

# THE RETURN OF KHILAFAH: THE CONSTITUTIVE NARRATIVES OF DAESH

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## INTRODUCTION

The radical extremist Muslim group that is referred to by the media variously as ISIS or ISIL is one of the greatest military dangers we face in the world today. In this article I will use the name Daesh to refer to this group, and I strongly encourage others to use this name as well. Daesh is strategically a better choice: it is accurate in that it spells out the acronym of the group's full Arabic name, Daesh is the Arab acronym for Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah fe Al-Iraq wa Al-Sham or The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (the Levant), from which the West originally derived the acronyms ISIS or ISIL.

Much of what has been written about the group's strategic communication campaign focuses on the rhetorical tactics used to argue for jihad (in their terms, a holy war that unites Muslims against unbelievers), including the use of violence and threatening tactics, such as beheadings, and religious justification for engaging in a retaliatory war to avenge perceived humiliation visited upon Muslims. However, in order to see the extent of what Daesh is really doing with its strategic communication, one needs to look at the larger picture. Daesh is not just recruiting soldiers to fight a war; the group is using what Maurice Charland, Professor of Communication Studies at Concordia University, calls 'constitutive rhetoric' to construct their particular conception of a Muslim nation-state in the minds of what they hope is a growing global contingent of allies, 'true believers' who will support Daesh's self-proclaimed Khilafah, Caliphate, or Islamic State.

To accomplish their communication goals, Daesh conducts an on-going and technologically sophisticated strategic communication campaign. At the core of Daesh's strategic communication campaign is the use of three main narratives, which they disseminate to the outside world through the Internet via social media platforms such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *YouTube* and various message boards. Robert J. Hastings, author of the Department of Defence Principles of Strategic Communication, describes strategic communication as 'an ongoing synchronization of images, actions

and words to get a desired effect'.<sup>1</sup> According to Hallahan et al. authors of 'Defining strategic communication', strategic communication is 'communicating purposefully to advance a mission'.<sup>2</sup>

Narratives construct meaning for the meaning-making brain by creating social realities that define subjects and establish relational positions.<sup>3</sup> Narratives are important to how we perceive the world and therefore become powerful tools for persuasion.<sup>4</sup> Daesh bases its strategic communication campaign on a hierarchy of narratives. At the top of that hierarchy is Daesh's constitutive meta-narrative. The constitutive meta-narrative organizes and explains experiences, both historical and contemporary, in such a way as to lead the listener to accepting the Daesh's version of events.<sup>5</sup> Charland defines the purpose of the narrative in constitutive rhetoric as 'calling a common, collective identity into existence'.<sup>6</sup> Daesh's meta-narrative creates the sense that all Muslims 'are one people with common enemies, values & beliefs, and connected through space and time'. In this hierarchy, Daesh's constitutive meta-narrative comprises three narrative arcs. The narrative arcs create a framework that allows a particular group (especially, susceptible young men) to connect apparently unconnected phenomena around some causal transformation.<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Freedman, Professor of War Studies at King's College London, tells us that 'Narratives are designed or nurtured with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events'.<sup>8</sup> Or, as Halverson, Goodall and Corman authors of *Master narratives of Islamist extremism* writes, '[They are a...] coherent system of interrelated and sequentially organized stories that share a common rhetorical desire to resolve a conflict by establishing audience expectations according to the known trajectories of its literary and rhetorical form'.<sup>9</sup>

1 R. J. Hastings. 'Strategic communication: Advice from the Defence Department' (8 December 2008) in ragan.com online [http://www.ragan.com/Main/Articles/Strategic\\_communication\\_Advice\\_from\\_the\\_Defense\\_De\\_34540.aspx](http://www.ragan.com/Main/Articles/Strategic_communication_Advice_from_the_Defense_De_34540.aspx) (Last accessed 5 October 2015).

2 K. Hallahan, D. Holtzhausen, B. Van Ruler, D. Verčič, and K. Sriramesh, 'Defining strategic communication', *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 1 (2007), 3-35.

3 J. Bruner, 'The Narrative construction of reality', *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991), 1-21.

4 K. Burke, *A Grammar of motives*, (Berkeley, 1969); M. Charland, 'Constitutive rhetoric: The case of the people quebecois', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987), 133-150.

5 J. Stephens & R. McCallum, *Retelling stories, framing culture: Traditional story and metanarratives in children's literature*, (New York, 1998).

6 M. Charland, 'Constitutive rhetoric', 133-150.

7 T. Todorov, *The poetics of prose*, (Ithaca, 1977).

8 L. Freedman, 'Networks, culture, and narratives', *Adelphi Papers Series* 45 (2006), 11-26.

9 J.R. Halverson, H.L. Goodall, and S.R. Corman, *Master narratives of Islamist extremism*, (New York, 2011), p. 14.

Daesh masterfully uses ‘immensely rich narratives’<sup>10</sup> to create a worldview that leads to supporting the Khilafah and thus radical jihad. Charland’s three ideological effects—‘struggles and ordeals’, the ‘restricted path’, and ‘consubstantiality’ convincingly explain the three narrative arcs that Daesh uses to influence the perception of their audience in support of their constitutive rhetoric.<sup>11</sup> A series of what I will call sub-narratives or stories provide support for the internal logic of each narrative arc, both separately and inter-relatedly. In the sense of this paper, stories are ‘a particular sequence of related events that are situated in the past and recounted for rhetorical/ideological reasons’.<sup>12</sup> The stories provide evidence to support the three narrative arcs.

This paper examines Daesh’s public address, (videos, magazines, and speeches) and the way in which Daesh differs from al Qaeda in their strategic communication by analysing the stories used to support the perceptions crafted in the three narrative arcs. The core argument of this paper is that one aspect of the three, the ‘consubstantiality’ narrative, is the most important collection of stories for convincing new followers to join, and also Daesh’s weakest point. Daesh is conducting a sophisticated ‘long game’ ideological war focused on getting Muslims to accept the meta-narrative, which states: ‘We are one people with common values and beliefs, connected through space and time. We are a people under attack; we have common enemies, the forces of chaos and ignorance. When we join together under one banner in God’s name our victory will be inevitable!’

I will begin with an analysis of the ‘consubstantiality’ narrative because it provides the basis that the other narrative arcs build upon. I will then examine the stories that make up the ‘struggles and ordeals’ and ‘restrictive path’ narratives and what they accomplish. I will end with a summary of the three and some suggestions for combating Daesh’s influence.

## CONSUBSTANTIALITY

### ‘We are people across space and time’

Historically, radical jihadist groups have not received much support from the broader Muslim community. Contemporary radical jihadists have learned from the failures of those who went before them (e.g. the failed assassination attempt on Anwar Sadat

10 S. Cottee, ‘What is it so hard to stop ISIS propaganda’ (2 March 2015) in The Atlantic Online <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/03/why-its-so-hard-to-stop-isis-propaganda/386216/> (last accessed 30 September 2015).

11 M. Charland, ‘Constitutive rhetoric’, 33-150.

12 Halverson et al., Master narratives, p. 13.

that was meant to start a revolution) and have made it their goal to win the support of the ummah (the community of Muslims), if not physically, then at least emotionally, so they can further their aims. The constitutive meta-narrative arises from the need to garner support for jihad; this is where the ‘constatinality’ narrative becomes important.

According to Charland, ‘constatinality’ is defined as being of the same substance or essence, between groups and across generations.<sup>13</sup> The ‘constatinality’ narrative is meant to forge links between contemporary Muslims and the self-proclaimed Khilafah, as well as to their romanticized past. Global jihadists believe the only way to stop the ‘American crusade against Islam’<sup>14</sup> beset upon the ummah is to unite Muslims everywhere under Daesh ideology. Daesh ideology defines who is and who is not a true Muslim, and describes the need for defensive war to cope with their ‘struggles and ordeals’ (the second narrative arc described below).<sup>15</sup> As stated in the first issue of *Dabiq*, the online magazine produced by Daesh, ‘It also requested [of all true Muslims] that they assist the Islamic State with their wealth, their sons, their men, their weapons, their strength and their opinion, and encourage their sons and their brothers to join the military body of the Islamic State’.<sup>16</sup> The stories found in the ‘constatinality’ narrative can be distilled into one sentence: *‘We are one people across space and time.’*

## Historical Stories - The Origin of the Ummah

One of the historical stories used by Salafi-jihadists is the origin story of the ummah. ‘If Islam is again to play the role of the leader of mankind, then it is necessary that the Muslim community be restored to its original form’.<sup>17</sup> An origin story is the foundation upon which all else—policy, rhetoric, and action—is built. According to director of History of Religions department at the University of Chicago Mircea Eliade, origin stories repeat the idea that understanding one’s origin is important not only for understanding the past, but also for responding appropriately to what

13 M. Charland, ‘Constitutive rhetoric’, p. 140.

14 *Dabiq*, Issue 3, pg. 35. Online <http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#> (last accessed 15 March 2015).

15 J. M. Brachman, *Global jihadism: Theory and practice*, (London, 2009); A. Gendron, ‘Militant Jihadism: Radicalization, Conversion’ (2007) Online: <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/testimony/52.pdf> (last accessed 10 December 2015); A.B. Naji, *The management of savagery: The most critical stages through which the ummah will pass* (2003) Online: <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf> (last accessed 12 March 2015).

16 *Dabiq*, Issue 1, p. 13. Online <http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#> (last accessed 12 March 2015).

17 Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, (in Arabic: *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq*, Egypt, 1964), (Chicago, 2007).

is happening in the present.<sup>18</sup> The story of the original ummah refers back to the origin of Islam when it is considered to be at its purest. Before Islam, people lived in Jahiliyyah or ignorance; Muhammad discovered the truth of Islam and he and his followers used it to combat ignorance. For radical jihadists like Daesh, utilizing the origin story of the ummah is at the core of the constitutive meta-narrative. The strength of all other Daesh narratives depends on all members of the group buying into Daesh's version of the origin myth.

## What Origin Stories Accomplish

The origin story of the ummah defines the policies of the contemporary Khilafah, as interpreted by Daesh. Origin stories contain the political, social, and cultural doctrine of a group. Daesh's use of stories about the origin of the ummah binds contemporary Muslims together while linking them to the past through historical tales of battle that engender an optimistic appeal, assuring faithful Muslims of inevitable victory should they enter into war.<sup>19</sup> For example, in the introduction to the first issue of *Dabiq*, the editors cite Daesh leader Abu Bakr al-Husayni al-Qurashi al-Baghdadi in the article 'Glad tidings for the Muslim Ummah': 'The time has come for the Ummah of Muhammad...to wake up from its sleep sleep, remove the garments of dishonour, and shake off the dust of humiliation and disgrace, for the era of lamenting and moaning has gone'.<sup>20</sup> The origin stories of the ummah, and others that follow Salafi-jihadist interpretations of the early years of the ummah, explain how Muslims need to act in the present day and how war is legitimised through Qur'anic verses. The narrative of 'consubstantiality' ties Muslims from around the world and 'even across generations' together in their belief in Islam, and the Khilafah becomes the physical representation of consubstantiality.<sup>21</sup>

## Historical Stories—Tales of Battle

Tales of battle are common throughout the history of civilization.<sup>22</sup> They are used as cautionary tales and stories that inspire optimism by telling of the inevitable victory for those who fight on the side of truth and justice.<sup>23</sup>

18 M. Eliade, (W. Trask, trans.), *Myth and reality*, (New York, 1963).

19 R.F. Reid, 'New England rhetoric and the French War, 1754-1760: A case study in the rhetoric of war', *Communication Monographs* 43 (1976), p. 282.

20 *Dabiq*, Issue 9. Online <http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#> (Last accessed 13 July 2015).

21 K.S. Zagacki, 'Constitutive rhetoric reconsidered: Constitutive paradoxes in G.W. Bush's Iraq war speeches', *Western Journal of Communication* Vol. 71, No. 4, October 2007, 272–293 Online <http://www4.ncsu.edu/~kszagack/images/w-2007.pdf>

22 Halverson et al., *Master narratives*.

23 R.F. Reid, 'New England rhetoric and the French war.'

Salafi-jihadist historical battle stories are no different. The common stories, the battles of Khaybar,<sup>24</sup> the Trenches,<sup>25</sup> and Badr,<sup>26</sup> establish the foundations for how one should perceive and interpret contemporary struggles. These stories tell tales of treachery, triumph over perceived insurmountable odds, and, most importantly, faith winning over disbelief. For example, several issues of *Dabiq* mention the Battle of Badr in the context of contemporary warfare. The Battle of Badr was a turning point in the history of Islam.<sup>27</sup> The story of the Battle of Badr asserts that the righteous—those who submit to the will of God—will defeat the enemies of God. The story ‘serves as a powerful lesson for all Muslims to be firm in their faith...even in the face of seemingly impossible odds or certain death’.<sup>28</sup> These ‘against all odds’ battle stories feed off the ‘struggles and ordeals’ conspiracy stories (described below) and drive home the narrative of ‘consubstantiality’.

## What Battle Stories Accomplish

By portraying the current state of war within a carefully designed historical framework, discussions with prospective recruits can address questions of identity and foster a sense of belonging through the ‘consubstantiality’ narratives. This tactic gives the perception of a deeper, more personal interaction with the immediacy, necessity, and inevitability of war. Daesh makes use of historical battle stories to provide a dramatic vision for contemporary Muslims. In their stories, Muslims face what appear to be insurmountable odds. However, by submitting to God and demonstrating their faith and intellect by uniting behind those who carry forth the true message of the Prophet Muhammad, they are able to overcome the odds.

The Battle of the Trenches is an important example. The trench is a condensation symbol that has great meaning in the history of Islam. Political scientist Doris Graber defines the term condensation symbol as ‘a name, word, phrase, or maxim, which stirs vivid impressions involving the listener’s most basic values and readies the listener for action’. A condensation symbol can also be an image. In the Battle of the Trenches, Muhammad and the Muslim defenders of Medina intelligently used the city’s natural fortifications and complimented them by digging trenches where the defenders could weather attacks. This allowed the vastly outnumbered Muslims to defend themselves against a superior force until the confederacy of their enemies was broken. This story not only provides

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24 Refers to a battle that took place between the Muslims and the Jews in 629 C.E.

25 The Battle of the Trenches is an important story in Islamic history. It was a battle where Muhammad and his original ummah dug a trench and used the natural fortifications of Medina to hold off a superior force.

26 The original ummah defeated their enemies and signaled the rise of Islam’s power.

27 R. Aslan, *No god but God: The origins, evolution, and future of Islam*, (New York, 2005).

28 Halverson et al., *Master narratives*.

a ‘powerful lesson’ for current times, the understanding meant to be drawn from the story is the use of one’s faith and intellect to outwit a superior force.<sup>29</sup> ‘O ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two *trenches* [emphasis added], with no third camp present: The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (the unbelievers) and hypocrisy—the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin (those engaged in jihad, plural of mujahid) everywhere, and the camp of the jews [sic], the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the jews’.<sup>30</sup> On the basis of a common interest, the story offers a connection ‘between the dead and the living’, while also giving hope to modern jihadists.<sup>31</sup> Just as in the battle stories of the past, it tells how the believers, firm in their faith, faced certain death by powerful foes and, by the grace of Allah, lived to protect the ummah.<sup>32</sup>

Daesh systematically updates its battle stories while reinforcing the idea of ‘consubstantiality’. They engage their audiences via social media. ‘Social media have become “story telling instruments”, ensuring high circulation in virtual spaces where fighters share their experiences from the battlefield’.<sup>33</sup> Before social media, previous incarnations of radical jihadism tended to function through the use of the older one-way message model of mass communication. Now Daesh has embraced the new technology and can engage their audiences directly through two-way social media platforms.<sup>34</sup> Prospective recruits are encouraged to use Twitter and other social media platforms to communicate with foreign fighters engaging in battle to learn from them.<sup>35</sup>

## Stories of Care and a Thriving Community

Origin stories legitimising battle are not the only stories Daesh uses to connect the origin myth to the ummah, ‘the group has also released images showing foot soldiers

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29 Ibid.

30 A.B. al-Baghdadi, *The revived caliphate: The Islamic State (2003-2014+)* (2014) pp. 71-72. Online [https://archive.org/stream/EbookTheRevivedCaliphate2014/Ebook-The-REVIVED-CALIPHATE-2014\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/EbookTheRevivedCaliphate2014/Ebook-The-REVIVED-CALIPHATE-2014_djvu.txt) (last accessed 15 October 2015).

31 K. Burke, *A Grammar of motives*.

32 M. Charland, ‘Constitutive rhetoric’.

33 M. Lobardi, ‘IS 2.0 and beyond: The Caliphate’s communication project,’ in Maggioni and Magri (eds.), *Twitter and jihad: The communication strategy of ISIS*, p. 88 Online <http://www.ispionline.it/en/articles/article/twitter-and-jihad-communication-strategy-isis-13105> (last accessed 15 October 2015).

34 Scott Simon interviews Clint Watts of the Foreign Policy Institute, ‘ISIS runs a dark media campaign on social media’ (6 September 2014) in *Weekend Edition Saturday*, NPR online: [http://www.npr.org/2014/09/06/346299142/isis-runs-a-dark-media-campaign-on-social-media?utm\\_medium=RSS&utm\\_campaign=news](http://www.npr.org/2014/09/06/346299142/isis-runs-a-dark-media-campaign-on-social-media?utm_medium=RSS&utm_campaign=news) (last accessed 16 November 2015).

35 J. Farwell, ‘How ISIS uses social media’, (02 October 2014) Online <https://www.iiss.org/en/politics%20and%20strategy/blogsections/2014-d2de/october-931b/isis-media-9d28> (last accessed 9 September 2015).



eating Snickers bars and nurturing kittens'.<sup>36</sup> Farwell cites Thomas Elkjer Nissen, who explains that the image of 'playing with kittens' functions as a condensation symbol to connect contemporary Muslims to past Muslims. It is common knowledge among Muslims that Huraira, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, was known for being fond of cats.<sup>37</sup> Although violence plays a vital role in Daesh narratives, the original ummah is also represented through stories focusing on community. Fondness for cats can be seen as an oblique reference to the character of the original ummah. The reason for nurturing myriad connections to the Muslim origin myth is to strengthen the perception that Daesh is the re-emergence of the original ummah. 'Isis wants the people living in the lands they now control to return to the ultraconservative traditions that they claim the earliest Muslims lived by'.<sup>38</sup> In a documentary-style Daesh production entitled *'From inside the Halab'*,<sup>39</sup> hostage John Cantlie, a British photojournalist, travels around the Aleppo showing how the city prospers under Daesh's sharia rule.<sup>40</sup> This sort of video also bolsters the claim that Daesh is reviving the Khilafah.<sup>41</sup>

## The Impact of the Consubstantiality Narrative

In his article 'Empirical Evidence for a Narrative Concept of Self,' John Bickle argues that the concept of self is constructed through narratives from the perspective of cognitive psychology.<sup>42</sup> Psychologist Jerome Bruner has also written extensively on how important narratives are to a human sense of self and the construction of a child's identity.<sup>43</sup> Stories that support the 'consubstantiality' narratives fit with our understanding of the narrative of self. Stories supporting the idea of 'consubstantiality' work to construct or reinforce the identities of groups of individuals. An individual sense of identity is commonly linked to a person's ethnicity, nation, race, etc. A sense of identity linked to such markers hinders the perception of commonality between Muslims, which in turn impedes the acceptance of the conspiracy narratives and, further down the line, to invasion narratives. The 'consubstantiality' narrative is meant to bind contemporary Muslims to their shared religious past and to each other in the present. These are meant to create a stronger connection to Islam, their

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 P. Kingsley, 'Who is behind ISIS's terrifying online propaganda operation?' (23 June 2015) Online <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/23/who-behind-isis-propaganda-operation-iraq> (last accessed 14 October 2015).

39 The ancient name of Aleppo.

40 P. Kingsley, 'Who is behind ISIS's terrifying online propaganda operation?'

41 A.B. al-Baghdadi, *The revived caliphate: The Islamic State*.

42 J. Bickle, 'Empirical evidence for a narrative concept of self', in McVay, Flanagan, and Fireman (eds.), *Narrative and consciousness: Literature, psychology, and the brain*, (New York, 2003).

43 J. Bruner, *Acts of meaning*, (Cambridge MA, 1990).



Muslim identity, and, eventually, to ‘the Islamic State,’ thus decreasing a person’s identification with other, more salient, identities (national, tribal, ethnic, racial, etc.). In the address printed in the first issue of *Dabiq*, Abu Bakr says of the Khalifa: ‘It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers.’<sup>44</sup> The ‘consubstantiality’ narrative is meant to redirect the identity of the individual.

It becomes incumbent upon the jihadist organization to convince individuals from any part of the world to defend a place that he/she may never have visited and with which he/she has absolutely no familial ties. It is important for Daesh to make their audience believe an attack on any Muslim is an attack on all of Islam.

In order to influence a person to defend an abstraction like the ummah, Daesh must find a way for that abstraction to become a basic part of the identity of all Muslims, indivisible from their core values and beliefs. The stories of consubstantiality accomplish these tasks. Daesh cultivates these stories, so that their ideology can worm its way into the core belief system of the individual and to slowly twist it, leading to fear of remaining outside the group and the inevitable imperative for fighting a ‘defensive war’. The ‘consubstantiality’ narrative is the key to Daesh’s strategic campaign. Without the acceptance of these narratives, Muslims could not be moved to support their cause. All other aspects of Daesh propaganda rely on people accepting the consubstantial narrative that frames their worldview.

## STRUGGLES AND ORDEALS

### ‘We are a people under attack!’

According to Charland, the purpose of a ‘struggles and ordeals’ narrative is to encourage a group of people to identify with each other through their common experiences.<sup>45</sup> Most Salafi-jihadist organizations tell stories of conspiracy plots, both internal and external, and invasion, both ideological and geographical, to feed a broader ‘struggles and ordeals’<sup>46</sup> narrative of Islam under attack.<sup>47</sup> Salafi-jihadists also make use of common themes in their speeches and imagery, such as ‘the demonization and victimisation of Muslims’<sup>48</sup> and ‘the occupation of the Islamic

44 Dabiq, Issue 1, pg. 7. Online <http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#> (last accessed 11 March 2015).

45 M. Charland, ‘Constitutive rhetoric’, pp.133-150.

46 K.S. Zagacki, ‘Constitutive rhetoric reconsidered’

47 J. Brachman, Global jihadism; A. Gendron, ‘Militant jihadism’

48 The Combating Terrorism Center, ‘The Islamic imagery project: Visual motifs in jihadi internet propaganda’ (West Point, 2006) Online <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-islamic-imagery-project> (last accessed 16 February 2015).

nations’, in order to facilitate the acceptance of conspiracy and invasion stories.<sup>49</sup> The ‘struggles and ordeals’ narrative is made up of stories that reflect the idea: *‘We are a people under attack!’*

## Conspiracy stories

Counterterrorism specialist Jarret Brachman states, ‘The first premise of Jihadism is there is a global conspiracy working to destroy Islam’.<sup>50</sup> The conspiracy premise is built upon stories in which the ummah faces power imbalance, subjugation, and constant humiliation from the West.<sup>51</sup> According to radical jihadists, a conspiracy of victimization has been taking place for more than 700 years; or as Professor Global Studies M.B. Steger notes,<sup>52</sup> at least since ‘the Great Powers’ division of the Ottoman Empire after the Great War’ with the signing of the Sykes-Picot accord.<sup>53</sup>

The conspiracy stories tell us that there is an entire system that subjugates Muslims. Not only has it been in place for centuries, but it is vital and active today. ‘The current socio-political system is one that oppresses and discriminates against Muslims, who are the victims of an international world order dominated by the West—the aggressor and enemy of Islam’.

A conspiracy must be two or more people, a group, or an organization seeking goals that create undesirable state of affairs for others.<sup>54</sup> Radical-jihadist conspiracies cite two threats to Islam—ruling regimes in the Arab world and external Western forces. These two threats are enmeshed and cooperate with one another, both overtly and covertly. Thus, the conspiracy stories can be divided into two interdependent types, internal and external threats.

49 C. Bockstette, ‘Jihadist terrorist use of strategic communication management techniques’, Online [http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/MCDOcs/files/College/F\\_Publications/occPapers/occ-paper\\_20-en.pdf](http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/MCDOcs/files/College/F_Publications/occPapers/occ-paper_20-en.pdf) (last accessed 9 September 2015).

50 J. M. Brachman, *Global jihadism*, p. 11.

51 J. M. Brachman, *Global jihadism*; A. Gendron, ‘Militant jihadism’; B. Lewis, ‘License to kill: Usama bin Laden’s declaration of jihad’ in G. Rose & J. Tepperman (eds.), *The U.S. vs. al Qaeda: A history of the war on terror*. (New York, 2011).

52 M.B. Steger, ‘Religion and ideology in the global age: Analysing al Qaeda’s Islamist globalism’. *New Political Science* 31.4 (2009), p. 535

53 A. Gendron, ‘Militant jihadism’.

54 P. Knight, ‘Making sense of conspiracy theories’ in P. Knight (ed.), *Conspiracy theories in American history: An encyclopedia*. (Santa Barbara, CA, 2003).

## The Facilitators of Conspiracy—Stories of Internal Threats

Conflicts between Middle Eastern states and religious Salafi-jihadist groups play an important part in Middle East culture and politics. These ongoing conflicts force radical jihadists groups to prove the need to overthrow Arabic regimes. In order to garner support for overthrowing the status-quo, Salafi-jihadists groups tell stories of conspiracy that point to the internal corruption that threatens the Islamic identity. Halverson et al. have given names to the two stories that tell of internal corruption, the Pharaoh and Hypocrite.<sup>55</sup>

The Pharaoh story articulates the struggles of the believers against despised rulers and corrupt regimes.<sup>56</sup> These stories identify the state system and its leaders as a part of the internal corruption and provide a need for change through revolution. The Hypocrite story depicts a ruse that involves an ‘individual or group that is insincere and opportunistic, rather than being outright treasonous’.<sup>57</sup> The story of the Hypocrite is a cautionary story meant to identify those who do not follow the strict path Salafi-jihadists understand to be the true path of Islam. Both of these stories expose corruption within the ummah.

### What Internal Threats Accomplish

The Pharaoh and Hypocrite stories work as ethnocentric appeals that serve as a basis for the false set up of the restrictive path narratives described in the next section. These stories create an ‘us vs. them’ opposition, or as stated in Issue One of *Dabiq*, ‘The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr and hypocrisy’.<sup>58</sup>

### The Facilitators of Conspiracy - Stories of External Threats

The external threat to Islam is identified in two abstractions, Jahiliyyah and Western ideology. ‘Jahiliyyah is evil and corrupt, whether it be of the ancient or modern variety’, while the Western ideology represents a defiant and institutionalised ignorance of evil and an inevitable return to the state of Jahiliyyah.<sup>59</sup> These two abstractions are concretised for the audience by identifying the agents of conspiracy who promote them—Western nations, led by the United States of America, and Israel.

55 Halverson et al., Master narratives.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., p. 57.

58 *Dabiq*, Issue 1, p. 11.

59 Sayyid Qutb, Milestones.

## What the External Threat Accomplishes

Stories of external corruption have three effects. First, they identify regions historically and contemporarily viewed as Muslim territories, which are currently experiencing strife, thus reinforcing the conspiracy narrative of Islam under attack. Second, they identify the cause for that strife as being due to Western influence. Finally, in providing an enemy to strike out against in order to defend Muslims, they create a unifying hatred for the ‘inferior alien’.<sup>60</sup> Together, internal and external threats create the need for change through war—the purity of Islam must be defended against internal threats and corrupting influences and Islamic territory must be defended against invading forces.

### Invasion stories

A notable aspect of the stories that support the ‘struggles and ordeals’ narrative is that in each case aggression is perpetrated against Muslims and Muslim nations. These stories have a common theme that Muslims are the victims and therefore need to fight a defensive war. ‘O Americans, and O Europeans, the Islamic State did not initiate a war against you, as your governments and media try to make you believe. It is you who started the transgression against us, and thus you deserve blame and you will pay a great price.’<sup>61</sup> Halverson et al. argue that the invasion stories feature prominently in extremist rhetoric and encourage a desire for satisfaction, which can be attained through jihad.<sup>62</sup> The invasion story creates a sense of violation that justifies the need for a brutal defensive war.

Daesh addresses the public by means of various media platforms to communicate this perception of world events. The online magazine *Dabiq* is a mouthpiece for the movement. Issue Four of *Dabiq* states, ‘We do not fight Kurds because they are Kurds. Rather we fight the disbelievers amongst them, the allies of the crusaders and Jews in their war against the Muslims’.<sup>63</sup> Even in the truncated messaging of Twitter, Daesh finds a way to support the victimisation of the Muslim while projecting an attitude of strength. For example, ‘#ISIS #Break\_border The End of Sykes Picot - Islamic State,’ a tweet that directed people to a Daesh propaganda video, was one of tens of thousands of tweets that support the Daesh narrative of the victimization. To many jihadi organizations, the Sykes-Picot accord is a symbol of intrusive Western power in the Muslim

60 R.F. Reid, ‘New England rhetoric and the French War’.

61 *Dabiq*, Issue 4, p. 8. Online <http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isis-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#> (last accessed 11 March 2015).

62 Halverson et al., Master narratives, p. 109.

63 *Dabiq*, Issue 4, p. 9.

world.<sup>64</sup> Daesh uses the Sykes-Picot accord as an example of the humiliation of Muslims brought about by the West. This tweet connects its audience to a larger story by linking to a video of the same name, a video that tells the story of Daesh fighting to destroy the borders created by the Sykes-Picot accord. Layering propaganda over real world events makes it more difficult to distinguish from any type of objective reality and easier to accept.

## What Invasion Stories Accomplish— Breaking the Borders in Text and Video

The Daesh stories of invasion are meant to shape a perception of the Middle East as a territory was invaded, that is, the tenets of Islam and its historical truths have also been invaded by Western ideology. These are constant themes throughout Daesh's public addresses—stories of Islamic lands under constant attack spiritually, economically, and physically.

The founding of a state does not exist in a vacuum; it requires people to accept it, to believe in it, and to support it. A significant part of the creation of acceptance, belief, and support is the retelling of historical stories of Islam while prompting modern Muslims recognize their Islamic identity above all other identities (national, ethnic, tribal etc.). Trans-historical narratives are a good start, but to capture the attention and support of modern Muslims, Daesh, like al Qaeda, addresses audiences around the world through social media platforms to show people from different backgrounds all coming together under the aegis of Daesh to defend themselves against territorial invasion and the corruption of the true Islam.

Often times, in Salafi-jihadist public addresses, Islamic identity appeals are textual. For example, the first issue of *Dabiq* contains an article entitled 'Khilafa Declared' in which the editors of *Dabiq* publish 'important excerpts' from a longer speech by Amirul-Mu'minin. Each of the five excerpts rephrases the same theme of unity in Islam even though their audience is worldwide.

Amirul-Mu'minin said: 'O Muslims everywhere, glad tidings to you and expect good. Raise your head high, for today – by Allah's grace – you have a state and Khilafah, which will return your dignity, might, rights, and leadership.'

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64 M. Ruthven, 'The Map ISIS hates' (25 June 2014) Online <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2014/jun/25/map-isis-hates/> (last accessed 2 December 2015).

It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and Westerner are all brothers.

It is a Khilafah that gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Maghribi (North African), American, French, German, and Australian. Allah brought their hearts together, and thus, they became brothers by His grace, loving each other for the sake of Allah, standing in a single trench, defending and guarding each other, and sacrificing themselves for one another.

Their blood mixed and became one, under a single flag and goal, in one pavilion, enjoying this blessing, the blessing of faithful brotherhood.

If kings were to taste this blessing, they would abandon their kingdoms and fight over this grace. So all praise and thanks are due to Allah.<sup>65</sup>

Though many Salafi-jihadist organizations textually create a sense of trans-national identification, Daesh also makes its appeal for the ‘breaking of borders’ visually through online videos such as *Join the Ranks* (2014), *There is No Life without Jihad* (2014), and *The End of the Sykes-Picot* (2014). The videos show Daesh as a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-racial organization.

Daesh video representation works on several levels. On a visual level they use images that stir vivid impressions of a belief system that attracts individuals from a variety of nations and ethnicities. On a conceptual level, the video stories break down the idea of borders imposed by the West on Central Asia and the Middle East. Muslims from all around the globe renounce their nationalities, ethnicities, etc., and become one with the Islamic state. *There is No Life Without Jihad* contains testimonials from Brits and Australians who reject the East Asian (Middle Eastern) borders falsely imposed by the West.<sup>66</sup> This, along with illustrations of the territory gained by Daesh, comprises their visual representation of the erasure of ‘arbitrary’ Western borders.

## An Important Difference in Daesh and al Qaeda Messaging

All jihadist narratives, regardless of setting, repeat and rephrase a pervasive theme—‘a global conspiracy is working to destroy Islam’.<sup>67</sup> Jihadist conspiracy stories, framed through appeals to wage war, construct the need for change. They interlace conspiracy stories with territorial and ethnographic appeals to manufacture the need for defensive war by a religious state that will address and rectify the indignities visited upon the Muslim people.<sup>68</sup>

65 Dabiq, Issue 1, pp. 7-9.

66 Farwell, ‘How ISIS uses social media’.

67 J. M. Brachman, *Global jihadism*, p. 11.

68 R.F. Reid, ‘New England rhetoric and the French war’.

Daesh communication campaigns, however, provide examples of ‘fighting a defensive war’ and winning. This is precisely where the Daesh ‘struggles and ordeals’ narrative differs from the messages used by al Qaeda. Whereas al Qaeda spent their time and energy focusing on the persecution of the Muslims, Daesh emphasises stories of conspiracy and invasion in which they are fighting back and *overcoming* their ‘struggles and ordeals’.<sup>69</sup> This is a key distinction between Daesh and al Qaeda—Daesh narratives portrays the jihadists as the true champions of the faith who are avenging the perceived sufferings of Muslims, stressing that Daesh is gaining strength and amassing power; for them victory is inevitable.<sup>70</sup> According to Daesh, all that is needed for victory to be achieved, is for Muslims to unite under the banner of Daesh. Here they create another significant either/or proposition described further in the next section.

### Using Trans-historical Enemies to Create a Coherent Tale of Conspiracy

Societies and cultures need ‘the other’ to promote their own social systems. Daesh, like other prospective nation-builders, defines its people by not only who they are, but also by who they are not. In seeking to connect contemporary Muslims both to their historical past and in contemporary fellowship around the globe, Daesh endeavours to merge current perceived enemies—Israel and the West—with past enemies such as Jews, Crusaders, and the Quraysh<sup>71</sup>, giving credence to trans-historical conspiracy narratives and thus proving the need for both a homeland and a defensive war as corroborated by carefully misinterpreted quotes from the Qur’ān and Hadiths.<sup>72</sup>

Daesh’s use of ‘consubstantiality’ sub-narratives gives weight to what Reid calls ‘the ethnocentric appeal of barbarism vs. gallantry’, in which the enemy’s cultural values are seen as inherently evil and must therefore be destroyed.<sup>73</sup> Jihadist organizations, like Daesh, do this by linking contemporary Western thought and the Western powers to the rationale of the Crusades. The Crusader stories are stories of Western Christian civilization subjugating, mistreating, colonizing, and killing all those who refused to submit to them.<sup>74</sup> These stories foster the perception that Western powers have historically waged war and corrupted the followers of Islam. This idea dovetails with the ‘struggles and ordeals’ narrative to warrant usurping the current international Western-biased system.

69 J. Stern and J.M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of terror*, (New York, 2015).

70 J. Farwell, ‘How ISIS uses social media’.

71 The tribe in control of Mecca until Muhhammad and his ummah took control.

72 A collection of sayings by the prophet Mohammed that is a major source of guidance for Muslims along with their holy book the Qur’ān.

73 R.F. Reid, ‘New England rhetoric and the French War’, p. 269.

74 Halverson et al., *Master narratives*.



## What Trans-historical Enemy Stories Accomplish

The trans-historical enemy story provides a rationale for accepting stories of external conspiracy and invasion. A basic tenet of global Salafi-jihadism is that the ummah has been under attack throughout history.<sup>75</sup> By linking the idea of the West to the ideology of the Crusades, the ‘established truth’ of constant attack throughout the generations is reinforced in the public memory. ‘Hence there is a sense of belonging to a community encapsulated in an indifferent or hostile society’.<sup>76</sup> These stories also reinforce the ‘us vs. them’ argument used in conspiracy and invasion stories. The feeling of on-going threat creates an impetus for change, change that can only happen through defensive war or jihad, according to the radical jihadists.

### THE RESTRICTIVE PATH

#### **‘You are free to make the right choice.’**

According to Charland, constitutive rhetoric that is meant to call a ‘common, collective identity into existence’, must strive to create the ‘illusion of freedom’.<sup>77</sup> Target audiences are led to believe they have a choice in the way they see the world, but the ‘restrictive path’ narrative is designed so that freedom is limited to an either/or decision. In his 2014 speech ‘This is the Promise of Allah’, Daesh spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-‘Adnani declared that Muslims everywhere support the Islamic state. He told his audience, ‘if you forsake the State or wage war against it, you will not harm it. You will only harm yourselves’.<sup>78</sup> A person’s identity is constrained to the choice between believer and unbeliever.

Daesh’s ‘restrictive path’ narrative provides only two options—to submit to Allah and follow the path of the true believers, i.e. Daesh, or to flounder in Jahiliyyah, and return to the ‘Age of Ignorance’, the ignorance in which people lived before the prophet Muhammad related the word of God.<sup>79</sup> According to Egyptian Islamic theorist Sayyid Qutb, those who do not choose Islam ‘whether it is based on nationalism, colour, and race, class struggle, or similar corrupt theories, are truly enemies of mankind’.<sup>80</sup> Once the truth as told by Daesh is ‘accepted’ the only option is jihad. As Charland says, the ‘endings of narratives are fixed before the telling’.<sup>81</sup> Daesh uses religious stories prescribing the

75 A. Gendron, ‘Militant Jihadism’.

76 O. Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a new ummah*, (New York, 2004), p. 36.

77 M. Charland, ‘Constitutive rhetoric’, p. 141.

78 A.M al-‘Adnani, ‘This is the promise of Allah’, Online [https://ia902505.us.archive.org/28/items/poa\\_25984/EN.pdf](https://ia902505.us.archive.org/28/items/poa_25984/EN.pdf)

79 Halverson et al., *Master narratives*, p. 37.

80 Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 160.

81 M. Charland, ‘Constitutive rhetoric’, p. 140

inevitable ending, ‘The earth is Allah’s. {Indeed, the earth belongs to Allah. He causes to inherit it whom He wills of His servants. And the [best] outcome is for the righteous} [Al-A’raf: 128]’.<sup>82</sup>

## Religious Justification for the ‘Restrictive Path’

Stories that provide religious justification for the creation of the Khilafah and the premise of jihad are culled from the Qur’an and Hadiths. These stories not only explain how previous generations went to war to defend Islam, but describe how the world should be, thus becoming important guidelines for the members of Daesh. The most commonly cited stories are stories from the Qur’an and Hadiths that describe historical battles. The use of such stories serves two purposes. First, they provide the religious authority to justify war and second, the historical battles are used to provide context that frames contemporary battles in such a way as to serve the purposes of the ‘consubstantiality’ narrative.

According to Stern and Berger, the authors of *ISIS: The State of Terror*, the ranks of Daesh are deeply infused with religious fervour and Koranic quotations are ubiquitous.<sup>83</sup> Religious authority is used to justify their actions and any representations of those actions. Thus, if one beheads a ‘kufir’ the action is justified by a decontextualized citation from an accepted religious text, which serves as its own representation of a self-sustaining reality.

Allah (*‘azza wa jal*<sup>84</sup>) states in the Qur’an after granting *imamah*<sup>85</sup> to Ibrahim (*‘alayhis-salam*<sup>86</sup>), {And who would turn away from the religion of Ibrahim except one who makes a fool of himself. Truly, We chose him in this world, and indeed in the Hereafter he will be among the righteous.} [Al-Baqarah: 130] So we can see from the context of these verses that *imamah* is from the *millah*<sup>87</sup> of Ibrahim (*‘alayhis-salam*), and that whoever turns away from it is turning away from something that’s a part of this great *millah*. The *millah* is the path that is followed in its entirety, and the path that Allah chose for Ibrahim (*‘alayhis-salam*) and his progeny thereafter is the path of *imamah* – both religious and political – as much as they’re able to do.<sup>88</sup>

82 Dabiq, Issue 1, p. 11.

83 J. Stern and J.M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of terror*.

84 ‘mighty and majestic’

85 ‘the spiritual and political leadership of the Ummah’

86 ‘peace be upon him’

87 Loosely translated *millah* means ‘nation’ but can be used to mean ‘religion and shari’ah’; it expresses the social aspect of religion. See the discussion online at the Questions on Islam website: <http://www.questionsonislam.com/question/can-you-explain-difference-between-%E2%80%9Cmillah%E2%80%9D-nation-and-%E2%80%9Cummah%E2%80%9D-community> (last accessed 03 December 2015).

88 Dabiq, Issue 1, p. 27.

As Jim Suchan, in his article, ‘Toward an Understanding of Arabic persuasion: A Western Perspective’, notes, that there is no need to support the word of Allah; the truth is in the existence of the word.<sup>89</sup> In the view of a radical jihadist the decontextualized quotes are absolutely true. The use of the Qur’an is at the core of the web of radical jihadist narratives. *Dabiq* is also replete with citations from the Hadiths and the Qur’an that are used to legitimise many of the group’s actions. For example, there are ten mentions of the Qur’an and way more quotes in issue nine of *Dabiq* alone. As Suchan observes, ‘All knowledge worth knowing starts with Muhammed’s recitation of God’s word inscribed in the Qur’an and clarified in other texts’.<sup>90</sup> The use of decontextualized verses frames the world in the context of creating a need for an Islamic state or Khilafah to protect Muslims and to justify jihad. Daesh fulfils that need.

## **The Impact of the Religious Justification for the ‘Restrictive Path’**

‘Muslim belief and practice is based on the words of the Koran, but Islamist discourse in interpreting the meaning of those words is contentious and fractured. Nowhere is this truer than with respect to jihad, about which there is no single, universally accepted doctrine’, writes Angela Gendron, a Senior Fellow at the Canadian Centre of Intelligence and Security Studies (CCISS).<sup>91</sup> Muslims believe the Qur’ān is the verbatim word of God making it the central text of Islam. The use of the Qur’ān in jihadist rhetoric is important because they need religious legitimation. Salafi-jihadist groups like Daesh use propaganda to justify defensive war to protect the ummah through the selective use of verses from the Qur’ān[...]<sup>92</sup> This means that the Salafi-jihadist call for a ‘defensive war’ must be seen as taking place within the religious tenets of Islam. The use of religious texts in the stories comprising their Restrictive Path Narrative is meant to give the group religious authority and credibility within the ummah.

## **Video Representations of Religious Authority and the ‘Restrictive Path**

Daesh videos create vivid associations with our most basic human values and prepare their target audiences for action. At the most basic level, the videos can be divided into two types—holy war videos and execution videos. Each type

89        Suchan, ‘Toward an understanding of Arabic persuasion: A Western perspective’, *International Journal of Business Communication* 51 (2014), 279-303.

90        Suchan, ‘Toward an understanding of Arabic persuasion’, p. 290.

91        A. Gendron, ‘Militant jihadism’, p. 6.

92        *Ibid.*

of video provides a story to justify the ‘restrictive path’ narrative, the creation of the Khilafah, and jihad. The Holy War videos are propaganda videos that romanticize Daesh Muslims and the mujahidin fighting against internal and external threats (see conspiracy stories above). In the videos *The Clanging of the Swords I-IV* and *Messages from the Land of Epic Battles*, fighters are shown in battle while religious justification is presented throughout, commonly through the use of quotes from the Qur’an or Hadiths.

Perhaps the most sensational and, therefore, most widely-known videos are the execution videos. In these videos, victims are dressed in orange jump suits, a condensation symbol for the subjugation of Muslims held at Guantánamo Bay. Usually, the executioner explains Daesh’s motivation, providing religious authority for the action, before the victim is brutally killed.

Unlike other Salafi-jihadist organizations, Daesh expands upon the ‘us vs. them’ bifurcation through the practice of takfir or violent excommunication, which justifies killing fellow Muslims who do not follow the strict path of Islam dictated by Daesh. Within the Muslim community, the distinction between barbarism and gallantry<sup>93</sup> is an important factor in nation-building.<sup>94</sup> The Daesh video released in February 2015 showing a Jordanian pilot being burned to death is a good example of this. The video frames the justification of the execution by flashing ‘snippets of news segments showing Jordan’s involvement in the US-led fight against the Islamic State before focusing on computer generated images of a “crusader” fighter jet firing missiles and a truck burning.’<sup>95</sup> By linking the Jordanian pilot to the US-led fight against Daesh, Daesh positions the Jordanian pilot as being in the employ of the barbaric/evil West and therefore is justified in executing the pilot according to the practice of takfir. According to Reid, the ‘barbarism vs. gallantry’ theme is an ethnocentric appeal that depicts an enemy as the epitome of evil and the rhetor’s audience as a force for good.<sup>96</sup> Salafi-jihadist stories depict a Western-controlled system of corruption that is opposed to everything the jihadists believe to be true of Islam, thus defining the external threat to Islam.<sup>97</sup>

93 R.F. Reid, ‘New England rhetoric and the French War’, p. 269

94 B. Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (London, 1991).

95 T. McCoy & A. Taylor, ‘Islamic State says immolation was justified; experts on Islam say no’ (4 February 2015) in *The Washington Post Online*: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/02/04/the-chilling-reason-the-islamic-state-burned-a-jordanian-pilot-alive/>

96 R.F. Reid, ‘New England rhetoric and the French War’, p. 269

97 A. Gendron, ‘Militant Jihadism’.

The beheading videos in particular function to strategically construct a past, present, and future by means of the ‘consubstantiality’ and ‘restrictive path’ narratives.<sup>98</sup> The beheadings harken back to a past where such violent ‘justice’ was commonplace, ‘So when you meet in battle those who disbelieve, then smite the necks’.<sup>99</sup> By connecting Daesh to the violent past, as ‘the only Islamic organization truly adhering to the ways of the original ummah’, they explain their present-day atrocities. The beheadings also tell the story of the power of Daesh; they are a clear attempt to provoke the US ‘into an ever deeper engagement in Iraq’.<sup>100</sup> And, just as importantly, the beheading videos reveal the future of anyone who does not adhere to Daesh’s strict understanding of Islam, exemplifying the restrictive nature of their belief system.

## The Impact of Daesh Propaganda Videos

The Holy War videos become contemporary representations of historical battle narratives. The videos portray Daesh fighters preparing to fight or battling the enemy. They recall both the conspiracy and invasion storylines of the ‘struggles and ordeal’ narratives. The videos present the mujahidin valiantly fighting the kufr. When coupled with religious verses, the visual representation of violence is justified and commended, making it incumbent upon any Muslim to support Daesh in this way.

The execution videos accomplish several tasks. First, they are brutally sensational, therefore almost guaranteeing their transmission by various agents (fellow jihadists, non-jihadi individuals, news media, etc.). Second, they work as messages of intimidation for those within the reach of Daesh. And third, they are a visual representation of the group’s extreme interpretation of Islam and their origin story of the ummah, showing target audiences that Daesh is following a strict path of Islam; they can follow it as well, or end up like the kufr in the videos.

Most important of all, both types of video portray individuals heeding the call of Daesh and supporting the Khilafah through jihad. If the target audience feels connected to the ummah, as described in the ‘consubstantiality’ narrative, accepts the salience of the Daesh worldview, and accepts the need for change, as shown in the stories of ‘struggles and ordeals’, then they can visualize the only solution: jihad and a Khilafah. Visualization prompts action.

98 Miskimmon et al., Strategic narratives

99 Qur’an, 47:4, Online <https://www.comp.leeds.ac.uk/nora/html/47-4.html>

100 J. Stern and J.M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of terror*, p. 244.

## The Impact of the ‘Restrictive Path’ Narrative

The end result of Daesh’s rhetoric is to win support for the Khilafah and jihad, financially, emotionally, or most importantly, physically. If one accepts the carefully constructed worldview of Daesh, the ‘restrictive path’ narrative makes jihad inevitable. The ‘restrictive path’ narrative builds upon the ‘struggles and ordeals’ and ‘consubstantiality’ narratives. The ‘struggles and ordeals’ narratives show the ummah experiencing threats from the world at large and illustrate the crises that warrant the unification of the global ummah into the Khilafah, to defend itself in the name of Allah. The narratives strive to obviate the necessity of the Khilafah for the protection of Islam and for waging a defensive war. Through the use of quotes and decontextualized verses from the Qu’ran, Daesh communicators use the ‘restrictive path’ narrative to force Muslims to choose if they are ‘for us or against us’. As do other jihadists, Daesh defines a true Muslim as one who follows their strict interpretation of the Qu’ran.

The second effect of the ‘restrictive path’ narratives is to give Daesh credibility. In a religious system like that of the radical-jihadists, authority is given to those who are knowledgeable in the Qu’ran.<sup>101</sup> Daesh cites the Qu’ran and uses it to support the actions of the group and to augment its credibility. For example, the video *Establishment of the Islamic State* part 1, becomes visual evidence supporting the idea that strict adherence to the Qur’an and Hadiths results in the victory of the believers over the unbelievers, thus further adding to the religious credibility of Daesh and spreading the perception that if one is truly Muslim (as defined by Daesh), one must accept the inevitability of supporting Daesh.

‘Therefore, rush O Muslims to your state. Yes, it is your state. Rush, because Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis.

The earth is Allah’s. {Indeed, the earth belongs to Allah. He causes to inherit it whom He wills of His servants. And the [best] outcome is for the righteous} [Al-A’raf: 128].

The State is a state for all Muslims. The land is for the Muslims, all the Muslims. O Muslims everywhere, whoever is capable of performing *hijrah* (emigration) to the Islamic State, then let him do so, because *hijrah* to the land of Islam is obligatory’.<sup>102</sup>

101 J. M. Brachman, Global jihadism.

102 Dabiq, Issue 1, p. 11.

## CONCLUSION

Daesh is attempting to influence the perceptions of its Muslim audience on a global scale. In order to do this, the group has crafted a sophisticated, strategic communication campaign to create the vision of a modern Khilafah in need of defending, through which they can spread their ideology. At the centre of their strategic communication campaign is its ‘constitutive’ narrative: a finely crafted meta-narrative that breaks up into three sub-narratives: ‘struggles and ordeals,’ the ‘restrictive path,’ and ‘consubstantiality’. The ‘struggles and ordeals’ narrative is built upon the stories of Islam, humiliated and under attack from both inside and outside of the ummah. However, as Stern & Berger posit, Daesh follows the narrative of ‘struggles and ordeals’ through to the necessary conclusion for the jihadist movement—Daesh is fighting back.<sup>103</sup> The ‘restrictive path’ narrative relies upon stories of religious authority and actions based on that authority suggesting that one has the freedom to chose one’s own path, yet if one comes to agree with the proposition that it is the duty of every true Muslim to submit to Daesh’, then there is only one choice. Both of these narratives are integral to the internal logic of Daesh and their strategic communication, however the ‘consubstantiality’ narratives are at the core of their communication campaign. These are the most important stories Daesh utilizes, because these stories are intended to bring Muslims together under the banner of Daesh. Historically most Muslims reject these attempts by radical jihadist organizations to convince their Muslim audiences to identify with them.

Going after the ‘consubstantiality’ narratives is the best choice to combat Daesh messaging. There are multiple ways to ‘attack’ the stories of ‘consubstantiality’. One simple, yet effective tactic is to discontinue referring to Daesh as the Islamic State or IS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS, or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL. It is imperative to deny the perception that the radical jihadist group constitutes a legitimate state that represents the interests of Islam. Instead, the group should be consistently referred to as ‘Daesh’.

To weaken Daesh’s communication campaign there must be a strategic communication campaign to distance Daesh from the ummah origin story. This is best accomplished through two ways. First, counter narratives from the origin of Muhammad’s original ummah to reveal how radically different Daesh’s ideology is from the original ummah. Second, highlight their use of crime to accomplish their goals. Tell the stories of how Daesh commits crimes that do not fit within the creed of the original ummah. Media audiences can be reminded of the group’s self-aggrandizing attitude towards violence by prefacing the name Daesh with ‘the criminal organization...’ The origin story of Islam is a powerful narrative, as are all origin stories, that extreme organization like Daesh tend to

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103 J. Stern and J.M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of terror*.



utilize as a sign of credibility. To distance them from it would be a considerable 'blow' to their ethos. As Mazzetti and Gordon note in the New York Times, a crucial part of the West's public diplomacy is to encourage Arab leaders to denounce the 'Islamic State as a distortion of Islam'.<sup>104</sup>

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104 M. Mazzetti and M.R. Gordon, 'ISIS is winning the social media war, US concludes' (12 June 2015) in The New York Times Online [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/13/world/middleeast/isis-is-winning-message-war-us-concludes.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/13/world/middleeast/isis-is-winning-message-war-us-concludes.html?_r=0)