refugees undertaking the dangerous journey

to Europe.⁷⁰ These actions disprove the idea of the Caliphate as a place for every Muslim. That is why Daesh has released so many videos messages criticising the refugees, threatening them with the dangers of living among 'unbelievers' and imploring them to join the Caliphate. Even so, the refugee crisis also provides an opportunity for Daesh to insert undercover terrorists who can work to destabilise European society and spread the message about joining the Caliphate.⁷¹

⁶⁹Office of the US spokesperson, 'Joint Statement Issued by Partners at the Counter-ISIL Coalition Ministerial Meeting', Washington, DC, released on 3 December 2014, retrieved on 14 October 2015.

⁷⁰Deborah Amos, "The Flood Of Syrian Refugees Puts ISIS On The Defensive", NPR, released on 22 September 2015, retrieved on 14 October 2015

⁷¹al-Barakah Province Media, "Advice to the Refugees To the Countries of Disbelief", propaganda video released on 17 September 2015.

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