

# The Islamic State's Strategy in Cyberspace

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The success of the Islamic State (henceforth: ISIS) includes the integration of interrelated elements in a way that helps the organization consolidate its control of extensive regions, serve as the current spearhead in the global Jihad effort, and threaten the world with terrorist attacks carried out by its agents holding citizenship in a Western country. These agents are liable to return to their homeland and along with "lone wolves" they are liable to carry out terrorist attacks against targets in the West. The aim of this article is to examine ISIS's model, as it is an organization that has successfully conquered many geographic areas while attracting public attention on an unprecedented global scale. The article will attempt to assess the organization's unique strategy, which combines two key interrelated elements: extensive use of the social media on the one hand and extreme and savage cruelty on the other.

**Keywords:** Islamic state, ISIS, social media, Iraq, Syria, terrorism

## Introduction

In May 2004, an Islamic website published a video clip showing the execution of Nick Berg, a U.S. citizen, in Baghdad. The clip showed Berg in an orange prisoner's uniform (the same worn by prisoners at Guantanamo Prison), beheaded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Ten years later, this video assumed horrifying historical significance with the publication of a video clip showing the beheading of American James Foley by agents of ISIS, carrying on the actions of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

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The main difference between the two video clips is that the man who beheaded Foley spoke fluent English, and the professionally edited clip was spread virally throughout the entire world. Viewers in Western countries experienced a feeling of horror at the sight of a prisoner being led to the slaughter, not only because the victim seemed like their next-door neighbor, but because the slaughterer also represented the image of a neighbor. ISIS uses the global village of the information era, in which the boundaries between reality and imagination have been blurred using technological means available to everyone, in its call to its supporters in the West to make the hegira (immigration to the Islamic state) or join the jihad - "pack your suitcases or prepare explosive devices."

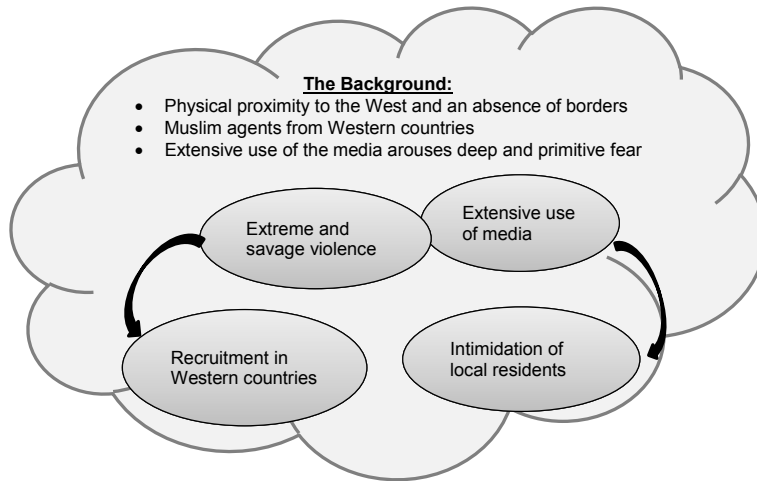
Psychological warfare in the service of terrorist organizations is not a new phenomenon. Carlos Marighella, one of the fathers of modern revolutionary terrorism, published *The Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerilla* in the 1960s, in which he referred to a war of "nerves" and psychological warfare. He asserted that governments will always be in a position of inferiority in combating psychological warfare used by a terrorist organization, as a result of the many resources used in counter efforts and censorship. According to Marighella, this investment is doomed to fail. In the digital and new media era, the challenges and threats have changed as a result of the new spheres in which a terrorist organization can operate to promote its political objectives. ISIS operates on a large scale in virtual space by using new media platforms that make censorship difficult. The position of inferiority in defending against this phenomenon is therefore significant, and requires observation and a solution to this threat that makes use of up-to-date tools.

The wave of spontaneous terrorist attacks ("lone wolves") in the U.S., Canada, Australia, Europe, and Israel highlights the emerging symbiotic connection between ISIS's recruitment calls, propaganda, and terrorism against Western civilians and the various communications platforms made possible by virtual space. It incorporates terrorism executed by veterans who fought within ISIS ranks in Syria and Iraq and returned to the west, such as the murder of Israeli couple Mira and Emanuel Riva at the Jewish Museum in Brussels in May 2014 by Mehdi Nemmouche, a French citizen of Algerian origin who returned to Europe after fighting with jihad forces in Syria. These local unorganized terrorist actions, carried out "under the influence of ISIS" and inspired by it, include attacks by shooting and running over pedestrians in Canada, and attempted beheadings in Australia

and the U.S. ISIS employs public relations, recruitment, and propaganda apparatuses in virtual space, including the publication of magazines and high-quality video clips that can be viewed by the international media with restrictions, and sells merchandise with the organization's symbol online. The organization's agents even document and share their comments on social networks. This mode of operation, which includes transparency and ruthlessness, is perfectly suited to the organization's current strategic policy: preparation for global terrorist activity by recruiting foreign agents and establishing new terrorist cells throughout the world. In "The Violent Image: Insurgent Propaganda and the New Revolutionaries," Neville Bolt says that the Islamic State has adopted the idea of "propaganda of the deed," similar to the old tactics used by revolutionary groups, in which violence and communications were merged in order to achieve the maximum effect in delivering a political message. He claims that what is unique about ISIS is its combination of distribution platforms in the media and the new media to display extreme and savage cruelty. This constitutes a new spectrum of "network warfare" involving exploitation of the information revolution. The organization uses reciprocal propaganda, and includes horrific pictures immortalizing terrorism, designed to generate fear and anxiety (such as video clips featuring beheadings), and as means for influencing decision-makers in the West.

The success of ISIS, which has consolidated itself over the past year in Iraq and Syria, and has established organizational infrastructure in North Africa and the Sinai peninsula, includes the integration of interrelated elements in a way that helps the organization consolidate its control of extensive regions and serve as the current spearhead in the global Jihad effort. In addition to posing a threat to the stability of Arab regimes in the Middle East such Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Lebanon, there is also the threat of terrorist attacks carried out throughout the west by western citizens who have joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq and then returned home, and encouragement of spontaneous terrorist attacks against Western targets. The media and violence are used in tandem to both intimidate nearby enemies and to recruit agents and supporters. These actions, which are being conducted in places geographically proximate to democratic countries (the West), include extensive use of media on the one hand, and extreme and savage cruelty on a previously unseen scale on the other.

These elements are intertwined; aiming at a Western target group and the physical proximity to this target along with the appeal for recruitment



**Figure 1. ISIS modus operandi**

of supporters from those countries generates a feeling of deep primitive dread among the general public, combined with a strong attraction among the audience of potential supporters (see Figure 1).

This article asserts that ISIS's internet success is due to the connection between its use of extreme ruthless cruelty and the use of cyberspace to spread messages internally and externally for purposes of recruitment and intimidation. The background to this policy is physical proximity to the West and the creation of a deep feeling of dread in Western countries of being inundated with terrorists and supporters of Islamic-motivated violence.

ISIS makes intelligent use of social networks for delivering focused messages to specific target audiences, namely Muslim communities in Western and Asian countries. Up until now, ISIS's media strategy has succeeded in positioning the organization as the main enemy of the West, branding it as the spearhead in the global jihad struggle, winning support among Muslim audiences and jihad organizations.<sup>5</sup>

### **ISIS Propaganda and Recruitment System**

ISIS, like al-Qaeda in its early days, recognizes the fact that it must operate simultaneously on a number of fronts in its war against infidels. The organization therefore regards its media strategy as representing "two thirds of the battle,"<sup>6</sup> and regards the struggle over popular opinion as essential and complementary to its activity.<sup>7</sup> The importance of the media in its various forms as means of gaining influence, support, and sympathy from millions

of Muslims around the world is evident in the organization's activities and the many resources invested for the purpose. The Internet and social networks are the chief means of disseminating its ideology and political messages, as well as means of recruiting foreign volunteers and financing, while being careful to control the flow of information from the battle areas. ISIS uses a number of online platforms,<sup>8</sup> such as the al-Furqan Institute for Public Relations Production,<sup>9</sup> which serves as the official media arm of ISIS and its leaders, and the "al-Athzham Agency for Media Production." This agency has been operating for the past two years, producing ISIS video clips and distributing them on the social networks. Another ISIS media arm is the Islamic State organization website, called the al-Hayat (Life) Media Center, which is aimed mainly at a Western target audience.

The al-Hayat media center contains a great deal of material about ISIS, including speeches and video clips translated into more than 10 languages. The website, which is aimed at the West and a non-Arabic speaking audience, combines content and diverse material with new video clips and subtitles for earlier video clips, in addition to articles, news reports, and translation of jihad material. The website is of high quality, and was probably designed by a team with experience in producing material for a Western audience. ISIS distributes bloody propaganda clips on the Internet, in which the organization showcases the cruel tactics used in its conquests in Syria and Iraq, while boasting the helplessness of its enemies. One of the propaganda films issued in September by the Islamic State, which was professionally edited as a documentary film, is entitled, "Flames of War: The Struggle Has Only Begun."<sup>10</sup> Its purpose is to deliver a clear message against U.S. intervention targeting the organization. The 55-minute film uses carefully designed romantic images, combined with special elements of explosions, battles, wounded American soldiers and those about to be killed, anti-American rhetoric, edited slow-motion segments of executions, and archive segments of Western leaders. The film includes sophisticated illusory elements (size, distorted pictures, enhancement of speakers, a speech lit by torches) resembling the 1934 propaganda film produced in Nazi Germany as a propaganda documentary move by Leni Riefenstahl, "Triumph of the Will."<sup>11</sup>

This movie joins a long series of professionally edited films documenting bombings, terrorist attacks, and assassinations of officials, military, and security forces personnel in Iraq. One example is the popular four-part series entitled "The Clanging of the Swords," the first part of which

was distributed as early as June 2012. The series has gained widespread exposure on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.<sup>12</sup> A comprehensive analysis of the fourth part of the *Clanging of the Swords*, aired on May 17, 2014, was published by Nico Prucha and Ali Fisher on the Jihadica website. It describes the level of sophistication demonstrated in the use of the social media and in the use of information distribution technology on various platforms, including cellular telephones (the preferred platform, especially the use of the “Twitter for Android” application), various web technologies, and file sharing websites (justpaste.it, archive.com), with the use of a different size and format, variable quality, and different languages (Arabic, Indonesian, English, German, and Japanese). It is no surprise that the video was released on Saturday as a deliberate strategy to prevent blocking by web companies, as their employees are on their day off. In the first 24 hours after the video was released, there were nearly 60,000 hits (the average viewing time was 17 minutes).<sup>13</sup>

In November 2014, a short film showing the beheading of 22 Syrian prisoners was published. The film was analyzed by the Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium (TRAC), and the Quilliam Foundation think tank pointed out that the film was professionally produced, including many hours of filming, the use of HD cameras, and professional editing. The analysis concluded that the cost of producing this film was about \$200,000.<sup>14</sup> The production of this film reflects the level of savagery as well as the level of sophistication. This film does not document an execution; it is a “reality” film of a mass execution carried out solely by “outside” soldiers recruited to the organization. The “extras” in the film are executed. This method shows the importance attributed by the organization to the use of media, and its profound understanding of the effect that such a film has on viewers; generating a feeling of “romantic” attraction for potential recruits on the one hand, and the creation of a feeling of terror and dread among Western citizens on the other.

In addition to violent material and content, some of its publications are designed to recruit new volunteers from Western and non-Arab countries. The al-Hayat Media Center, for example, published a number of original video clips under the “Mujatweets” headline aimed at showing that life under the Islamic State was peaceful and normal, pointing to a positive aspect that would soften the brutal image of a murderous organization, and in order to attract new recruits.<sup>15</sup> In addition, a series of high-quality articles published as PDF documents, similar to al-Qaeda’s “Inspire” online

magazine, can be found on the website aimed at showing and emphasizing the organization's success on the battlefield and portraying prominent soldiers in its ranks. Some of the video clips were designed for the purpose of influencing public opinion by showing scenes of food distribution, medical treatment, and charity. The films have English subtitles, and are designed to convince Western professionals to come and help in the building of the Islamic state. The organization publishes something called the IS Report, which contain articles in English describing the founding of offices for the training of Imams, religious legal rulings, pictures of executions, and victories on the battlefield.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the ISIS media apparatus distributing the organization's publications on the Internet, ISIS publishes a number of Internet magazines; the most important is the Dabiq periodical.<sup>17</sup> The first issue was published in July 2014 in a large number of languages, and resembled the al-Qaeda "Inspire" magazine in its design. The main emphasis in the first issue, which filled 50 pages and was entitled "The Return of the Calilafah," was to convince its readers of the legitimacy of the caliphate declared by ISIS leader Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi, and to call upon Muslims from all over the world to come to "their natural country" under its leadership. The other three issues came out in September-October, and included quotations and remarks by senior officials in the organization, hadiths legitimizing slavery as "the spoils of war," information about building the Islamic State, calls for the killing of "Crusaders," justification of executions, etc. Another public relations activity designed to appeal to Muslim communities outside the war zones in Syria and Iraq was the English language "Islamic State News" Internet news magazine, which contained both regular reports about the organization and reflections with an Islamic Salafi-jihadist orientation.<sup>18</sup> ISIS conducts additional forums and official news sites in Arabic on the Internet, such as al- Minbar al- Ilami al- Jihadi<sup>19</sup> (Jihad Forum) and others with diverse propaganda content about ISIS.

For ISIS, the use of social networks is a platform constituting a significant lever enabling the organization to recruit broad support among the young radical Muslim public in their countries of origin and in the West, while delivering focused messages. On the other hand, communications and messages between the global jihad organizations and their supporters, such as al-Qaeda, are usually deployed over the "dark web" that is not accessible to everyone, in mosques, and through distribution of leaflets and designated websites.<sup>20</sup> ISIS has therefore chosen to operate openly on the social media



channels, including YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and other less well-known social networks that appeal to a Western target audience and in Muslim communities in the West. ISIS is flooding social networks with especially savage and graphic materials of torture, mass execution, beheading, and crucifixion. As noted, however, this is only part of the broader picture. The use of social networks serves a number of purposes, such as psychological warfare and creating a deterrent effect on both a specific target audience in the battle zones and on Western public opinion, creating a presence and image of size in order to give the impression that the organization is larger than it actually is, disseminating ideology, obtaining financing, and calling for volunteers to join jihad, while distributing videos and interviews with Australian, European, and American Muslim citizens.

The organization's use of these networks is highly sophisticated, mainly in transmitting vicious propaganda messages that overshadow the media efforts of competing organizations, such as al-Qaeda and its affiliates. The efforts by Western countries to close accounts affiliated with ISIS and its supporters and censor their content almost never succeed. For example, the Islamic State organization used an application working on the Twitter network called "Dawn of Glad Tidings." Until not long ago, this application, which could be downloaded from the Google Play Store, facilitated automatic posts to the accounts of the organization's supporters. Another method is the use of Hashtag, which is used on social networks (such as Twitter, and Facebook).<sup>21</sup> ISIS uses "Hashtag Hijacking," which is a relatively simple method of implanting popular words, thereby gaining the attention of people looking for certain content. ISIS also uses advanced technologies, as noted in a recent special report published by the ZeroFox Company. This involves taking advantage of computers by inserting malware in order to promote specific campaigns. ISIS also distributes computer games in order to recruit volunteers and supporters, while training and preparing them for the battlefield. One example is a trailer distributed with a computer game called "Jihad Simulator," in which the games simulate abductions, military vehicles' detonation, and shooting at schools.<sup>22</sup> The games facilitate a high level of communications (managing conversations through texts, network cameras, earphones, and microphones), and constitute a convenient way of maintaining an extensive recruitment and training infrastructure.<sup>23</sup>

As part of its well-financed and well-timed media activity, ISIS is initiating major media campaigns designed to encourage joining its ranks, including the issuing of threats against the U.S. and its allies in order to



deter them from intervening in events in Iraq. One such campaign took place on July 19, 2014, and was distributed on various media outlets under the headline "A Billion Muslims Support the Islamic State." The campaign was successful in gaining support when messages were published all over the world following photographs of various sites: the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Big Ben in London, and other landmarks in North America, Europe, and Asia. ISIS also sells souvenirs (shirts, key chains, toy soldiers, and personal items) for propaganda purposes and as an additional source of income. Several months ago, CNN reported that Facebook was taking steps to stop this, so far unsuccessfully.<sup>24</sup>

### Psychological Warfare

The savage terrorist theater used by ISIS, the result of a dangerous symbiosis between the terrorist hungry for recognition and exposure, and the media in pursuit of ratings and eager for violent and riveting scripts created by terrorist events,<sup>25</sup> is not a new phenomenon. It is part of a rational strategy aimed at delivering a message that is mainly psychological in nature. In this sense, the use of terrorism by ISIS and similar organizations against British and American civilians is "mainly symbolic and part of propaganda."<sup>26</sup> Given the great cruelty and inhumanity used by the organization and its comprehensive use of cyberspace to distribute this content, ISIS introduces a new method of operation. By its nature, savagery creates an atmosphere of prolonged international interest and awareness. It also shapes its cruel image, sometimes creating the impression of being more powerful than it actually is.

The use of media by ISIS for terrorist purposes is substantially different from previous terrorist attack that won broad international media coverage, such as the 1979-1981 hostage crisis in Iran, the attack on the Twin Towers (2001) and the hostage crisis in a Moscow theater (2002).<sup>27</sup> While the subject of the use of the communications media by terrorists has been extensively researched<sup>28</sup> in an attempt to understand it in the context of symbolic communications theory,<sup>29</sup> ISIS does not regard the victim as "unimportant." The victims (children, journalists, aid workers, and women) are very important, and their selection is designed to target the "soft underbelly" while the organization invests many resources in using kidnapped journalists for propaganda purposes.

## A Strategic Change in the Targets of Terrorism

During 2014, ISIS made a number of strategic changes in its targets and modus operandi in the battle zone. In the first stage, the organization focused on creating infrastructure that would enable consolidation of its control of various areas in Syria and Iraq. The organization therefore committed savage terrorist acts against hostile local Sunni populations, symbols of the regime, and religious-based ethnic cleansing. These included the massacre of the Yazidi minority in the Erbil region, the Sinjar Mountains, and the area of the Mosul Dam. This process was accompanied mainly by media threats against the West, and continued until late summer 2014. A document was recently published by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documenting the execution of 1,429 people since last June in Syria. Half of the victims were civilians, and half were members of the al-Shaitat Shi'ite tribe in the eastern Deir a-Zor region in eastern Syria.<sup>30</sup>

The second stage began in August 2014, during the formation of the coalition to fight ISIS, the main significance of which was marking the West, particularly the U.S., as a key target for terrorist operations. As part of this change, ISIS brutally beheaded a number of foreigners it had kidnapped (Americans, British, and French), while making manipulative use of the media with the intention of generating horror in the West and the moderate Arab world. At the media level, the well-timed executions by an ISIS soldier of British origin dressed in black, referred to as "Jihadi John" was done under the heading of "A message to America," according to a prepared script, using advanced photography equipment. The messages placed responsibility on the U.S. and Canada, with the threat that any intervention by Western governments would lead to attacks on innocent civilians. According to a November 17 report in *The New York Times*, at least 23 people from 12 countries were kidnapped by ISIS in November 2012-January 2014, some of whom were released for ransom.<sup>31</sup>

In the third stage, beginning in mid-September, ISIS called for attacks on civilians in various Western countries taking part in the coalition formed against the organization. This was expressed in a speech by ISIS leader Abu Mohammad al-Adnani al-Shami under the title: "Indeed, your Lord is ever watchful," in which he called for the killing of "disbelievers" in Western countries.<sup>32</sup> The calls were issued in audio recordings calling for attacks on Western civilians and security forces.<sup>33</sup> The call also appeared in the fourth issue of *Dabiq* in October. Initial signs of the results of ISIS's call to kill Western civilians can be seen in the thwarted plan to kill civilians

in Australia, the shooting and vehicular attacks in Canada, the axe attack against policemen in Queens in New York, the laying of explosives in Vienna, etc.<sup>34</sup>

The main purpose of the widely publicized beheadings is twofold; on the one hand, it is designed to generate pressure on public opinion, mainly against the governments of the U.K., U.S., and France, and to differentiate ISIS from the other organizations by its ultra-national savagery. On the other hand, it is a source of attraction for potential recruits by appealing to senses of basic Islamic morality in the framework of a return to the fundamentals of early Islam and a rejection of modern Western morality. The beheading of journalist James Foley on August 19 was designed to deliver a threatening message (“a message to America”), while attributing responsibility for his murder to the U.S., stating that any decision or action taken against the Islamic State will lead to attacks on American civilians. The murder of journalist Steven Sotloff on September 2 was also designed to deliver a sharp message to the U.S. (“a second message to America”) against the continued aerial attacks by U.S. forces: “as long as your missiles continue to attack our people, our knife will continue to attack your people’s throats.”<sup>35</sup>

The beheadings are aimed at two target audiences: local and global. The first is not organized; it is part of the desire to wage psychological warfare against opponents from within. This includes propaganda videos, which are usually not well edited. The second and more significant audience, however, consists of the Western world, especially the U.S., the U.K., and Australia, with the purpose of gaining achievements and propaganda, terrorizing public opinion, and recruiting potential operatives. In September-October 2014, ISIS published a number of videos featuring British journalist John Cantlie from the battlefields in Ayn al-Arab (Kobani) designed for propaganda purposes, in which he announces that he will present the “manipulation of the Western media,” and that “the West is being dragged into a war it cannot win against thousands of armed men.”<sup>36</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights director Rami Abdul Rahman claimed that a large number of soldiers were murdered by beheading, and by placing the head in a public place ISIS wishes to generate terror and dread.<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that the phenomenon of murdering hostages by beheading is not new. Examples can be found, such as the execution of Daniel Pearl in 2002 by the National Movement for the Restoration of Pakistani Sovereignty, beheadings of ethnic Russians and foreigners by Chechen terrorists, and other groups, including Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, Algerian groups, and the Taliban.

## Summary and Insights

In recent months, the Islamic State has exhibited its mastery of social media, which it regards as a legitimate weapon in its war against its opponents in the organization's countries of origin and against the West (the U.S., U.K., and Australia). ISIS uses simple content that makes its objectives and message very clear, with one ultimate purpose: to induce terror through the calculated management of savagery and the complete absence of mercy.<sup>38</sup> The viral campaigns featuring beheading, crucifixions, burnings, and mass executions distributed through the various media are conducted with unprecedented brutality and cruelty. Terrorism is a type of propaganda, and the more cruel elements it includes, the greater its effect and the bigger the impression it leaves. The horrifying graphic description of beheadings, with its focus on a lone defenseless individual, has a greater effect than propaganda achieved through different means, such as car bombs and terrorism, even if the latter's death toll is higher.<sup>39</sup> ISIS is exploiting the inherent potential of global networking and the ability to simultaneously operate various and diverse means of mass influence, based on computer games, the Internet, and social networking.<sup>40</sup> These measures have created a sophisticated and well-timed online propaganda campaign.

ISIS's propaganda machine and the use of the social and communications media fulfill two important functions that are very distinguishable from each other in their purpose, relying on a media platform that did not exist a decade ago. The first is psychological warfare, targeting the morale of the enemy's soldiers. This is not a new strategy. Chinese general and philosopher Sun Tzu (Master Sun) asserted that victory is usually achieved by "selective, instant decapitation of military or societal targets to achieve shock and awe" through the use of cruel and merciless means, such as beheading.<sup>41</sup> The Blitzkrieg in WWII brought a similar concept of intimidating the enemy through psychological warfare by distributing leaflets from the air, messages from very powerful loudspeakers, etc. The second involves gaining support from Western Islamic groups, while unifying the Islamic State's soldiers behind one goal and under one leadership through an appeal for a return to Islamic roots and sanctioning violence by recruits with no need for any further justification.

The combination of cruelty and the use of social networks by ISIS have been very successful so far, and are being used as a very powerful tool in combination with the Islamic State's military arsenal. In an unusual step, the Iraqi government banned the use of social media during the fighting

in June in order to disrupt communications between ISIS members, a ban that continued for 17 days. More than 20 news websites were blocked, including al-Arabiya.<sup>42</sup>

ISIS operates differently than al-Qaeda, which has so far refrained from harming innocent Muslim civilians in order to avoid losing the population's support. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri advised that it was better to kill hostages by shooting, and to focus on attacks against the American and Iraqi forces. "You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the sheikh of the slaughterers," he said, adding, "we are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And this media battle is a race for the hearts and minds of our people."<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, ISIS has no scruples about means; it also conducts deadly attacks against the local Muslim population, while implementing a murderous ideology in which the Islamic State's vision is realized through provocations, such as pitiless attacks against strategic sites and national infrastructures.<sup>44</sup> ISIS regards the use of rough violence as essential. The use of media, on the other hand, is also essential for effective propaganda.

The success of ISIS in adopting this strategy is reflected in a number of principal characteristics that distinguish its activity from that of other terrorist organizations and constitute criteria for the organization's success: conquering large territories in Syria and Iraq within a relatively short time span, consolidation of its rule, and the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate. The organization, which was founded as a branch of al-Qaeda in Iraq, has spread to eastern Syria and to the north, while exploiting the weakness of the Iraqi regime. It now controls a population of 10-12 million people, one third of Iraq's territory, and one third of Syria, a territory almost equal in size to the entire U.K.

In the context of combating the organization, coalition military operations should be supplemented by action in other spheres. One is locating and disrupting the "money trail" through which the organization successfully operates a widespread financial system to supply its needs. This task requires an intelligence and global economic warfare effort in order to identify and neutralize the parties involved in financing the organization and trading with it. In addition, a supplementary political effort should be made, particularly with Turkey and Qatar, which in their support for radical Islam, ignoring the movement of volunteers to ISIS by way of the border between Turkey and Syria, are maintaining support in both

camps. Finally, there should be an intelligence struggle and operations in cyberspace should be employed as well.

The second element involves reining in the organization's Internet exposure by blocking sites and content. These are used to recruit operatives, generate attacks, raise money, and exert psychological warfare. Legal infrastructure should be created for this purpose, and agreements should be reached with the large Internet companies having commercial interests. The technological ability to take practical measures exists, but without assembling an international task force that will take immediate effective action to remove malware from the Internet, it will be difficult to cope with this phenomenon. This team can also take action to undermine the organization's narrative through counter campaigns on the social networks: "fighting fire with fire."

The third element is designed to deal with spontaneous terrorist attacks in Western countries. Due to the absence of hierarchies in these attacks and the fact that most of the attacks do not require an existing organizational infrastructure in the country in which the attack takes place, it will be necessary to devise suitable tools for dealing with the attacks. One of these tools would be the ability to generate a profile of potential attacks. This profile will be derived from a variety of sources, the chief of which will be an analysis of the characteristics of the Internet activity by the populations likely to produce attackers. It is usually possible to retrospectively find signs indicating a wish to carry out an attack. It is therefore necessary to assemble an international task force that will be able to create the methodology for constructing such a profile and devise the tools to identify potential hazards on the basis of an analysis of regularly collected big data. The main challenge in this approach concerns the assembling of the characteristics in the profile, rather than the technological aspects of the analysis systems. The defense organizations in the Western countries have a common interest, and will therefore be able to cooperate in devising this capability, thereby pooling their capabilities and expediting the implementation of this concept.

The Western countries require a combined effort to cope with the phenomenon before it is too late. ISIS is acting systematically in cyberspace, and creating a successful model for itself. The West, led by the U.S., needs political, legal, economic, operational, and technological action. Only a long-term combination of these aspects can facilitate an effective struggle against the organization and its jihad effort in the West.

## Notes

- 1 As expressed by a soldier in the organization of Canadian origin in a recruitment video clip distributed by ISI in November:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hzg2WMB3ZA>.
- 2 Carlos Marighella, "Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla," *Survival* 13, no. 3 (1969): 95-100.
- 3 Daniel Cohen, "Fighting Islamic State in Cyberspace," *Haaretz*, September 5, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.614320>.
- 4 Neville Bolt, *The Violent Image: Insurgent Propaganda and the New Revolutionaries* (London: Hurst & Company, 2012).
- 5 *ISIS: Portrait of an Organization*, Meir Amit Intelligence and Information Center, document no. 182, November 28, 2014, <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/he/article/20733>.
- 6 "Antiterrorism Seminar Discusses Media Role," *a-Sharq al-Awsat* (November 25, 2005), <http://www.aawsat.net/2005/11/article55268813>.
- 7 Angela Gendron, "al-Qaeda : propaganda and media strategy," *ITAC Trends in Terrorism Series 2* (2007).
- 8 For further discussion of the ISIS public relations apparatuses, see the comprehensive analytic study of ISIS, *ISIS: Portrait of an Organization*.
- 9 The literal translation of al-Furqan is "separation," i.e., separation of truth from lies.
- 10 Ryan Mauro, "ISIS Releases 'Flames of War' Feature Film to Intimidate West," *The Clarion Project*, September 21, 2014, <http://www.clarionproject.org/analysis/isis-releases-flames-war-feature-film-intimidate-west>.
- 11 Brad Conley, "Leni Riefenstahl – Triumph Des Willens [1935] [HD]," February 25, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rclIE\\_VZ5g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rclIE_VZ5g).
- 12 "Al-Furqan Media Production Presents a New Film of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant," *Online Jihad Exposed*, May 18, 2014, <http://www.onlinejihadexposed.com/2014/05/4.html>.
- 13 Nico Prucha, "Is this the Most Successful Release of the Jihadist Video Ever?" *Ideological trends, Iraq, social media*, May 19, 2014, <http://www.jihadica.com/is-this-the-most-successful-release-of-a-jihadist-video-ever>. And:  
<http://www.jihadica.com/is-this-the-most-successful-release-of-a-jihadist-video-ever-part-2-the-release-of-الصواريخ-الرابع-صليل-الصواريخ-الرابع/>.
- 14 See Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC) Press Room, <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/content/trac-press-room>.
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