Islamic State's English-language magazines, 2014-2017: Trends & implications for CT-CVE strategic communications

A quick reference guide to Islamic State News (issues 1-3), Islamic State Report (issues 1-4), Dabiq (issues 1-15) and Rumiyah (issues 1-13)

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Islamic State (IS) has used English-language magazines as a crucial component of its propaganda strategy, particularly targeting Muslims living in the West. This paper provides a quick reference guide to IS's English-language magazines released between June 2014 and September 2017 examining key themes and propaganda strategies deployed across three issues of Islamic State News, four issues of Islamic State Report, fifteen issues of Dabiq and thirteen issues of Rumiyah. It concludes by highlighting four trends and their implications for CT-CVE strategic communications practitioners. First, IS use a mix of rational- and identity-choice appeals to provide its various target audiences with a 'competitive system of meaning' which CT-CVE strategic communication efforts must seek to dismantle with careful campaign and message design. Second, over the period of 2014-17 IS appears to have deployed a thematic 'hedging' strategy characterised by certain messaging themes being prioritised over others during periods of boom versus bust. By identifying the signatures of IS's use of propaganda 'hedging', CT-CVE practitioners can be better prepared to confront current and future challenges from IS propagandists. Third, IS's English-language magazines must be understood within the context of trends across its broader propaganda effort. To effectively address this multifaceted threat, CT-CVE practitioners would benefit from applying the KISMI (Keep It Simple Maximise Impact) principle of rolling-out a strategic communications campaign. Finally, the appearance of instructional material in IS propaganda highlights the need for post-incident CT-CVE strategic communication plans to undermine the strategic logic of so-called "inspired" attacks.

ICCT International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague

Acknowledgements

Introduction

> *"The media is a jihad in the way of Allah. You, with your media work, are therefore a mujahid in the way of Allah (provided your intention is sound). The media jihad against the enemy is no less important than the material fight against it."*
> *Excerpt from Media operative, you are also a mujahid, Al-Himma Library*

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, it offers a quick reference guide to English-language magazines released by Islamic State (IS) between June 2014 and September 2017: Islamic State News (issues 1-3), Islamic State Report (issues 1-4), Dabiq (issues 1-15) and Rumiyah (issues 1-13). This collection of primary source materials spans a historical period characterised by extraordinary booms and busts for IS that offers valuable insights into the strategic logic of its propaganda, especially how it both opportunistically and strategically sought to appeal to English-speaking audiences. Rather than in-depth content analyses, this paper is designed to provide scholars and practitioners with a reference guide for shaping their own engagement with the materials. Second, this paper draws out four key trends to emerge from this analysis and explores its implications for CT-CVE strategic communications practitioners. To these ends, this paper begins by outlining the overarching strategic logic of IS propaganda as a means to frame the quick reference guide that follows. It concludes with a suite of operational, strategic and policy recommendations applicable for government, private and civil society sector CT-CVE practitioners.

The strategic logic of Islamic State propaganda

The field is inundated with analyses of IS's propaganda efforts and even a casual glance at this literature reveals the diversity of themes in IS messaging and the range of mediums the group uses to disseminate its messages to local and transnational audiences.[1] It is important, however, to step-back and consider the strategic logic of IS propaganda, i.e. the overarching purpose of its messaging effort within the context of its broader politico-military campaign strategy.

What emerges from this perspective[2] is that the fundamentals of IS's propaganda efforts are far from unique. Indeed the basic principles of its propaganda strategy broadly reflect the thinking of modern insurgency thinkers from Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara to Ho

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[1] For a history of IS's propaganda apparatus see C. Whiteside "Lighting the Path: the Evolution of the Islamic State Media Enterprise (2003-2016)", The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 7, no. 11 (2016). https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ICCT-Whiteside-Lighting-the-Path-the-Evolution-of-the-Islamic-State-Media-Enterprise-2003-2016-Nov2016.pdf. For analyses of IS' online and broader propaganda strategy see A. Alexander, "Digital Decay? Tracing change over time among English-language Islamic State Sympathizers on Twitter", *Program on Extremism* (2017); JM Berger & Jonathon Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter", *Analysis Paper – Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World 20* (March 2015); Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The ideology of the Islamic State", *The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World,* Analysis Paper No. 19 (2015); J. Farwell "The media strategy of ISIS", *Survival* 54, 6 (2014): 49-55; Daniel Milton "Communication Breakdown: Unraveling the Islamic State's Media Efforts", *Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point* (2016); Charlie Winter, "The virtual 'caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy" *Quilliam* (2015). Other studies have also offered broader perspectives on IS appeals to specific linguistic audiences such as Laurence Bindner, "Jihadists' Grievance Narratives against France" The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 8, no. 7 (2018).

[2] For a more detailed analysis of the overarching strategic logic of IS propaganda see Haroro Ingram "The strategic logic of Islamic State information operations", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 69(6): pp. 729-752. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10357718.2015.1059799.

Chi Minh and Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin.[3] IS share with their counterparts an understanding of asymmetric warfare as dual battles of control – characterised by clashing politico-military systems (i.e. what Bernard Fall would call "systems of control") – and battles of meaning (i.e. the deployment of messaging designed to shape the way friends, foes and neutrals perceive the conflict). The great strategists of modern asymmetric warfare understand that in order to compete against adversaries who typically enjoy considerable technological and resource advantages, it is necessary to synchronise politico-military and propaganda efforts to maximise the effects of *their* actions and narrative as well as nullify those of opponents. Like the great strategic plagiarists that they are, IS's propaganda strategy broadly mirrors these common principles.[4]

Figure 1 offers a graphic representation of the strategic logic that drives IS's propaganda efforts. At its core, the *raison d'être* of IS's messaging is to shape the perceptions and polarise the support of target audiences. It achieves this by deploying messages that are designed to contribute to two broad lines of effort. First, IS messaging draws on pragmatic factors – such as stability, security and livelihood – as a means to promote its politico-military actions and denigrate those of its enemies. This type of messaging is geared towards leveraging rational-choice decision-making in its target audiences by presenting, inevitably jaundiced, cost-benefit consideration of options. Rational-choice messaging was particularly prominent in IS's propaganda through 2014-15 when, unsurprisingly, it had politico-military successes in the field to promote itself as the alternative to its competitors. As its so-called caliphate crumbled and traveling to IS-controlled territories became increasingly difficult, IS introduced terrorist instructional material into its propaganda messaging in 2016 as a pragmatic alternative to becoming a foreign fighter for its supporters.
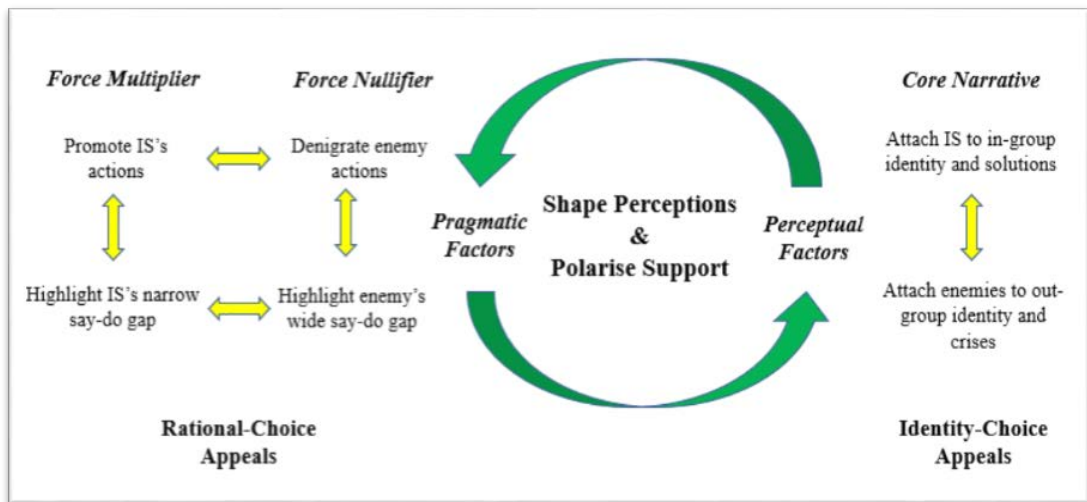

Figure 1: The strategic logic of IS propaganda

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[3] For an analysis of how IS's broader politico-military strategy also mirrors the doctrine and practice of other modern insurgencies see Craig Whiteside, "New masters of revolutionary warfare: The Islamic State Movement (2002-2016)". *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 4 (2016), http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/523/html. For an analysis of IS's operational innovations within that strategic context see Craig Whiteside & Vera Mironova, "Adaptation and Innovation with an Urban Twist: Changes to Suicide Tactics in the Battle for Mosul," *Military Review,* Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Press (2017); Winter, C. "War by Suicide: A Statistical Analysis of the Islamic State's Martyrdom Industry", The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 8, no.3 (2017).

[4] For an analysis of IS's propaganda doctrine see Charlie Winter, "Media Jihad: The Islamic State's Doctrine for Information Warfare", *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation* (2017). http://icsr.info/2017/02/icsr-report-media-jihad-islamic-states-doctrine-information-warfare/

Second, IS messaging also plays on perceptual factors tied to identity, solution and crisis constructs (see Figure 1). This type of messaging is designed to coax its audiences into engaging in identity-choice decision-making, i.e. decisions based on what is deemed appropriate for their identity. These types of appeals are central to the core narrative at the heart of IS's propaganda: we are champions and protectors of Sunni Muslims (the in-group identity) and the only hope for solving enemy (i.e. anyone who is not ISIS aligned Sunni Muslims) induced crises. IS's identity-choice appeals compel its supporters to perceive themselves and the world through identities that simultaneously present IS-aligned Sunnis as pure and divinely guided while anyone outside of this narrow category is dehumanised, filthy and worthy of destruction. Take for example the following excerpt from "You will remember what I have told you" published in *Rumiyah's* fourth issue:

The defense of Darul-Islam and the Shari'ah is not a responsibility solely for the mujahidin. Thus, no slave has any excuse with Allah nor with the Muslims if the brothers of apes and swine and worshippers of stones, trees, and men reach it. Rush, therefore, to join the caravan of jihad and support the fighters for Allah's cause in any way you can help, with combat, wealth, incitement, and supplication.[5]

Synchronising their deployment of rational- and identity-choice messaging becomes an important means for IS to try and align powerful decision-making processes in its audiences. Overall, IS's propaganda is calibrated to provide its audiences with a "competitive system of meaning", i.e. a lens through which to perceive and judge the world. The deeper followers can be drawn into accepting IS's system of meaning the more likely it is that their judgements will be shaped by that view of the world and the greater their vulnerabilities to supporting the group. Understanding the fundamental dynamics of IS's propaganda campaign also offers valuable insights into its strategic adaptability to pivot as its politico-military fortunes ebb and flow. It is this overarching strategic logic that has driven IS's varied propaganda efforts including, of course, messaging in its English-language magazines.

It is also important to consider what is unique about IS's approach to propaganda and three key factors are worth highlighting here. First, the apocalypse hangs like a pall over IS's entire messaging effort emerging as a flexible and ever-ready mechanism to amplify perceptions of crises and the urgency of its agenda amongst supporters whether in times of boom or bust. Second, IS draws on the notion of a caliphate as a multidimensional mechanism to appeal to its supporters rational and identity-choice decision-making. In IS propaganda the caliphate emerges as simultaneously the inevitable product of purely applying its methodology (*manhaj*) and thus a politico-military ideal as well as a jurisprudential imperative and eschatological precursor. Of course, IS are not unique in leveraging the apocalypse or caliphate in their messaging but it is the degree to which it is not only drawn upon in their messaging but operationalised via decisions in the field that sets it apart from many of its peers. This also helps to underscore the third and arguably most important factor: the various components of IS's propaganda effort are intimately connected to generate a self-reinforcing and compounding strategic and psychological impact on target audiences.[6] The result is a campaign that demonstrates a multidimensional, comprehensive, coherent and *systematic* approach to propaganda. This results in an overall messaging effort that fundamentally differentiates IS from its competitors. Put another way, there is no single factor that renders IS's propaganda campaign as radically innovate from its peers. Rather, it is the cumulative impact of a

[5] A. Al-Muhajir, "You will remember what I have told you: A speech by the official spokesman of the Islamic State" *Rumiyah* (issue 4): p.7.
[6] For more see Haroro Ingram, "Deciphering the siren call of militant Islamist propaganda", *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (The Hague).

range of incremental innovations that results in an overall campaign that appears radically innovative.

A quick reference guide to IS's English-language magazines: Islamic State News, Islamic State Report, Dabiq and Rumiyah

> "Some criticise media operatives for engaging in verbal jihad whilst sat on sofas in beautiful houses… But by Allah no, they are at the forefront of the conflict, in the heart of the war, within the furnace of its battles."
> Excerpt from *Media operative, you are also a mujahid*, Al-Himma Library

Islamic State (IS) are not the first Islamist group to use English-language magazines as a format to deploy messaging to transnational Muslim audiences, especially those living in the West. During the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989), the *Afghan Jehad Quarterly* was published in English, amongst other languages, in an effort to draw attention to and support for the Afghan and foreign *mujahideen* war effort. The Australia-based *Nida'ul Islam* was arguably the flagship militant Islamist English-language magazine of the 1990s featuring interviews with the likes of the Afghan Taliban and, in 1996, a then little known Osama Bin Laden. When Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula launched *Inspire* magazine in mid-2010, the influence of its American editors – Samir Khan, the editor of several issues of *Jihad Recollections* published in 2009, and the charismatic Anwar Al-Awlaki – was clear. *Inspire*'s "Open Source Jihad" section – offering readers detailed operational advice – immediately became its most notorious feature with Issue 1 featuring an article titled "Make a bomb in the kitchen of your Mom".[7] There have been others, of course, including the Taliban in Khurasan's *Azan*, As-Sahab media's *Resurgence* and the Mujahideen of Shaam's *Al-Risalah*. This context is highlighted because it offers a broader historical and strategic context for the narrow focus of this paper.

The following analysis covers an historical period beginning in June 2014 with the publication of issue 1 of *Islamic State News* and ending with issue 13 of *Rumiyah* released in September 2017. It covers a period of over three years stretching from the weeks immediately preceding IS's triumphant capture of Mosul to a point of utter ruin in its heartlands of Iraq and Syria. The period epitomises the boom-bust dynamic that characterises much of IS's history and analysing the propaganda of this particular period – even if limited to a single format (online magazines) and language (English) – offers important insights into the group's propaganda campaign and message design strategies. The quick reference guide that follows is divided into sections, each of which begins with a brief analysis of the narrative, thematic and propaganda strategy trends across the respective magazine's issues followed by a table containing a short summary of each issue's major themes and key articles.

Islamic State News (Issues 1-3)

All three issues of *Islamic State News* (ISN) featured photo reports with captions that tended to be dominated by rational-choice appeals promoting IS's politico-military efficacy but also the deficiencies or cruelty of its enemies. While ISN's issues were short publications of no more than ten pages, its authors highlighted a range of topics from

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[7] The AQ Chef. "Make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom", *Inspire* (issue 1): pp.33-40.

military operations in Iraq and Syria, tribal reconciliation efforts, education programs, the implementation of *hudud* (i.e. restrictions according to *sharia*) and initiatives to boost trade. With reference to Table 1 (below), the stories featured on the cover of each issue of *Islamic State News* underscores this variety. Issue 1's "top story" reported on a car bomb attack in Raqqa against IS, issue 2's cover triumphantly declared "Trade flourishes under the rule of the Islamic State" while issue 3 praised IS's military successes and prowess. Given IS military operations built momentum through eastern Syria and western Iraq during this period, the dominance of rational-choice appeals in ISN is unsurprising. Fostering the image that IS was implementing a full spectrum "system of control" was clearly an important aim for ISN's authors. For example, a single page photo report from Wilayat Homs in issue 3 featured images of an IS militant training a recruit with the caption "mortar training to pound the *nusayriyyah*", images of pamphlets being distributed to civilians with the caption "Islamic State passes out flyers explaining its '*Aqidah*" and photos showing farmers harvesting and shepherding sheep with the caption "Islamic state provides security to farmers" with accompanying testimonials.[8] ISN's contents not only promoted the diversity of IS' politico-military activities but the scope of its areas of control. Also noteworthy is the more casual language used in ISN compared to that used in later magazines such as *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*. For example, in issue 2 photos of IS militants were accompanied by captions such as "ABU AASIM AL-LIBI @ AL-HIRAKI VILLAGE".[9] With *Islamic State Report*, IS started to transition to a more article dominant format and, with it, a change in stylistics that seemed to be more formal and authoritative.

Table 1: Islamic State News, Issues 1-3

	***Islamic State News*, Issue 1** **Issue date:** Shaban 1435 (June 2014) **Pages:** 6 **Cover story:** "Car bomb rocks Ar-Raqqah" **Example reports:** "Car bomb rocks Ar-Raqqah" (p.1, also identified as "Top Story") "Gates of Al-Khair Reached" (p.2) "Shola in Homs Bombarded" (p.3) "Hunting for Tanks" (p.4) "Aid distribution" (p.5) "Light through Knowledge" (p.6) **Key theme/s:** IS are engaged in a range of politico-military activities across its territories in Syria and Iraq

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[8] No Author "Wilayat Homs", *Islamic State News*, issue 3 (2014): p.5.
[9] No author "Istishhadiyyun: Victory through Allah and then the truthfulness of the Istishhadiyyun" *Islamic State News*, issue 2 (2014), p. 3.

Islamic State News, Issue 2
Issue date: Shaban 1435 (June 2014)
Pages: 10
Cover story: "Trade flourishes under the rule of the Islamic State"
Example reports: "Fresh produce injects life into Halab market" (p.1)
"Allah will punish them by your hands" (p.4)
"Retaking Al-Khayr" (p.6)
"Attack on a Safawi checkpoint in Biji, Salahuddin" (p.8)
"Answering the call to prayer" (p.9)

Key theme/s: While most content relates to military reporting, IS's economic and political initiatives in Syria and Iraq feature prominently.

Islamic State News, Issue 3
Issue date: Shaban 1435 (June 2014)
Pages: 6
Cover Story: "Enter upon them through the gates: Islamic State humiliates Maliki's safawi army with a brazen attack on Mosul"
Example reports:
"Maliki's forces humiliated while Islamic State stockpiles on war booty" (p.2)
"Islamic State advances in Al-Khayr. Sahwat eradicated from Koniko gas field" (p.3)
"Allah guides whom he wills to the light. Sahwah continue to make Tawbah" (p.6)

Key theme/s: The cover and opening story are devoted to IS victories over the Iraqi army. 50/50 split of military and political content.

Islamic State News (Issues 1-4)

With *Islamic State Report* (ISR), IS transitioned to a format that prioritized short articles allowing for more detailed reporting on not only its efforts in the field but the strategic, operational and jurisprudential logic driving them. In contrast to ISN which used photo reports to highlight a range of politico-military activities across IS's areas of control, ISR's first, second and fourth issues used short articles and eye-catching photos to narrow its reader's focus onto two key topics per issue. For example, ISR's first two issues featured reports from Ar-Raqqah with Issue 1 focusing on *manhaj* (methodology) training initiatives[10] and consumer protection efforts[11] while issue 2 focused on the boost in farming enjoyed in IS-controlled areas[12] and the vital role of IS police in achieving its

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[10] No author. "Propagating the correct manhaj", *Islamic State Report* (issue 1): pp.1-3.
[11] No author. "On patrol with the office of consumer protection", *Islamic State Report* (issue 1): pp.4-6.
[12] No author. "Farmers reap the rewards of their harvest by giving zakah", *Islamic State Report* (issue 2): pp.1-4.
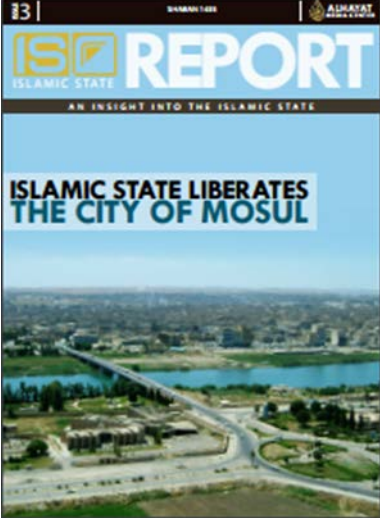
politico-military aims.[13] The central theme of these articles was the tangible benefits IS was delivering to its citizens across a range of governance initiatives. Put simply, IS were not just filling a politico-military void but advancing the lot of their citizens. ISR's content included interviews with, for example, the organizer of an *imam* training workshop, the "Head of the Consumer Complaints Division" and the head of police. Such a strategy is designed to personalize, humanize and give credibility to IS's governance efforts. Crucially, these reports also directly and unambiguously framed all of these initiatives as crucial to having a functioning state – for example, ISR's report on policing highlights "their importance in state building"[14] – that is also in accordance with the correct *manhaj* (methodology). ISR's contents reflect an interweaving of rational- and identity-choice appeals that would become the signature of *Dabiq* magazine.
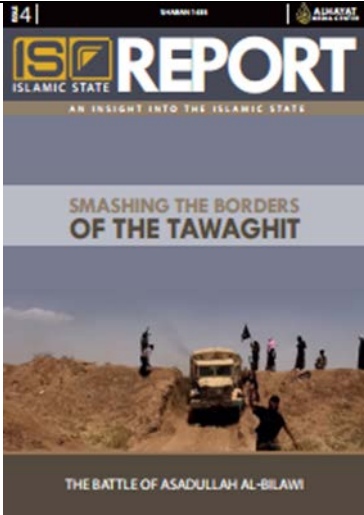
Table 2: *Islamic State Report*, Issues 1-4

	***Islamic State Report,* Issue 1** **Issue date:** Shaban 1435 (June 2014) **Pages:** 6 **Cover Story:** "Propagating the correct manhaj" **Example articles/reports:** "Interview with the seminar organizer, Shaikh Abul-Hawraa' Al-Jazaa'iri" (p.2) "On patrol with the office of Consumer Protection" (p.4) "Interview with Abu Muhammad (AM), Head of the Consumer Complaints Division" (p.6) **Key theme/s:** Issue 1 of *Islamic State Report* is immediately distinct from *Islamic State News* because its contents consist of (albeit short) articles. It focuses on *manhaj* training and consumer protection in Ar-Raqqah.
	***Islamic State Report,* Issue 2** **Issue date:** Shaban 1435 (June 2014) **Pages:** 6 **Cover Story:** "Farmers reap the rewards of their harvest by giving zakah" **Example articles/reports:** "Farmers reap the rewards of their harvest by giving zakah" (pp.1-4) "On the beat: ISR examines how the Islamic Police safeguards Ar-Raqqah and their importance in state building" (p.5-6) **Key theme/s:** Issue 2 focuses on successful harvests and the role of Islamic State Police in bringing security and stability to IS areas of control.

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[13] No author. "On the beat", *Islamic State Report* (issue 2): pp.5-6.
[14] Ibid.

	***Islamic State Report,* Issue 3** **Issue date:** Shaban 1435 (June 2014) **Pages:** 5 **Cover Story:** "Islamic State liberates the city of Mosul" **Example articles/reports:** "Islamic State liberates the city of Mosul" (pp.1-5) **Key theme/s:** This issue is devoted to celebrating IS's capture of Mosul. It begins by emphasizing the size and importance of Mosul before describing the strategy underpinning its capture. Issue 3 features photos of IS militants and residents apparently celebrating in the streets of Mosul.
	***Islamic State Report,* Issue 4** **Issue date:** Shaban 1435 (June 2014) **Pages:** 7 **Cover Story:** "Smashing the borders of the Tawaghit" **Example articles/reports:** "Smashing the borders of the Tawaghit" (pp.1-4) "The battle of Asadullah Al-Bilawi" (pp. 5-7) **Key theme/s:** This issue focuses on two topics: the destruction of the Sykes-Picot border between Syria and Iraq and the "battle of Asadullah Al-Bilawi". Most of the issue is devoted to describing the significance of the Sykes-Picot border and its implications for Prophetic predictions. The issue ends with images of IS massacring its enemies.

ISR's third issue stands out from the others in that it was devoted solely to one topic: IS's capture of Mosul. While issue 3 contained all the expected celebratory themes and imagery, it also offered ISR's authors with an opportunity to promote IS's strategic prowess in insurgency warfare:

This past Monday, the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham liberated the city of Mosul in its entirety. Campaign 'Enter upon them through the gate' succeeded in placing the city under the full control of the Islamic State….

This followed a shift in the Islamic State strategy, which now saw its forces leaving their desert strongholds in Iraq and making their way into the cities. Since the start of the jihad in 2003, the province of Al-Anbar has traditionally been the stronghold of the mujahidin, with Fallujah serving as its jihadi capital. In spite of the advantage of having a strong power base, the Islamic State understood that having just a single power base in any given region would work against them by giving their enemies a point of focus for their strikes.[15]

In its final issue, ISR heralded the destruction of the Sykes-Picot border implying that their achievement represented the fulfilment of the Prophet Muhammad's prophecy

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[15] No author. "Islamic State liberates the city of Mosul" *Islamic State Report*, issue 3 (2014), p.1.

that "[t]here will be oppressive kingship for as long as Allah wills, then He will remove it when He will. Then there will be khilafah on the prophetic methodology." [16] The implication is clear: IS's efforts are not just divinely sanctioned but foretold. It is a theme that would be central in *Dabiq*.

Dabiq (Issues 1-15)

When IS's Al Hayat Media Center replaced *ISN* and *ISR* with *Dabiq* it offered this explanation in issue 1 of the new magazine: "After a review of some of the comments received on the first issues of Islamic State News and Islamic State Report, AlHayat Media Center decided to carry on the effort – in sha'allah – into a periodical magazine focussing on issues of *tawhid* [oneness of God, monotheism], *manhaj* [methodology], *hijrah* [migration], *jihad* [struggle], and *jama'ah* [organisation]. It will also contain photo reports, current events, and informative articles on matters related to the Islamic State."[17] The logic behind the magazine's name was also articulated: "As for the name of the magazine, then it is taken from the area of Dabiq in the northern countryside of Halab (Aleppo) in Sham. This place was 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."[18] The magazine's format and structure remained broadly similar from its first issue released in July 2014 to its fifteenth issue released in July 2016. Each opened with the same quote attributed to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi: "The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq." With each issue, the reader is reminded of the fusion of the profane and sacred realms in IS's war and the imminence of the apocalypse. Indeed, the apocalypse unambiguously hangs over every issue of *Dabiq* from the opening Al-Zarqawi quote to the final page which typically featured an excerpt from the *hadiths* to highlight certain signs leading to End Times in an effort to draw historical parallels to the present.

Across fifteen issues, *Dabiq's* authors drew upon an extraordinary range of themes in articles that often appeared in recurring sections that were central to every issue. For instance, a "Feature" article, typically promoted on the cover page, brought into acute focus the central theme of that particular issue (see Table 3). "Islamic State Reports" and "Islamic State News" sections remained broadly similar in style and format to *Dabiq's* predecessor magazines – with photo reports and short articles respectively – that made up a significant portion of *Dabiq's* early issues. However, by issue 7, *Dabiq's* contents were becoming increasingly dominated by lengthier, more in-depth articles. Indeed, in *Dabiq's* later issues, the type of reporting that had appeared in relatively large "Islamic State Reports" and "Islamic State News" sections now appeared in a much shorter "Islamic State Operations" section; arguably partly a result of IS's waning fortunes in the field warranting a smaller allocation of space. Other sections such as "In the Words of the Enemy" – where IS would offer counter-narratives to the views of an opponent, typically from the West – and "Wisdom" – excerpts from the Quran or hadiths related to key themes – regularly appeared in *Dabiq's* issues.

Stable core message, shifting themes

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[16] No author. "Smashing the borders of the Tawaghit", *Islamic State Report*, issue 4 (2014), p. 2.
[17] No author. "Until it burns the Crusader armies in Dabiq" *Dabiq*, issue 1 (2014), p.3.
[18] Ibid. p.4.

Dabiq's fifteen issues span a tumultuous time in IS's history from the announcement of its so-called caliphate and the zenith of its territorial gains through a period of ultimately devastating resource, personnel and territorial losses. The magazine thus offers a fascinating insight into IS's use of propaganda deployed both proactively and reactively to shape the perceptions and polarise the support of followers as strategic conditions shift.[19] *Dabiq's* core message and the psychosocial dynamics it sought to drive remained broadly the same: increase perceptions of crisis and tie these to enemies while framing themselves (IS) as champions of true Sunni Muslims and the only hope for solving enemy-induced crises. However, *Dabiq's* authors strategically emphasised certain themes over others dependent on how it hoped to shape its audiences' interpretation of changing strategic conditions. It is useful to briefly consider how *Dabiq's* propaganda evolved over this period.

Dabiq's first two issues focused heavily on establishing the strategic, jurisprudential and theological credentials of IS's politico-military agenda. Issue 1 focused on heralding IS's establishment of its Caliphate as a manifestation of divine will, the product of applying the correct *manhaj* and unequivocal proof that "the world has divided into two camps". Issue 2 featured two large multi-part articles: "It's either Islamic State or the Flood"[20] and "The flood of the Mubahalah"[21]. The former essentially draws comparisons between the plight of IS and that of Noah while the latter articulates the *mubahalah* (imploring Allah's curse on the deceitful party) between IS and Jabhat Al-Nusrah in early-2014. As *Dabiq* explains to its readers, within months of the *mubahalah* being declared IS had reversed its losses, achieved extraordinary territorial and resource gains peaking with the establishment of its caliphate while its rivals floundered. This article epitomises the interweaving of rational- and identity-choice appeals, a signature of IS propaganda.

The next four issues of *Dabiq* emphasised calls to foreign fighters by leveraging IS's apparent politico-military successes in the field to highlight the multifaceted credibility of its agenda *and* the obligation of all "true" Muslims to migrate to "their" Caliphate.[22] For instance, the cover of issue 3 declares "A call to Hijrah" and its opening article titled "The Islamic State before al-Malhamah the immigrants to the land of Malahim" begins with this quote from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi: "So I swear by the One to whom I will return, that there is no real jihad in Iraq except with the presence of the muhajirin [migrants], the sons of the generous ummah, those who have left their tribes, those who bring victory to Allah and His Messenger."[23] This theme is reinforced by the issue's feature article "Hijrah from hypocrisy to sincerity"[24] Importantly, this message was in stark contrast to Al-Qaeda, especially as communicated in Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's *Inspire*, which had tended to discourage foreign fighters instead stressing the importance of lone mujahid attacks.[25]

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[19] For more detailed analyses of IS's *Dabiq* magazine see B. Colas, "What does *Dabiq* do? ISIS hermeneutics and Organizational Fractures within *Dabiq* magazine", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40, 3 (2017): 173-190; Haroro Ingram "An analysis of Islamic State's *Dabiq* magazine", *Australian Journal of Political Science* 51, 3 (2016): 458-477; Stuart Macdonald, "Radicalisers as Regulators: An examination of *Dabiq* magazine", *Terrorists' use of the Internet*. NATO Science for Peace and Security Series 137 (2017): 146-157.

[20] No author. "It's either Islamic State or the Flood", *Dabiq* issue 2 (2014): pp.5-11.

[21] No author. "The flood of the Mubahalah", *Dabiq* issue 2 (2014): pp. 20-30.

[22] For detailed analyses of IS foreign fighters traveling from Europe and the United States see Alastair Reed, Johanna Pohl, and Marjolein Jegerings. "The Four Dimensions of the Foreign Fighter Threat: Making Sense of an Evolving Phenomenon". The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 8, no. 1 (2017). https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ICCT-Reed-Pohl-The-Four-Dimensions-of-the-Foreign-Fighters-Threat-June-2017.pdf
Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Seamus Hughes, Bennett Clifford "The Travellers", *Program on Extremism* (2018). https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/extremism.gwu.edu/files/TravelersAmericanJihadistsinSyriaandIraq.pdf

[23] No author. "The Islamic State before al-Malhamah (the immigrants to the land of Malahim)", *Dabiq* issue 3 (2014): p.5.

[24] "Hijrah from hypocrisy to sincerity", *Dabiq* issue 3 (2014): pp.25-34.

[25] For comparative analyses of *Inspire* and *Dabiq* see N. Lorenz-Dus, L. Walker & A. Kinzel "The role of discourse analysis in terrorism studies: Comparing *Inspire* and *Dabiq*", *Terrorists' use of the Internet*. NATO Science for Peace and Security

Through issues 4, 5 and 6, IS's military successes and the variety and efficacy of its governance initiatives were a central focus, especially in detailed "Islamic State Reports" sections. The emphasis tended to shift across these issues with issue 4 dominated by content promoting successes in IS's areas of control across Syria and Iraq. In contrast, issues 5 and 6 focused more on IS's growing transnational influence with articles heralding the swearing of *bayats* (pledges) across the Middle East and North Africa[26] and praising the actions of lone actors in the West.[27]

Whether strategically or coincidentally, issue 7 appears to be significant pivot point in *Dabiq's* evolution. Three new sections were introduced with this issue: "From the Pages of History" which identifies lessons drawn from Islam's history pertinent to contemporary challenges, "Among the Believers Are Men" eulogising IS militants, and "To Our Sisters" offering content catering specifically to IS's female audiences.[28] The timing may also be significant with issue 7 being the first issue released in 2015 *and* in the aftermath of high profile events that captured global media attention (e.g. the burning to death of a Jordanian pilot featured in IS's video "Healing the Believer's chests"). Indeed, an opening article is devoted to justifying that execution ("The burning of the Murtadd pilot") [29] and the video is cross-promoted later in the issue. [30] Furthermore, the feature article titled "The Extinction of the Grayzone"[31] contains the central argument of IS's appeals to Western Muslims: with the establishment of the Caliphate there is no excuse for any "true" (i.e. IS-aligned) Muslim to avoid either traveling to IS's areas of control or acting on IS's behalf (i.e. what it would describe as "just terror"). Issue 7 represents the stylistic and structural blueprint for *Dabiq's* remaining issues.

Some notable trends emerge in *Dabiq's* later issues. The first relates to ways in which *Dabiq* sought to draw its readers deeper into its propaganda web with large multi-part articles that appeared across multiple issues as well as cross-promotional advertisements of recent or upcoming propaganda releases. For instance, the five-part article titled "The allies of Al-Qa'idah in Sham",[32] which condemned AQ-aligned rebels fighting in Syria, appeared across five issues and, much like the effect of recurring sections across multiple issues, may help to create a sense of coherence and consistency in IS's messaging over time. The purpose of cross-promoting propaganda releases, for instance the emergence in issue 9 of "Selected 10" advertisements promoting videos released by IS's wilayat-based media units, may have the effect of corralling readers towards other IS propaganda and thus coaxing them deeper into IS's "competitive system of meaning".

Second, *Dabiq's* narratives increasingly focused on transnational issues, especially concerning Western Muslims, which is in subtle contrast to its earlier issues. This is evidenced in feature articles emphasising the conspiring of Muslim and Western

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Series 137 (2017): 158-169; H. Ingram "An analysis of *Inspire* and *Dabiq*: Lessons from AQAP and Islamic State's propaganda war", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2017).

26 For example, No author. "Remaining and Expanding", *Dabiq* issue 5: pp.22-33.

27 No author. "Foreword", *Dabiq* issue 6: pp.3-5.

28 For detailed analyses of IS's appeals to women in *Dabiq* see K. Ingram "IS's appeals to Western Women: Policy Recommendations", *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (2017): https://icct.nl/publication/iss-appeal-to-western-women-policyrecommendations/ Also see K. Ingram "More than 'Jihadi Brides' and 'Eye Candy': How *Dabiq* appeals to Western women", *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (2016): https://icct.nl/publication/more-than-jihadi-brides-and-eye-candy-how-dabiq-appeals-to-western-women/

29 No author. "The burning of the Murtadd pilot", *Dabiq* issue 7: pp.5-8.

30 See No Author "New Release: The video that set Crusader hearts on fire and left them burning in rage" *Dabiq* (issue 7): p.67.

31 No author "The Extinction of the Grayzone", *Dabiq* issue 7: pp.54-66.

32 No author. "The allies of Al-Qa'idah in Sham", *Dabiq* issue 8: pp. 7-11.

leaders,[33] warnings about the "new breed of crusader" that seeks to "anger the Muslims by mocking and ridiculing" the Prophet Muhammad,[34] the stories of foreign fighters in recurring "Interview" and "Among the Believers are men" sections[35] and an increasing emphasis on terrorism in the West. [36] It is a transition that reflects both shifting conditions on the ground (e.g. during this period IS's progress in the field stalled then started to recede), *Dabiq's* primary target audience (e.g. English speaking Muslims globally) and the position of *Dabiq* within the context of IS's broader propaganda campaign (e.g. understanding its purpose within the context of other propaganda outputs).

Finally, the nature of *Dabiq's* appeals to its readership shifted considerably from 2014-15 to 2016-17. During the period of its boom (2014-2015), *Dabiq's* messaging tended to emphasise themes such as statehood, conventional politico-military activities, calls to foreign fighters, the notion of building its ranks and rational-choice appeals. However, as its fortunes hurtled towards another bust (2015-16), *Dabiq* tended to emphasise themes of unconventional politico-military activities, struggle, purification of the ranks, engaging in "just terror", and identity-choice appeals. These dynamics reflect a propaganda hedging strategy which facilitated a thematic transition circa. 2015-16 as its politico-military fortunes declined.

The fifteenth issue of *Dabiq* epitomised the aforementioned trends. *Dabiq* 15 contained three "Selected 10" ads and a cross-promotion to Al-Furqan's "The structure of the Khilafah" video, [37] focused heavily on Europe's summer of terror and particularly targeted converts [38] with content dominated by identity-choice appeals. Its central theme was clear: IS are deadlier than ever and its enemies need to consider their dire predicament. Indeed, more than previous issues, the messages in *Dabiq* 15 was designed for IS's enemies particularly in the "Foreword"[39] and other articles such as "Why we hate you and why we fight you"[40] and "Break the cross".[41] It is telling that while *ISN*, *ISR* and early issues of *Dabiq* were filled with images promoting the range and effectiveness of IS's politico-military achievements accompanied by narratives dominated by rational-choice appeals (e.g. "join because we are strong"), issue 15 focussed heavily on terrorist attacks in the West by so-called "soldiers of the caliphate" designed to inspire others with identity-choice appeals (e.g. "act because of who you are"). These themes would play a central role in IS's next magazine for English-speaking audiences: *Rumiyah*.

Table 3: Dabiq, issues 1-15

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[33] No author. "And Allah is the best of plotters", *Dabiq* issue 9: pp. 50-59; No author "From the battle of Al-Ahzab to the war of coalitions", *Dabiq* issue 11:pp. 46-55.

[34] No author. "Foreword" *Dabiq* issue 9: p.3.

[35] For example, "Interview with the wali of Khurasan", *Dabiq* issue 13: pp. 48-54; "Among the Believers are men: Abu Jandal Al-Bangali", *Dabiq* issue 14: pp.50-51.

[36] For example "Join the Caravan of Islamic state Knights in the Lands of the Crusaders", *Dabiq* issue 10: p.5. Also see the Foreword to issue 14 heralding the Brussels bombings, "Foreword", *Dabiq* issue 14: pp.4-5.

[37] No author "The structure of the Khilafah", *Dabiq* issue 15: p.3.

[38] For example, No author "Words of sincere advice from an American convert in the Islamic State to the former Christian who accepted Islam", *Dabiq* issue 15: pp.26-29; Umm Khalid Al-Finlandiyyah, "How I came to Islam", *Dabiq* issue 15: pp.36-39; No author "Interview: Abu Sa'ad at-Trinidadi", *Dabiq* issue 15: 64-69.
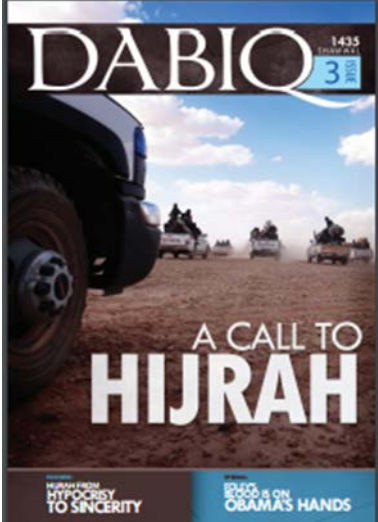
[39] No author "Foreword", *Dabiq* issue 15: pp.4-7.

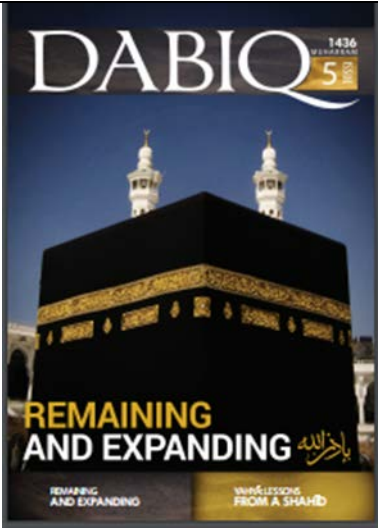[40] No author "Why we hate you and why we fight you", *Dabiq* issue 15: pp.30-33.

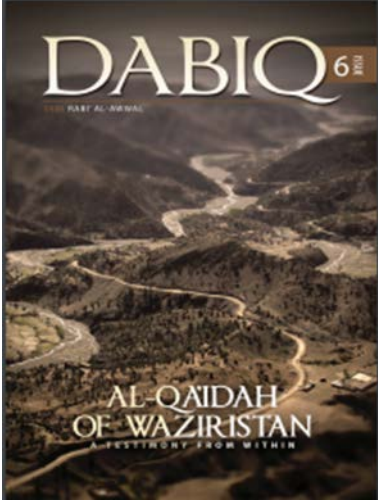[41] No author "Break the cross", *Dabiq* issue 15: pp.46-63.

***Dabiq,* Issue 1**
Issue date: Ramadan 1435 (July 2014)
Pages: 50
Feature Story: "From Hijrah to Khilafah" (pp.34-41)
Example articles/reports:
"Khilafah Declared" (pp.6-11)
"The concept of Immah (leadership) is from the millah (path) of Ibrahim" (pp. 20-29)
"Highway robbers executed" (p.45)
"Murtaddin repent in the thousands" (p.48)

Key theme/s: The primary focus of issue 1 is to herald the establishment of IS's caliphate and explore how it is both foretold and the product of applying the correct *manhaj* (i.e. methodology). Prominent "Islamic State Reports" (pp.12-19) and "Islamic State News" (pp.42-49) sections describe IS's diverse politico-military activities.
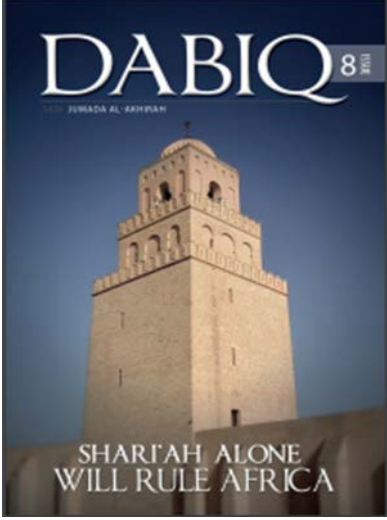
***Dabiq,* Issue 2**
Issue date: Ramadan 1435 (July 2014)
Pages: 44
Feature Story: "The Flood of the Mubahalah" (pp.20-30)
Example articles/reports:
"It's Either the Islamic State or the Flood" (pp.5-11)
"Ramadan: The blessed month" (p. 35)
"The soldiers of the Islamic State liberate the city of 'Alam" (p.38)
"Caring for the Orphans" (p.38)
"The capture of Division 17"

Key theme/s: IS focus on establishing its credibility on multiple levels using "the flood" as a key concept. Its opening article compares IS's rise to the struggles of Noah while the feature examines IS and Nusra's *mubahalah*.

Dabiq, Issue 3
Issue date: Shawwal 1435 (July/August 2014)
Pages: 42
Feature Story: "Hijrah from hypocrisy to Sincerity" (pp.25-34)
Example articles/reports:
"The Islamic State before al-Malhamah (The immigrants to the Land of Malahim)" (pp.5-11)
"Da'wah and Hisbah in the Islamic State" (pp.16-17)
"Military conquests in Ninawa and Ar-Raqqah" (pp.18-22)
"The liberation of Dabiq" (p. 35)
"Foley's blood is on Obama's hands" (p.37-38)

Key theme/s: A dominant theme is appeals to migrate to IS's caliphate with the execution of James Foley providing the bookends of this issue.

Dabiq, Issue 4
Issue date: Dhul-Hijah 1435 (September 2014)
Pages: 56
Feature Story: "Reflections on the final crusade" (pp.32-44)
Example articles/reports:
"Excerpts from 'Indeed your Lord is ever watchful' by the official spokesman for the Islamic State" (pp.6-9)
"The birth of two new Wilayat" (pp.18-20)
"A window into the Islamic State" (pp.27-29)
"A message from Sotloff to his mother days before hs execution" (p. 47-51)
"Hard Talk: The real story behind my videos" (p.52-55)

Key theme/s: The tone of issue 4 is relatively upbeat with the diversity of its field successes being promoted as a means to attract migrants to its territories.

Dabiq, Issue 5
Issue date: Muharram 1436 (October 2014)
Pages: 40
Feature Story: "Remaining and Expanding" (pp.22-33)
Example articles/reports:
"Yahya: Lessons from a Shahid" (pp.4-9)
"The fight for Wilayat Al-Anbar" (pp.10-11)
"Unifying the Ranks" (pp.12-14)
"The currency of the Khilafah" (pp.18-19)
"If I were the US President Today" (pp. 36-39)

Key theme/s: The theme of "remaining and expanding" dominates with IS promoting its new transnational wilayats. The feature article titled "Remaining and Expanding" heralds the swearing of *bayat* (pledges) to al-Baghdadi from across North Africa and the Middle

Dabiq, Issue 6
Issue date: Rabi'Al-Awwal 1436 (December, 2014)
Pages: 63
Feature Story: "Al-Qa'dah of Waziristan: A testimony from within" (pp.40-55)
Example articles/reports:
"Advice for the soldiers of the Islamic State" (pp.6-15)
"Abu Hamzah Al-Muhajir Training Camp" (pp.26-27)
"Misleading scholars and bewitching media" (pp.38-39)
"Meltdown" (pp.58-62)

Key theme/s: The transnational focus continues with issue 6. It begins by celebrating terrorist attacks in the West before promoting developments such as a new wilayat in Libya, the capture of a Jordanian pilot and criticism of Al-Qaeda in Yemen and South Asia.

Dabiq, Issue 7
Issue date: Rabi 'Al Akhir 1436 (February, 2015)
Pages: 83
Feature Story: "The extinction of the Grayzone" (pp.54-66)
Example articles/reports:
"The burning of the murtadd pilot" (pp.5-8)
"From the pages of history: An explicit ultimatum from the Salaf to the Apostates" (pp.17-19)
"Among the believers are men: Abu Qudamah Al-Misri" (pp.46-49)
"A brief interview with Umm Basir Al-Muhajirah" (pp.50-51)

Key theme/s: The feature article of issue 7 captures the central argument of IS appeals to Muslims living in the West. Three new sections appear and cross-promotion of other IS propaganda releases is more prominent. Qaeda in Yemen and South Asia.

***Dabiq,* Issue 8**
Issue date: Jumada Al-Akhirah 1436 (March, 2015)
Pages: 68
Feature Story: "Irja the most dangerous bid'ah"
(pp.39-56)
Example articles/reports:
"The Allies of Al-Qa'idah in Sham" (pp.7-11)
"The Bay'ah from West Africa" (pp.14-16)
"The announcement of two new wilayat in Iraq" (p.27)
"The twin halves of the Muhajirin" (pp.32-37)
"Paradigm Shift" (pp.64-67)

Key theme/s: The message to either travel to IS territories or engage in terrorism domestically (in their country of origin) is central here and *Dabiq*'s authors deploy a variety of messages and themes to support it.
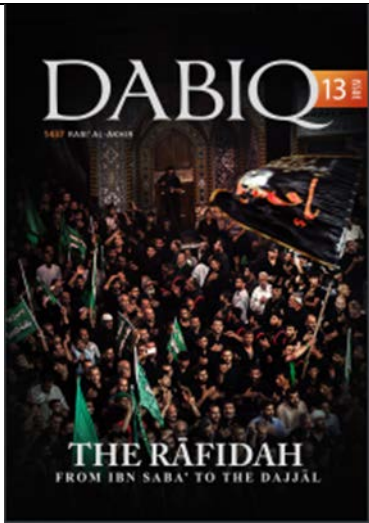

***Dabiq,* Issue 9**
Issue date: Sha'ban 1436 (May, 2015)
Pages: 80
Feature Story: "And Allah is the best of plotters"
(pp.50-59)
Example articles/reports:
"The virtues of Ribat for the Cause of Allah"
(pp.8-13)
"From the pages of history: The flags of Jahiliyyah"
(pp.20-23)
"Selected 10" (p.27, p.33, p.78)
"Slave girls or prostitutes?" (pp.18-19)
"The perfect storm" (pp. 74-77)

Key theme/s: Emphasis was placed on the close interconnection of all types of *kuffar* while warning against conspiracy theories. A far more pronounced cross-promotional effort emerges with the "Selected 10" section being introduced in addition to other cross-promotional "ads".

***Dabiq,* Issue 10**
Issue date: Ramadan 1436 (July, 2015)
Pages: 79
Feature Story: "The law of Allah or the laws of men: Is waging war against the Khilafah apostasy" (pp.50-64)
Example articles/reports:
"A fatwa for Khurasan" (pp.18-24)
"The Qawqazi caravan gains pace" (pp.36-37)
"They are not lawful spouses for one another" (pp.42-48)
"Interview with Abu Samir Al-Urduni" (pp.70-76)

Key theme/s: An increasing focus on "lone wolf" attacks in the West is highlighted in the opening pages of this issue. A broad focus on IS's politico-military efforts against great odds remains but is comparatively less prominent. addition to other cross-promotional "ads".

Dabiq, **Issue 11**
Issue date: Dhul-Qa'dah 1436 (September, 2015)
Pages: 66
Feature Story: "From the battle of al-Ahzab to the war of coalitions" (pp.46-55)
Example articles/reports:
"The allies of al-Qa'idah in Sham: Part 4" (pp.6-9)
"A selection of military operations across the Islamic State" (pp.28-30)
"A jihad without fighting" (pp.40-45)
"In the words of the enemy" (pp.56-58)

Key theme/s: The death of Mullah Omar provided IS with an opportunity to again reinforce its claim to leadership of the global *ummah*. A particularly prominent narrative is the historical and contemporary unification of Islam's enemies against the faith with IS portraying itself as the current flagship of "true" Islam against a coalition of enemies.

Dabiq, **Issue 12**
Issue date: Safar 1437 (November, 2015)
Pages: 65
Cover: "Just Terror"
Example articles/reports:
"The allies of al-Qa'idah in Yemen" (pp.5-7)
"The allies of al-Qa'idah in Sham: The End" (pp.11-16)
"A selection of military operations" (pp.25-28)
"The fate of the two prisoners: Executed after being abandoned by the Kafir nations and organizations" (pp.64)
Key theme/s: Beginning with a celebration of terrorist attacks in the West, the opening articles are devoted to criticizing al-Qaeda elements in Yemen and Syria. The emphasis on unity and action in this issue is indicative of growing pressures experienced by IS in the field. Where IS Reports and News sections once dominated, this content is now a single section of a few pages.

Dabiq, **Issue 13**
Issue date: Rabi' Al-Akhir 1437 (January, 2016)
Pages: 56
Feature Story: "The Rafidah: from Ibn Saba' to the Dajjal" (pp.32-45)
Example articles/reports:
"Kill the imams of Kufr" (pp.6-8)
"The best shuhada" (pp.20-21)
"Do they not reflect on the Quran" (pp.28-30)
"Interview with the wali of Khurasan" (pp.48-54)
"Just Terror: Let Paris be a lesson for those nations that wish to take heed" (p.55)

Key theme/s: This issue's opening and closing contents promote what IS increasingly refers to as "just terror" against the West. The "Foreword" praises the San Bernadino attacks and the issue concludes by praising the Paris attacks. There is a particular focus in this issue on enflaming sectarian tensions.

Dabiq, **Issue 14**
Issue date: Rajab 1437 (April, 2016)
Pages: 68
Feature Story: "The Murtadd Brotherhood" (pp.28-43)
Example articles/reports:
"The knights of shuhada in Belgium" (pp.6-7)
"Kill the imams of kufr in the West" (pp.8-17)
"Lessons from the fitnah of the Mongols" (pp.44-49)
"The blood of shame" (pp.52-55)
"Interview with the Amir of the Khilafah's soldiers in Bengal" (p.58-66)

Key theme/s: The opening articles of this issue praise the terrorist attacks in Brussels and calls for the killing of Muslim clerics in the West. Reports of IS's politico-military actions are dwarfed by long articles that fixate on identity-choice appeals.
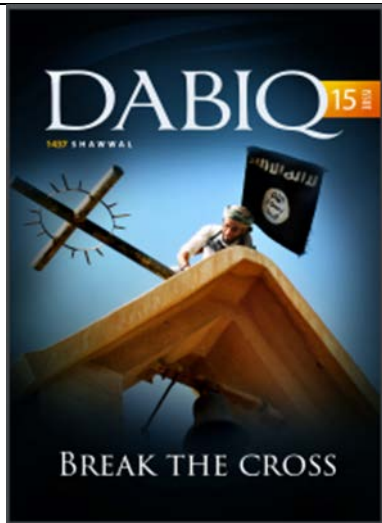
Dabiq, Issue 15
Issue date: Shawwal 1437 (July, 2016)
Pages: 82
Cover: "Break the Cross" (pp.46-63)
Example articles/reports:
"Contemplate the Creation" (pp.8-13)
"The Fitrah of Mankind and the Near Extinction of the Western Woman" (pp.20-25)
"Why we hate you and why we fight you" (pp.30-33)
"How I came to Islam" (pp.36-39)
"By the sword" (pp.78-80)

Key theme/s: The final issue of *Dabiq* is dominated by content that compels readers to join IS and take action as an obligation of faith. A variety of articles are presented that call for readers to contemplate what it is to be Muslim, the hypocrisy of the West and the requirement to attack IS's enemies. More than preceding issues, the messaging in *Dabiq*'s final issue appears to be designed for IS's enemies.

Rumiyah (Issues 1-15)

As its so-called caliphate crumbled and after a notable lull in production after the release of *Dabiq's* fifteenth issue, *Rumiyah* emerged as IS's new multilingual online magazine, the flagship of a seemingly more streamlined overall propaganda effort. Each issue of *Rumiyah* opened with a quote by Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir, the legendary IS leader who led the organisation through its post-Zarqawi period of bust: "O muwahhidin, rejoice, for by Allah, we will not rest from our jihad except beneath the olive trees of Rumiyah (Rome)." Over thirteen issues, *Rumiyah's* content mostly consisted of translated articles and infographics, often drawn from its *Al-Naba* publication, alongside limited "Exclusive" content designed specifically for, in this case, English-speaking audiences. Original content is potentially more resource and time intensive to produce and likely entails greater security risks during the production process. Translating recycled content into different linguistic versions of *Rumiyah* may have been a strategic decision to pivot towards a more efficient messaging strategy with the added advantage of deploying a consistent message to its diverse audiences if at the expense of tailored content.

Nevertheless, *Rumiyah* offered its audiences a diversity of articles and infographics that often appeared in sections adopted from *Dabiq* such as "Among the Believers are Men", "Selected 10", "Military and Covert Operations" and "Sisters". Multi-part articles published over several issues, like "The religion of Islam and the jama'ah of the Muslims"[42] and rehashed publications by former IS leaders such as Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi[43] and Abu Hamzah Al-Muhajir,[44] also played a prominent role in *Rumiyah*. The regular multi-page reports on the diversity of IS's governance initiatives that were a trademark of *Dabiq's* early issues largely disappeared. Although, in an attempt to

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[42] This article appeared in the first four issues of *Rumiyah*. For example, see No author, "The religion of Islam and the Jama'ah of the Muslims Part 4" *Rumiyah* (issue 4): pp.16-18.
[43] Al-Zarqawi's "And likewise the Messengers are afflicted, when the final outcome is theirs" was published in several parts spread over issues 8, 9 and 10. Al-Zarqawi's "Important advice for the Mujahidin" was published across issues 11, 12 and 13.
[44] Al-Muhajir's "Paths to Victory" was published in four parts across issues 2, 3, 5 and 6 of *Rumiyah*.

highlight its ability to govern, six of thirteen *Rumiyah* issues contained interviews with IS government and military officials.[45] Far more common, however, were reports of IS militants inflicting violence against its enemies on behalf of the truest of the true believers promoted in eye-catching *Al-Naba* infographics and "Military and Covert Operations" sections. It is perhaps unsurprising given IS's politico-military freefall that *Rumiyah's* messaging was dominated by identity-choice appeals that grew increasingly desperate with each issue. Indeed, by 2017, *Rumiyah* all but demanded its supporters switch-off their rational-choice reasoning, hardly surprising given IS's crushing losses in the field.

With its second issue, *Rumiyah* introduced a "Just Terror Tactics" section similar in intent to AQAP's "Open Source Jihad" section. The emergence of "Just Terror Tactics" in many ways represented an opportunity for IS to offer not only the operational, strategic and jurisprudential rationale for engaging in terrorism but a rare opportunity for rational-choice messaging that framed terrorism in the West as the cost-benefit alternative to becoming a foreign fighter. This messaging was reinforced by instructional messaging in other formats whether via video (e.g. "You must fight them o muwahhid", a multilingual instructional video showing IS supporters how to engage in knife attacks and produce the explosive acetone peroxide) or "unofficially" by IS fanboys online. It seems that IS may have recognised that as its territorial losses continue, remaining relevant means continuing to have practical appeal and instructional content imbues its message with a type of rational-choice appeal that would otherwise be missing given their ongoing losses.

Purify the Ranks, Punish the Kufr

A simple yet powerful overarching theme was common across *Rumiyah's* thirteen issues: IS's current hardships are gifts from the divine designed to purify our ranks so remain committed and punish the *kuffar* wherever you find them. With each issue, IS's propagandists presented a diverse array of messages to support not only *Rumiyah's* overarching theme but the group's central narrative that, now more than ever, IS are the only hope for solving Sunni-crises caused by their enemies. With reference to Table 4, it is useful to highlight the various ways in which *Rumiyah's* issues sought to persuade its readers in this way. For example, the "exclusive" content in *Rumiyah's* inaugural issue was a eulogy for the Australian Ezzit Raad ("Abu Mansur al-Muhajir) published in its "Among the Believers are Men" section.[46] This article showcased the ability of IS's propagandists to produce content that could simultaneously resonate with not only globally disparate English-speaking audiences but demonstrate to specific audiences that IS understood their unique local nuances. The article details the "War on Terror" in Australia, the introduction and application of "new, retrospective anti-terrorism laws" and its apparent impact on Raad and his peers. The article demonstrated a kind of "glocalisation" strategy in that it was written so that IS's transnational supporters could broadly appreciate its message but Australian audiences (especially those from the state of Victoria) would immediately recognise its local nuances.

Rumiyah's next three issues brought the publication to the end of 2016. The bulk of *Rumiyah's* contents remain devoted to themes of purification and punishment with

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[45] These interviews appeared in the following order: "Interview with the Amir of the Central Office for Investigating Grievances" (issue 1), "Interview with the wali of Tarabulus: Shaykh Abu Hudhayfah al-Muhajir" (issue 4), "Interview with the Amir of Hisban in Sinai" (issue 5), "Interview with the military Amir of Hims Wilayah" (issue 6), "Interview with the Amir of the Soldiers of the Khilafah in Misr" (issue 9) and "Interview with the Amir of the Soldiers of the Khilafah in East Asia" (issue 10).

[46] No author "Among the believers are men: Abu Mansur al-Muhajir", *Rumiyah* issue 1: pp.14-17.

articles such as "Brutality and severity towards the kuffar"[47], "Glad tidings of imminent victory to the patient"[48] and "The Pledge to fight to the death"[49] or al-Naba infographics like "The excellence of jihad".[50] However, reporting from its transnational provinces was also drawn upon to demonstrate that IS continued to remain and expand.[51] Indeed, *Rumiyah's* final issue for 2016 opened with a Foreword titled "Hijrah does not cease as long as the kuffar are fought."[52] Also notable is that Issues 2 and 3 featured *Rumiyah's* first "Just Terror Tactics" articles devoted to knife and vehicle attacks respectively while Issue 4 offered a single page infographic reinforcing the knife attack instructions. "Just Terror Tactics" would appear again in issue 5 (arson attacks) and issue 9 (hostage-taking).

Rumiyah's first issue for 2017 (issue 5) featured two "exclusive" articles titled "Collateral Carnage"[53] – articulating IS's position on the killing of women and children – and a "Just Terror Tactics" outlining the benefits of arson attacks. Indeed, fire was a prominent theme in issue 5 which promoted IS's execution of Turkish troops by incineration with articles such as "The flames of justice".[54] This may have been an attempt by IS to replicate the propaganda strategy it deployed at the beginning of 2015 with the burning death of a Jordanian pilot which featured in a video titled "Healing the Believer's Chests" with cross-promotions and explanatory articles in *Dabiq* 7. With the opening issues of 2017, IS introduced new content in *Rumiyah* with a specific "Sisters" section appearing in issue 5, cross-promotional ads for Al-Hayat video releases in issue 6, cross-promotional ads for Al-Himmah library publications in issue 7 and Rumiyah Infographics in issue 8 that went onto appear in subsequent issues.

For the first six issues of 2017 there also seemed to be a greater coherence of content around a particular message that, in its own way, supported *Rumiyah's* common overarching theme. For example, the common message in issue 6 was for IS's supporters to be wary of deceitful and treacherous Muslims with articles such as "The Rights of Muslims over each other",[55] "And do not weaken in pursuing the enemy"[56] and "Resembling the Kuffar".[57] In the aftermath of executing Turkish soldiers and the Istanbul nightclub attack such messaging clearly served the strategic purpose of justifying attacks against Muslims and underscoring IS's narrow say-do gap. The content in issue 7 focussed heavily on reinforcing IS's methodology (e.g. "Establishing the Islamic State: Between the prophetic methodology and the paths of deviants"[58]) and the need for true believers to stay the course (e.g. "That Allah should test those who believe and destroy the disbelievers"[59], "Only those of his slaves with knowledge fear Allah"[60] and "What they never told me"[61]). The cover of issue 8 featured the image of the late IS propagandist "Abu Sulayman Ash-Shami" (Ahmad Abousamra), the third IS propagandist to be eulogised in *Rumiyah* after Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani (issue 1) and Abu Muhammad al-Furqan (issue 3). For issue 9 *Rumiyah's* focus was on enflaming Muslim-

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[47] No author, "Brutality and severity towards the kuffar", *Rumiyah* issue 2 (2016): 22-25.

[48] No author, "Glad tidings of imminent victory to the patient", *Rumiyah* issue 2 (2016): 26-27.

[49] No author, "The pledge to fight to the death", *Rumiyah* issue 4 (2016): 24-25.

[50] No author, "The excellence of Jihad", *Rumiyah* issue 3 (2016): 13.

[51] For example, No author, "A message from East Africa", *Rumiyah* issue 2 (2016): 2-3; No author, "Results of the military operations in Khurasan Wilayah during the year 1437AH", *Rumiyah* issue 4 (2016): 39.

[52] No author, "Hijrah does not cease as along as the kuffar are fought", *Rumiyah* issue 4 (2016): 2-3.

[53] No author, "Collateral Carnage", *Rumiyah* issue 5 (2017): 6-7.

[54] This may have been an attempt by IS to replicate the propaganda strategy it deployed at the beginning of 2015 with the burning to death of the Jordanian pilot.

[55] No Author, "The rights of Muslims over each other", *Rumiyah* issue 6 (2017): 7.

[56] No author, "And do not weaken in pursuing the enemy", *Rumiyah* issue 6 (2017): 8-10.

[57] No author, "Resembling the Kuffar", *Rumiyah* issue 6 (2017): 17.

[58] No author, "Establishing the Islamic State: between the prophetic methodology and the paths of the deviants", *Rumiyah* issue 7 (2017): 6-9.

[59] No author, "That Allah should test those who believe and destroy the disbelievers", *Rumiyah* issue 7 (2017): 4-5.

[60] No author, "Only those of his slaves with knowledge fear Allah", *Rumiyah* issue 7 (2017): 14-17.

[61] Umm Finlandiyyah "What they never told me", *Rumiyah* issue 7 (2017): 18-20.

Christian tensions (e.g. "The ruling on belligerent Christians"[62]) while issue 10 used the achievements of IS militants in Marawi to underscore the jurisprudential legitimacy and strategic efficacy of its *manhaj* (e.g. "Interview with the Amir of the Soldiers of the Khilafah in East Asia"[63]).

With the final three issues of *Rumiyah* in 2017 there were growing signs that the war was once again taking its toll on the quality of IS's propaganda production. *Rumiyah's* eleventh issue underscored IS's desperation for supporters to act not just despite but because of the extraordinary odds facing the group (e.g. "Either we exterminate the Mushrikin or die trying"[64]). IS offered a range of angles on this message with articles from Al-Zarqawi for an historical perspective ("Important advice for the Mujahidin"[65]), a speech from IS's media spokesman ("And when the believers saw the confederates"[66]), a female perspective ("Our journey to Allah"[67]) and the personal stories of a martyr ("Among the Believers are Men: Abu Mujahid Al-Faransi"[68]). But with issue 12, basic formatting problems and stylistic inconsistencies suggested that the *Rumiyah* production team were struggling. In terms of content, *Rumiyah* 12's reflections on the battle of Mosul ("A mujahid's memories from the battle of Mosul"[69]) and a rallying cry to support the then ongoing battle for Raqqa ("It will be a fire that burns the cross and its people in Raqqa"[70]) synchronised with key themes in Al-Hayat's *Inside the Khilafah* video series. *Rumiyah's* thirteenth issue contained the full spectrum of cross-promotional content – such as advertisements for Al Hayat videos, Al-Himmah publications and even an advertisement promoting IS's "Learn the Quran"[71] app for kids – as well as "News" and "Sisters" sections and Part 1 of Al-Zarqawi's "Important advice for the Mujahidin"[72]. It would be *Rumiyah's* last issue for 2017.

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[62] No author, "The ruling on the belligerent Christians", *Rumiyah* issue 9 (2017): 4-10.

[63] No author, "Interview with the Amir of the Soldiers of the Khilafah in East Asia", *Rumiyah* issue 10 (2017): 36-41.

[64] No author, "Either we exterminate the Mushrikin or die trying", *Rumiyah* issue 11 (2017): 4-5.

[65] A. Al-Zarqawi, "Important advice for the Mujahidin: Part 1", *Rumiyah* issue 11 (2017): 6-10.

[66] Al-Muhajir, A. "And when the believers saw the confederates: A speech by the official spokesman of the Islamic State the Mujahid Shaykh Abul-Hasan al-Muhajir", *Rumiyah* issue 11 (2017): 16-21.

[67] No Author, "Our journey to Allah", *Rumiyah* issue 11 (2017): 12-15.

[68] No Author, "Among the Believers are Men: Abu Mujahid Al-Faransi", *Rumiyah* issue 11 (2017): 44-52.

[69] No author, "A mujahid's memories from the battle of Mosul", *Rumiyah* issue 12 (2017): 10-16.

[70] No Author, "It will be a fire that burns the cross and its people in Raqqah", *Rumiyah* issue 12 (2017): 32-35.

[71] No author, "Learn the Quran", *Rumiyah* issue 13 (2017): 42.

[72] Al-Zarqawi, "Important advice for the Mujahidin: Part 3 by Shaykh Abu Mus'ab Az-Zarqawi", *Rumiyah* issue 13 (2017): 22-25.

Rumiyah (issue 1)
Issue date: Dhul Hijah 1437 (September 2016)
Pages: 38
Example articles:
"Stand and die upon that for which your brothers died" (pp.2-3)
"Interview with the Amir of the Central Office for Investigating Grievances" (pp.10-12)
"Among the believers are men: Abu Mansur al-Muhajir" (pp.14-17)
"The wicked scholars are cursed" (pp.28-30)
"The kafir's blood is halal for you, so shed it" (pp.34-36)

Key theme/s: Featuring a mix of content from *Al-Naba* and original material, the death of IS's spokesman and calls to engage in terrorism in the West dominate. Hardship purifies the ranks so only the true and pure remain is a prominent theme as field pressures mount.
attack IS's enemies. More than preceding issues, the messaging in *Dabiq*'s final issue appears to be designed for IS's enemies.

*Rumiyah (*issue 2*)*
Issue date: Muharram 1438 (October 2016)
Pages: 38
Exclusive articles:
"Important memorandums" (pp.4-6)
"The shuhada of the Gulshan attack" (pp.8-11)
"Just terror tactics" (pp.12-13)
Other articles:
"Paths to victory by Abu Hamzah Al-Muhajir" (pp.18-20)
"Brutality and Severity towards the Kuffar" (pp.22-25)
"Stories of Steadfastness from the lives of the Sahabiyyat" (pp.28-30)

Key theme/s: Issue 2 clearly distinguishes between "exclusive" content and content translated from Al-Naba. "Just Terror Tactics" is a new section that provides operational advice for engaging in terrorism. The Operations section is significantly scaled down compared to Dabiq. This issue also contains an advertisement for IS's "alphabet teacher" app.

	Rumiyah (issue 3) **Issue date:** Safar 1438 (November 2016) **Pages:** 46 **Exclusive articles**: "This is what Allah and his Messenger promised us: A speech by Amirul-Muminin Abu Bakr Al-Husayni Al-Baghdadi" (pp.4-9) "Just Terror Tactics – Part 2" (pp.10-12) "Among the believers are men: Abu 'Abdillah Al-Britani" (pp.14-15) Other articles: "The weakest house is that of a spider" (pp.2-3) "The obligation of exposing wicked scholars" (pp.28-30) "Shahada of the Mujahid Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Furqan: Amir of the Media Diwan" (pp.31) Key theme/s: A translation of Baghdadi's speech reinforces the central message of this issue: hardship was promised by God and it will purify the ranks. It is a theme that dominates the exclusive content which includes another "Just Terror Tactics" section and a eulogy for a British foreign fighter
	Rumiyah (issue 4) **Issue date:** Rabi' al-Awwal 1438 (December 2016) **Pages:** 40 **Exclusive articles:** "You will remember what I have told you" (pp.4-7) **Other articles:** "Hijrah does not cease as long as the kuffar are fought" (pp.2-3) "Interview with the wali of Tarabulus" (pp.10-13) "Treatise on Hypocrisy and the Hypocrites" (pp.20-21) "The pledge to fight to the death" (pp.24-25) "Stories of victory after patience" (pp.28-29) **Key theme/s:** Opening with a renewed call to migrate to IS territories across the Middle East, South Asia and Africa, much of the content is recycled from *Al-Naba* or devoted to reporting on IS's transnational wilayats.

Rumiyah (issue 5)
Issue date: Rabi' al-Akhir 1438 (January 2017)
Pages: 44
Exclusive articles:
"Collateral Carnage" (pp.6-7)
"Just Terror Tactics: Part 3" (pp.8-10)
Other articles:
"Interview with the Amir of Hisbah in Sinai" (pp.12-15)
"The Flames of Justice" (pp.16-18)
"Traits of the Evil Scholars" (pp.26-28)
"I will outnumber the Other Nations through You" (pp.34-35)

Key theme/s: The exclusive content featured in the first issue of 2017 focused on a mix of strategic, operational and jurisprudential justifications for killing women and children ("Collateral Carnage") followed by a guide to engaging in arson attacks ("Just Terror"). Fire was a major theme with the front cover and feature story promoting the incineration execution of Turkish soldiers, perhaps an attempt to mirror the propaganda campaign that opened 2015.

Rumiyah (issue 6)
Issue date: Jumada al-Ula 1438 (February 2017)
Pages: 44
Feature article:
"Shedding light on the blessed operation in Istanbul" (pp.12-16)
Other articles:
"They say, 'We fear that a calamity may strike us'" (pp.4-6)
"And do not weaken in pursuing the enemy" (pp.8-10)
"The safe zone" (pp.18-20)
"Wala and Bara, O Women" (pp.22-24)
"Paths to Victory: Part 4" (pp.30-32)
"With the military Amir of Hims Wilayah" (pp.34-38)

Key theme/s: Cross-promotion for Al-Hayat videos acted as the bookends for this issue. Much of the opening pages were devoted to justifying the Istanbul nightclub attack – most notably the feature article "Shedding light on the blessed operation in Istanbul" which was followed by the Al-Naba infographic identifying the traits of Muslims "Resembling the Kuffar."
execution of Turkish soldiers, perhaps an attempt to mirror the propaganda campaign that opened 2015.

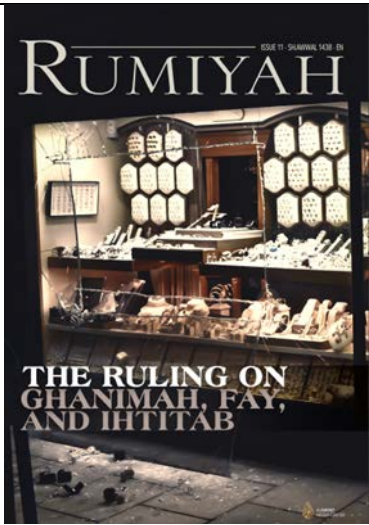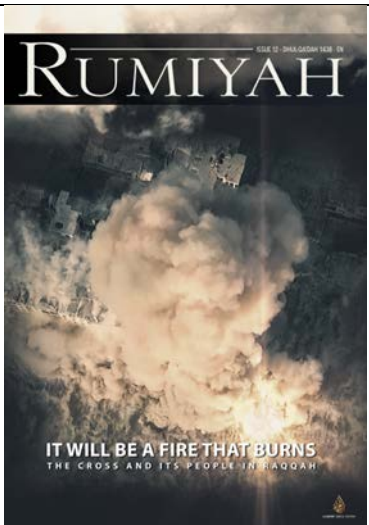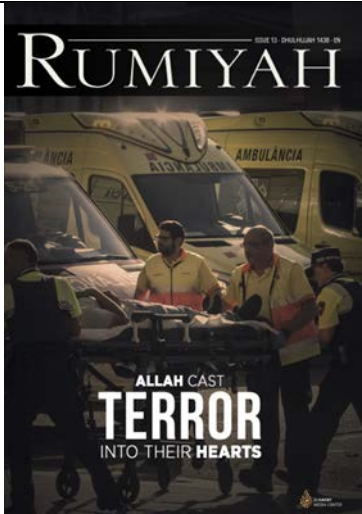|	
	***Rumiyah* (issue 7)** **Issue date**: Jumada al-Akhirah 1438 (March 2017) **Pages**: 38 **Exclusive article:** "What they never told me" (pp.18-20) **Other articles:** "Establishing the Islamic State : between the prophetic methodology and the paths of the deviants" (pp.6-9) "Rely on Allah, Not your equipment" (pp.12-13) "La Ilaha Illallah in Word and Deed" (pp.22-24) "The flesh of your spouse is poisonous" (pp.30-32) Key theme/s: The overarching message calls for Muslims to understand the world and act according to their identity while not being overawed by material losses. It is a theme incessantly reinforced by highlighting how this principle must uncompromisingly permeate every aspect of collective and individual life.
	***Rumiyah* (issue 8)** **Issue date**: Rajab 1438 (April 2017) Pages: 48 **Exclusive articles**: "The Kafir's wealth is halal for you, so take it" (pp.12-15) **Other articles:** "Establishing the Islamic State: Part 2" (pp.8-11) "And likewise the messengers are afflicted, then the final outcome is theirs" (pp.20-25) "Being blessed with health and tested with illness" (pp.30-32) "Those who seek the judgement of the Tawaghit" (pp.34-36) "Among the Believers are Men" (pp.40-45) **Key theme/s:** This issue featured a eulogy devoted to the chief propagandist responsible for Dabiq magazine and other Al-Hayat productions, Ahmad Abousamra (Shaykh Abu Sulayman Ash-Shami), as part of Rumiyah's recurring "Among the Believers are Men" section. His example was highlighted as epitomizing a key theme for issue 8: this is the divinely promised period of death and destruction to test the believers

Rumiyah (issue 9)
Issue date: Sha'ban 1438 (May 2017)
Pages: 58
Exclusive articles:
"Be Patient, for Indeed the promise of Allah is True" (pp.26-35)
"Just Terror Tactics: Part 4" (pp.46-51)
Other articles:
"The ruling on the beligerent Christians" (pp.4-10)
"The Woman is a shepherd in her husband's home and responsible for her flock" (pp.18-21)
"They took their scribes and monks as Lords beside Allah" (pp.22-25)
"Interview with the Amir of the Soliders of the Khilafah in Misr" (pp.52-55)

Key theme/s: Inciting Christian-Muslim tensions is the key theme in this issue. A variety of articles are devoted to highlighting different examples of the source and result of Christian deviancy and animosity. "Just Terror Tactics" returns with an article devoted to hostage-taking and an infographic on conducting truck attacks.

Rumiyah (issue 10)
Issue date: Ramadan 1438 (June 2017)
Pages: 46
Exclusive articles:
"Important memorandums" (pp.12-14)
Other articles:
"Be a supporter, not a demoralizer" (pp.16-19)
"Establishing the Islamic State: Part 4" (pp.20-26)
"Among the believers are men: Abu Sabah al-Muhajir" (pp.28-30)
"With the Amir of the Soldiers of the Khilafah of East Asia" (pp.36-41)

Key theme/s: The so-called East Asia wilayat's Marawi-operation featured prominently in the Foreword, Among the Believers Are Men, Interview and News sections of this issue. The exclusive content leveraged this context by reiterating the jurisprudential legitimacy and strategic efficacy of ISIS's method as a means achieve individual, collective and socio-political success.

Rumiyah (issue 11)
Issue date: Shawwal 1438 (July 2017)
Pages: 60
Exclusive articles:
"And when the believers saw the confederates" (pp.16-21)
Other articles:
"Either we exterminate the mushrikin or die trying" (pp.4-5)
"Important advice for the mujahidin: Part 1" (pp.6-10)
"Our journey to Allah" (pp.12-15)
"The ruling on ghanimah, fay, and ihtitab" (pp.28-39)
"Know your worth, O enemy of the nations" (pp.54-57)

Key theme/s: The opening pages of this issue calls for true believers to achieve glory by either killing ISIS's enemies or being killed themselves in this pursuit. These physical battles are framed as manifestations of a multidimensional war between ISIS-aligned Muslims and its enemies that is at once cosmic, psychological, physical, gendered, historical and contemporary.

Rumiyah **(issue 12)**
Issue date: Dhul-Qa'dah 1438 (August 2017)
Pages: 46
"The Muslim society between human reality and misleading fantasies" (pp.6-8)
"A mujahid's memories from the battle of Mosul" (pp.10-16)
"Important advice for the Mujahidin: Part 2" (pp.24-31)
"It will be a fire that burns the cross and its people in Raqqah" (pp.32-35)
"The female slaves of Allah in the houses of Allah" (pp.36-38)

Key theme/s: With the loss of Mosul, this issue reflects on IS's efforts to defend the city ("A mujahid's memories from the battle of Mosul") while promoting its efforts in other battlefields. Stylistically and structurally this issue suggests the ongoing war on ISIS is impacting its propaganda production.

	Rumiyah (issue 13) Issue date: Dhul-Hijjah 1438 (September 2017) Pages: 44 Articles: "The rule of the shari'ah, not the rule of jahiliyyah" (pp.6-8) "Take advantages of your spare time before you become occupied" (pp.10-12) "Important advice for the mujahidin: Part 3" (pp.22-25) "The characteristics of the munafiqin: Part 1" (pp.26-29) "The hijrah of Umm Sulaym Al-Muhajirah" (pp.30-35) Key theme/s: The truest of the true believers will never cease fighting until the Caliphate is reinstated or martyrdom is achieved.

Conclusion: Lessons for CT-CVE strategic communication practictioners

"All things considered, it is no exaggeration to say that the media operative is a martyrdom-seeker without a belt! This decoration is well-deserved."
Excerpt from *Media operative, you are also a mujahid*, Al-Himma Library

The collection of primary sources presented in this paper spans four magazines, thirty-five issues and almost three and a half years of seismic strategic shifts across multiple regions. Rather than delving into an in-depth content analysis of each issue, this study simply sought to provide the fields of research and practice with a quick reference guide to IS's English-language magazine. These primary sources offers valuable lessons for both understanding IS propaganda and developing CT-CVE strategic communication campaign and message design approaches.[73] This paper concludes by drawing out four key trends from the preceding section and its implications for CT-CVE practitioners.[74]

1. IS's English-language magazines use a mix of rational- and identity-choice messaging to provide its audiences with a "competitive system of meaning" designed to shape the perceptions and polarise the support of friends and enemies alike.

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[73] For analyses of CT-CVE strategic communication approaches see Kurt. Braddock & John Horgan, "Towards a guide for constructing and disseminating counternarratives to reduce support for terrorism", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 39, no. 5 (2016): pp. 381-414; Alastair Reed et al "Countering Terrorist Narratives", *Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs* (November 2017). https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Reed-Ingram-Whittaker-Narratives.pdf; J. Berger, "Countering Islamic State Messaging through 'Linkage-Based' Analysis", *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 8, no. 2 (2017). https://icct.nl/publication/countering-islamic-state-messaging-through-linkage-based-analysis. J.M Berger, "Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption", The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague 7, no. 5 (2016).

[74] The CT-CVE strategic communications guidelines outlined here are based on the "linkage-based" approach. For more see Haroro Ingram "A 'Linkage-Based' Approach to Combating Militant Islamist Propaganda: A Two-Tiered Framework for Practitioners", *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 7, no. 6 (2016). https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ICCT-Ingram-A-Linkage-Based-Approach-Nov2016.pdf

It is important that practitioners do not fixate on the more rudimentary mechanistic aims of violent extremist propaganda, e.g. recruitment of supporters and inspiring fear in enemies. Violent extremist propagandists appreciate that achieving these rudimentary aims is the likely by-product of satisfying the *raison d'être* of propaganda messaging: to provide audiences with a "lens" (i.e. a "competitive system of meaning") through which to understand themselves and the world more broadly. Figure 2 offers a useful way to think about not only the strategic logic of IS's messaging but the "competitive system of meaning" it offers target audiences. By coaxing audiences into seeing the world through IS's strategically constructed lens, it is easier to recruit and radicalize supporters as well as lure enemies into the psychological and politico-military traps which are so essential to those fighting asymmetric wars against superior opponents. The extent to which these dynamics are intuitive or strategic is perhaps debatable but two points are important to keep in mind. First, analysis of IS's propaganda doctrine (*Media operative you are also a mujahid*) indicates that strategy plays a significant role as a driver of IS propaganda efforts.[75] Second, whether intuition or strategy, it does not alter the psychosocial and strategic forces at play.
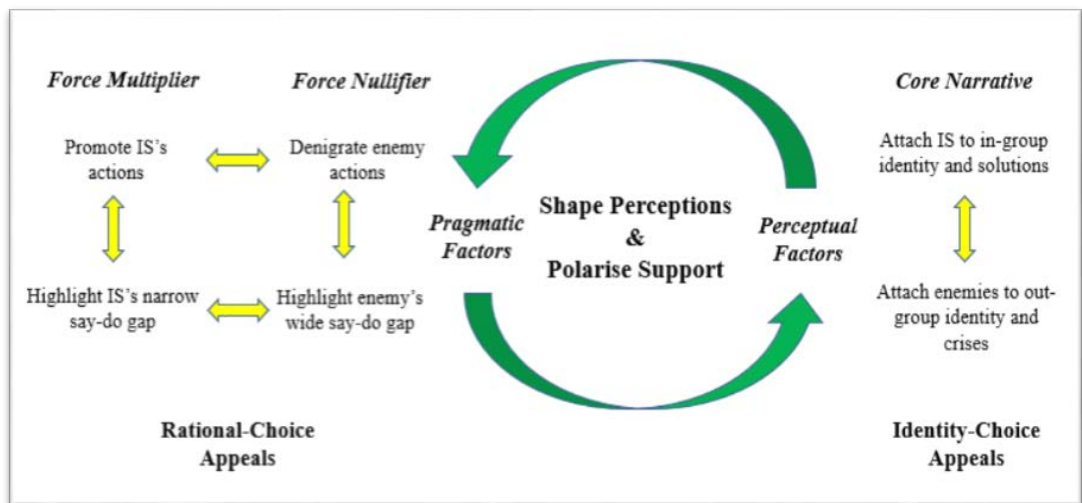

Figure 2: The strategic logic of IS propaganda

Ultimately, Figure 2 represents the most basic mechanics of the strategic logic that drives IS's propaganda machine. As this study has briefly highlighted, IS deploy an extraordinary range of propaganda strategies and levers that contribute to these dynamics. Practitioners need to be able to identify and understand the range of strategies IS deploys as part of its propaganda effort. For example, in the pages of *ISN, ISR, Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* IS have:

- used history as a tool to frame their messaging particularly as a means to legitimise certain political and military actions over others [Framing];
- designed propaganda to "bait" adversaries into misguided messaging and politico-military responses that IS then follow up with second- and third wave messaging [Baiting];
- sequenced the order of contents in its magazines in order to maximise the impact of its narratives [Ordering/Sequencing of content];

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[75] For more see Charlie Winter, "Media Jihad: The Islamic State's Doctrine for Information Warfare". *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence*, 13 February 2017.

- inundated articles in *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* with excerpts from the Quran and hadiths which, along with rarely identifying the author of its contents, imbues its message with a sense of being inherently credible if not foretold [Communication by Quotation];
- demonstrated to target audiences an understanding of local nuances while ensuring overarching themes remain broadly pertinent so as not to lose broader appeal [Glocalisation];[76]
- cross-promoted propaganda produced by its central and wilayat based media units as a means to show the interconnectedness of its message, lure potential supporters deeper into its system of meaning and potentially create a culture of conformity (e.g. trademark structure, flow and stylistics) and innovation (a necessity if the products of provincial units are to be selected by central) within its propaganda apparatus [Cross-promotion].

CT-CVE strategic communications should seek to dismantle IS's "competitive system of meaning" with messaging that targets the rational- and identity-choice "linkages" that IS uses to (a.) bind itself to solutions and its enemies to crises and (b.) force multiply the effects of its actions and nullify those of opponents.

An understanding of the strategic logic that drives IS propaganda is designed to help practitioners satisfy the first rule of CT-CVE strategic communications: "don't do violent extremists any favors". At a very practical level this means avoiding the dissemination of messages that contribute to the aims of IS propaganda. This may seem obvious yet practitioners frequently (if inadvertently) break this first rule. Ideally, CT-CVE messaging should be tailored to dismantle the linkages, represented by the arrows in Figure 2, that drive the strategic logic of its propaganda effort and bind together IS's "competitive system of meaning". The "linkage-based" approach to CT-CVE strategic communications recommends deploying a combination of rational- and identity-choice messaging both defensively (i.e. to counter violent extremist propaganda) and offensively (i.e. to initiate discourse and/or trigger a counter from adversaries) with a preference for the latter.[77] This could involve messages that seek to:

- link government or civil society initiatives to solutions for crises pertinent to target audiences;
- link violent extremist actions to crises in target audiences;
- highlight the disparity between violent extremist claims in their propaganda and their actual actions in the field;
- highlight how government or civil society initiatives match the promises/claims in its messaging;

These fundamental mechanics need to be augmented by a range of strategies and levers. The rationale for such an approach is simple: certain messaging strategies and themes may appeal to some members of a target audience more than others thus a range and diversity of strategies is more likely to cater to a motivationally diverse spectrum of target audiences. Moreover, the deployment of multiple strategies and levers may help to create a compounding effect upon target audiences which is potentially lost with the deployment of only a single strategy. Cross-promotion may also be a useful means to maximise the effect of each message and the campaign more broadly.

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[76] Glocalisation strategy.
[77] For more on the need to prioritise offensive over defensive CT-CVE messaging see Alastair Reed "IS Propaganda: Should we counter the narrative?" *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* – The Hague (2017).

2. Over the period of 2014-17, IS's English-language magazines appear to deploy a "hedging" strategy characterised by certain themes being prioritised over others during periods of boom (e.g. 2014-15) versus periods of bust (e.g. 2016-17).

IS's English language magazines – as well as its propaganda campaign more broadly – appears to deploy a thematic "hedging" strategy that reflects not only the strategic calculations of its propagandists but facilitates strategic pivots – in both messaging and action – as conditions in the field change. As graphically represented in Figure 3, IS's propaganda tends to emphasise themes of statehood (epitomised by the Caliphate), conventional politico-military activities, "build the ranks", calls for foreign fighters and rational-choice appeals during periods of boom (e.g. circa 2014-15). During periods of bust (e.g. circa 2016-17), IS's propaganda tends to emphasise themes of struggle and sacrifice, unconventional politico-military activities, "purify the ranks", calls for "just terror" and identity-choice appeals (see Figure 3). In many ways *ISN* and *ISR* are case studies in IS's coming boom while *Dabiq* is a case study in IS propaganda from boom to coming bust. *Rumiyah*, on the other hand, emerges as a case study of IS propaganda during a period of bust. However, as highlighted in the preceding section, bust themes did not entirely disappear during periods of boom nor did boom themes disappear entirely during periods of bust. Thematic hedging allows IS's propagandists to strategically pivot its messaging as conditions in the field change and its politico-military activities and those of its adversaries shift.
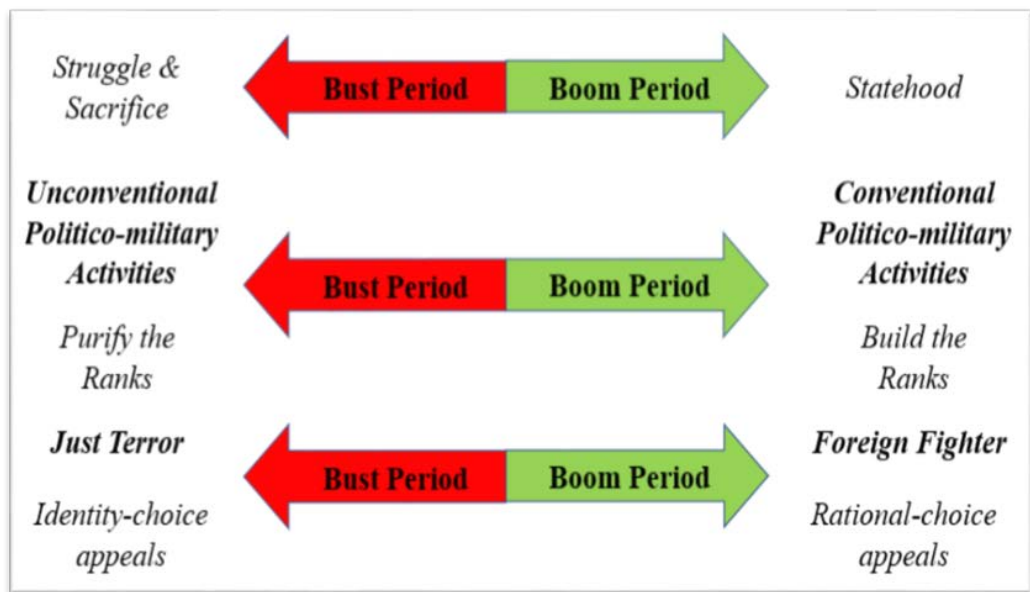

Figure 3: Hedging

In recognising the characteristics of IS's 'hedging' strategy, CT-CVE strategic communications practitioners are better positioned to shape their campaign and message design to pre-empt IS's strategic pivots in action and messaging.

At a campaign design level, cohering a messaging strategy around a central narrative helps to buffer CT-CVE efforts against IS's hedging strategy. Understanding the signatures of IS's propaganda hedging has important implications for practitioners. First, IS's use of "hedging" underscores the importance of CT-CVE practitioners devising a simple overarching narrative (i.e. a narrative-based approach) to cohere their messaging campaign rather than a narrow selection of themes (i.e. a thematically-based approach). Consider, for instance, the argument that was popular in 2015-16 that anti-IS

counternarratives should focus on themes such as undermining IS's concept of the caliphate and its statehood claims. While such an approach makes intuitive sense given IS's messaging at the time, it ignored the fact that IS's application of hedging meant that it would also deploy bust themes during those boom periods. In short, the counterstrategies risked focusing on the dominant theme while ignoring the hedge. Moreover, a focus on countering IS's claims of statehood and the caliphate ultimately meant that such CT-CVE strategic communications efforts would be slow to respond to IS's strategic pivot. Indeed, as the so-called Caliphate crumbled through 2016-17, IS had already pivoted to emphasising unconventional politico-military activities and the imminent period of purification. Meanwhile, CT-CVE strategic communication efforts scrambled with the "what's next?" question long after the seeds of the IS propaganda (and politico-military) pivot were planted.

At a message design level, the difference in IS propaganda between periods of boom and bust is an incongruity that anti-IS messaging should seek to exploit. Leveraging an adversary's "say-do gap", i.e. the disparity between what one says and one's actions, is a potent messaging strategy. Strategic communications efforts that highlight the contrast between IS boom and bust messaging will expose inconsistencies in both its messaging and actions. For example, CT-CVE strategic communications by non-Muslim actors (e.g. Western secular governments) should focus on rational-choice oriented messaging that contrasts the promises of IS's governance initiatives and life in its caliphate with the starkly different reality. Local and regional actors (e.g. Muslim state and non-state actors) should look to highlight jurisprudential discrepancies that may emerge in IS's propaganda. For example, IS's mubahalah in 2014 may be a particularly potent factor to leverage given the speed with which IS's fortunes have waned.

3. The strategic role of IS's English-language magazines must be understood within the context of trends across its overall propaganda campaign.

It is essential that the role of IS's English-language magazines are understood within the context of the group's overall propaganda effort. The four magazines examined here represent a specific format (i.e. magazines), disseminated on a specific medium (i.e. online), targeting a certain audience (i.e. English-speaking Muslims, predominantly living in the West) with long form messages (i.e. each issue is several dozen pages in length) disseminated periodically (e.g. monthly, quarterly). After all, IS deploys a multitude of formats (e.g. radio, video, audio) using online (e.g. social media) and offline (e.g. posters) mediums with a mix of short (e.g. 1-2 minutes audiovisual, photo reports) and long (e.g. over 3 minute audiovisual, multipage articles) form messages. Importantly, IS's propaganda campaign has typically been quantitatively dominated by short form messages designed to provide its target audiences with a steady flow (if not a flood) of, for example, photo reports as well as brief statements and audiovisual communiques that are disseminated by its online and offline networks. This may have the effect of priming target audiences for IS's longer form messages, whether online magazines or lengthier audiovisuals. This priming effect may be further reinforced by the tendency for IS's longer form messages to build on themes and narratives that feature in its shorter form messages. CT-CVE strategic communication campaigns need to be calibrated to confront this campaign rollout method.

The KISMI principle (Keep It Simple, Maximise Impact) for rolling-out a CT-CVE strategic communication campaign is characterized by messaging cycles dominated by PS-PS (Persuasive-Simple, Positive-Short) messages punctuated with TANDEM (Thematically Accumulated, Narrative Driven, Emotion Motivators) messaging.

The Keep It Simple Maximise Impact (KISMI) principle of rolling out a CT-CVE strategic communication campaign emerged from three crucial findings to emerge from the Counter-Terrorism Strategic Communication (CTSC) Project. First, content analyses of violent extremist propaganda suggests that its messaging may seek, whether intuitively or strategically, to drive automatic over deliberative thinking in its audiences by manipulating mental models and social factors which cumulatively may increase their susceptibilities to cognitive biases. Second, human cognitive abilities tend to be reduced under stressful conditions, e.g. stress acts as a buffer for activating deliberative thinking. This is important for CT-CVE messaging because those most susceptible to radicalization are, by definition, individuals and groups experiencing perceptions of crisis (i.e. under stress). Third, whether intuitively or strategically, violent extremist propaganda tends to leverage these psychosocial forces with messaging designed to increase perceptions of crisis. It is for these reasons that the KISMI principle argues that the majority of the messaging deployed by a CT-CVE strategic communications effort should be:

- Persuasive: the message is deployed with the intent of leveraging rational or identity choice decision-making in its audiences. In other words, messaging is deployed with persuasive intent and never for simply informational purposes.
- Simple: the message is direct and unambiguous and does not rely on its audiences engaging in complex deliberative considerations in order to achieve its intent.
- Positive: the message focuses on the benefits of certain rational or identity choice decisions. In contrast, negative messaging focuses on the detrimental impact of certain rational or identity choice decisions.
- Short: whether written, verbal or audiovisual, the message is brief in length.

As illustrated in Figure 4, PS-PS messaging should dominate at both the message cycle (i.e. a designated period of message dissemination linked to a particular event or issue) and overall campaign levels. However, PS-PS messaging should be punctuated by the strategic dissemination of long-form TANDEM messages that are:

- Thematically Accumulated: the message brings together the key themes which featured in the PS-PS messaging that preceded it in the messaging cycle. Put another way, the PS-PS messaging acts as a primer for the fusion of themes that appear in the TANDEM message.
- Narrative Driven: the message ties together those aforementioned themes into a story. This narrative may use certain characters, issues or events to explore the relationship between those themes.
- Emotion Motivators: the message weaves emotion-based motivators pertinent to the target audience into its narrative.

As graphically represented in Figure 4, the purpose of deploying TANDEM messaging is to leverage the dynamics of target audience priming created by the preceding period of PS-PS messaging. The themes, persuasive intent and secondary aims of the TANDEM messaging are reinforced by more PS-PS messaging that culminates again in TANDEM messaging to end the message cycle. With careful campaign level planning, message cycles can be synchronized to create a cumulative compounding impact on target audiences over the course of a campaign.
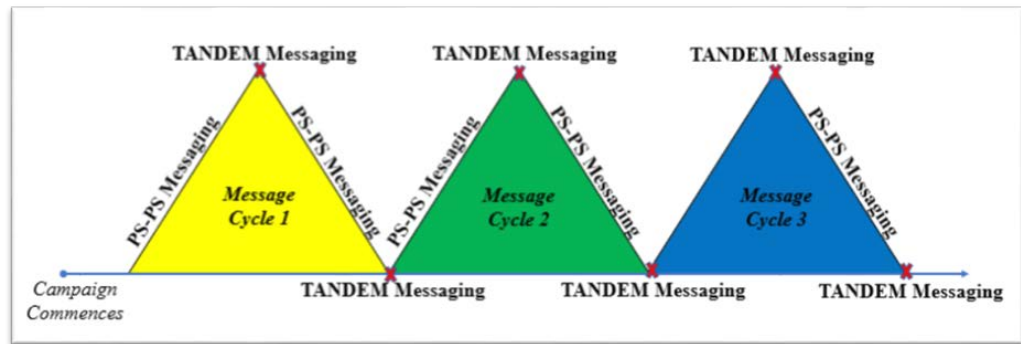
Figure 4: Synchronising PS-PS and TANDEM messaging

4. The appearance of instructional material in IS's Rumiyah magazine reflects both its propaganda hedging strategy and politico-military pivot circa. 2016-17.

CT-CVE practitioners should interpret the emergence of Rumiyah's "Just Terror Tactics" section as a product of several interconnected dynamics. First, "Just Terror Tactics" offered a rare opportunity for IS's propagandists to disseminate rational-choice messaging to English-speaking audiences. Second, instructional material promises to generate an almost guaranteed "force multiplying" impact on IS's propaganda aims. This occurs primarily because the media have tended to report on the latest "Just Terror Tactics" section as somehow indicative of an ever-present terrorist threat thus inadvertently amplifying the reach of such messaging. Third, the dissemination of instructional material acts as a form of "preparatory offensive messaging" whereby it essentially primes the information theatre for a certain event, in this case a so-called "inspired" terrorist attack, the group will then respond to with waves of secondary messaging. This approach sets up a propaganda "trap" whereby IS can lay claim to the violent actions of an individual with whom they have had potentially no prior contact and thus no prior knowledge. It is a claim which government messaging and media reporting have too often inadvertently verified and amplified rather than countered. Fourth, terrorist attacks in the West, including so-called "inspired" attacks", are the asymmetric warfare equivalent of "strategic bombing" designed to undermine the morale of target populations and coax democracies into misguided responses that can then be exploited. Recognising these factors must inform post-incident messaging plans.

CT-CVE post-incident messaging should seek to undermine the strategic logic and impact of inspired attacks.

Two simple lessons provide a useful foundation for informing post-incident CT-CVE messaging frameworks. First, government and civil society communications in the immediate aftermath of a terrorist plot or incident should be guided by the first rule of CT-CVE messaging: "don't do violent extremists any favors". Speculative commentary that attributes responsibility for an attack to a certain violent extremist group or repeats violent extremist claims of responsibility helps groups like IS to achieve their multifaceted aims. While the political and media capital may prove too great for some to resist, overtime closer adherence to this simple recommendation may help to generate a culture of "self-policing" amongst politicians, journalists and media commentators. Second, CT-CVE strategic communications should actively dispute violent extremist claims of responsibility for "inspired" attacks, i.e. where there is no direct link between the perpetrators and the group. Allowing violent extremists, like IS, to make such claims affords them all the "upsides" of a terrorist attack without the risks associated with direct operational planning and engagement. Far better to remove the

incentives for IS to claim "inspired" attacks thereby potentially helping to drive a strategic pivot towards directed attacks.

Final Remarks

This paper offered the fields of research and practice with a quick reference guide for IS's English-language magazines circa 2014-2017. It concluded by drawing out four trends and their implications for CT-CVE strategic communication practitioners pertinent to confronting IS messaging and potentially violent extremist propaganda more broadly. Future publications will expand upon the primary source materials and findings in this study.

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Islamic State's English-language magazines, 2014-2017: Trends & implications for CT-CVE strategic communications

A quick reference guide to Islamic State News (issues 1-3), Islamic State Report (issues 1-4), Dabiq (issues 1-15) and Rumiyah (issues 1-13)

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12-3-2018

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