



**HATE**SPEECH  
INTERNATIONAL  
INVESTIGATING EXTREMISM

THE ISLAMIC STATE  
PROPAGANDA MACHINE

A report by Hate Speech International

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THE ISLAMIC STATE PROPAGANDA MACHINE  
A report by Hate Speech International  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"The Islamic State Propaganda Machine" is a report on how the Islamic State uses propaganda – via traditional media and social media platforms – to recruit, to shape perceptions and to form identities conducive to its global jihadist agenda and state-building project.

The report has been compiled on the basis of research of open source material and also draws on previous research and mapping. Presenting the broad span of its media and communications apparatus, this report illustrates how the IS propaganda machine is key to the jihadist group's successes in recent years.



## THIS REPORT SHOWS THAT:

- IS has greatly capitalized on the unprecedented advances that communications technology has undergone in recent years. Although IS represents a political project that promotes anti-modernity, the Islamic State, by all means, is also living in the age of the YouTube generation.
- The IS media apparatus is well-funded, well-equipped and highly sophisticated, with a number of associated specialized media wings including printing houses and radio broadcasters. Its productions involve hundreds of media professionals, including videographers, producers and editors.
- Media productions in various languages (among them English, several European languages and Turkish), attest to a strategy aimed at recruiting foreign fighters and ideological supporters globally.
- IS propaganda uses a variety of social media, file-sharing platforms and other tools to spread its message to local, regional and global audiences.
- The IS propaganda apparatus also targets its local audiences through regional (wilayah) offices, and via offline media and propaganda work, including viewing parties of official content held in territories it controls. This includes media points (nuqat il'amiyya) established in a number of cities and villages, where printed and digital media is being distributed to locals.

While the Western media have focused on IS narratives of brutality and destruction of cultural heritage sites, the organization's propaganda also emphasizes state-building and consolidation of a cultural identity. To that end it disseminates religious material such as da'wa literature, pamphlets, religious guidelines and information on hisbah activities (moral policing), as well as the production of nasheeds – Islamic vocal chants, and recitations from the Qu'ran.

More news-oriented material is moreover disseminated to local populations in IS-held areas. These are usually Arabic language newsletters that feature content as propagandistic battlefield reports and "interviews" with captives, but also public notices and "advertisements".

This report shows how the IS propaganda apparatus highlights the group's apocalyptic, jihadist and dualistic world view. This is not exclusively aimed at the West, but also targets "near enemies" such as Shia Muslims, the Saudi regime, rival Syrian groups and other extremist Islamist groups.



Often in conjunction with governmental efforts to combat terrorism, Twitter and other mainstream social media are currently increasing their efforts to remove Islamic State content and to suspend users affiliated with the terrorist group.

But as myriad new media platforms emerge in the market – often featuring sophisticated encryption technology – we are no doubt set to witness an arms race of sorts in the realms of terrorism and privacy-enhancing technology.

Kjetil Stormark  
Executive Director  
Hate Speech International





Al-Kataib

The Somali group Al Shabaab has been amongst the pioneers of online jihadist propaganda. Here, a screenshot from the 2013 video "Woolwich attack: It's an eye for an eye"



# A SHORT HISTORY OF JIHADIST ONLINE PROPAGANDA

*(Electronic Jihad) has emerged between those who seek to assist the Jihad on the Internet, and this is a blessed field which contains much benefit (...).*

– Muhammad bin Ahmad as-Salim, *39 Ways to Serve and Participate in Jihad*

While this report focuses on the media and propaganda efforts of the self-declared Islamic State (IS), a look at the history of jihadist propaganda online may be beneficial, as it illustrates both the development of online jihadism and the role that IS's predecessor group, Islamic State of Iraq, played in this development.

Communications technology has undergone unprecedented advances in recent years. However, already 10 years ago, in 2006, Hanna Rogan of the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment published the report *Jihadism online – a study of how al-Qaida and radical Islamist groups use the Internet for terrorist purposes*. The report pointed to three main categories of jihadist websites.

The first category was of official websites representing jihadist clerics and organizations. Rogan's examples include pro-Hamas sites, but also the websites of Abu Musab al Suri, an al Qaeda figure also known as a prolific writer; Abu Basir al Tartousi, a Syrian jihadist theoretician; and of sheikh Omar Bakri, the founder of the UK-based Mujahiroun movement. She also mentions Salafi-jihadist groups operating within Iraq, such as the Islamic Army in Iraq (*al Jaysh al Islami fi'l-Iraq*, or IAI), with a website featuring "information about operations, communiqués, articles books and online magazines", and the unofficial website of al Qaida in Iraq (or al Qaida in the Land of the Two Rivers, *Qa'idat al-Jihad fi bilad al-Rafidayn*), a predecessor group of the current Islamic State.<sup>1</sup>

The second category described by Rogan included chat forums and blogs.<sup>2</sup> The third category was described as "distributor sites", a varied group of websites "sustaining jihadist online infrastructure by distributing material from and links to important jihadist websites".<sup>3</sup> One example mentioned was *Dalil Meshawar*:

Its front page shows pictures of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Musab al-Zarqawi, and then follows a long list of links to jihadi websites, forums, news sites, sheikhs' sites, sites with lists of martyrs, etc.<sup>4</sup>

In the conclusion to her report, Rogan remarked that the Internet enabled jihadists to reach out to a significant audience, and that it encouraged publication of a wider range of jihadist material, "combining text and audio-visual methods". While warning against exaggerating the scope of online jihadism, she added that online jihadism would "most likely increase in the future, as improved bandwidth, increased functionality and the fast growing number of users will make the Internet a far more vital nerve in modern society than it is today".<sup>5</sup>

Extremist groups have sometimes been described as "early adapters" of new media technology, including the Internet. Stormfront.org, a neo-Nazi-oriented Internet site launched in 1995 is generally

<sup>1</sup> Hanna Rogan, *Jihadism online – a study of how al-Qaida and radical Islamist groups use the Internet for terrorist purposes*, Oslo: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (Forsvarets forskningsinstitutt), 2006, p. 17 – 18.

<sup>2</sup> Rogan, p. 20 – 22.

<sup>3</sup> Rogan, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Rogan, p. 32 – 33.



considered the first online hate site, although United States-based right-wing extremists were already using bulletin board systems as early as the first half of the 1980s. Other extremist groups eventually followed. In 1998, fewer than half of the organizations then designated foreign terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department, a list that included the Khmer Rouge and the Japanese Red Army, but to which al Qaeda was only added the following year, had a website. By the end of 1999, however, almost all of the 30 designated groups had an Internet presence, and within a few years the number of websites connected to terrorist-designated groups boomed: "A thorough and extensive scan of the Internet in 2003-05 revealed more than 4,300 websites serving terrorists and their supporters."<sup>6</sup> Internet websites had several clear advantages: they were cheap to run, could be maintained from anywhere with an Internet connection and made it possible to spread propaganda globally.

In the earliest phase, the jihadist Internet presence was mostly made up of relatively simple websites, such as al Qaeda's website *al Neda*, which was hijacked by an American Internet entrepreneur in March 2002.

As such websites came under increased attack from both intelligence agencies and Internet activists after the historic attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001, online jihadists adapted, using mirror sites and distributor sites to stay online. Supporters of their cause also started using Internet discussion boards, first seeking out general discussion forums, later setting up their own, including – for instance – *Al Ekhlaas*, *Al Hesbah* and *Al Boraq*. As a 2010 report from the UK-based Quilliam Foundation notes, such sites soon evolved "from more than simple meeting places of like-minded individuals to virtual universities of jihadism, where a user could learn everything from the theological justifications of jihadism to bomb making and first aid skills".<sup>7</sup> Rather than belonging to specific jihadist groups, such forums took a pan-jihadist approach, "championing the causes of extremist organizations from the Nigerian Boko Haram to al-Qaeda".<sup>8</sup> The administrators of such sites become important figures in the spread of propaganda.

One group harnessing the possibilities offered by the Internet was the Iraq-based *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, led by the Jordanian national known as Abu Musab al Zarqawi. The group's original goal was to overthrow the 'apostate' Jordanian king, but it gained for more notoriety from its involvement in Iraq after the 2003 invasion of the country carried out by the United States and its allies. In May 2004, a video was released on a jihadist website hosted in Malaysia, *al-ansar.biz*.

The video was introduced with off-white Arabic text on a black background reading: "Sheik Abu Musab Zarqawi slaughters an American infidel with his hands and promises Bush more." The footage itself showed five masked men in a white room, the American freelance radio-tower repairman Nicholas Evan Berg kneeling in front of them, wearing an orange jump suit similar to those worn by prisoners detained by the United States at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, which had been established in January 2002.

Nick Berg stated his name, mentioned the names of his parents and siblings, and said he was from West Chester, Pennsylvania. One of the masked men – believed to be Abu Zarqawi himself – read a lengthy text in Arabic. "How can a free Muslim sleep soundly," he asked, "while Islam is being slaughtered, its honor bleeding and the images of shame in the news of the Satanic abuse of the Muslim men and women in the prison of Abu Ghraib. Where is your zeal and where is the anger for the religion of God? And where is the jealousy over the honor of the Muslims and where is the revenge for the honour of Muslim men and women in the prisons of the Crusaders?"

"As for you, scholars of Islam, it is to God that we complain about you. Don't you see that God has established the evidence against you by the youth of Islam, who have humiliated the greatest power in

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2006, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Mohammed Ali Musawi, *Cheering for Osama, How jihadists use Internet discussion forums*, London: Quilliam Foundation, 2010, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.





history and broken its nose and destroyed its arrogance? Hasn't the time come for you to learn from them the meaning of reliance on God and to learn from their actions the lessons of sacrifice and forbearance? How long will you remain like the women, knowing no better than to wail, scream and cry? One scholar appeals to the free people of this world, another begs Kofi Annan (the UN Secretary-General from 1997 to 2006), a third seeks help from Amr Musa (the Secretary-General of the Arab League from 2001 to 2011) and a fourth calls for peaceful demonstrations as if they did not hear the words of Allah. 'O Messenger, rally the believers to fight.'

He continues by asking if the scholars aren't fed up with "the jihad of conferences and the battles of sermons".

The months prior to the release of the video had been marked by increased insurgency in Iraq, and also by the Abu Ghraib scandal. In late April 2004, the American television newsmagazine *60 Minutes II* broadcasted a story on abuse of prisoners at the prison complex just west of Baghdad. Although human rights violations at the prison had been reported already in 2003, the *60 Minutes report* – which included photographs depicting the abuse – received much more attention, on an international scale.

The masked man in the Tawhid wal-Jihad video also referenced the scandal directly, saying that "the dignity of the Muslim men and women in the prison of Abu Ghraib and others will be redeemed by blood and souls. You will see nothing from us except corpse after corpse and casket after casket of those slaughtered in this fashion: 'So kill the infidels wherever you see them, take them, sanction them, and await them in every place.'"

"God is great," the man yelled, and the five men threw themselves at their prisoner, holding him down, cutting his head off with a knife. The bloodcurdling sounds and the pixelated and grainy – yet horrible – imagery are no longer in sync.

The gruesome video was an amateurish production, but it was part of an Internet-savvy campaign that helped Zarqawi build a new terrorist "brand". In early April 2004, Zarqawi posted online a 30-minute audio recording explaining who he was and why he was fighting, and detailing attacks for which his group was responsible. The message was strongly anti-Kurdish and anti-Shiite, playing into animosities already spurred by the United States led invasion and the fall of the authoritarian regime of Saddam Hussein. Within the next few weeks, Zarqawi's group started issuing communiqués on an Internet messaging board. The video showing the murder of Nick Berg underscored Zarqawi's message, while the Internet's multiplier effect both amplified its brutality and ensured widespread attention in Western media, including major media outlets such as the *New York Times*, the BBC, CNN and Fox News. In a matter of weeks, al-Zarqawi became somewhat of a terrorist celebrity.<sup>9</sup> Later that year, Zarqawi pledged allegiance to al Qaeda, and his group became known as al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). It was, however, a pragmatic alliance, tenuous from the start. The strategies of Zarqawi and the central al Qaeda leadership were different. Zarqawi sought to ignite further sectarian conflict within Iraq, and was responsible for a number of brutal terror attacks targeting the Shia community. He also followed a strategy of extreme violence, using suicide bombings and car bombs, that was contrary even to the al Qaeda leadership's strategic vision at the time, a strategy reportedly found "too violent" even by their standards.<sup>10</sup>

Zarqawi was killed in a U.S. airstrike in June 2006. His group, however, still exists. After several name changes and mergers, it is now known as the Islamic State.

While online jihadism was changing, the Internet too changed. In 2004, Facebook was launched. In

<sup>9</sup> See Paul Eedle's remarks on Zarqawi's media campaign in Karen J. Greenberg (ed), *Al Qaeda Now, Understanding Today's Terrorists*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 124 – 126.

<sup>10</sup> See Hisham Allam and Øyvind Strømme, "Zarqawi's legacy", [hate-speech.org](http://hate-speech.org), 19 February 2014. Online: <https://www.hate-speech.org/zarqawis-legacy/>



2005, YouTube was created. In 2006, Twitter. All of these social media platforms would become important tools of various extremist groups, including jihadists. The Somali jihadist group al Shabaab may serve as an example.

As Stig Jarle Hansen points out in his seminal work *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, al Shabaab took its war online by the autumn of 2007, and the Internet played an important role in its break with the Islamic Courts Union (*Midowga Maxkamadaha Islaamiga*, ICU). After the Somali Transitional Federal Government, heavily supported by Ethiopian forces, effectively ended the rule of the ICU, al Shabaab was an insurgent group without any territorial control, and without control over traditional media outlets. The Internet was a good alternative for disseminating propaganda.<sup>11</sup> Articles written by the US-born Omar Hammami were circulated through the Global Islamic Media Front, an underground media organization connected to al Qaeda, while speeches made by leading al Shabaab figures Fuad Shongole and Ahmed Abdi Godane were distributed through YouTube.<sup>12</sup>

Eventually, al Shabaab also started hosting their own websites, while sympathizers hosted others; one early example was Hegaan.net, opened by a Norwegian Somali in early 2007.<sup>13</sup> In April 2007, kataaib.info was set up from the town of Marka Caday in southwestern Somalia, although it was hosted in Canada. At a time when al Shabaab had still not officially declared allegiance to al Qaeda, the website, kataaib.info “put the struggle in Somalia in a larger context”, and contained speeches and works by Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, all of them considered founding members of al Qaeda. It also contained speeches by al Shabaab leaders, featured a Somali-language newsletter, *Nashrada al-Jihad*, and even offered visitors with the opportunity to submit questions directly to the group's now deceased leader, Ahmed Abdi Godane.<sup>14</sup>

As al Shabaab gained territorial control over parts of Somalia, the group also used more traditional media, such as the radio channel Al Andalus and the newspaper *Milat Ibrahim*. Due to the high level of illiteracy in Somalia, radio channels have been an important part of the media landscape in the country, and have also been important to al Shabaab. However, the Internet – in spite of limited Internet accessibility within Somalia itself – has remained a central outlet for the group. In late 2011, it set up an official Twitter account from which it bragged about recent attacks and taunted its enemies.<sup>15</sup> Terrorism experts interviewed by the *New York Times* at the time described “Twitter terrorism” as “part of an emerging trend”, as several al Qaeda franchises were “increasingly using social media like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Twitter”, and mentioned the Yemeni branch, known as AQAP, as “especially adept at disseminating teachings and commentary through several different social media networks”.<sup>16</sup> By that time AQAP had also released its magazine *Inspire*, which sported a modern layout and targeted a Western audience.

Foreign recruits definitely played a role in the media efforts of both al Shabaab and AQAP. The Wisconsin-born Jihad Mostafa is said to have played an important role in their media efforts, while the Pakistani-American Samir ibn Zafar Khan – who grew up in Queens, New York – was the editor of *Inspire Magazine* until killed in a drone attack in Yemen in September 2011.

Social media allowed online jihadists and jihadist supporters to adapt once again. Websites and discussion boards came under frequent attack, and often had to change web addresses on a frequent basis. But as Jytte Klausen points out in an article in *Studies on Conflict & Terrorism*, the new

<sup>11</sup> Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Hansen, p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, “Somalia's Insurgents Embrace Twitter as a Weapon”, *New York Times*, 14 December 2011. Online: [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/15/world/africa/somalias-rebels-embrace-twitter-as-a-weapon.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/15/world/africa/somalias-rebels-embrace-twitter-as-a-weapon.html?_r=0)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



media environment offered by social media and file-sharing platforms is resistant to policing and makes it easier to build redundancy by cross-posting on different platforms. Today, online jihadists use a variety of social media and other tools to spread their message, including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, PalTalk, kik, viper, JustPaste.it, Tumblr, Telegram and others.

Twitter, which is easy to use – even with limited Internet access – has been particularly popular. In recent months, however, Twitter has stepped up its efforts to shut down pro-jihadist Twitter accounts.

In many ways, this should come as no surprise. The development of online jihadism follows the development of the Internet itself, and of increased accessibility to the web almost everywhere. Technological development has also made both communication and multimedia production much easier than in the past. In short, we are living in an Internet era, and in the age of the YouTube generation. So is the Islamic State.





Screenshot from a propaganda video on the Brussels terrorist attacks, released by al Furat media.



# THE ISLAMIC STATE MEDIA APPARATUS

*It is a whole army of media personnel.*

– Abu Abdullah al-Maghribi, IS defector, interviewed by the *Washington Post*.<sup>17</sup>

In October 2006, the so-called Islamic State in Iraq was declared on the Internet, by al Qaeda in Iraq and a number of smaller groups. At the time, the group had a considerable military presence in the Al Anbar governorate, the largest governorate in Iraq, encompassing much of the country's western territory. In the autumn of 2006, it also gained control over Baqubah in the Diyala governorate, about 50 kilometres northwest of Baghdad, and declared it to be its governorate.

The new "state" soon established a Ministry of Information, and established an official multimedia producer, the **Al Furqan Institute for Media Production**. Today, al Furqan is part of the media apparatus of ISI's successor group, the Islamic State (of Iraq and Syria).

Early releases from al Furqan included videos of attacks carried out by the group, as well as other material, such as a 33-page interview with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who had been killed earlier that year, and a December 2006 release of an audio speech made by his successor, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (not to be confused with the group's current leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi). The material was spread through the use of jihadist web forums.

Already in 2007, Hanna Rogan noted that the videos being released by al Furqan were of increasingly high quality, rapidly approaching the technological sophistication shown by al Qaeda's media operation al Sahab, which had been founded years earlier.<sup>18</sup>

Al Furqan is still often described as the main media wing of the Islamic State, and it produces a considerable number of videos. Defectors interviewed by the *Washington Post* for a November 2015 article described it as being headquartered in an Islamic State-held area near Aleppo, in a building also used by the main English-language magazine published by IS, **Dabiq**.<sup>19</sup> However, the Islamic State and its predecessor groups have also established several other media wings. In March 2013 the **Al If'isam Media Foundation** was established, and that August saw the birth of the **Ajnad Foundation for Media Production**, specializing in the production of nasheeds – Islamic vocal chants – and other audio content. In 2014, the group launched the **Al-Hayat Media Centre**, which targets an international audience, and produces material in several European languages. Al-Hayat is responsible for the electronic magazines *Dabiq* (in English), *Konstantiniyye* (in Turkish) and *Dar al-Islam* (in French). In addition, the propaganda apparatus includes the **Al-Bayan** radio channel, which operates within Iraq – broadcasting on several local frequencies – and reports in several languages,<sup>20</sup> the Arabic-language newsletter **al-Naba**, as well as the publishing house **al-Himma**, which publishes *da'wa* (i.e. missionary) literature. These last three outlets largely target a local audience, although material is also made available online.

In total, the IS media operation is said to involve hundreds of people, including videographers,

<sup>17</sup> Greg Miller and Souad Mekhennet, "Inside the surreal world of the Islamic State's propaganda machine", *Washington Post*, 20 November 2015. Online: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-the-islamic-states-propaganda-machine/2015/11/20/051e997a-8ce6-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-the-islamic-states-propaganda-machine/2015/11/20/051e997a-8ce6-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b_story.html)

<sup>18</sup> Hanna Rogan, "Abu Reuter and the E-Jihad", *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, summer/fall 2007, pp. 90 – 96.

<sup>19</sup> Miller and Mekhennet, "Inside the surreal world".

<sup>20</sup> "Islamic State launches English-language radio news bulletins", *Associated Press*, 7 April 2015. Online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11519977/Islamic-State-launches-English-language-radio-news-bulletins.html>



producers and editors. The media operation is well funded, and well equipped; shipments of cameras, computers and other equipment are coming in through Turkey. According to the defectors interviewed by the Washington Post, the media division is dominated by foreigners, some of whom have previously held jobs at news channels or technology companies.<sup>21</sup>

However, the propaganda apparatus of IS also includes regional (*wilayah*) offices, whose most significant online output is photographs, literally numbering in the thousands. It is also important to acknowledge the offline media and propaganda work carried out by IS, including viewing parties of official content held in territories it controls as well as media points (*nuqat il'amiyya*) established in a number of cities and villages, where printed and digital media products are distributed to locals.<sup>22</sup>



TABLE 1: THE MEDIA STRUCTURE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

al-Himma Library	"The library of endeavour" publishes da'wa literature, pamphlets, religious guidelines. Al-Himma has also published anti-Shi'ite and anti-Druze pamphlets.
al-Furqan Foundation	Important multimedia producer, responsible for video productions, audio productions, etc.
al-I'tisam Foundation	Another multimedia producer, which has produced videos.
Al-Hayat Media Centre	Media department responsible for the production of Dabiq and other online magazines. Has also released other materials, including videos and nasheeds.
Ajnad Foundation	Media producer specializing in audio material, including nasheeds and recitations from the Qu'ran
Al-Bayan Radio	Iraqi-based Islamic State radio channel, broadcasting over the FM band, has also been available online. Radio broadcasts have also been made available online.
Al-Naba	Al-Naba is an Arabic-language newsletter which targets the local population in IS-held areas, where it is distributed in printed form. In addition, it is made available online. The newsletter features propagandistic battlefield reports and "interviews" with captives, but also public notices, "advertisements" for other IS propaganda material and articles on various other topics.
Al-Bayan Radio	An Islamic State propaganda outlet providing news stories,

<sup>21</sup> Miller and Mekhennet, "Inside the surreal world".

<sup>22</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, "Picture or it didn't happen: A snapshot of the Islamic State's official media output", Perspectives on Terrorism, vol. 9, no. 4. Online: <http://www.terrorism analysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/445/html>



including reports from the battle front, and with the trappings of mainstream journalism. The outlet first surfaced in connection with the drawn-out battle of Kobane.

The A'maq News Agency was used to claim responsibility for the 22 March bombing attacks in Brussels, Belgium.

#### Furat Media

Furat Media was launched in June 2015, as a Russian-language media channel with an unofficial connection to the Islamic State. Furat can be seen as a continuation of FiSyria, a website run by a group of Chechen militants. It has, however, also published videos in other languages, such as a video obviously targeting Swedish speakers.

#### Al-Bayan Radio

ISIS has also established media offices on a regional level in Syria and Iraq, as well as in other countries where it has or claims to have activity. Some of these offices issue a considerable number of releases, often in the form of photography concerning a specific topic.

Several studies into the material spread by the Islamic State deserve mention here. In July 2015, the Quilliam Foundation released the report *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy*, and in October they followed up with *Documenting the Virtual 'Caliphate'*. Both reports were written by Charlie Winter. Also in 2015, Aaron Y. Zelin published his article "Picture or It Didn't Happen: A Snapshot of the Islamic State's Official Media Output" in *Perspectives on Terrorism*.

Zelin's article looks at IS media output from 18–24 April 2015 while Charlie Winter – in *Documenting the Virtual 'Caliphate'* – looks at propaganda releases between 17 July and 15 August 2015. Both point to a considerable number of media releases, with Zelin finding an average of 18 per day and Charlie Winter able to identify a total of 1,145 "discrete batches of propaganda", an average of 38 a day, including videos, photo essays, articles and audio programmes, all compiled using Arabic-language sources.<sup>23</sup>

While Islamic State propaganda is certainly targeting a wider audience than many other jihadist propagandists – and material is being released in a number of European, Asian and African languages – Arabic remains the main language. In the week covered by Zelin's article, he found 123 releases in Arabic, a sum dwarfing the eight English-language releases, the five releases in Russian, and the four, two and one issued in Kurdish, French and Urdu respectively.

At the same time, a large number of the releases identified by Zelin – 77 of 123 – were online picture galleries.<sup>24</sup>

Charlie Winter identifies six themes or narratives in Islamic State propaganda: brutality, mercy, victimhood, war, belonging and utopianism.<sup>25</sup> Zelin identifies a number of different topics, including military, governance, da'wa (missionary work), hisbah (moral policing) and promotion of the caliphate.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Zelin, "Picture or it didn't happen"; Charlie Winter, *Documenting the Virtual 'Caliphate'*, London: Quilliam Foundation, 2015, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Zelin, "Picture or it didn't happen".

<sup>25</sup> Charlie Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy*, London: Quilliam Foundation, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Zelin, "Picture or it didn't happen".





# SELECTED 10

TEN VIDEOS SELECTED FROM THE WILAYAT OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

1<sup>ST</sup>

سبقتني ولدي

MY SON WENT AHEAD OF ME



WILAYAH HALAB

2<sup>ND</sup>

الأمن والأمان بدولة الإسلام

SAFETY AND SECURITY IN THE ISLAMIC STATE



WILAYAH NINAWA

3<sup>RD</sup>

إلى النور

INTO LIGHT



WILAYAH HALAB

4<sup>TH</sup>خذ من أموالهم صدقة  
OF THEIR GOODS, TAKE ALMS

WILAYAH TARABULUS

5<sup>TH</sup>غزوة أبي بصير القرشي بقبلة الله  
THE BATTLE OF ABU BASIR AL QURASHI

WILAYAH SALAHUDDIN

6<sup>TH</sup>هم العدو فأذروهم  
THEY ARE THE ENEMY SO BEWARE OF THEM 4

WILAYAH AR-RAQQA

7<sup>TH</sup>غزوة أبو طيبة الأنصاري  
THE BATTLE OF ABU TAYBAH AL ANSARI

WILAYAH AL ANBAR

8<sup>TH</sup>إن يافعكم الفجار  
YOU SHALL NEVER FLEE

WILAYAH AL KUTAYB

9<sup>TH</sup>المسلمين جروح أنفهم  
SLAYING THE WOUNDS OF THEIR ENEMIES

WILAYAH SALAHUDDIN

10<sup>TH</sup>انصر من الله وهتاج حروب  
SUPPORT FROM ALLAH AND A MAJOR VICTORY

WILAYAH NORTH BAGHDAD

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Out of these, the narrative of brutality is the one that has received the most attention in Western media. Gruesome videos involving murders, massacres, stonings and other forms of violence have been covered extensively in the Western press, rivalled only by the attention given to other videos with obvious shock effect – such as the destruction of cultural heritage sites. As Winter notes, “(o)ne cannot deny the pride of place that (brutality) enjoys in Islamic State's messaging”, the triumphalist brutality also serving “as a reminder of the group's self-proclaimed supremacy and its ability to exact revenge on behalf of Sunni Muslims against the Crusader-Shi'ite-Zionist conspiracy allegedly mounting against them”.<sup>27</sup> Brutal execution videos also seek to intimidate enemies, warn the local population against dissent, and – indeed – provoke outrage from and in international media.



However, Winter argues, “Its (brutality's) prevalence has fatally derailed mainstream understanding of the organization and its appeal to many thousands of foreign recruits.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, it is worth briefly mentioning the other five narratives identified by Winter:

- **Mercy.** The mercy narrative is promoted in tandem with brutality, and “is closely connected to the idea of repentance, before God and the Islamic State organisation itself”. As an example, Winter points to the April 2015 video “From the Darkness to the Light”, in which fighters from Jabhat al-Nusra (a competing extremist group, connected to al Qaeda), the Free Syrian Army (rebels) and the Syrian Arab Army (the Syrian government) are shown reneging on their former beliefs, joining the Islamic State instead.
- **Victimhood.** This, of course, is a common theme in much jihadist propaganda. The victimhood narrative portrays Sunni Muslims as the victims of a global war against Islam. A very clear example of the victimhood narrative being employed is, as also mentioned by Winter, the video “Healing of the Believers' Hearts”. In international media, this video received massive attention, as it features the Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kaseasbeh being burnt alive. However, much of the film is made up of footage showing the aftermath of coalition airstrikes, including wounded and killed children.
- **War.** Winter describes the IS war machine as a “very prominent part” of its brand. The IS propagandists regularly seek to underscore the Islamic State's military abilities, access to military equipment and – of course – actual military victories. These are also used to underscore an image of IS as a real state with a real army, feeding into what Winter defines as its utopian narrative.
- **Belonging.** IS propagandists often focus on belonging in their propaganda, showing fighters who relax and drink tea, take part in celebrations, et cetera. “Understanding radicalisation better than

<sup>27</sup> Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate'*, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate'*, p. 6.



most", Winter writes, "(IS) propagandists recognise that offers of friendship, security and a sense of belonging are powerful draws for its supporters abroad."

- Utopianism. Charlie Winter describes this as "arguably the broadest and most important theme", a narrative also supported by the rest. The creation of the caliphate is a central selling point for IS propagandists, who seek to portray IS as a real and functioning state. "Islamic State is forever seeking to provide evidence that it is not just talking about the 'caliphate', but that it is enacting it too."<sup>29</sup>



In fact, the focus on state-building is essential to Islamic State propaganda. A very clear example is the "Return of the Gold Dinar", a film released by Al Hayat in August 2015. It's an hour-long movie based on the introduction of golden dinars within Islamic State-held areas. According to the film, the new currency is meant to break the shackles of "the capitalist financial system of enslavement", which is said to be underpinned "by a piece of paper called the Federal Reserve dollar note". The movie also speaks of "the dark rise of bank notes, borne out of the Satanic conception of banks, which mutated into a fraudulent system of enslavement orchestrated by the Federal Reserve in America – a private corporation and system that would, through the use of deceit and force, deprive people of their due, by imposing upon them the usage of the piece of paper that came to be known as the dollar bill".

As the *Economist* writes, the movie is "a bizarre sales pitch" for the new gold currency, a movie covering "a dizzying range of topics". Unsurprisingly, it includes religious interpretation and references to the practices of the early historical Caliphate. However, it also includes a cut from an interview with former US presidential candidate Ron Paul, a libertarian, in which he denounces inflation as theft.<sup>30</sup>

Not only is the film unlikely to impress economists, but reports from within IS-controlled areas indicate that the group has only minted a small number of coins, and the preferred currency in the city they claim as their capital remains the Syrian pound, while those close to IS prefer US dollars.<sup>31</sup> As propaganda, however, the film underlines the ambition of Islamic State to be seen as an actual, functioning state, and more than that: as an actual caliphate, reintroducing the minted coins of the Caliphate of the past.

The utopian narrative can also be seen in a video released by al-Furat, called "En Mujahids Eid", Swedish for "The Eid of a Mujahideen". The film focuses on the religious celebration of Eid, and while it includes jokes about butchering not only sheep, but also disbelievers, its focus is the celebration at the end of Ramadan, on community, on happy children and on handing out food to poor people. Several

<sup>29</sup> Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate'*, pp. 22 – 30.

<sup>30</sup> W.Z, "Why Islamic State's gold coins won't replace the global banking system", the *Economist*, 3 September 2015. Online: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/09/economist-explains-1>

<sup>31</sup> "Activist: Islamic State currency a 'media stunt'", *syriareport.com*, 18 February 2016.

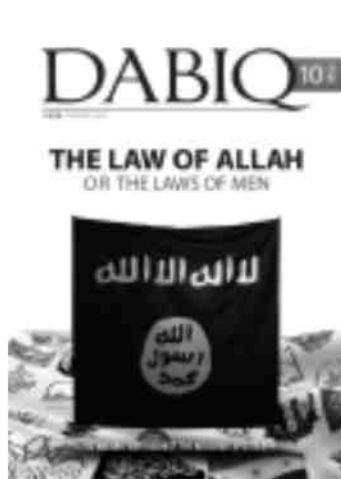
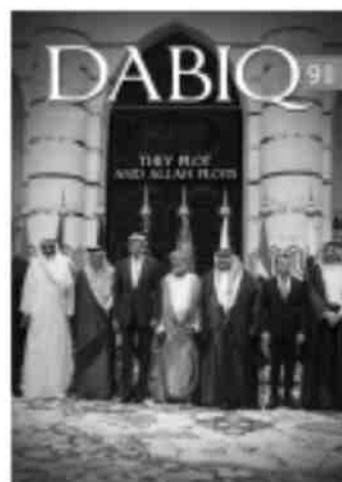
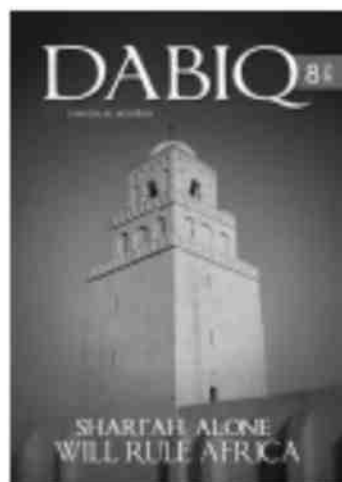
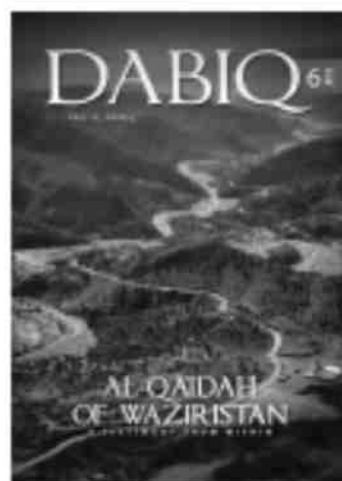
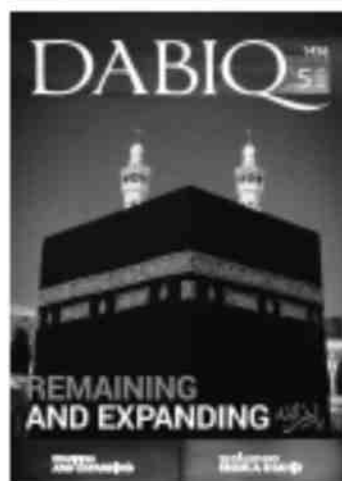
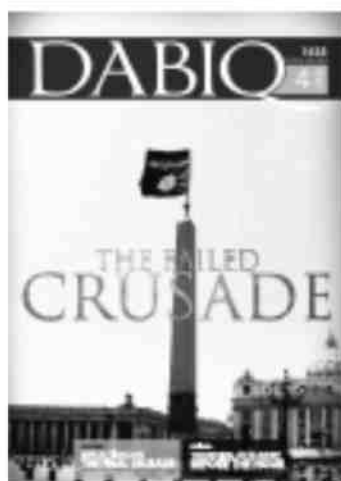
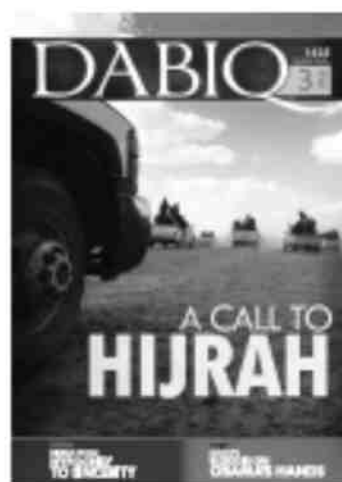
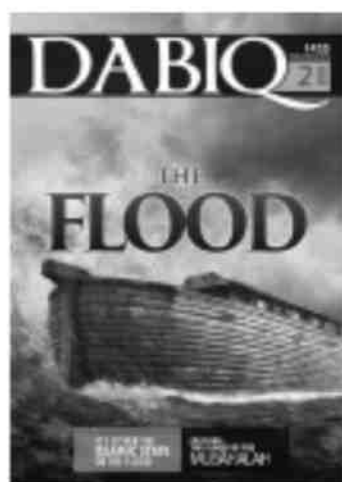
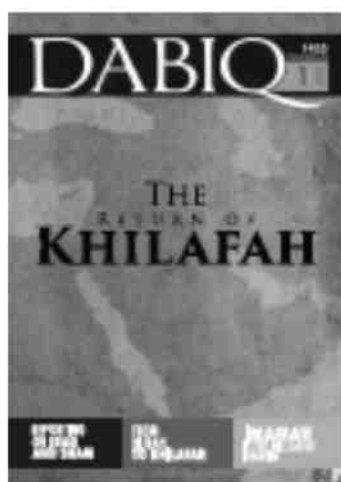
Swedish-speaking foreign fighters, as well as others, are interviewed in the film, which has a clear message: Muslims should come to the self-declared Islamic State, rather than living their lives amongst the *kuffar*, the disbelievers.

In late November 2015, a film titled “No respite” was released, in English, Arabic and several other languages. The video has a film-trailer-like voiceover, and features effects that bring video games to mind. The booming voiceover with an American accent brags about the size of the self-declared caliphate and its system of rule; it mocks America, attacks nationalism, portrays the Islamic State as anti-racist and says that it is counting the banners of its enemies, a reference to the battle they believe will take place between themselves and their enemies towards the end of times. “Bring it on,” the voiceover says, promising that the “flames of war will burn you on the hills of Dabiq”. Here, we can see how different narratives prominent to IS propaganda come together in a larger whole.

Indeed, even many of the brutal videos of the Islamic State, focusing on its *hisbah* (moral policing) activities, are part of several narratives at once. Videos and photographs showing how IS burns cigarettes, alcohol and other materials deemed immoral as well as similar media products showing how the Islamic State metes out corporal and capital punishment all play into the story of state-building. They are an attempt to underscore the group's implementation of law and order, according to its understanding of *sharia*.

At the same time, it is important to note how IS propaganda references Western pop culture, including Hollywood movies and video games. Javier Lesaca, a visiting scholar at George Washington University, has carried out a qualitative analysis of 845 audio-visual campaigns between January 2014 and mid-September 2015, and found “more than 15 percent (to be) directly inspired by real films, videogames and music video clips”, including *Saw*, *The Matrix*, *American Sniper*, *V for Vendetta*, *Call of Duty*, *Mortal Combat X* and *Grand Theft Auto*. As Lesaca points out, IS “uses cultural images of modernity in order to promote a political project based on anti-modern values”. The material is obviously aimed at audiences who know and recognize the pop culture references. Just as obviously, it targets young people in search of purpose.









# DABIQ

*Dabiq* – the online magazine of IS – could be said to have received disproportionate attention in Western media coverage of the group and its propaganda, largely owing to the fact that it is available in English. At the same time, a closer look at the magazine does further illustrate the varied nature of and varied themes of IS propaganda.

*Dabiq* was first published in July 2014 (previously, a magazine called **Islamic State Report** had been published). By January 2016, 13 issues had been released, with a varying publication frequency.

The title of the magazine – taken from a small town in northern Syria – is itself symbolic, and the significance is explained in the first issue of the magazine: “This place is mentioned in a hadith describing some of the events of the Malahim (what is sometimes referred to as Armageddon in English). One of the greatest battles between the Muslims and the crusaders will take place near Dabiq.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the title underscores an apocalyptic vision, connecting the establishment of the Islamic State, as a caliphate, with the approaching end times.

The first issue also underscored the dualistic (and anti-Semitic) world-view of the group through a message from its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (given the honorific title Amir al-Mu'minin, Leader of the Faithful):

O Ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present:

The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy – the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the jews.<sup>33</sup>

The second edition of the magazine, titled “The Flood”, further illustrates the black-and-white world-view of IS. Referencing the story of the prophet Noah (or Nuh, in Arabic), the magazine seeks to give religious legitimacy to the extremely violent approach of the self-declared Islamic State, and presents readers with a choice between themselves and the Flood.

One of the featured articles states:

We must confront them with the fact that they've turned away from the religion, while we hold onto it, grasping its purity, its clarity, its comprehensiveness, without any blemishes due to shirk, misguidance or heresy, and that we're completely ready to stand in the face of anyone who attempts to divert us from our commitment to making the religion of Allah triumphant over all other religions, and that we will continue to fight the people of deviation and misguidance until we die trying to make the religion triumphant.<sup>34</sup>

Notably, *Dabiq* places an enormous focus on *hijrah*, immigration, calling on Muslims to travel to and join the Islamic State.

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<sup>32</sup> Editorial, *Dabiq*, no 1, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> “The World has divided into two camps”, *Dabiq*, no. 1, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> “The widespread ignorance amongst the people”, *Dabiq*, no. 2, p.



Already in the first issue of *Dabiq*, the magazine urged its readers to “rush to the shade of the Islamic State with your parents, siblings, spouses and children”<sup>35</sup>, and promised “homes for you and your family”. The third issue was titled “A Call to Hijrah” and contained a number of articles concerning the topic, bluntly telling its readers that there is no life without jihad, and no jihad without hijrah: “The life of jihad is not possible until you pack and move to the Khilafah.”<sup>36</sup> Another article stated that a life “amongst the sinful” would kill the heart, “never mind living amongst the kuffar”.<sup>37</sup>

The magazine has furthermore been underscoring the “oneness” of the Islamic State. In the first edition of the magazine, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is quoted as saying that IS is a state “in which the Arab and the non-Arab, the white man and the black man, the easterner and the westerner are all brothers”, and that the “Caliphate” has gathered “the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Maghribi (North African), American, French, German, and Australian”.<sup>38</sup>

Given the apocalyptic connotations of its name, it might seem ironic that *Dabiq* – like other propaganda outlets – maintains considerable focus on state-building. As Charles Vallee points out in an interesting study contrasting *Dabiq* with *Inspire*, the magazine of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the magazine regularly includes sections that emphasize infrastructure and social services. “*Dabiq* presents sharp, high-quality pictures of bustling markets, clean hospitals and organized checkpoints.”<sup>39</sup>

*Dabiq* #13, published in January 2016, can serve as an example. Its 56 pages (including the front page) has the following contents.

- A foreword, praising the perpetrators of the mass shooting and attempted bombing at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California.
- Overviews of selected video released by regional IS media offices, complete with an Arabic-language Twitter hashtag. Videos advertised include battle reports and execution videos.
- An attack on Saudi Arabia's regime, described as apostate, calling on readers to kill “the imams of kufr”, and palace scholars “described by the Prophets as ‘callers to the gates of Jahannam’” (i.e. hell).
- An article called “Know your enemy”, portraying the historical Safavid State, and describing “today's Rafidah” as a “continuation of this cult”. Rafidi, or “rejectors”, is a derogatory term used to describe Shia Muslims.
- An overview of military operations and other attacks conducted by the Islamic State. The overview starts by describing other Syrian rebels – including other Islamist groups – as apostates. It includes reports from Syria and Iraq, but also from Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, Indonesia, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.
- An article on martyrs.
- An article offering advice on *ihdad*, “for the widow to stop adorning herself with jewellery, perfume, decorative clothing and anything else meant to beautify oneself”.
- “Do they not then reflect on the Quran”, an article aiming to provide legitimacy to the IS understanding of jihad.
- An advertisement for the IS video “No respite”.
- An article called “The Rafidah: From Ibn Saba to the Dajjal”, attacking Shia Muslims. The article,

<sup>35</sup> Editorial, *Dabiq*, no. 1, p. 3

<sup>36</sup> “There is no life without jihad, and there is no jihad without hijrah”, *Dabiq*, no. 3, p. 31.

<sup>37</sup> “Kuffar” can be translated as “disbelievers”. “Bad company kills the heart”, *Dabiq*, no. 3, p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> “Glad tidings for the Muslim umma”, *Dabiq* no. 1, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Vallee, *Digital Jihad: Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, Dabiq vs. Inspire*, IDC Herzliya/International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, summer 2015, p. 16.



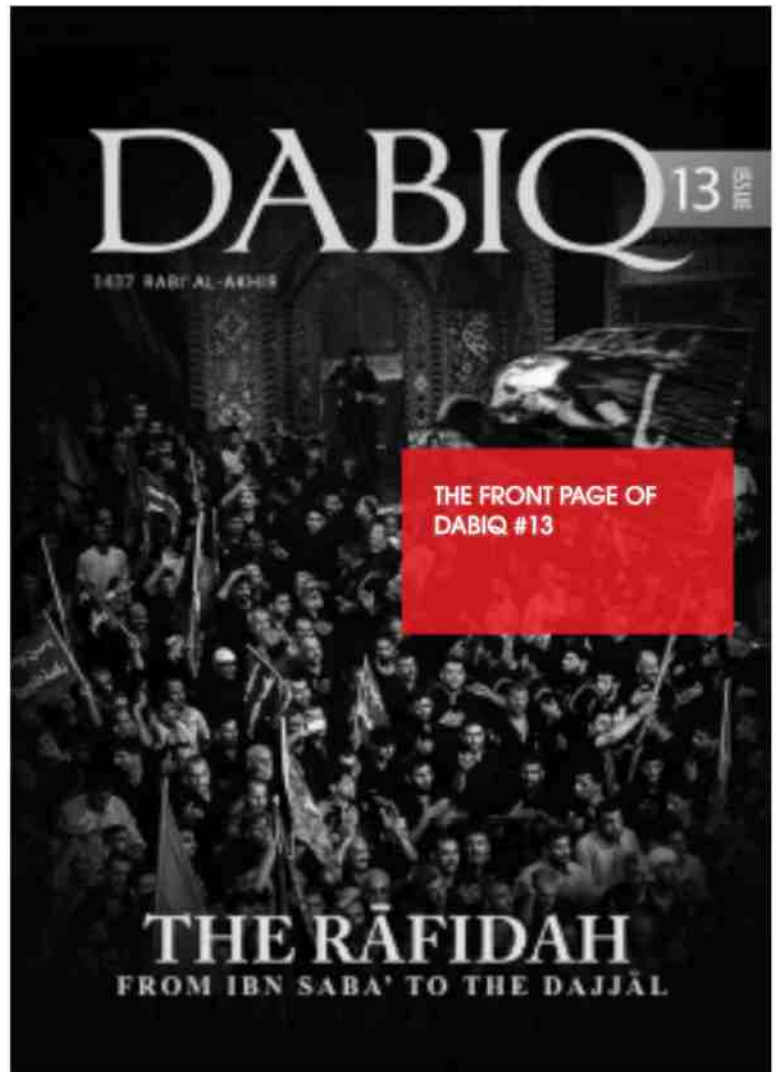


which described Shia Islam as having been “initiated by a sly Jew”, strongly connects Shiites with Judaism. Quoting rulings from Abu Zarqawi and al-Baghdadi, as well as a number of scholars, the article seeks to provide religious legitimacy to anti-Shia persecution and violence. The article, also criticizes “various jihad claimants” that “try to portray the Rafidah as a sect of ‘Muslims’”.

- “In the words of the enemy”, a repeated section where Dabiq quotes statements made by Western journalists, academics, et cetera. In this issue they quote “the crusader Michael Morell”.
- An interview with the “wali of Khurasan”, Hafidh Said Khan, promoting the Islamic State-affiliate in the Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the interview, Khan notably attacks the Taliban.
- A poster for “Just terror”, depicting the perpetrators of the November 2015 Paris terror attacks and stating: “Let Paris be a lesson for those nations that wish to take heed.” The poster employs movie poster-like symbolism.

Unlike many other issues of *Dabiq*, this most recent issue does not have a heavy focus on state-building. While it does celebrate terrorism in the Western world, the main focus is on “near enemies”, particularly Shia Muslims, but also the Saudi regime and other extremist Islamist groups, including Syrian groups as well as the Afghan and Pakistan Taliban. The importance of *hijrah* is underscored several places. The issue also illustrates the international ambitions of IS by including reports from various groups connected to IS in other countries. A heavy role is placed on providing religious legitimacy to the political ideology of the Islamic State.

In summary, *Dabiq*, while targeting an international audience, promotes a focus on the “near” enemy. It places a heavy focus on *hijrah*, and can thus be seen as an important part of IS's recruitment efforts. While the name of the magazine speaks of an apocalyptic worldview, the magazine also focuses on everyday issues for the self-declared Islamic State, ranging from military campaigns to daily life and state-building efforts. The magazine is also used to promote other material released by IS propaganda outlets.





Jack  
Twitter founder



Mark  
Facebook founder

Action taken by Twitter and Facebook against IS-related social medial profiles was answered with mockery and threats in a 27-minute propaganda video called "Flames of Ansar" released by a group of online IS supporters.



## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Thus far, this report has focused on the media apparatus of IS, as well as on its English-language magazine *Dabiq*. But discussing modern-day online jihadism at all, or IS propaganda in particular, is impossible without taking social media into consideration.

To mention but two examples: When IS fighters entered Mosul in June 2014, they also launched a Twitter hashtag campaign, #AllEyesOnISIS, bombarding the site with pro-Islamic State messages. When the film "A message to America" – showing the journalist James Foley kneeling in the desert, and then his beheaded corpse – was released by IS in August that same year, it was first uploaded onto YouTube. Although quickly deleted, it continued to circulate on other Internet sites, and through social media, including, once again, Twitter.

In short, various social media and file-sharing sites – open by nature – have taken over the role of the distributor sites of the past. The various media outlets of the Islamic State rely on the use of social media to spread their message. However, social media also have an interactive element to them, allowing grooming of prospective foreign fighters and other potential recruits to the ranks of IS.

Furthermore, social media have also been used by individual fighters within IS and other extremist groups in Syria, as well as by supporters and pro-jihadist groups. For organizations like Sharia4Belgium, the Norwegian Profetens Ummah (Ummah of the Prophet) and the Danish Kaldet til Islam, which all have been connected to al-Mujahiroun's successor group Islam4UK and to the recruitment of foreign fighters joining extremist groups in Syria, Facebook has most certainly played a role.

According to an estimate by J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan in their March 2015 analysis paper "The ISIS Twitter Census", no less than 46,000 Twitter accounts were used by IS supporters between September and December 2014. According to their analysis, typical IS supporters were located within IS-controlled territories in Iraq and Syria as well as in regions contested by the group. Berger and Morgan furthermore noted that much of the social media success of the organization could be attributed to "a relatively small group of hyperactive users, numbering between 500 and 2,000 accounts which tweet in concentrated bursts of high volume".<sup>40</sup>

With increased attention on the use of social media by IS, Facebook and Twitter have increased their efforts to delete pro-IS material and user accounts. Twitter reported that from mid-2015 to early 2016 it suspended more than 125,000 accounts "threatening or promoting terrorist attacks" and primarily related to IS.<sup>41</sup> A recent study by J. M. Berger and Heather Perez indicated that the large-scale account suspensions do have an effect. The study, carried out from June to October 2015 and focusing on English-language ISIS adherents, showed that the number of readily discoverable supporters is relatively small, usually fewer than 1,000, and that extending the discovery process using advanced social network analysis also produced a network of fewer than 3,000 accounts at any given time. Furthermore, the suspensions have had an effect on the amount of pro-ISIS content available through Twitter.<sup>42</sup>

Of course, online IS supporters have been trying to adapt by continuously setting up new accounts,

<sup>40</sup> J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, *The ISIS Twitter Census*, Washington: Brookings Institution, 2015, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> "Combating violent extremism", [blog.twitter.com](https://blog.twitter.com/2016/combating-violent-extremism), 5. February, 2016. Online: <https://blog.twitter.com/2016/combating-violent-extremism>

<sup>42</sup> J. M. Berger and Heather Perez, *The Islamic State's Diminishing Returns on Twitter: How suspensions are limiting the social networks of English-speaking ISIS supporters*, George Washington University Program on Extremism, February 2016, p. 4.



sometimes in bulk, by hijacking the abandoned accounts of other Twitter users (described as *ghanima*, spoils of war) and by switching to alternative platforms.<sup>43</sup> After Twitter suspended a number of pro-IS accounts in 2014, IS supporters tried to branch out to the less well-known platforms Quitter (GNU Social), Friendica and Diaspora, as well as to VKontakte, which is often described as a Russian version of Facebook.

More recently, the organization's use of the app Telegram has been highlighted by media. Telegram, a direct messaging app, allows users to send encrypted messages to each other and is said to have been used for operational purposes by the attackers behind the Paris attacks.<sup>44</sup> However, it also features channels. This feature, introduced in September 2015, can be used to disseminate information to an unlimited number of followers. IS was quick to set up official Telegram channels in Arabic and a number of other languages. Somewhat reluctantly, and only after the November terrorist attacks in Paris, Telegram intervened, deleting 78 ISIS-related channels across 12 languages.<sup>45</sup> Since then, however, ISIS supporters have been setting up chat groups and so-called supergroups on Telegram.

In their report, Berger and Perez also point to another interesting development: in late December 2015, a new forum – called Alkhefala – was created on the Ansar al-Mujahideen message board, a simple interface forum site which has been hosted in various countries. In a statement released on Twitter and Telegram, as well as on the site JustPaste.it, the move – a return to the old message board format – was described as an “urgent and immediate (...) counter offensive”.<sup>46</sup> IS has also been using online jihadist forums such as Minbar al-Jihad al-I'lamī, which has been seen as affiliated with the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), and Shumukh al-Islam, a password-protected forum for which al Qaeda and IS supporters have been competing for control.

In addition to the social media platforms mentioned above, IS supporters have taken to sites like Instagram and Tumblr, posting IS-related memes, but also pictures showing “normal life” within IS-held areas, and even pictures of fighters cuddling kittens.

Of more significance, however, is JustPaste.it – a Polish-based website that allows anonymous users to paste text (including HTML codes which allow formatting and pictures to be added) and provides them with a link that can be distributed. The site is simple to use and loads quickly, even on slow Internet connections. Consequently, it has become a popular tool for IS propagandists as well as for other extremist groups. IS and IS supporters have also been using the San Francisco-based Internet Archive (archive.org) to post material.

In conclusion, the increased efforts of Twitter and other mainstream social media to remove Islamic State content and to suspend users affiliated with the terrorist group seem to have had a significant impact. As a result, it is likely that the online propagandists of the Islamic State will increasingly turn to alternatives, as illustrated by their use of Telegram, whose service offer a possibility for encrypted communication. Furthermore, the United States has begun a campaign of cyberattacks on the terrorist group, targeting the group's ability to use social media and the Internet to recruit fighters and inspire followers. Cyber-vigilantes have stated similar goals. While the results thus far may not be impressive, it is likely that the online operatives of the Islamic State, as well as of other jihadist groups, will adapt and realign their online strategy.

<sup>43</sup> Berger and Perez, pp. 15 – 17.

<sup>44</sup> James Billington, “Paris terrorists used WhatsApp and Telegram to plot attacks according to investigators”, International Business Times, 17. December 2015. Online: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/paris-terrorists-used-whatsapp-telegram-plot-attacks-according-investigators-1533880>

<sup>45</sup> Laurie Segall and Paul P. Murphy, “Telegram messaging app shuts down 78 ISIS channels”, CNN.com, 18 November 2015. Online: <http://money.cnn.com/2015/11/18/technology/telegram-isis-shutdown/index.html>

<sup>46</sup> Berger and Perez, pp. 19 – 20.



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