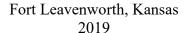TERRORISTS' PROPAGANDA AND THE USE OF MEDIA: CASE STUDY OF THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE General Studies

by

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Terrorist organizations have long realized the invaluable benefits of traditional media platforms in general and social media, in particular, in achieving their tactical, operational, and strategic goals. They have figured out how to make an impact through social media. ISIS, in particular, produces the most technologically sophisticated propaganda compared to other terrorist groups. The present study examines terrorists' use of media by focusing on ISIS media as a case study. Case Study methodology has been used to analyze ISIS use of media. Research findings suggest that employing media as a weapon in combat is vital to ISIS strategy to establish an Islamic Caliphate. ISIS uses media for three central goals: promoting its propaganda, recruiting new fighters, and inciting violence.

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ABSTRACT

TERRORISTS' PROPAGANDA AND THE USE OF MEDIA: CASE STUDY OF THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA ISIS, by Maj Tareq Alemian, 72 pages.

Terrorist organizations have long realized the invaluable benefits of traditional media platforms in general and social media, in particular, in achieving their tactical, operational, and strategic goals. They have figured out how to make an impact through social media. ISIS, in particular, produces the most technologically sophisticated propaganda compared to other terrorist groups. The present study examines terrorists' use of media by focusing on ISIS media as a case study. To achieve the purpose of this research, Case Study methodology has been used to analyze ISIS use of media. Research findings suggest that employing media as a weapon in combat, is vital to ISIS strategy to establish an Islamic Caliphate. ISIS uses media for three central goals: promoting its propaganda, recruiting new fighters, and inciting violence.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"The media people are more important than the soldiers," he said. "Their monthly income is higher. They have better cars. They have the power to encourage those inside to fight and the power to bring more recruits to the Islamic State." Abu Abdullah al-Maghribi, ISIS defector.
—Greg Miller and Souad Mekhennet, *The Washington Post*

Research Background

Terrorist organizations have long realized the invaluable benefits of traditional

media platforms in general and social media, in particular, in achieving their tactical,

operational, and strategic goals. They have figured out how to make an impact through

social media. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), in particular, produces the most

technologically sophisticated propaganda compared to other terrorist groups. No group to

date has been as savvy in terms of its propaganda campaign and recruiting terrorists via

the Internet, and specifically via social media platforms, as the Islamic State of Iraq and

the Levant (ISIS).[1]

Through advanced digital tools, they promoted the idea that ISIS has attracted

thousands of new recruits and successfully established a state. This false propaganda

effected millions of shocked and shaken spectators across the globe.

Via what appears to be limitless numbers of websites and social media platforms,

such as Facebook, Instagram, Tumbler, Ask.fm, and most prominently, Twitter, terrorist

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[1] "ISIS Displaying a Deft Command of Varied Media," *New York Times,* 2014, accessed 5 February 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/31/world/middleeast/isis-displaying-a-deft-command-of-varied-media.html.

groups utilize the Internet's unregulated and unrestricted freedom to craft and

disseminate propaganda, tailoring their rhetoric to target thousands if not hundreds of

thousands of potential new recruits to join their organization and further their cause. ISIS

was very successful. They used a so-called "online battalion", a group comprising 500-

2000 very active members working online to tweet and re-tweet certain propaganda

messages to make them trending, thus increasing their exposure and outreach.[2]

The struggle with ISIS is not only military, as some understand it, but it is a media

one as well. The group that succeeded in establishing its state in June 2014, which began

experiencing setbacks with the fall of the city of Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, was

only able to do so through the media machine to recruit through social networks and for

planning terrorist operations. ISIS also succeeded in providing attractive quality content

to its published articles. It succeeded in attracting tens of thousands of young people from

the Arab world and the rest of the world who are looking for a new experience that

combines excitement and search for a better reality in the world.

<u>ISIS Roots</u>

> O' lions of al Tawhid across the dear land of Mesopotamia. I urge you to
> drench your swords with the blood of your enemies before the day is over . . .
> There is no point in living when our honor is being taken away and we are being
> ruled by the cross worshippers.' I ask you, O' soldiers of Islam − in the same way
> the aforementioned martyr ordered you before me − do not miss this chance to
> join the convoy of martyrs during these holy days
> — Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, *Springer*

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[2] J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census," The Brookings
Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, 20 March 2015, accessed 17 January
2019, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/isis_twitter_census_
berger_morgan.pdf.

The emergence of ISIS in its current formulation was a result of consequent events in the Middle East in general and in Iraq and Syria in particular. The roots of ISIS can be traced back to al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), founded by the Jordanian extremist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Al-Zarqawi's career as an ambitious jihadist started by joining the Afghani *Mujahideen* (fighters) in their war against the Red Army in 1989. However, al-Zarqawi arrived to Afghanistan late as the war was ending.[3] He returned home to Jordan in 1992 where he was arrested by Jordanian intelligence services in 1994 along with his spiritual teacher Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi for plotting a terrorist attack. Al-Zarqawi benefited to a great extent from his prison time, using his charisma and leadership to actively recruit fighters for the new terrorist group he was forming.[4]

Al-Zarqawi was released from prison in 1999 under a general amnesty. He then travelled to Afghanistan meeting with al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden to receive his blessings and financial support. The meeting did not go well as Bin Laden was offended by al-Zarqawi's disrespect, arrogance, and radical views on murdering Muslims. However, he received money from Bin Laden and was able to set up a training camp in western Afghanistan.[5] In 2001 al-Zarqawi left Afghanistan after the US invasion and in early 2003, he established *Jamaat Tawhid wal Jihad* in Iraq, the forerunner of ISIS.

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[3] Joby Warrick, "Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS," Cornell University, 2015, accessed 12 January 2019, https://www.sce.cornell.edu/sce/altschuler/pdf/altschuler_ review_20150924_929.pdf.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Mary Anne Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi," *The Atlantic*, 2006, accessed 20 October 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/ archive/2006/07/the-short-violent-life-of-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/304983/

As part of the US administration's efforts to justify their invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, used al-Zarqawi's presence in Iraq and his alleged connections to al Qaeda in his address to the United Nations as a proof of Saddam Hussein - al Qaeda cooperation.[6] Ironically, none of those claims were true. In fact, Bin Laden repeatedly requested al-Zarqawi to pledge allegiance to al Qaeda which the latter refused wholeheartedly. If the US administration's accusation succeeded in anything, they succeeded in catapulting al-Zarqawi overnight from the status of an unknown fighter to that of a jihadist superstar.[7]

Following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, al-Zarqawi's add-fuel-to-fire strategy became based on prolonging the conflict through triggering Sunni-Shia sectarian violence on a massive scale. He thought this would scare his enemies and attract more followers to his cause. Additionally, al-Zarqawi conducted a series of attacks including targeting the Jordanian embassy, Shia and the UN headquarters in Iraq.[8] Although this strategy created a rift between al-Zarqawi and al Qaeda leaders who were concerned with the constant targeting of Shia, Bin Laden saw al-Zarqawi as a leader capable of moving the Jihadi cause forward. Eventually and despite the disagreements, al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance to al Qaeda, creating the so-called Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in 2004.[9]

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[6] Colin Powell, "US secretary of state's address to the United Nations security council," *The Guardian*, 2003, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/feb/05/iraq.usa.

[7] Mary Anne Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

[8] Joby Warrick, "Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS."

[9] Jeffrey Pool, "Zarqawi's Pledge of Allegiance to Al-Qaeda: From Mu'Asker Al-Battar," *Terrorism Monitor*, 16 December 2004, accessed 25 November 2018,

In 2006, when al-Zarqawi was killed by the US and Iraqi intelligence agencies, Abu Ayyoub al-Masri, a.k.a Abu Hamza al Muhajir, an Egyptian, emerged as the new leader. Four months later al-Masri implemented al-Zarqawi's plan for AQI. In 2006 the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) "*Dawla al -Islamya fi Iraq*" was established with a fully structured cabinet.[10] Having warned against this move previously, this declaration unpleasantly surprised Al Qaeda leaders. At that time the relationship between AQI and Al Qaeda was unclear. This, coupled with al-Masri's lack of fighting and management skills, confused Jihadists around the world.[11]

In the years to follow, AQI was losing its popularity among the Jihadist community due the rising popularity of ISIS whose leadership was closer to the battlefields. By 2009, the group was almost extinct. However, there were many factors that contributed to the AQI strong come back, including US-organized Iraqi detention facilities such as Camp Bucca where Sunni extremists were able to interact with former Baathists from the Saddam Hussein regime. This created recruitment centers for radicals. Cells organized within them, along with remnants of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's ousted Arab-nationalist Ba'ath party, make up some of the Islamic State's

https://jamestown.org/program/zarqawis-pledge-of-allegiance-to-al-qaeda-from-muasker-al-battar-issue-21-2/.

[10] Charles Lister, "Profiling the Islamic state (Analysis Paper No. 13)," Brookings, 2004, accessed 12 January 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/research/profiling-the-islamic-state/

[11] William McCants, "State of Confusion, ISIS' Strategy and How to Counter It," *Foreign Affairs*, 2014, accessed 20 February 2019, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2014-09-10/state-confusion.

ranks.[12] "If there was no American prison in Iraq, there would be no IS now. Bucca was a factory. It made us all. It built our ideology."[13]

Later, and following the death of Abu Ayyoub al-Masri by US and Iraqi forces in April 2010, Abu-Baker al-Baghdadi, who was of Iraqi origin, was announced as the new leader. The self-proclaimed caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a shy and reserved scholar with a PhD, spent time in US run prisons in Iraq. He was released in 2004 classified as posing no further security risk. In June 2014, under the leadership of al-Baghdadi, ISIS overran the northern city of Mosul, and then advanced southwards towards Baghdad, massacring adversaries and threatening to eradicate the country's many ethnic and religious minorities. At the end of the month, after consolidating its hold over dozens of cities and towns, ISIS declared the creation of a caliphate and changed its name to "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria ISIS."[14]

<u>ISIS Vs Al Qaeda</u>

As already pointed out, ISIS was a branch of Al Qaeda in Iraq. Shortly after it initiated operations under al Qaeda protection, it began to carry out many violent operations such as suicides, kidnappings and executions. ISIS did not coordinate with al

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[12] Zachary Laub, "The Islamic State," Council on Foreign Relations, 2016, accessed 20 November 2018, http://lionelingram.com/403W_Islamic% 20State%20(ISIS)%20-%20Council%20on%20Foreign%20Relations.pdf.

[13] Martin Chulov, "Isis: the inside story," *The Guardian*, 2014, accessed 25 February 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/-sp-isis-the-inside-story.

[14] William McCants, "Who is Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi?" *BBC,* 2016, accessed 20 February 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35694311.

Qaeda leadership, which later led to the separation of the two organizations. This was accompanied by sharp statements from both parties: ISIS claimed al Qaeda was deviating from its Jihadi path and was no longer the base of global jihad, while al Qaeda claimed ISIS was on a "wrong" path and their methods were "deviant".

The dispute between al Qaeda and ISIS started politically and militarily on the backdrop of the Syrian crisis in 2011. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (leader of ISIS) decided to expand his activities to Syrian territory and sent a number of ISIS fighters to battle against the regime. Ayman al-Zawahri, heir to al Qaeda leadership since the death of Osama bin Laden, welcomed ISIS entry into the war against the Syrian regime. Dispute emerged over the Nusra Front, the al Qaeda representative in Syria, whether it should remain an independent entity separate from ISIS (al-Zawahri idea) or merge with it (al-Baghdadi idea). The fighting between al Qaeda and ISIS broke out in early 2014 and formally ended their relations. The military conflict did not hide the ideological-religious divide between the two militant organizations either, which can be summarized in religious authority, doctrine of jihad, military objective, identification of enemy, organizational structure, and spheres of influence.

Both Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahri were famous leaders of al Qaeda and very well known for their religious hardness and brutality. Neither ever claimed to be world leaders of Jihad. This is not the case with ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi who announced himself a legitimate caliphate of all Muslims, "calling on the world's Muslims to 'obey' him as the head of the caliphate declared by the Sunni jihadist group."[15] ISIS

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[15] Hannah Strange, "Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi addresses Muslims in Mosul," *Telegraph*, 2014, accessed 6 January 2019,

aimed at restoring the former glory of Muslims and re-establishing the historic caliphate by conquering the whole world.

Al Qaeda does not have a regular army. The leaders hide and the organization works in the form of cells and branches. Al Qaeda's most popular branches are the Nusra Front, which was actively involved in fighting against the Assad army in the Syrian civil war. In addition, al Qaeda had hundreds, if not thousands, of other branches, including *al-Shabab*, a movement active in Somalia, and *Jamaat al-Islamiya*, which operates in Indonesia. One of its operations was the bombing of a nightclub in Bali in 2002 killing 202 people. Al Qaeda even announced the establishment of a branch in India.

Today there is disagreement among Western countries over al Qaeda's relationship with Boko Haram of Nigeria and Ansar al-Din, the movement that has taken control of large areas of northern Mali. It is estimated these organizations operate alone and there is cooperation between them. On the other hand, ISIS, in line with its name, aspires to establish an independent political entity, which is a state in itself. ISIS members tried to impose a very strict system of law in every city they occupied, especially in Al Raqqa, their capital.

Furthermore, both al Qaeda and ISIS claim to be fighting the infidels (non-believers). This definition includes all those who do not live a devout Sunni Muslim life (pray five times, do not drink alcohol, etc.). Despite this, there is a difference in the objectives of both organizations. While al Qaeda operates all over the world against infidels and focuses its efforts on large-scale operations against Western targets (such as

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https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10948480/Islamic-State-leader-Abu-Bakr-al-Baghdadi-addresses-Muslims-in-Mosul.html.

the 9/11 attacks, the bombings on the ground train in Spain and elsewhere), ISIS tends to attack weak enemies. Their achievements on the ground were only in the areas free of the control of the post-Saddam Iraq state and in fractured Syria.

For terrorists, one of the important ways to achieve success for terrorists is gaining popularity. ISIS did better than al Qaeda in this field. ISIS has been "elegant" in its efforts to attract radical militants. The violent videos published by ISIS for Westerners are horrifying, but through these videos ISIS was able to win the hearts of many Muslims who feel their "duty" was to rise up and leave their comfortable lives and participate in the fighting.

<u>Research Scope</u>

This research examines ISIS use of media in general and social media in particular and will investigate ISIS utilization of media to distort/manipulate Quran verses, the Prophet's sayings, as well as *Fatwas* (a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority) to achieve their agenda. The research challenge is to collect wide-ranging information about ISIS use of media and have a clear understanding of its effects.

<u>Importance of the Research</u>

This study examines the strategic logic of ISIS media campaigns. Its importance stems from both its theoretical and practical significance. From a theoretical aspect, the findings add to the existing body of literature in this field. Employing the findings of this and similar studies in countering terrorism and terrorist propaganda is its practical significance.

I argue the overarching purpose of ISIS media campaigns is to shape the perceptions, polarize and influence target audiences in order to spread propaganda, recruit new fighter members, and incite violence.

The war against ISIS has been one of the most pressing security issues facing the world in the last few years. Although they are being defeated, they are not destroyed. Their ideology still exists in the heart and minds of many people. Countering ISIS media campaigns—i.e. their multidimensional communications strategy—has been identified as very crucial as stated by many world leaders (former Australian Prime Minister Anthony Abbott 2015; United States former President Barrack Obama 2015).

It is imperative to examine ISIS messaging and rhetoric and its fundamental propaganda machinery working relentlessly to publicize the group. How is ISIS discourse constructed to have such global influence and inspire Islamic youth, most remarkably in the West? Moreover, how is their rhetoric challenging the influence of the world`s most dominant media organizations in the West and the Arab/Islamic world?

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

How does ISIS use the media? The sub-questions include:

1. To what extent does ISIS rely on media to spread their ideology and promote their caliphate?

2. To what extent is ISIS interpretation of certain religious texts (whether Quran verses, Prophet sayings, or Fatwas), particularly those texts on Jihad and violence, justified compared to their interpretation by famous Muslim scholars? To what extent do these radical groups interpret these texts out of context in order to fulfill their agendas?

3. To what extent does ISIS rely on media to recruit new fighters from the Arab world and the West?

<div align="center">Research Outline</div>

Chapter one provides an introduction to the topic including the research background, research importance, research scope, research questions and research outline. Chapter two reviews related literature while chapter three discusses the methodology that will be used to answer research questions. Chapter four presents the findings of the study and chapter five presents the recommendations of the research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a literature review of major writings and other sources on ISIS use of media. The sources include scholarly journal articles, books, government reports, web sites, etc. I will describe, summarize, and evaluate each source.

ISIS Messaging

A wave of literature devoted to analyzing ISIS use of media came to light during the peak of ISIS success in 2014 until 2017. One of the broadest and earliest analyses of ISIS literature is a report by The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point titled "The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State". In their report, Al-'Ubaydi et al. used a large collection of primary source materials. Their work included a comprehensive analysis of ISIS history and evolution as well as a detailed a study of their media apparatuses.[16]

In their book titled ISIS: The State of Terror, Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger (2015) focus on the violence in ISIS media campaigns, particularly those produced by their main media outlets, such as Dabiq magazine and al-Furqan's 'Clanging of Swords' video series. Other journalists, such as Benjamin Hall's (2015) explore the rise of ISIS with a particular focus on the violence that characterized their politico-military and media campaigns. Several chapters in Hall's book, Inside ISIS: The Brutal Rise of a Terrorist

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[16] Daniel Milton and Muhammad Al-`Ubaydi, "Pledging Bay'a: Benefit or Burden to the Islamic State?" *CTC Sentinel*, March 2015, accessed 7 January 2019, https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2015/03/CTCSentinel-Vol8Issue320.pdf.

Army, were devoted to the aid workers and journalists beheaded in the 'A Message to…'
video series. Similar to Stern and Berger (2015), Hall also dedicated a chapter to ISIS use
of social media.

In their book, ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror, Weiss and Hassan (2015) also
participate in a comprehensive analysis of ISIS evolution, from al- Zarqawi's AQI to the
self-described caliphate. They devoted a chapter to ISIS media campaigns and the
violence in ISIS messaging, with an analysis of 'Clanging of Swords' and Dabiq. Weiss
and Hassan also highlighted the importance of social media to ISIS media campaigns to
reach out to people and convince young people to go on board on such a ghastly
journey.[17]

ISIS political, military, and religious programs reflect their aspirations. Their own
publications reveal some of the richest sources of information on these three linked
efforts. ISIS implemented a complex, multi-pronged propaganda strategy to attract the
support of foreign fighters and jihadist organizations outside of Iraq and Syria.[18] This
strategy involves sticks and carrots, patient appeals and urgent demands. It aims to
galvanize foreign fighters to join the caliphate, and persuade jihadist groups to align with
ISIS. This messaging strategy employs a variety of themes, including religion, domestic
and international politics, and intra-jihadist dynamics. ISIS externally-oriented

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[17] Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror,* updated ed.
(London: Phaidon Press, 2016).

[18] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Nathaniel Barr, and Bridget Moreng, "The Islamic
State's Global Propaganda Strategy," The International Centre for Counter Terrorism,
2016, accessed 10 January 2019, https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-
Gartenstein-Ross-IS-Global-Propaganda-Strategy-March2016.pdf.

propaganda also appeals to a wide range of target audiences, including prospective

foreign fighters and "migrants" in the West and the Middle East, political Islamists in the

Middle East, and al-Qaeda members and supporters.

Through their ability to master the use of hundreds of websites, social media

platforms, chatting forums, online magazines, such as Dabiq (discontinued since August

2016), Amaq News, Al-Naba and Rumiyah, ISIS brought cyber jihad to a whole new

level. Unlike Al Qaeda, ISIS followers are very loud and noisy while using the media.

ISIS' reports and magazines expose how ISIS frames and justifies its activities to

particular audiences. The intended audiences are noteworthy: a number of ISIS' new

periodicals are published and promoted primarily in English, with translations into other

languages, such as French, German, Russian, and Arabic, released alongside.[19]

Dabiq magazine is one of its most famous products. The online magazine featured

high-quality and slick design and available in English and several other languages. The

name Dabiq refers to a Syrian village located north of Aleppo in Syria. The village was

famous for its strategic location, which made it a major passage for prominent

civilizations. According to Islamic teachings, Dabiq is the land that will witness a

decisive battle between the Muslims and their enemies on the Armageddon day. ISIS

chose the name to exploit the symbolism of the village to market its propaganda and use

it as a means of recruitment.

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[19] Harleen Gambhir, "The Virtual Caliphate: ISIS's Information Warfare," Understanding War, 2016, accessed 10 January 2019, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISW%20The%20Virtual%20Caliphate%20Gambhir%202016.pdf.

Although Dabiq accounts for just a very small fraction all propaganda made by ISIS, the magazine tended to bring attention by western media and make it to the headlines of prominent outlets whenever a new Dabiq issue appeared. Dabiq is unique because it has the look and feel of modern magazines. It provoked a response (baiting strategy).[20] Furthermore, the group had media offices assigned to each of its states with periodic visual reports, besides Dabiq, a prospective TV channel, alongside the heavy use of social media (Facebook, Twitter) which is essential for the group`s pervasiveness. According to the Washington D.C.-based Brookings Institute ISIS has more than 46,000 hyperactive Twitter accounts that work to promote the ISIS and publish its news, videos, and infographics.[21]

ISIS Propaganda

> we should not underestimate the capacity of well-run propaganda systems
> to drive people to irrational, murderous, and suicidal behavior.
> —Noam Chomsky, *The Outlook*

Propaganda is defined as "the ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause."[22] The word itself, which is from the

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[20] Nick Robins-Early, "4 Things To Know About Dabiq, ISIS' Slick Propaganda Magazine," *Huffington Post*, 2016, accessed 10 February 2019, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/isis-dabiq-magazine_us_56a7e6cfe 4b04936c0e8938a.

[21] Renee Lewis, "ISIL's social media success from core group of Twitter users, study finds," *Aljazeera America*, 2015, accessed 2 December 2018, http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/3/6/brookings-report-on-isils-twitter-use.html.

[22] Merriam-Webster, "Propoganda," *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary,* 10th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1999).

ablative singular feminine of "propogandus," was first used in English as a reference to an organization established by Pope Gregory XV to promote Catholic missionary work and combat the Reformation.[23] It can be assumed the use of "propogandus" for the purpose of advocating a biased point of view for a critical issue, is the reason the term is attached with negative connotations.[24] Another reason behind the negative connotation of the word is its use in the military/warfare domain. From a military perspective, NATO defines it as "any information, ideas, doctrines or special appeals disseminated to influence the opinion, emotions, attitudes or behavior of any specified group in order to benefit the sponsor either directly or indirectly".[25] The use of the word 'propaganda' by the Allies during both world wars characterized only the enemy opinion-forming activities as propaganda, and treated these activities as composed mostly of lies.[26] It is because of such practices the word has strongly negative connotations.

Propaganda is a very powerful tool that has been used throughout history, especially by politicians, the military, religious figures, and terrorists. For the purpose of this research I will only focus on terrorists' use of propaganda. Additionally, terrorism uses violence and creates fear in order to coerce a certain group or entity to the demands

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[23] Merriam-Webster, "Propoganda."

[24] Douglas Walton, "What Is Propaganda, And What Exactly Is Wrong With It?" *Public Affairs Quarterly* 11 (October 1997): 383-413.

[25] North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), AAP-15, *NATO Glossary of Abbreviations Used in NATO Documents and Publications*, NATO Standardization Agency, 2015, accessed 5 January 2019, https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a534294.pdf, 2-205.

[26] R.R.A. Marlin, "Propaganda and the ethics of persuasion," *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies* 4 (1989): 37–72.

of terrorists. Both propaganda and terrorism seek to create influence on audiences for the benefit of perpetrators/sponsors. Both propaganda and terrorism attempt to persuade people not by using a logical argument but with the manipulation of their feelings and emotions.

Terrorism relies heavily on both violence and propaganda to thrive. According to Schmid (2014):

> Violence aims at behavior modification by coercion. Propaganda aims at the same persuasion. Terrorism is the combination of two, using demonstrative public violence as an instrument of psychological warfare, "advertising," as it were, an armed non-state group's capabilities to do harm and to destroy.[27]

ISIS has been able to use propaganda to further its cause. In order to understand ISIS propaganda successfully and present new effective strategies to counter it, we must study it within its military-politico context. ISIS has been able to synchronize its propaganda strategy with its political and military goals in order to achieve its end state. Unlike other radical groups who were very cautious in the handling of material and data among members and used password-protected websites and servers, ISIS is doing totally the opposite. It actually encourages its members to share and promote its propaganda.

The American businessman and philanthropist Edward Filene helped establish the Institute of Propaganda Analysis in 1937. The aim of the Institute was to educate Americans on how to identify propaganda techniques and understand it nature. According to Filene and his colleagues, there are seven common "tricks of the trade" used by

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[27] Alex Schmid, "Al-Qaeda's "single narrative" and attempts to develop counter-narratives," International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2014, accessed 22 February 2019, https://www.icct.nl/download/file/Schmid-Al-Qaeda's-Single-Narrative-and-Attempts-to-Develop-Counter-Narratives-January-2014.pdf.

successful propagandists.[28] In the following paragraphs I will name these techniques and identify how ISIS used them in their propaganda:

1. Name Calling: Propagandists use this technique to create fear and arouse prejudice by using negative words (bad names) to create an unfavorable opinion or hatred against a group, beliefs, ideas or institutions. This method calls for a conclusion without examining the evidence. ISIS uses this technique in their propaganda strategy. One example is naming[29] whoever against them as "*Murtadd*" (apostate) or "*Munāfiq*" (hypocrite). These two names are very bad in Islam. They create hatred against whoever receives this labeling. Victims often get oppressed, tortured, or even killed as a result.

2. Glittering Generalities: Propagandists employ vague, sweeping statements (often slogans or simple catchphrases) using language associated with values and beliefs deeply held by the audience without providing supporting information or reason. They appeal to such notions as honor, glory, love of country, desire for peace, freedom, and family values. One examples of ISIS use of this technique is their slogan "Remaining and Expanding" which is a

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[28] Brianna_Ledford, "4424 Common Propaganda Techniques," Quizlet, 2015, accessed 3 March 2019, https://quizlet.com/86946984/4424-common-propaganda-techniques-flash-cards/.

[29] "Kill the Imams of Kufr in the West," *Dabiq Magazine*, no. 14 (2016): 8, accessed 25 November 2018, https://www.ieproject.org/projects.

very vague and sweeping statement indicating that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has not only returned but it will continue to expand to rule the world.[30]

3. Transfer: Transfer is a technique used to carry over the authority and approval of something we respect and revere to something the propagandist would have us accept. Propagandists often employ symbols (e.g., waving the flag) to stir our emotions and win our approval. ISIS claims to be the true and only legitimate holder of Islamic authority. They manipulate Muslims' respect to their religion in order to pass their ideology. Using their own manipulative interpretation of Quranic verses is just one example of this technique.

4. Testimonial: Propagandists use this technique to associate a respected person or someone with experience to endorse a product or cause by giving it their stamp of approval hoping the intended audience will follow their example. ISIS associates the most respected person in Islam, Prophet Muhammed, to endorse whatever they are doing.

5. Plain Folks: Propagandists use this approach to convince the audience the spokesperson is from humble origins, someone they can trust and who has their interests at heart. Propagandists have the speaker use ordinary language and mannerisms to reach the audience and identify with their point of view. Whenever they appear before media, ISIS spokespersons always use simple and ordinary language to communicate with people. They dress humbly using

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[30] "Foreward Page," *Dabiq Magazine*, no. 5 (2015): 1, accessed 25 November 2018, https://www.ieproject.org/projects.

outfits known to be worn by Muslims in the past to emphasize that their goal is not materialistic but rather ideological.

6. Bandwagon: Propagandists use this technique to persuade the audience to follow the crowd. This device creates the impression of widespread support. It reinforces the human desire to be on the winning side. It also plays on feelings of loneliness and isolation. As mentioned earlier, ISIS use the slogan of "Remaining and Expanding" to persuade the public they are the winning side and the only option is to join them. Furthermore, ISIS targets lonely and isolated individuals to join their ranks in their recruitment strategy. Some of the terrorist attacks in the West were conducted by Muslims who felt marginalized and lonely in their communities.

7. Card Stacking: Propagandists uses this technique to make the best case possible for their side and the worst for the opposing viewpoint by carefully using only those facts that support his or her side of the argument while attempting to lead the audience into accepting the facts as a conclusion. Card stacking is the most difficult technique to detect because it does not provide all of the information necessary for the audience to make an informed decision. ISIS religious arguments are difficult to examine by ordinary Muslims. Unless one is educated to some extent, they will struggle to disprove the manipulation ISIS is using.

In today's era, propaganda can be easily created and disseminated, especially with the evolution of both electronic media (Internet, TV, Radio, cinema) and print media (journals, books, magazines). Thanks to technology, one individual sharing of his/her

experience of joining the group, can quickly result in hundreds if not thousands of Tweets

and posts circulating this piece of news. Whether intentionally or not, this promotes the

group. Another difference between ISIS propaganda machinery and those of other

terrorist groups is the targeted audience. According to Yeung (2015) "while groups such

as Al-Qaeda target Arabic-speaking Muslims who already have Jihadist aspirations, ISIS

intentionally develops and channels its propaganda discourse at a global audience,

including but not limited to devout Muslims and nominal Muslims, as well as non-

Muslims across different continents."[31]

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[31] Joanie Yeung, "A Critical Analysis on ISIS Propaganda and Social Media
Strategies," Research Gate, 2015, accessed 23 February 2019,
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316146537_A_Critical_Analysis_on_ISIS_Pro
paganda_and_Social_Media_Strategies.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Case study methodology helps investigate and understand complex issues. It is the

most appropriate for this kind of research because it involves in-depth and detailed study

of a small group of individuals. Case studies typically result in a narrative description of

behavior or experience. Furthermore, the emphasis is placed on exploration and

description of a phenomenon, which is exactly what I need to achieve the purpose of this

research. Case study methodology has been used in many areas and disciplines such as

social sciences, law, medicine, government, management, and education.

According to Yin 1994, "Case Study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a

contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries

between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident…[and] relies on multiple

sources of evidence".[32] Woods described it as an intensive, systematic investigation of a

single individual, group, community or some other unit in which the researcher examines

in-depth data relating to several variables.[33] George and Bennett 2005 define it as "an

instance of a class of events [where] the term class of events refers to a phenomenon of

scientific interest . . . that the investigator chooses to study with the aim of developing

theory regarding causes of similarities or differences among instances (cases) of that class

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[32] Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods,* 2nd ed. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing, 1994).

[33] Nancy Woods and M. Catanzaro, *Nursing Research: Theory and Practice* (St Louis, MO: Mosby, 1980).

of events".[34] There is an agreement among many scholars case study is not a particular method but rather a strategy. In social sciences, case studies are regarded primarily as an epistemic strategy. It is plausible to distinguish between weaker and stronger epistemic usage of case studies. At the weaker end of the spectrum, case studies occupy an ancillary role in the scientific investigation".[35] Through the use of case study model, researchers are given an opportunity to analyze and study a certain phenomenon within its context and thus develop a deep understanding of it.

Case Study Types and Categories

There are different case study types depending on the aspect of the case study. According to Levy[36] there are four different types of case studies:

1. Plausibility probes – studies that are used to illustrate or sharpen an existing theory.

2. Hypothesis testing case studies – studies which test already developed hypotheses.

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[34] Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

[35] Attilia Ruzzene, "Using case studies in the social sciences. Methods, inferences, purposes," Repub, 2014, accessed 22 February 2019, https://repub.eur.nl/pub/77842/USING-CASE-STUDIES-IN-SOCIAL-SCIENCES.pdf.

[36] Jack Levy, "Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25, no. 1 (2008): 1-18, accessed 19 January 2019, https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2013/MVZ453/um/Levy.

3. Idiographic case studies – studies which aim to "describe, explain, interpret, and/or understand a single case", and which are therefore not suitable for generalization to other situations.

4. Hypothesis-generating case studies – studies that generate hypotheses which can be theoretically tested with other methods.

On the other hand, Yin identifies three types of case studies:[37]

1. Exploratory case studies, which should be used to understand a certain phenomenon.

2. Descriptive case studies which demonstrate and define a phenomenon in its context.

3. Explanatory case studies which, in a real-life situation, aim at explaining the fundamental links between the case and the context where it appears.

<u>Case Study Limitations</u>

As mentioned earlier, case studies provide in-depth analysis of a single person, group, event or community. There is no doubt that case study is a valuable and important research method for researchers aiming to answer questions regarding an issue to be investigated, especially in view of the density and diversity of certain topics, such as this study. However, along with all its strengths, it also has some limitations. In this section I will briefly highlight both their strengths and weaknesses.

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[37] Robert Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research,* 2nd ed. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing, 2003).

1. Case study is a very good method for creating hypotheses. Using case study, researchers often find data they didn't anticipate in the first place.

2. Case study is a very genuine research method appropriate for qualitative and quantitative research alike.

3. Scientific experiments can be conducted in case study research.

4. Case study is very flexible. Researchers can select a topic and decide the boundaries of the topic under study. They can also use flexible methods to conduct the study.

5. Case study is an appropriate method to study rare phenomena and challenge theoretical assumptions.

On the other hand, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that there are five commonly discussed limitations /weaknesses of case study research:[38]

1. One cannot generalize from a single case.

2. Theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge.

3. The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building.

4. It is often difficult to summarize specific case studies.

5. The case study contains a bias toward verification.

I do not believe the limitations / weaknesses of case study methodology will have substantive impact on the results. First, there is no need to generalize from the single case of ISIS. It is described by many as a profound and unique group that imposes threat to

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[38] Bent Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (April 2006): 219-245.

peace and security in the whole world. Second, both theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge will be valuable to my research. Third, I am aiming through my research to generate a hypothesis about ISIS use of media not to test an existing one. Fourth, summarizing the findings is unimpeded for this research question. Finally, although the case study contains a bias toward verification, many theorists suggest other methods of research contain no less bias to case study with regard to verification, and "experience indicates that the case study contains a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than toward verification."[39]

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[39] Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research," 237.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Unlike in the past when the processes of mobilization, manpower recruitment and training mainly took place in the physical realm, today the Internet has become a central and anonymous arena in which these activities take place.

—International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, *The Jerusalem Post*

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate ISIS use of media and the benefits of traditional media platforms in general and social media, in particular, for terrorist groups in achieving their tactical, operational, and strategic goals. It further examined ISIS manipulation of Islamic religious texts, be it the Holy Quran, sayings of the Prophet, or Fatwas in order to recruit fighters and incite violence.

Terrorist organizations have long realized the invaluable benefits of traditional media platforms in general and social media, in particular, in achieving their sinister purpose. ISIS figured out how to make an impact through the heavy use of social media, even though the number of terrorists is very few in comparison to the overall user base. The spread of propaganda, the recruitment of new fighter members, and the incitement of violence are the main reasons as to why terrorist organizations, such as the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), use the media.

Spread of Propaganda

The most important reason as to why ISIS is focusing on media is the fact that media, in all of its forms, provides a great opportunity for terrorists to craft and

disseminate propaganda easily. Terrorists benefit to the maximum from the tens of

thousands of social media platforms and websites that are free to use in order to spread

their propaganda. Their focus on media and the internet can best be illustrated by the fact

ISIS devoted a whole section of its forces with the aim of posting media productions

online. Furthermore, ISIS considers senior media personnel within the group as "Emirs,"

meaning they have a rank similar to their senior military counterparts.[40]

Unlike other terrorist organizations, ISIS has mastered the use of media, mainly

Twitter in order to spread its propaganda. ISIS activity on Twitter is so large that early in

2016, the social media company shut down 125,000 accounts linked to ISIS. Despite that,

they still have a massive influence online. Thousands of active accounts have been

maintained by ISIS sympathizers around the world. In a study published by the

Brooklings Institute in 2015, author and extremism expert J. M. Berger said "Jihadists

will exploit any kind of technology that will work to their advantage," and ISIS is "much

more successful than other groups." This study came in parallel with Twitter decision to

take more aggressive actions against accounts linked to ISIS. This in turn, led to threats

against Twitter's employees and officials.[41]

As suggested in Table 1, ISIS uses fifty-nine languages to spread its propaganda,

thus reaching a diverse and global audience. Although Arabic, English, and French

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[40] Greg Miller and Souad Mekhennet, "Inside the Surreal World of The Islamic State's Propaganda Machine," *Washington Post*, 2015, accessed 5 November 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/.../051e997a-8ce6-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b_story.

[41] Rick Gladstone and Vindu Goel, "ISIS Is Adept on Twitter, Study Finds," *New York Times,* 2015, accessed 5 January 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/06/world/middleeast/isis-is-skilled-on-twitter-using-thousands-of-accounts-study-says.html.

dominate their Tweets, it their use of other languages can have purposes other than

recruiting. For example, tweeting in Farsi and Kurdish helps ISIS intimidate their

opponents.[42]

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[42] Ian Plis, "ISIS Videos send targeted messages to their worst enemies," *Dailycaller,* 2015, accessed 20 February 2019, http://dailycaller.com/2015/03/23/new-isis-videos-send-targetedmessages-to-its-worst-enemies/.

Table 1. Tweet Language Distribution for ISIS	
Tweet Language	**Number of Tweets**
Arabic	10,888,860
English	412,181
French	231,760
Turkish	82,961
Indonesian	55,251
Spanish	13,399
Farsi	12,964
Dutch	9,780
Russian	9,722
Urdu	7,844
Kurdish	5,473
Tagalog	4,089
Ukrainian	3,166
German	3,040
Haitian	2,951
Estonian	2,819
Romanian	2,305
Vietnamese	1,856
Japanese	1,435
Welsh	1,430

Source: This data was collected between April and October 2015 using the public list of accounts posted by Anonymous beginning in March 2015. Data from 16,364 accounts was collected. Tweet language is determined by Twitter's language detection algorithm.

ISIS propaganda and its master use of Twitter was very evident in 2015 when the group began posting videos of brutal atrocities such as beheadings and executions of civilians. These acts generated a great amount of media attention.[43] It is difficult to identify and follow-up ISIS sympathizers on Twitter, especially for western agencies. This is not least because Arabic, as indicated in Table 1 above, is the dominant language for ISIS online discourse. Using a dataset of almost 2 million Tweets made by ISIS members and sympathizers in 2014, Badawy and Ferrara analyzed the content in terms of the type of messaging and propaganda these members and sympathizers wanted to deliver as well as how the developments on the ground back implicated the Twittersphere.[44] The study concluded

> violence, Islamic theology, and sectarianism play a crucial role in ISIS messaging. In some cases, ISIS emphasis on some topics of discussion slightly anticipated events on the ground: for example, the use of sectarian language online toward those entities perceived as adversaries was systematic prior to executions and attacks. In other cases, ISIS focused on certain topics as an aftermath of offline events: this was the case, for example, when ISIS inflicted violence upon minorities, and then engaged online in theological defense and justifications for its actions. Possibly, the most prominent event during this period, in terms of its importance and perceived meaning to ISIS sympathizers, was the announcement of the caliphate. This event was both preceded and followed by several shocks in the Twittersphere, with multiple spikes occurring across different categories of discussion shortly before and slightly after the event.

Similar to Badawy and Ferrara study, Siegel and Tucker used a dataset of over 70 million Tweets in the period between February 2015 and April 2016 to investigate how successful ISIS online strategy was in attracting more members, promoting the caliphate,

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[43] Berger and Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census."

[44] Adam Badawy and Emilio Ferrara, "The Rise of Jihadist Propaganda on Social Networks," Arxiv, 2017 accessed 5 January 2019, https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1702/1702.02263.pdf.

and building up its propaganda. The study concluded ISIS was still very successful in producing messages and transmitting it to its targeted audience around the globe despite efforts made by governments and social media companies to monitor, suspend and delete accounts related to ISIS.[45] It was not difficult for ISIS to promote battlefield successes and glorify the utopian Caliphate. Furthermore, the study concluded that despite their success, ISIS messages were resoundingly rejected especially in the Muslim world that ISIS seeks to have influence in. Also, the discussion and search for vast majority of ISIS content was extremely negative.

The reasons behind pro-ISIS radicalization in social media in general and Twitter in particular were the subject of many studies. For example, Mitts (2017) investigated the relationship between pro-ISIS radicalization on Twitter and the intensity of anti-Muslim hostility in four European countries (France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Belgium). The study concluded there is a significant and substantive correlation between online pro-ISIS radicalization and local-level measures of anti-Muslim hostility in the subject countries.[46] Klausen (2015) investigated around 30,000 ISIS-linked Twitter accounts and concluded that propaganda in fact flew to ISIS sympathizers in the West from accounts related to terrorist organizations in the conflict zone.[47]

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[45] Alexandra Siegel and Joshua Tucker, "The Islamic State's information warfare. Measuring the success of ISIS's online strategy," Alexandra Siegel, accessed 15 March 2019, http://alexandra-siegel.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/JLP_ISIS_Jan2017.pdf.

[46] Tamar Mitts, *From Isolation to Radicalization: Anti-Muslim Hostility and Support for ISIS in the West* (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 2017).

[47] Jytte Klausen, "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 38, no. 1 (2015): 1-22.

<u>Manipulation of Quranic Verses</u>

ISIS fakes realities and manipulates texts, even religious ones. Muslim extremists take Qur'anic verses out of their context and also use questionable hadiths (sayings, actions, or approvals of the Prophet) to reach their political ends.[48] Unfortunately, this has led to absurd accusations against the Quran. Some media outlets around the globe portrayed Islam as inherently violent. The result is increased negative feelings towards Islam and Muslims in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.[49]

Certain verses in the Quran that appear to call for Muslims to kill non-Muslims have been brought to light. These verses have often been quoted with what appears to be a deliberate neglect for the context in which they occur, thus aggravating listeners' emotions, spreading grave misunderstandings, and contributing to the potential for violence on all sides.

> Understanding violence in Quranic texts, as with all religious texts, requires reading the text within its historical context. In Arabia's tribal society and environment, tribal raids and warfare were considered normal and lawful unless a truce had been concluded between tribes. Chivalry forbade killing noncombatants like children, women, religious leaders and old people. These rules were later incorporated into Islamic law and the doctrine of jihad.[50]

ISIS members and affiliated groups consider themselves "true Muslims." They adhere strictly to the Muslims' scripture, the Holy Quran, as a justification for everything

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[48] Theresa Corbin, "The Most Misinterpreted Verses," Islamwich, 2015, accessed 13 January 2019, https://islamwich.com/2014/10/31/the-most-misinterpreted-verses/.

[49] Jonathan Lyons, *Islam Through Western Eyes: From the Crusades to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[50] John Esposito, "Islam and Political Violence," *Religions* 6, no. 3 (September 2015): 1067-1081.

they do. The group adopts an entirely literalist translation of the Quran, and claims to devoutly follow Sharia law, the religious law forming part of the Islamic tradition and which is derived from the religious precepts of Islam, particularly the Quran and the Hadith. One example of this manipulation is Quranic verse "We will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve for what they have associated with Allah of which He had not sent down [any] authority. And their refuge will be the Fire, and wretched is the residence of the wrongdoers."[51]

Interpreting the above verse literally may allow ISIS to cast terror, by mass execution and beheading. However, interpreting the above in its historical context tells us it refers to the Battle of Badr (624 CE) where some pagan tribes of the Arab Peninsula mobilized from the city of Makka to attack the Prophet and his companions in the city of Medina. Those pagan tribes were then terrified and finally defeated.

Another example of terrorists' misuse and manipulation of Islamic verses is in the Quranic verse "When the Sacred Months have passed, kill the polytheists wherever you find them. And capture them, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayers, and pay the alms, then let them go their way. Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful."[52] Once again, interpreting this verse literally justifies ISIS ruthless brutality. However, and in order to understand this verse we should study it in its historical context. This verse was revealed to the Prophet during the

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[51] The Holy Quran, trans. Talal Itani (Dallas, Beirut: ClearQuran), accessed 28 November 2018, https://m.clearquran.com/downloads/quran-english-translation-clearquran-edition-allah.pdf (3,151).

[52] Ibid. (9, 5).

Expedition to Tabuk (630 CE) which was a retaliation against the Byzantine Empire buildup to attack Muslims and demolish their rising influence in the city of Medina. In this verse, God ordered the Prophet and his followers to fight this battle against oppression. It was a defensive one. Furthermore, the verses that followed this verse were clearer in keeping with the Quranic spirit based on peace, obedience, and forgiveness, as they clearly explain that the war against the polytheists is not open and is specific to place and time. The very next Quran verse (9:6) is self-explanatory "And if anyone of the polytheists asks you for protection, give him protection so that he may hear the Word of Allah; then escort him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know."[53]

Jihad has been legislated in Islam for two reasons only. The first is to defend and protect the state, and the second is to defend freedom of belief and fight aggression. However, some Muslim scholars misinterpreted this fact and generalized the use of Jihad in the name of religion. These interpretations were used throughout history to justify killing people. Furthermore, some Hadiths that appeared in the most famous Hadith books (Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim) were also misinterpreted and placed within a wrong context.

Thanks to the misuse of media, exploiting this manipulation of sacred texts and disseminating it to the largest number of people could not have been easier for terrorists. A successful and well-organized propaganda facilitates the way for the most important ambition for terrorists, i.e. the recruitment of new fighter members.

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[53] The Holy Quran (9, 6).

The second main reason terrorists use the media is to recruit new fighters. Extremists demonstrated a shocking ability to lure people from around the world, including the West. They have long recognized the need to win hearts and minds for many reasons, including fundraising, attracting fighters, and ultimately establishing power and legitimacy. ISIS' stylish online operation integrates special effects, images and audio with high definition resolution, and videogame footage to attract foreign fighters. ISIS videos use a strange combination of Hollywood – style entertainment and documentaries among other things while demonstrating executions, battle scenes, and the ultimate morals of the ISIS Caliphate. An estimated 30,000 foreign fighters traveled to Iraq and Syria between 2011 and 2015 to join ISIS. A big portion of these recruits have been recruited through the media. Some reports state 80% ISIS recruits were recruited by means of social media.[54]

The ISIS recruitment process is built on the declaration of a caliphate state and the establishment of training camps for members. On 26 March 2017, the Sunday following the UK terrorist attack on London Bridge, British Prime Minister Teresa May leveled a portion of the blame at social media sites in a televised address "We cannot allow this

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[54] Edwin Bakker and Mark Singleton, "Foreign Fighters in the Syria and Iraq Conflict: Statistics and Characteristics of a Rapidly Growing Phenomenon," Springer, 2016, accessed 5 March 2019, https://www.springer.com/cda/content/document/cda_downloaddocument/9789462650985-c2.pdf?SGWID=0-0-45-1550186-p177783279.

ideology the safe space it needs to breed. Yet that is precisely what the internet—and the

big companies that provide internet-based services—provide."[55]

ISIS uses social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to

reach potential terrorists around the globe. Recruitment serves two purposes: First,

encouraging people around the world to join their cause. Second, training new fighters to

execute missions and tasks on behalf of ISIS. It is easy for new recruits to become

affiliated to any terrorist organization without any notice from those around him / her.

They can communicate with terrorist organizations from their bedroom using their

computers or mobile phones. Some terrorist organizations even use social media pages

and accounts on jokes or even cooking to assess members' willingness to become

radicalized. Later, they invite them to private chats where the process of recruitment is

completed. Because ISIS knows private or personal messages are more effective in

convincing people to joint their cause, they adopted one-on-one chats as part of their

recruitment strategies.

New foreign recruits are very important to ISIS. In the short term, they are used to

fill up the ranks of the group and help it expand by fighting on all fronts, but in the long

term, ISIS uses new foreign recruits to promote their Jihadi cause and add legitimacy to

their organization.

ISIS uses multiple narratives to recruit new fighters. One of these narratives is the

"winner's message" narrative where ISIS portrays itself as a powerful and well-

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[55] Theresa May, "Commenting on terrorist attacks on London Bridge," *The Guardian,* 2018, accessed 20 March 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/ technology/2018/jan/25/theresa-may-calls-tech-firms-act-encrypted-messaging.

established organization capable of defeating all enemies while concealing all weaknesses. The elements brought together in the "winner message" narrative amount to half of ISIS propaganda. ISIS cannot convince people living thousands of miles away to come and join the group without demonstrating its power. In this narrative ISIS depicts itself as a functioning and viable state, the only place where true Islam is implemented as a way of life.[56] Leppink (2017) identified four components of ISIS "winner message" narrative:[57]

1. Brutality. ISIS has used social media extensively to demonstrate its violence and brutality to its audience, thus showing its supremacy and power. One example is broadcasting a video showing the immolation of Muath Al Kasasbeh, the Jordanian pilot who was captured by ISIS in 2014. Executions and beheadings show that ISIS capable of punishing their enemies and imposing their will on local population.

2. Mercy. ISIS showed different videos of captives being granted mercy. This component demonstrates that ISIS is in control. People who travel to join ISIS will be granted mercy of all the sins they committed prior to joining ISIS.[58]

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[56] Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, and Moreng, "The Islamic State's Global Propaganda Strategy."

[57] Dorian Leppink, "Recruitment Propaganda of the Islamic State Recruiting Narratives in the Islamic State's Propaganda," Dspace Library, 2017, accessed 24 February 2019, https://dspace.library.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/1874/345180/BA-ThesisDoriancomplete.pdf?sequence=2.

[58] Charlie Winter, "Documenting the Virtual "Caliphate," Quilliam Foundation, 2015, accessed 23 February 2019, http://www.quilliaminternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL-documenting-the-virtual-caliphate.pdf.

3. Battlefield Success. In this component, ISIS promotes its military successes on the ground aiming to emphasize their slogan "remaining and expanding" as mentioned in Dabiq magazine.

4. ISIS as Utopia. In this component ISIS presents itself as a full functioning and organized state where Islamic Sharia is the system of governance.[59] To do so, ISIS produced media materials about people living normal lives in ISIS controlled territories where the economy is strong and public services are available.

Another strong narrative in ISIS recruiting messaging is the use of religious obligation. ISIS claims it is obligatory for all Muslims around the world to emigrate to the Islamic State which rules under the caliphate.[60] However, if that is not possible due to any reason, such as health, security, financial ability, then it is possible for those people just to pledge allegiance to ISIS from the country that they live in.[61] ISIS again manipulated religious texts as justification for their call on people to migrate to the areas controlled by ISIS. One example of this manipulation is ISIS use of Quran verse 4: 97 "While the angels are removing the souls of those who have wronged themselves, they will say, "What was the matter with you?" They will say, "We were oppressed in the land." They will say, "Was Allah's earth not vast enough for you to emigrate in it?"

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[59] Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, and Moreng, "The Islamic State's Global Propaganda Strategy."

[60] Ibid.

[61] "Until it Burns the Crusader Armies in Dabiq," *Dabiq Magazine*, no. 1 (2015): 3, accessed 6 December 2018, https://www.ieproject.org/projects.

These—their refuge is Hell. What a wretched retreat!"[62] And Quran verse 4: 100 "Anyone who emigrates for the sake of Allah will find on earth many places of refuge, and plentitude. Anyone who leaves his home, emigrating to Allah and His Messenger, and then is overtaken by death, his compensation falls on Allah. Allah is Forgiver, Most Merciful."[63]

Opposite to ISIS interpretation, in these verses God permitted the emigration to those who are oppressed where they live and are afraid for their religion, family or wealth, and were unable to perform worship to God, then they are allowed to abandon their place and migrate to a safer place. Therefore, the meaning is not for Muslims to leave all the countries of Islam where they are safe and leave to the territory of an oppressive organization where they will not be safe.[64]

Using social media, ISIS promised new recruits they would have a better life if they traveled to the Caliphate. They would receive monthly allowances and even enjoy free food and health services as well as free public services, such as free houses, water, and electricity. However, new recruits, such as Mohamad Jamal Khweis, a 26-year-old from Virginia, found out the hard way these were all lies. Khweis was recruited online and was promised a peaceful life in the caliphate. He fled his home in the United States in 2015 and headed to Islamic State territory in Syria and Iraq. Mohamad Khweis was

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[62] The Holy Quran (4, 97).

[63] Ibid., (4, 100).

[64] Said Hijazi and Abdulwahhab Issa, "Al Azhar Response to ISIS Fatwa," *El Watan News,* 2018, accessed 20 March 2019, https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/3853878.

"curious" about life in the group's self-declared caliphate, he later recalled. What he found did not live up to the hype. Khweis was tasked with running errands such as grocery shopping, taking out the trash at his Islamic State house and caring for wounded fighters. According to an FBI special agent who testified during Khweis's trial, he eventually became "frustrated with waiting" for military training, he ended up fleeing and was captured in Iraq.[65]

Another example of ISIS success in recruiting even people with military connection is the story of Robert Hester from Missouri in the United States.[66] Hester was discharged from military service in 2013. Three years later, the 25-year-old father of two resurfaced as a different man. He converted to Islam and used a new name to get on social media under the alias Rabbani Jonaid Mohammed. Hester was recruited by ISIS and was tasked to conduct attacks that would have the most impact. Luckily, Hester was arrested before doing that. According to a study from George Washington University's Program on Extremism, many of the Americans who traveled to Syria and Iraq to join the group wound up coming back because "life in jihadist-held territory did not live up to their expectations."[67]

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[65] Greg Botelho and Hamdi Alkhshali, "Kurds: Virginia man, 26, captured leaving ISIS territory," *CNN,* 2016, accessed 20 March 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/16/middleeast/american-isis-captured-peshmerga/index.html.

[66] Tony Rizzo, "Kansas City terror attack suspect ordered held without bond," *Kansas City*, 2017, accessed 18 March 2019, https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/crime/article134740494.html.

[67] Mark Berman, "Young men left America to join ISIS. They ended up cooking and cleaning for the caliphate," *Washington Post*, 2018, accessed 20 February 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2018/02/08/young-men-left-

The attractiveness of ISIS is not limited to males only. A number of girls and women recruited via media from Arab and foreign countries have joined ISIS. A battalion named "Al-Khansa'" was formed to incorporate these women, who did not represent only mothers, wives, or sisters of terrorists, but a number of them were sympathizers with the ideology of the group. One example of female sympathizers with ISIS is Waheba Issa Dais, a mother of two from Wisconsin who on June 13, 2018 was arrested and charged with using social media to recruit new members for ISIS.[68]

The second purpose for online recruitment is the terrorists' ability to train online. Media can work as a virtual training ground for terrorists. They are trained on using weapons, making bombs, and executing suicidal attacks. Terrorists can also post military training manuals online so that recruits can benefit from them whenever they wish. Additionally, and through their ambitions to recruit youngsters, terrorists have been using video game technology in their recruitment efforts. Hoffman (2006) explains how terrorist groups were meant to draw "a computer savvy, media-saturated, video game-addicted generation." Video games, such as Grand Theft Auto, were modified. The new recruits are able to play as if they were ISIS members in military operations.[69] As part of their recruitment campaign, terrorists also produce and promote high quality YouTube

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america-to-join-isis-they-fled-when-it-didnt-live-up-to-their-expectations/?utm_term=.2048db0ee8c6.

[68] Pete Williams, "Wisconsin mother of two charged with trying to recruit for ISIS, hacking social media accounts," *NBC News*, 2018, accessed 3 March 2019, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/wisconsin-mother-two-charged-trying-recruit-isis-hacking-social-media-n883491.

[69] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

videos with attractive music. They make their ideology look exciting and fun especially

to young audience. According to Diresta (2018)

> Manufacturing a crowd is a bit different from growing an audience. Purchasing likes, ratings, followers, or bots; relying on automation to artificially amplify a message; gaming algorithms to get something trending or highly rated by a recommender system; using sockpuppets to leave comments and shape narratives. It's mass deception: hard to detect, and societally corrosive.[70]

<u>Incitement of Violence</u>

Once the propaganda campaign succeeds, and individuals recruited and trained,

terrorists exploit media even more to incite violence. Before encouraging more violence,

terrorists promote hate speech. According to the American Bar Association, hate speech

is "a speech that offends, threatens, or insults groups, based on race, color, religion,

national origin, sexual orientation, disability, or other traits."[71] Hate speech is a middle

step between recruitment and incitement to commit violence. Hate speech works as fuel

for different conflicts in the world. The world's conflicts are no longer confined to oil and

gas, but rather to ideologies and beliefs. Most countries penalize hate speech and define

the difference between hate speech and freedom of speech. Hate speech serve many

purposes, including criticizing and exposing political figures, hurting others feelings and

insulting them, and most importantly incitement to cause violence and harm against

others. ISIS adopted the third one and long realized the importance of promoting hate

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[70] Enee Diresta, "How Isis and Russia Won Friends and Manufactured Crowds," *Wired*, 2018, accessed 18 February 2019, https://www.wired.com/story/isis-russia-manufacture-crowds/.

[71] Radwa Abdelrahman, "Hate Speech," *Prezi,* 2016, accessed 1 February 2019, https://prezi.com/jsvn0fi4fnhv/hate-speech/.

speech for their supporters against Muslim and non-Muslims alike. Their hate speech targets anyone opposing them.

The relationship between hate speech by terrorist organizations and the death of innocent people is linear and clear. On October 31, 2017, New York witnessed the deadliest attack since September 11th when Uzbek immigrant Sayfullo Saipov drove a rental pick up down a crowded street in Manhattan killing eight innocent people and injuring many. The attacker was inspired by videos and literature of ISIS which claimed later that Saipov was a "soldier" of the Caliphate. New York Police Department's Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence and Counterterrorism John Miller told journalists that Saipov appeared "to have followed almost exactly to a 'T' the instructions that ISIS has put out in its social media channels before, with instructions to their followers on how to carry out such an attack."[72]

Although ISIS has been defeated in both Syria and Iraq, losing their capital Al-Raqqa, they remain a strong and dangerous organization with a powerful influence on others. Because of their losses, ISIS began to incite violence and encourage their supporters and affiliates worldwide even more to conduct "Lone Wolf" attacks. "[ISIS] has elevated its incitement of followers around the world, not merely with messages and propaganda, but also with practical advice to attack using available methods, like cars

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[72] David Patrikarakos, "Social Media Networks Are the Handmaiden to Dangerous Propaganda" *Time,* 2017, accessed 27 February 2019, http://time.com/5008076/nyc-terror-attack-isis-facebook-russia/

and knives."[73] One problem for countries who are trying to criminalize the incitement of terrorism is the absence of an agreed definition of "terrorism" itself. Although the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1624 confirms "Condemning also in the strongest terms the incitement of terrorist acts and repudiating attempts at the justification or glorification of terrorist acts that may incite further terrorist acts […the UNSC] Calls upon all States to adopt such measures as may be necessary and appropriate and in accordance with their obligations under international law to

1. Prohibit by law incitement to commit a terrorist act or acts;

2. Prevent such conduct;

3. Deny safe haven to any persons with respect to whom there is credible and relevant information giving serious reasons for considering that they have been guilty of such conduct."

It might be more convenient and beneficial for countries to criminalize incitement individually not in a collective manner as they already have different definitions of "Freedom of Expression."[74]

The role of the internet as a driving force in terror attacks was dramatically brought to light by the Tsarnaev brothers who planted bombs at the Boston marathon in

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[73] Jared Keller, "The War against ISIS Is Far from Over," *Task and Purpose,* 2018, accessed 3 February 2019, https://taskandpurpose.com/us-military-campaign-isis-iraq-syria.

[74] Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1624 (2005), Compilation of International Good Practices, Codes and Standards, accessed 16 January 2019, https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/news/document/united-nations-security-council-resolution-1624-2005-compilation-of-international-good-practices-codes-and-standards/.

April 2013 and Roshonara Choudry, the university student who stabbed Stephen Timms, a Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom with a kitchen knife in November 2010. Both the Tsarnaev brothers and Choudry were radicalized by online content which inspired them to conduct acts of terror. Both viewed websites and audio-visual sermons of radical preachers such as US-Yemeni cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, leader of AQAP, who inspired over a dozen people in the US, UK, Canada and France to conduct lone wolf terrorist attacks in their own countries. Anwar al-Awlaki also inspired and helped fund the Kouachi brothers who attacked the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris. Recent attacks against New York police officers, the Canadian National War Memorial soldier and the House of Parliament appear to have been committed by self-radicalized individuals following ISIS.[75]

Lone Wolves

The "lone wolf" strategy, which might be the most prevalent form of terrorism since ISIS loss of almost 90% of its territory at the beginning of April 2014, represents a new challenge to security agencies around the globe. Several recent terrorist attacks have been attributed to "lone wolves" which represent a new and old phenomenon that have been used by extremist groups all around the world. The number of "lone wolf" attacks has increased significantly especially with ISIS adoption of "lone wolf" attacks as a fighting strategy after the elimination of its affiliates in Libya, Afghanistan and Nigeria. This strategy is difficult to predict, track, or monitor, especially with terrorists' use of

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[75] Christina Liang, "Cyber Jihad: Understanding and Countering Islamic State Propaganda," *GCSP*, 2015, accessed 5 January 2019, https://www.gcsp.ch/download/2763/72138.

modern technologies and communications and has become even more dangerous with the return of foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria to their home countries.

Some define "lone wolves" as isolated individuals who often suffer from psychological problems. They are motivated by ideology, not always by religion. They plan and conduct their actions alone and without pressure from other groups. They also do not receive any material assistance to carry out their attacks.[76] This definition singles individuals who do not suffer any psychological problems such as the case in many of the attacks, however, I still think this definition is accurate with regard to the connection between "lone wolves" and terrorist organizations in the sense that "lone wolves" operate alone. A "lone wolf(ves)" is an individual, or a group of individuals, who do not follow a hierarchical organization where they receive instructions. They carry out terrorist attack based on individual planning and a personal motive. Most of these individuals have normal personalities that do not raise doubts about their daily behavior and movement. Most of them are young people of Arab and Islamic origin, the majority of which reside in Europe and other Western countries.[77]

This phenomenon has first appeared as a racist and extremist strategy. Radical groups have exercised it for many years. One of the famous users of this phenomenon is Louis Beam, the Grand Dragon of the Texas Ku Klux Klan, who in 1983 called for a

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[76] Daniel Byman, "How to hunt a lone wolf: Countering terrorists who act on their own," Brookings, 2017, accessed 13 January 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/how-to-hunt-a-lone-wolf-countering-terrorists-who-act-on-their-own/.

[77] Raffaello Pantucci, "A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists," Trackingterrorism, 2011, accessed 4 March 2019, https://www.trackingterrorism.org/system/files/chatter/1302002992ICSRPaper_ATypologyofLoneWolves_Pantucci.pdf.

"leaderless resistance" against the federal government of the United States of America. This strategy, which had long been practiced by communists, argues that these groups should organize themselves in two levels:

1. "Phantom Cells" or militants wo operate under cover to conduct violence in small groups or individually (lone wolves).

2. Political arm that claims not to be affiliated with the violence made by the first group.[78]

For Muslim terrorist groups, the "lone wolf" strategy first appeared under the term "individual jihad" which was introduced in the International Islamic Resistance book. The author, Abu Musab al-Suri, is the first to emphasize the idea of decentralization where the organization becomes a cross-border one and "every Muslim must represent an army of one man."[79] In the second part of his book, al-Suri spoke extensively about what he called "individual jihad," where terrorist groups/organizations should stop "regular" jihadi work and focus on "lone wolf" operations especially with the International Campaign against Terror that followed the September 2001 attacks. Al-Suri stated that working in groups made it easier for security agencies to infiltrate, defeat, and isolate these groups, and distort their reputation. Thus, creating weak and dispersed resistance. He claimed "individual jihad" achieved shocking military success because it is

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[78] Laura Smith, "Armed resistance, lone wolves, and media messaging: meet the godfather of the 'alt-right'," Timeline, 2017, accessed 10 February 2019, https://timeline.com/louis-beam-white-supremacy-history-20d028315d

[79] Ahmad Attar, "The most dangerous book in the world. How did the theories of Abu Musab al-Suri inspire ISIS and their lone wolves," *Rosaelyoussef,* 2018, accessed 10 February 2019, http://www.rosaelyoussef.com/news/details/369473

spontaneous and unorganized thus, confusing international intelligence services since the arrest of any terrorist cell will not affect the work of others. Commenting on the educational and political absence of "individual jihad," Abu Musab says "the absence of the curriculum is a defect that can be avoided."[80]

ISIS declared this new type of war through its Dabiq magazine in July 2016 under the title of "lone wolves" war. It urged its affiliates and followers to carry out "lone wolf" attacks against "crusader nations" who are part of the International Campaign against Terror. The magazine states " At this point of the crusade against the Islamic State, it is very important that attacks take place in every country that has entered into the alliance against the Islamic State, especially the US, UK, France, Australia and Germany."[81] The prominent ISIS leader Al Adanani urged "lone wolves" to carry out more attacks on Western interests everywhere, saying that the targeting of the so-called civilians is more appealing to us and more effective on the enemy. There are no innocents. If you are not able to find an IED or a bullet, then single out the disbelieving American, Frenchman or any of their allies. Smash his head with a rock or slaughter him with a knife or run him over with your car or throw him down from a high place or choke him or poison him."[82] ISIS adoption of "lone wolf" strategy was based on Abu Musab al-Suri's theory. Al-Suri explained members should practice this kind of jihad in the area where they live and

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[80] Attar, "The most dangerous book in the world. How did the theories of Abu Musab al-Suri inspire ISIS and their lone wolves."

[81] "Kill the Imams of Kufr in the West," 3.

[82] CNN Library, "Terrorist Attacks by Vehicle Fast Facts," *CNN*, 2018, accessed 5 January 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/03/world/terrorist-attacks-by-vehicle-fast-facts/index.html.

reside, without the cost of travel and immigration to where direct jihad is taking place. He also identified the targets of heads of states, ministers, military and security leaders as well as major strategic economic objectives, and civilians in general. The main battlegrounds targeted by "individual jihad" should be as follows:[83]

1. Countries of the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Egypt and Iraq.

2. North African countries from Libya to Mauritania.

3. Turkey, Pakistan and Central Asian countries.

4. Other countries in the Islamic world.

5. US and allied interests in third world countries.

6. In the heart of European countries allied to the US and involved in the war.

7. In the heart of the US itself.

Due to loss of territories, financial shortages and the absence of first-generation field leaders from al Qaeda, who either became old or died during fighting, ISIS resorted to "lone wolf" strategy as maybe a last resort for their survival. Usually "lone wolf" operations rely on self-financing and acquiring weapons and explosive materials which can be obtained from markets and local shops without attracting any attention. According to Abu Haniya, most attackers using "lone wolf" strategy are multi-linguists who are able to use modern technology. One of the reasons making it difficult to track "lone wolvers" is the fact they do not have personal communication with the group they follow.[84]

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[83] Attar, "The most dangerous book in the world. How did the theories of Abu Musab al-Suri inspire ISIS and their lone wolves."

[84] Hasan Abu Haniya, "Jordan Terrorist Attack Amman Lone Wolves," *CNN,* 2016, accessed 23 February 2019, https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2016/06/06/hassan-abu-haniyeh-jordan-terrorist-attack-amman-lone-wolves.

What distinguishes "lone wolf" strategy is the absence of coordination between attackers and terrorist groups or between different attackers operating in the same region. For example, the four terrorist attacks witnessed in France during the period from May to early August 2017 were carried out by ISIS-sympathizers. These attacks were followed by two terrorist attacks in Spain on 17 August followed by a terrorist attack using a knife in Finland on 18 August and Russia on 19 August. No coordination was found among the attackers although they all shared an ideological sympathy with ISIS. Another characteristic of "lone wolf" strategy is the suicidal tendency of the perpetrators. Most attacks end up by either killing the perpetrators or them committing suicide. They realize the difficulty of escaping after carrying out their terrorist attacks and therefore seek to bring down the largest number of victims even if this resulted in their death.

Through analyzing speeches made by terrorist leaders and case studies, ISIS "lone wolf" strategy is based on the following:

1. The chosen target. Most of the attacks carried out by ISIS target civilian gatherings (airports, train stations, public gatherings and some government sites) as well as military figures.

2. Attack mode. The means used to carry out terrorist operations varied from (explosive devices, explosive belts, armed attacks, stabbings and run over operations).

3. Timing. The attacks were focused on the presence of (concerts, festivals and various events). Also, these attacks increased following the speeches of incitement by terrorist influential leaders.

4. Executors. The attacks were mainly dependent on "Lone Wolves," who are ordinary people living in the same country as the attack, and usually ending with their deaths.

5. Means of communication. There is no direct means of communication between "Lone Wolves" and terrorist groups. Rather, they are influenced by the terrorist groups ideology through media and social media. "Lone Wolves" receive advice usually on social media on how to make explosives and choose the appropriate place, time and means of the attacks.

6. Influence and encouragement method. ISIS manipulate religious texts, be it Quran verses, Prophet sayings, or Fatwas in order to justify "Lone Wolves" attacks. They claim that this is real Islam and that attackers will end up in heaven.

7. Surprise. What distinguishes ISIS "Lone Wolf" strategy is the use of the element of surprise when using the timing or place or tools, which makes it more difficult to face.

8. The result. Usually, "Lone Wolves" succeed in conducting their operations. The level of damage depends on the timing, place or tools used in the attack. The attacks often succeed because everything is prepared away from the eyes of security apparatuses. They are also done using simple and unobtrusive tools.[85]

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[85] Khaled Alomosh, "Why do Jordanian Youth Commit Violent Acts as Lone Actors in Support of ISIS?" (unpublished master's thesis, National Defense University, Washington, DC, 2019).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This research suggests employing media as a weapon is vital to ISIS strategy to establish an Islamic Caliphate. ISIS uses media for three central goals: promoting its propaganda, recruiting new fighters, and inciting violence. Islamist narratives and selectively appropriated aspects of Islam have been effectively employed to reach political goals. This raises important questions concerning the role of Islamism among Muslim extremists in the process of radicalization. With the use of media, there is no geographical barrier or a need for face-to-face physical presence between terrorists. Media made it easy to communicate in a quick and relatively safe manner. Also, media made it possible for terrorists to disseminate their sick ideology directly to platforms with unfettered control in order to portray themselves as the "True Muslims."

Future Research and Implications

This is the era of globalization, endless communication, and the demise of borders among nations. It is the age of Internet and technology revolution. The world is witnessing political, military, and ideological conflicts and democratic transformations. People are living in a state of rapid change. Global terrorism is one of the main variables that affect political thought and dialogue.[86] The issue of terrorism today concerns the

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[86] Sharif Labban, "A look into ISIS media and cultural strategy," *Arab Media & Society,* 2016, accessed 11 December 2018, https://www.arabmediasociety.com/a-reading-of-the-media-and-cultural-strategy-of-daesh-arabic/.

world because of the effects it has on the society's relations with its individuals and institutions. Among these transformations was the rise of ISIS. The phenomenon of "ISIS" has been and remains the subject of extensive researches in many fields.

ISIS relies heavily on media and calls it "media jihad." ISIS media campaigns surpassed al Qaeda and other "jihadist" organizations. They are distinguished by efficient and quick messaging, quality of media content, and use of technology. The philosophy of ISIS media machinery is not limited to dress uniforms worn by ISIS fighters, but extends to visual and audio effects with focus on social media networks, high technology and even electronic games.

In this research I discussed ISIS use of media. It is obvious that it was /is one of ISIS' strengths. Even with the defeat of ISIS on the ground, many of its affiliates still use social media to promote for their ideology. Further research is needed to study specific details of ISIS use of media such as their manipulation of religious texts.

In January 2018, President Trump declared ISIS is almost defeated. He asserted "one year later, I'm proud to report that the coalition to defeat ISIS has liberated very close to 100 percent of the territory just recently held by these killers in Iraq and Syria."[87] I agree the current geopolitical situation is not in favor of ISIS but I also think the future of ISIS is still uncertain and there is a strong possibility it will re-emerge, possibly under a new name or in different locations outside the Middle East. ISIS leadership and prominent figures remain at large. During its prime, ISIS was able to win the hearts and

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[87] Donald Trump, "State of the Union Speech 2017," *Fox News*, 2017, accessed 5 March 2019, https://www.foxnews.com/politics/al-qaeda-returns-un-panel-warns-of-new-bin-laden-threat.

minds of many people around the world. It enjoys fertile ground for radicalization in many states especially the unstable ones. Their affiliates around the globe continue to operate and conduct "lone wolf" attacks in Europe and elsewhere, not to forget that it also remains a challenge for concerned governments to keep control of liberated areas in Iraq and Syria. "We cannot emphasize enough that the threat of losing the gains we have made is real, especially if we are not able to give the people a viable alternative to the ISIS problem."[88]

In this research, I only discussed their manipulation of Quranic verses. They also manipulate Prophet Hadiths (a collection of words, actions, and what the Prophet has approved whether verbally or silently). Hadiths rank second in Islam in terms of guidance and legislations. ISIS also manipulates Fatwas (religious rulings/decisions/judgements made by Muslim scholars) in order to support their cause.

Another area of future research is ISIS successful recruitment strategy. More research should be directed towards the reasons as to why people get attracted to join radical groups, especially people from the west. What is so tempting and inspiring about ISIS messaging campaigns, especially for westerners? Why would people living thousands of miles away from ISIS willingly leave their families, homes, jobs, friends... etc. to join the terrorist group and actually fight brutal battles in the name of the Caliphate? Furthermore, more research should be directed towards combating terrorist

[88] Sean Ryan, "Islamic State 'Well-Positioned' to Rebuild Caliphate," *VOA News,* 2018, accessed 30 March 2019, https://www.voanews.com/a/islamic-state-well-positioned-to-rebuild-caliphate/4530937.html.

propaganda. There is extensive research on the content of ISIS propaganda but limited research on combating it.

Recommendations

Islam has never been challenged from within as it is now. Muslim scholars must respond in an intellectual manner. I believe more studies must be directed towards the political employment of Islam by genocidal extremists as well as the attempts to blame a religion that has been there for more than 1430 years with more than two billion followers.[89]

Based on the findings of this research, I recommend the following measures as part of the global efforts to counter terrorist messaging and propaganda:

1. Promote a comprehensive international Internet and social media legislation by governments, including setting up page controls that allow tracking and pursuing users who promote radicalization.

2. Simplify procedures for the removal / restriction of social media accounts of terrorist groups.

3. Promote programs aimed at controlling the information created by users of social media.

4. Develop effective measures to monitor suspected uses of social networks.

5. Strengthen joint programs to create greater security for users of social media.

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[89] Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi, "Saving Islam from the Deceit and Depravity of the Islamic State," *ABC Religion and Ethics*, 2015, accessed 3 December 2018, http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2015/09/09/4308825.htm.

6. Enhance international cooperation and information sharing among countries as means for combating terrorism.

7. Establish and implement strategies and policies to rehabilitate ISIS ex-fighters.

8. The media domain should be the spearhead in the face of terrorism. It should be made clear that the war with terrorism is not just a military, but an intellectual and psychological one as well.

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