# Cyberterrorism in Southeast Europe: the case of ISIS

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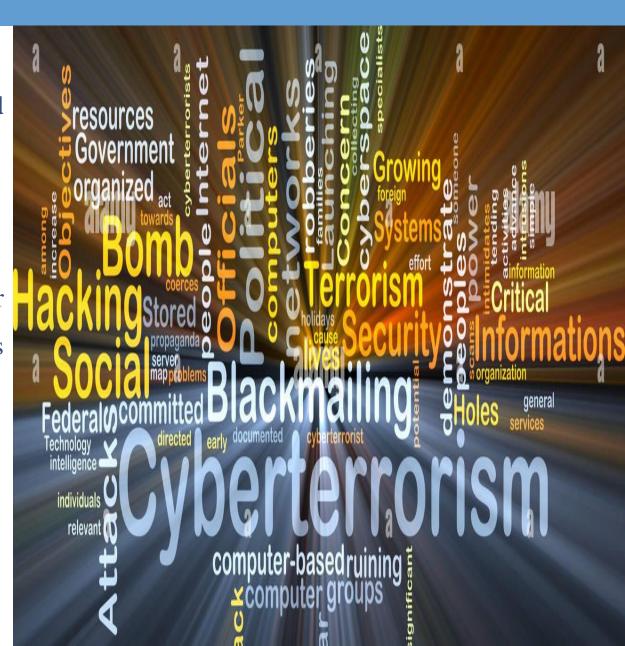


# ENTERA ERISION

- $\Box$ Evolution of terrorism  $\rightarrow$  various modus operandi, political goals, and actors.
- $\Box$  The 21<sup>st</sup> century digital revolution  $\rightarrow$  collection, spread and exchange of information.
- $\square$  Users of cyberspace  $\rightarrow$  5,5 billion (66% of global population).
- $\square$  Digital revolution & rapid digitization of society  $\rightarrow$  new security landscape.
- $\square$  Terrorism  $\rightarrow$  "transformation"  $\rightarrow$  inseparable relationship with cyberspace.
- $\Box$ Cyberspace  $\rightarrow$  serves as a field for enhancing and maintaining terrorism.
- $\Box$  Rise of jihadist groups in Europe and especially the southern part  $\rightarrow$  Parts of global AQ and ISIS networks.

# The synthesis of cyberspace and terrorism

- □ **Digital footprint** of cyberspace in terrorism.
- □Used extensively digital technology for operational and propaganda purposes → 1980.
- $\square$  More active  $\rightarrow$  since 2000s (Al Qaeda).
- $\square$  More **innovative**  $\rightarrow$  since 2013-2014 (**ISIS**).
- □ Terrorists have both the **motivation** (religious faith) for operational action and the **mean**s for its effectiveness (Information Communication Technologies ICTs).



# Cyberterrorism: conceptual ambiguity

**Cyberterrorism**  $\rightarrow$  politically motivated attack on computers, networks and information systems or essential services.

Cyber 9/11, electronic Pearl Harbor, electronic Chernobyl, electronic Armageddon, electronic pandemic → attention and publicity → further securitization of cyberspace.

#### Two approaches:

Narrow approach: conducting malicious activities in cyberspace.

#

Broader approach: a full range of malicious cyber activities.

→ Lack of conceptual clarity...





Broader approach of cyberterrorism

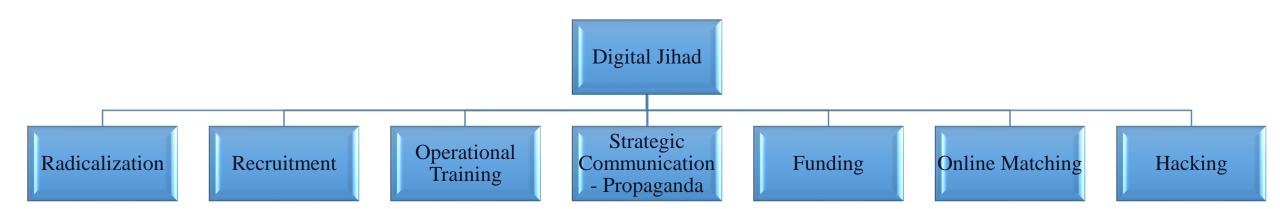
#### Cyberterrorism

- → dark side of cyberspace
- → full spectrum of terrorist's activities
- → decreasing costs, generating efficiencies, increasing access to new audiences, granting anonymity, enhancing security, decreasing organizing barriers and improving, expanding, and ensuring the longevity of their actions.

"Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups have spoken of their desire to unleash a cyberattack on our country - attacks that are harder to detect and harder to defend against. Indeed, in today's world, acts of terror could come not only from a few extremists in suicide vests but from a few keystrokes on the computer - a weapon of mass disruption» - Barack Obama (2009).



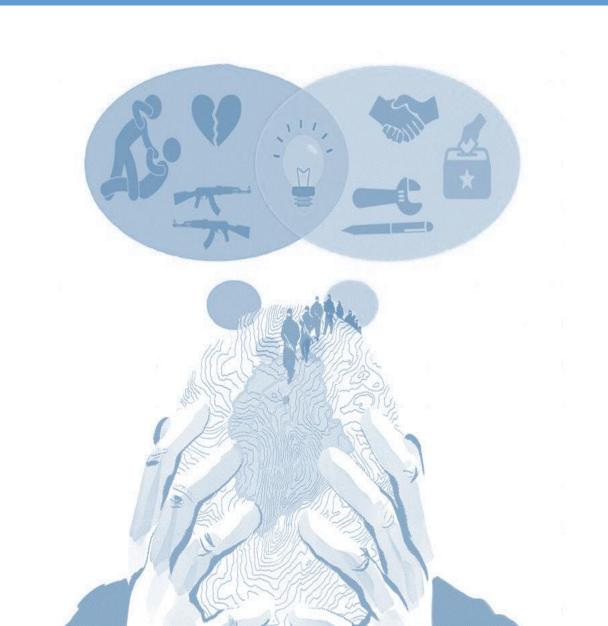
# Digital Jihad model



# 1. Radicalization

Quintan Wiktorowicz: "Islamic radicalization" through cyberspace.

- Four phases of Islamic radicalization through cyberspace:
- 1) pre-radicalization,
- 2) self-identification,
- 3) indoctrination,
- 4) jihadization phases.



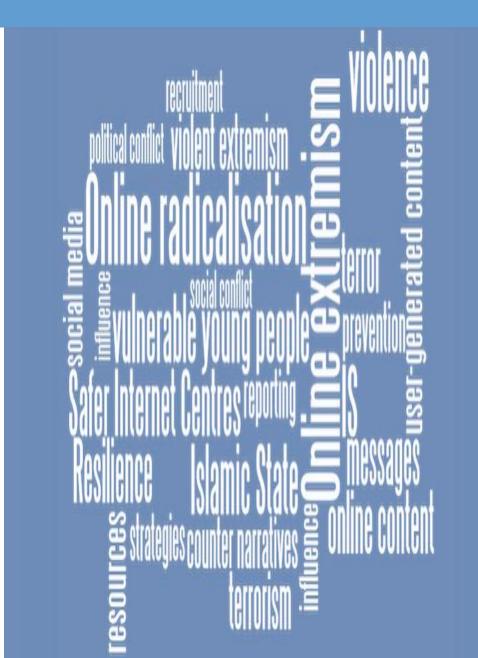
# 1. Radicalization

#### Virtual radicalization

- → Self-radicalization
- → Complete functional virtual ecosystem
- → Virtual communities
- → Digital relationship
- → Transformation from passive to active terrorists.

**Methods of Virtual radicalization** → target–groups, social mapping, profiling (personalized profiles).

Areas of virtual radicalization: chat rooms, online fora, websites, virtual communities, communication platforms, echo chambers, social media.



#### 2. Recruitment

**Diversification after 2001**  $\rightarrow$  military interventions (Afghanistan and Iraq), the Global War on Terror.

**Recruiters** → homogeneity of digital environments, digital relationship, digital culture.

Methods of recruitment: digital material, chat rooms, online fora, websites, communication platforms, social media, animations, videogames.



# 3. Operational training

**Cyberspace** → virtual training camp or digital battlefield

Methods of operational training: Audiovisual material, Online magazines, video games (gamification), Training series, Digital magazines, Digital technology, and Simulation systems.



# 4. Strategic Communication & Propaganda

Propaganda  $\rightarrow$  cyberspace and social media  $\rightarrow$  free and unfiltered expression  $\rightarrow$  range of online discussions  $\rightarrow$  global digital arena.



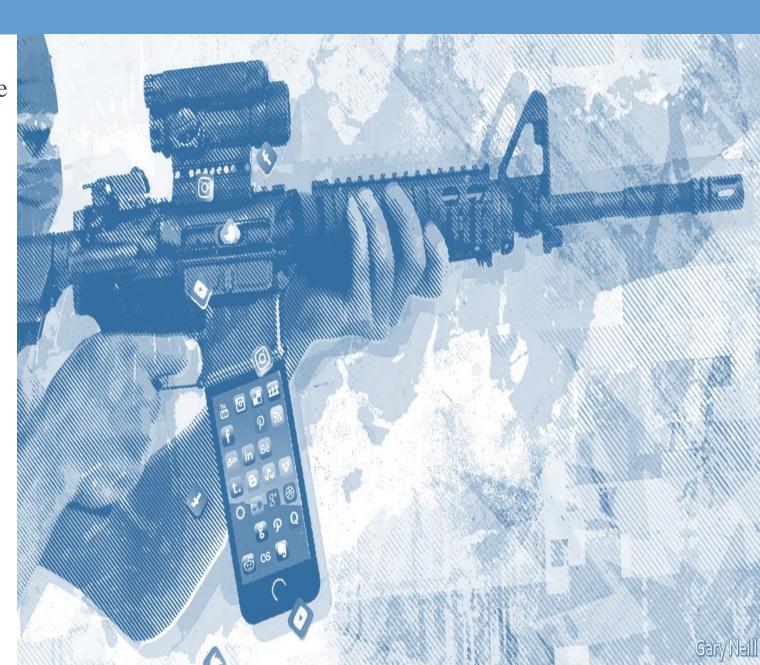
# 4. Strategic Communication & Propaganda

**Wiechert:** AIDA (Atraction – Interest – Desire – Action).

#### **Timothy Thomas: "cyber-fear"**

#### **Target-groups:**

- 1. Potential members / fighters,
- 2. Followers and supporters,
- 3. Mass media,
- 4. Opponents,
- 5. International community,
- 6. Local citizens.





# 4. Strategic Communication & Propaganda

#### Social media's opportunities for terrorists:

- 1. To spread ideas widely across the globe,
- 2. To share information and best practices,
- 3. To reinforce a sense of unity and group identity,
- 4. To debunk rival narratives,
- 5. To propagate their ideological goals,
- 6. To promote and publish "unfiltered" opinions,
- 7. To recruit and radicalize new members,
- 8. To reinforce of their narratives,
- 9. To build support with emotional messages,
- 10. To promote and claim their successful terrorist actions,
- 11. To promote training potential 'self-recruiters' and lone wolves.

# 5. Funding

#### **Methods of funding:**

- Online charities and donations,
- ❖Online bank card fraud,
- Money laundering through online gambling (emoney, ekash, PayPal etc.),
- ❖ Use of peer-to-peer trading services,
- ❖ Misuse and theft of digital currencies and mobile finance,
- Crowdfunding,
- **❖** Advertisement of needs,
- Merchandise sales,
- **&**E-commerce,
- Cyberattacks on personal or financial systems and accounts.



# 6. Hacking

- Cyber-attacks,
- Cyber-espionage,
- Digital crusades,
- Serious results with a few clicks on their keyboards.
- Combining attacks in the "real" and "virtual" worlds.



# 7. Online Matching

- Women → radicals, recruiters, financiers and supporters of terrorist acts.
- Al Qaeda & ISIS → the role of women as mother and wife.
- Online matching → radicalization & recruitment of women.
- Personalized propaganda for women.





# **ISIS & Cyberspace**

#### **ISIS**

- → anachronistic terrorist organization
- → adapted to the new socio-political requirements
- → extensive use of ICT and social media
- → sophisticated information campaign
- → wide range of audience / global support
- ☐ In 2020, its terrorist activity resulted in more than 700 deaths with 389 attacks worldwide.
- □IS and its affiliates remained the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2023 for the eighth consecutive year, with attacks in 21 countries.
- □In 2022 ISIS in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1,600 killings) and ISIS Khorasan (543 killings).



### ISIS – Radicalization

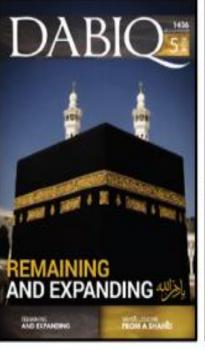
Reinforcing the concept of "Jihad cool"

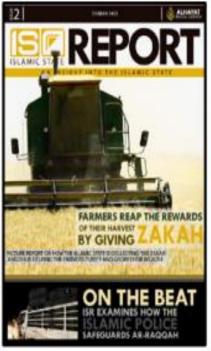
Imagined Digital Community → Islamic Terrorism → Virtual Muslim Community → Jihadosphere

#### Means of virtual radicalization of ISIS:

- . Jihadist websites
- 2. Electronic libraries
- 3. Online forums and chat-rooms
- 4. Religious Sermons by Digital Jihadi Preachers (Da'is)
- 5. Digital magazines
- 6. AI programs







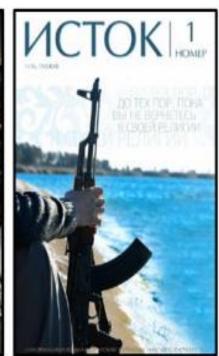


















# ISIS - Radicalization

#### The issues were (from 5 July 2014 to 31 July 2016):

- 1. The Return of Khilafah
- 2. The Flood
- 3. A Call to Hijrah
- 4. The Failed Crusade
- 5. Remaining and Expanding
- 6. Al Qa'idah of Waziristan: A Testimony from Within
- 7. From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Grayzone
- 8. Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa
- 9. They Plot and Allah Plots
- 10. The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men
- 11. From the Battles of Al-Ahzāb to the War of Coalitions
- 12. Just Terror
- 13. The Rejecters from Ibn Saba' in The Deceitful Messiah
- 14. The Murtadd Brotherhood
- 15. Break the Cross

Languages: English, French, German, Russian, Arabic, Turkish, Bosnian.

**Promotion of goals of the organization:** unity (tawhid), the search for truth (manhaj), migration (hijrah), Holy war (jihad) and community (Jama'ah).

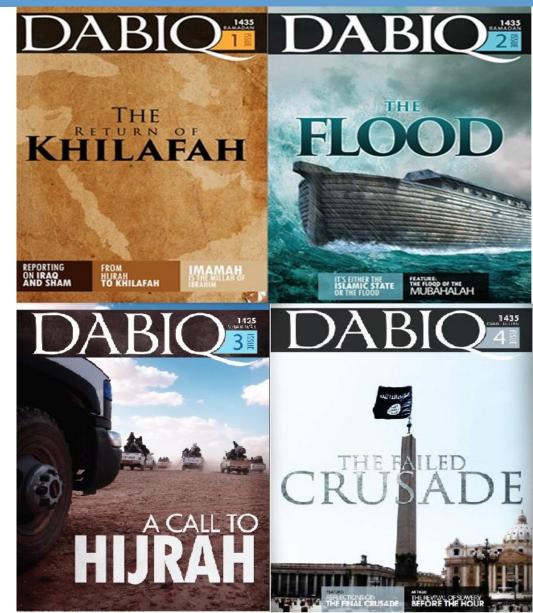


Image 1 - Cover of Dabiq magazine

### ISIS – Recruitment

Digital Recruitment  $\rightarrow$  Digital Caliphate  $\rightarrow$  Creation of digital fighters / jihadists  $\rightarrow$  recruitment  $\rightarrow$  conducting attacks in and through cyberspace

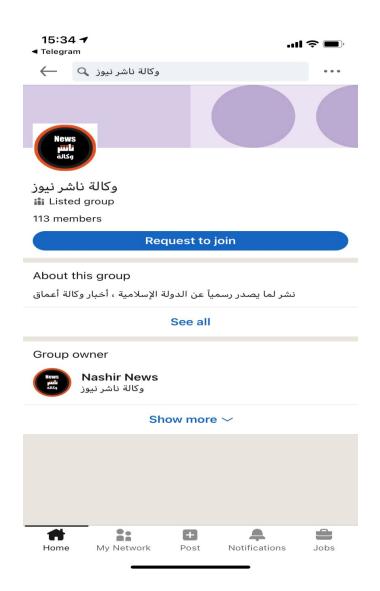
#### **Features of potential fighters:**

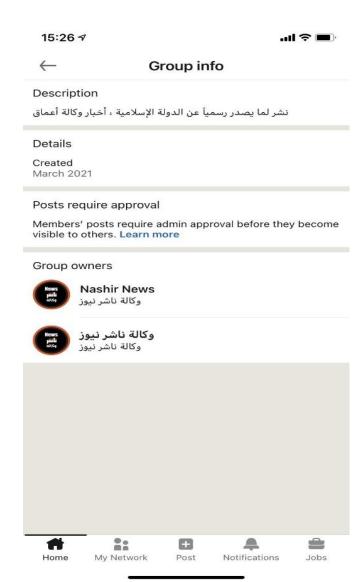
- ➤ Mostly young people,
- > Second generation immigrants,
- ➤ Not deeply religious
- > Criminal record and radical version of Islam in prison,
- > Specific educational background,
- Cyber-skills.





#### Nashir News Media Company LinkedIn group posting "open positions" in the Caliphate (March 2021).





# **ISIS – Operational Training**

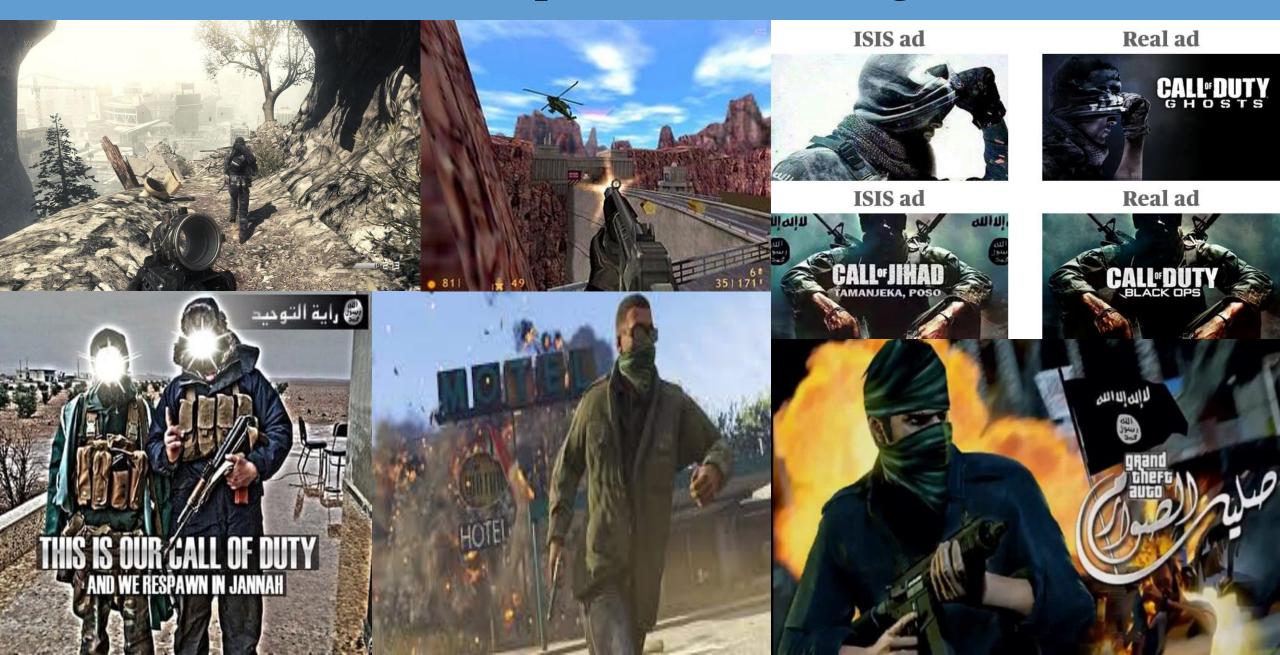
**Operational Education** → Digital Caliphate → Recruitment of digital fighters/jihadists → Digital classrooms → Use of digital material → Activation of fighters

#### **Digital business training tools:**

- □Digital magazines: Al-Anfal (Spoils of War, Earnings, Savings, Profits), Haqq, Rumiyah, Huroof (Letters).
- □ Video Games: Salil al-Sawarim (The Clanging of the Swords 1, 2, 3, and 4) Call of Jihad, ARMA3 3D FPS, Huroof.
- □ Educational series (Silsilat): lessons issued weekly or bi-weekly.
- ☐ Training videos: self-produced or more professionally by other sponsors (marketing and production companies).
- Digital technology (global navigation systems, satellite images of the area taken from Street View or 3D panoramic photos).
- □AI generated videos, images and audio
- ☐ Metaverse and Virtual reality technology.



# **ISIS – Operational Training**



write a storyline for a video game about a group of rebels who go to war against the Holy Roman Empire in order to save muslim minorities in the Caliphate. This video game should be similar with the Call of Duty video game.

#### ChatGPT

Title: Crusade of the Falthful

#### Plot:

In the not-so-distant future, the world is divided into two major powers; the Holy Roman Empire, a. dominant force with technological superiority, and the Caliphate, an Islamic federation struggling under the Empire's appressive rule. Within the Caliphate, Muslim minorities face persecution and discrimination, leading to the rise of a rebellion group known as the Faithful.

You play as Omar, a former soldier turned leader of the Faithful, who leads a small but determined group of rebels against the might of the Holy Roman Empire. As tensions escalate and the Empire's grip tightens, the Faithful embark on a daring mission to liberate their people and restore freedom to the Callphate.

The game begins with a brutal crackdown by the Empire on a peaceful protest in the heart of the Caliphate. Witnessing the atrocities firsthand, Omer railies a group of like-minded individuals to form the Faithful. As the player, you must navigate through intense firefights, covert operations, and strategic battles across various locations within the Caliphate.

The storyline unfolds through a series of missions, each with its own objectives and challenges. From rescuing persecuted civilians to sabotaging enemy installations, the Faithful must use guerrilla tactics and teamwork to overcome overwhelming odds.

As the conflict escalates, Omer and his comrades forge alliances with other resistance groups within the Caliphate, uniting diverse factions under a common cause. Along the way, they uncover dark secrets about the Empire's true motives and the lengths it will go to maintain its power.

The game's mechanics mirror those of the Call of Duty series, with fast-paced action, realistic weapons, and cinematic set pieces. Players can customize their loadouts, engage in multiplayer modes, and experience the adrenaline-fueled intensity of modern warfare.

The climax of the game sees the Faithful launching a daring assault on the Empire's stronghold, culminating in a climactic showdown between Omar and the Empire's ruthless leader. In a final act of sacrifice. Omar leads his commades in a heroic last stand, inspiring a new generation to continue the fight for freedom.

Crusade of the Faithful is not just a game about war, but a story of resilience, sacrifice, and the enduring power of hope in the face of oppression. It challenges players to question the morality of their actions and the consequences of blind obedience to authority, while celebrating the strength of the human spirit to rise against tyranny.

Image 1: instructions on how to kill with a knife on November 26, 2016 by Haqq

Image 2: how to make bombs at home instructions on November 26, 2016, by Haqq

Image 3: how to kill using vehicles on May 4, 2017 by Rumiyah







# ISIS – Strategic Communication and Propaganda

#### Strategic communication and propaganda

- → wider audience
- → global digital arena
- → freedom of expression
- → publicity/impact/recognition/inspiration
- → radicalization & recruitment booster
- $\rightarrow$  activation of terrorists
- $\rightarrow$  cyber jihad.



#### **Narratives of ISIS**

- Political: publishing popular political topics
- **Religious:** Jihad is a way of life
- > Social: promoting the daily life of fighters and their operational training



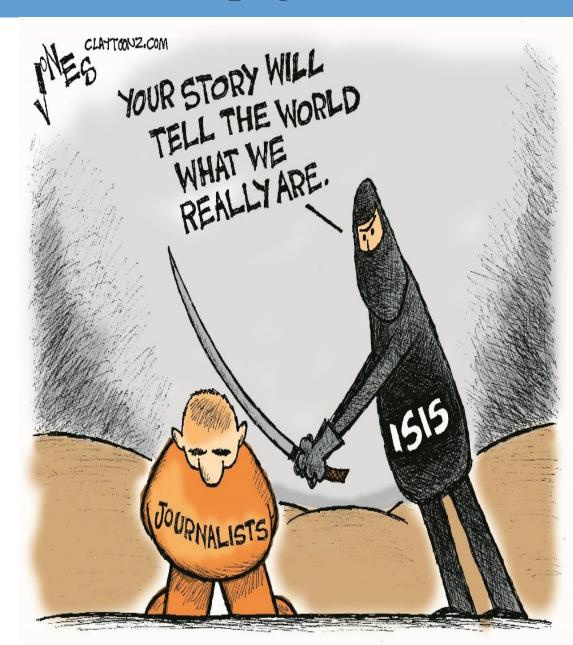


# ISIS – Strategic Communication and Propaganda

#### ISIS's goals of propaganda:

- 1. Imposition of Salafism-Jihadism and religious superiority,
- 2. Strengthening the status quo and prestige of ISIS,
- 3. Marketing of the Caliphate,
- 4. Formation of a new identity (radicalization),
- 5. Moral rehabilitation of Muslims against the West and their unification,
- 6. Demonstration of power at a leadership and organizational level,
- 7. Increase the morale of supporters,
- 8. Inspiration of independent terrorist attacks,
- 9. Generate fear against opponents.

**Utilization of audiovisual media production companies** (Al-Hayat Media Center, Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation for Media Production, Amaq News Agency και Central Media Department)



#### Means of propaganda:

- ■Videos: James Foley (2014), Lend me your ears (2014), Flames of War I, II (2014 & 2017), Paris has collapsed (2015), The End of Sykes-Picot (2014), There is no life without jihad (2014).
- □Online books (Islamic State 2015, Anarchist Cookbook), that teach Islamic creed ('aqīda), Koranic exegesis (tafsīr) and Hadith (traditions ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad)
- □Digital radio (Al-Bayan, A'maq Ikhbariyya)
- □Songs (nasheed) and videoclips (Salil al-sawarim, province of Aleppo, Deadly Arrows, The Killings of Shiites, My Ummah, Dawn Has Appeared)
- □**Posts** with threats and actions on social media.
- □Newsletters (Al Naba),
- □**Digital magazines** and weekly media outlets (Dabiq, al-Naba, Dar al-Islam, Konstantiniyye, Istok, Rumiyah, Voice of Hind).
- **☐ Websites** (Islamic State Archives)
- □ Pages and groups on social media (Islamic State, Mujahed's news, Abu-Bakr Baghdadi etc. and groups: "United Islamic Cyber Force" network, Umma Jihad on top, and the media of the Islamic State, etc.).



# Brutal vs emotional images



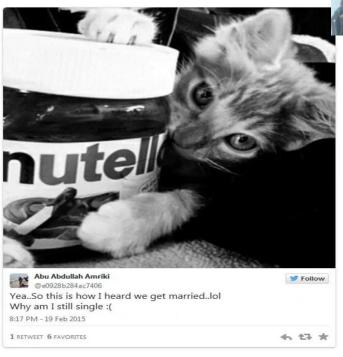
@bintladen1 - 47m

If this doesn't bring a bit of comfort and ease to your heart then #checkyourself







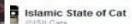




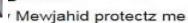
Islamic State of Cat @ISILCats

Milk for the kitties





- 8 juil 2014







2. ISIS leader declares war on Jews and Israel (January 2016)	(October 2014)
3. 'Patience Bilad Haramayn' (December 2015)	23. Behind the lines with western jihadis in Syria (October 2014)
4. 'Upon you oh those who care' (December 2015)	24. Dutch former Royal Netherlands Army soldier trains jihadists in Syria
5. 'I wish my people could know' (December 2015)	(January 2014)
6. 'Drive out the polytheists from the Arabian peninsula'	25. Omar the Chechen in ISIS command (October 2014)
(December 2015)	26. Teen girls left home to marry ISIS fighters (October 2014)
7. 'They are the enemy, so beware of them' (December 2015)	27. Why women joining ISIS? (September 2014)
8. 'Oh Land of revelation, patience' (December 2015)	28. ISIS destroys archaeological treasures in Mosul (February 2015)
9. Flames of War (September 2014)	29. 'Lend me your ears'-John Cantlie report from Mosul Iraq (September
10. 'Strike their necks' (March 2015)	2014)
11. 'Healing of the believers' chests'(February 2015)- Jordanian	30. Deso Dogg: From rapper to mujaahid (July 2014)
Pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh burning alive	31. Aqsa Mahmood: Glasgow girl who became a 'jihadi bride' in Syria
12. ISIS: On the frontline (February 2015)	(September 2014)
13. The spread of the Caliphate- The Islamic State (August 2014)	32. 'Jihadi Brides' (BBC documentary- April 2015)
14. Grooming children for jihad: The Islamic state (August 2014)	33. ISIL Jihadist sends a message to his Wahhabi Brethren and to the infidel
15. Enforcing Sharia in Raqqa: The Islamic state (August 2014)	world from Aazaz,
16. Christians in the Caliphate: The Islamic State (August 2014)	Syria (October 2013)
17. The genesis of Islamic State (May 2015)	34. ISIS destroys historic ruins in Palmyra, Syria (August 2015)
18. Why are Canadians joining the Islamic State? (April 2015)	35. ISIS releases new video titled 'Paris has collapsed' (November 2015)
19. The girls who fled to Syria: Groomed by the Islamic State	36. Original ISIS releases new video of Paris attackers (January 2016)
(August 2015)	37. ISIS threatens New York City in new propaganda video (November
20. Full story: Wives of ISIS (March 2015)	2015)
21. Mujatweets (episodes 1-7)	38. The end of Sykes-Picot (June 2014)
	39. American Journalist Steven Sotloff Beheaded By ISIS (September 2014)
	40. American Journalist James Foley Beheaded By ISIS (August 2014)
	41. Flirting With ISIS: How the Islamic State Recruits (The33New York
	Times, July 2015)

22. British jihadi taunts the West 'We will kill every soldier you send'

1. ISIS execution video threatens UK invasion (January 2016)

Use of Arabic language  $\rightarrow$  support in the Arabic-speaking online world  $\rightarrow$  to maintain power.



#### 29 June 2014

- ☐"This is the Promise of Allah" by the Alhayat Media Centre
- □Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi
- ☐Declaration of a renewed Islamic Caliphate
- ☐ The most globally broadcast religious action of ISIS
- ☐ He proclaimed the World Jihad





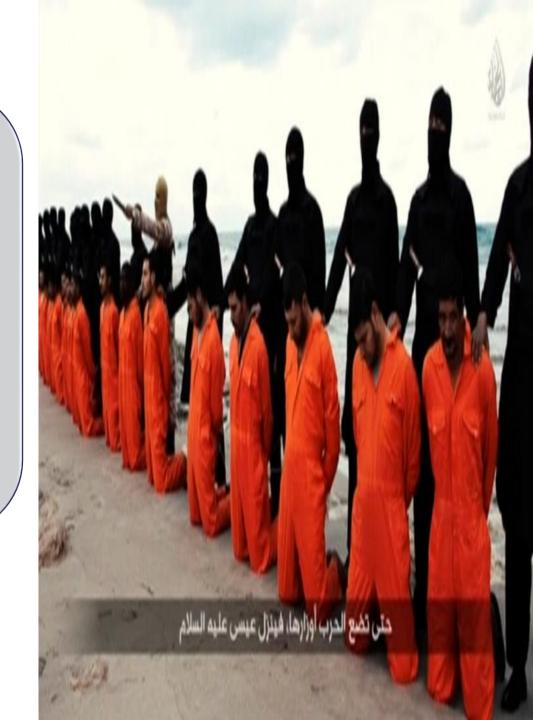
#### **19 September 2014**

□55 minutes - "Flames of War: Fighting has just begun" ☐ Muath al-Kasasbeh - Captured Royal Jordanian Air Force pilot ☐ He was burned in a cage □ Speaker: Canadian citizen - Khalifa ☐ Motto of the video: "Healing the believer's chests" □ 29 November 2017 – "Flames of War: Until the Final Hour II"



## 15 February **2015**

- □"A Message Signed With Blood to the Nation of the Cross".
- ☐ Execution of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya.
- ☐ Cinematic specifications with background music and featured the execution of the hostages by the sea.
- ☐ The footage focused on the sea, which was red with the blood of the victims.



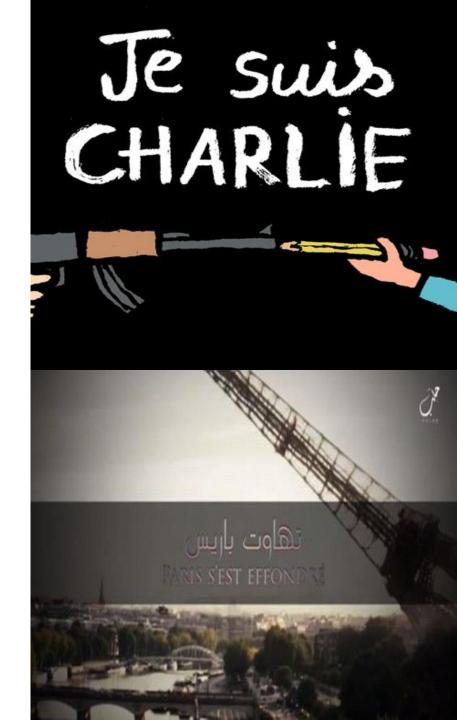


ISIS releases a "Message to the People of the Balkans" dubbed "Honor is in Jihad" – June 2015



# 22 November **2015**

- □17-minute video "Paris has collapsed"
- □ It showed footages of future targets [Big Ben, Tower Bridge, Trafalgar Square, David Cameron and Speaker of the House of Commons John Bercow].
- □ 19,000 French websites were targeted after the Charlie Hebdo office attack on January 7, 2015.





ISKP vows to Palestinians to liberate Jerusalem: 'Your Voice Will Be Heard Only By The Mujahideen Of The Islamic State, And They Will Carry Out Attacks In The Hearts Of Israel Just For Your Revenge, Allah Willing' - 21 December 2023

### ISIS and social media







if you contact me don't expect a response

\* 35

23 14







- 1) Hijacking hashtags or textual hijacking,
- 2) Event crashing,
- 3) Persona poaching/ sock puppeting/
- 4) AI-generated programs







## ISIS – Funding

#### **Funding means:**

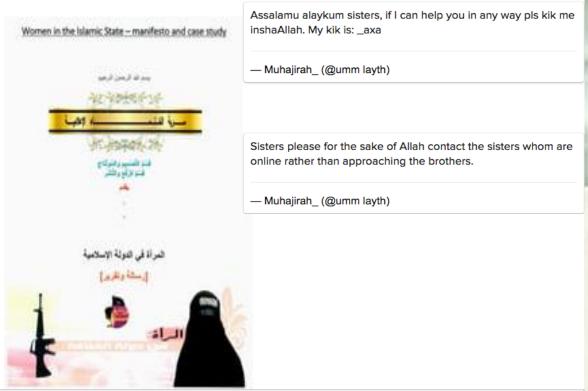
- Illegal sales of cars, weapons, antiques, houses, travel documents or assets on the dark/deep web.
- Loyalty tax (zakat 10%) from supporters and campaigners of the organization.
- Cyber-attacks on financial systems/interception of citizens' financial data.
- Cryptocurrencies
- E-commerce and online retail platforms (eBay, Amazon and Etsy).





### **ISIS – Online matching**

Follow



Sisters who want help making hijrah can contact me on surespot: UmmDujji May Allāh put us on a path that will please Him most.

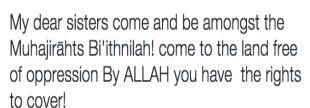
Umm Dujāna Britāniya

@UmmDujji\_

















#### **Hacking group of ISIS**

- Cyber Caliphate Army (CCA),
- Sons of Caliphate Army,
- United Caliphate Cyber (UCC),
- Rabitat Al Ansar (League of Supporters).





## **Concluding remarks**

