
JIHADISM AND TERRORISM

THE GLOBAL TERRORISM NARRATIVES: TYPOLOGY OF THE ISLAMIC STATE'S MEDIA PROPAGANDA

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The present article discusses the global terrorism narratives exemplified by the media strategies of the Islamic State (IS).¹ The authors conclude that the 'soft power' of the IS was based on three components: culture, political ideology, and foreign policy. The sources of the 'soft power' were the elements and images that allowed the IS to gain control over the consumer. Throughout its existence, the IS had been able to promote itself as a popular and attractive 'global brand', skillfully instrumentalizing information and foreign policy strategies. The wide coverage of content distributed via the Internet exponentially increased the audience that terrorists might be interested in. Such organizations could distribute content over the Internet not subject to external control. The promotion of extremist rhetoric through a growing number of Internet platforms encouraged acts of violence, which was also a general trend. Terrorist propaganda in cyberspace addressed a variety of goals and audiences. It adapted, in particular, to reach potential or actual supporters of extremists or to share a common extremist ideology. The Internet was used not only as a means for disseminating extremist publications, but also to develop relationships with potential supporters.

Keywords: *global terrorism, the Islamic State, propaganda, media strategies, information security.*

Introduction

Although the IS might be considered defeated after Al-Bagdadi's death, the radical extremist ideologies still remain widespread among terrorist and extremist groups. They, including Al-Qaeda, exploit cyberspace as a communications platform. These groups' online propaganda and narratives have been examined in a number of studies (Whine 1999; Lachow and Courtney 2007; Denning 2010; Awan and Blakemore 2016; Michael

2013; Greene 2015; Aly *et al.* 2017; Bloom *et al.* 2017). Dolatabadi and Seifabadi (2017) state that globalization has led to the emergence and enhancement of resistant and fundamentalist identities of the ISIS group by challenging the ideological and monologue identities. Many researchers describe the so-called 'Islamic State' (IS) and other terrorist organizations as relying on the Internet (primarily via online networks and social media applications) to disseminate their extremist rhetoric and recruit people to their cause. Some even describe them seeking to establish a digital Caliphate and the generation of cyber jihadists, expanding the scope of local conflicts to a global appeal (Rane and Sumra 2012; Archetti 2015; Atwan 2015; Fernandez 2015; Rane 2015; Awan 2017; Sardarnia and Safizadeh 2017). This paper will address the phenomenon of IS's success as a mass movement and its use of 'soft power' via cyberspace to gain followers.

The notion of 'soft power' as it forms part of the IS's strategy, including its media strategy, consists of three components: culture, political ideology and foreign policy. The sources of 'soft power' are those that attract consumers, that is those elements and images that let the person who applies this power to win the hearts and minds of the consumers. An American political expert and creator of the 'soft power' strategy, Joseph Nye, has pointed out that the information space is the primary space for 'soft power', as it is based on intangible things: images, senses and values (Nye 1990). The application of 'soft power' allows a flexible foreign policy strategy that can transform depending on circumstances. This power is based on the attractiveness of the cultural images and its ability to form beliefs in the minds of the people that are advantageous for the entity applying the strategy. Throughout its existence, the IS has skillfully instrumentalized this strategy, turning itself into a popular and attractive 'global brand'. It presents itself not just as a terrorist group, involved in assaults, robberies and destabilization of a certain region, but as a political organization.

The IS was one of the most prosperous and numerous modern terrorist groups. It is difficult to associate this organization with any specific politico-geographical entity; among other issues, it has changed its name multiple times: 'Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia', then 'Al-Qaeda in Iraq', then 'The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant', finally arriving at the current variant, 'the Islamic State'.

This implies that the IS did not belong to any specific entity. However, the fact that the IS has been established in areas formerly under control of Al-Qaeda leads to conclusion that the leaders of this new state at least have had the experience of handling captured territories.

The Islamic State represented a new type of terrorist organization and that is why it has become the core of transnational armed jihadist movements. The following distinctive features of the Islamic State, which differentiate it from other terrorist organizations, can be highlighted:

- 1) Rapid growth of its influence in Syria, Egypt, Libya and Iraq;
- 2) Vast criminal financial turnover in comparison with other terrorist organizations;
- 3) Absence of other large terrorist organizations able to compete with the IS both in its own region and worldwide;

4) Well-planned information intervention that facilitates the distribution of information and propaganda from the IS both in the Middle East as well as countries in Central and Southeast Asia;

5) Financial, political and ideological support from Muslims living in Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East;

6) Prominent warfighting and military planning, shifting from sporadic terrorist activities aimed at drawing attention to the organization or frightening the population to full scale and severe offensive operations;

7) Creation of its own media structure (Internet resources, television, press), the activity of which is aimed at forming positive images of terrorism and offering justification for the organization's actions;

8) International nature of the organization, which considers terrorism as an information weapon;

9) Unwillingness to engage in dialog with the authorities and persistence in performing active military actions in order to achieve their own goals;

10) Active recruitment of young people and introduction of the ideology of Caliphate to people worldwide via mass media and social networks (Teslenko and Pestrilova 2015).

The features of movements like the IS have been widely studied. Archetti (2015) provides a communication-based explanation of the phenomenon of radicalization, coming to the conclusion that communication technologies can form both direct relationships (through phone, e-mail, *etc.*) and indirect relationships (*e.g.*, admiration of a terrorist leader developed through watching speeches available online). Aly *et al.* (2017) pay attention to the role of charismatic preachers who act as 'mediators' between ideological pronouncements of the group's leaders and the target audience through online sermons and other materials spread on the Internet. Stern and Berger (Stern and Berger 2015) describe the IS as a group regarding themselves as the Islamic State Electronic Army, the efforts of which are aimed at social media messaging, hacking and security.

A substantive part of the body of research in this area is devoted to the role of religion in the formation of violent extremist ideas and the evolution of terrorist organizations. Rabasa and Benard (2015) note that radical ideas stem from the feeling of disaffection and a search for identity; Mozaffari underlines that the IS is based on following the sharia'h law (Mozaffari 2007). Scholars addressing modern extremist movements agree that these processes intensified in the digital era because the Internet provides more opportunities for their implementation (Sageman 2011; Klausen 2015; Farwell 2014; Greene 2015; Aly *et al.* 2017; Awan 2017; Al-Rawi 2018). Mahood and Rane (2017) consider IS recruitment propaganda as not only reflecting the organization's selective manipulation and extreme interpretations of Islam, but also as a contemporary manifestation of Islamist political ideology. They also stress that these factors resonate in the IS's selective use of Islamist narratives, images and sounds in its media content and in its descriptions of self and others.

The IS media strategy, as outlined by Ali (2015), is as a set of methods used to ensure coverage in the world's traditional media. The first step entails isolation of areas under IS control, excluding journalists to ensure total control over information. This

differentiates the approach of the IS from, for example, Al-Qaeda's strategies, which supposed a certain degree of cooperation with journalists based on mutual interest. The next method to be mentioned is professionalized propaganda techniques that help terrorists to provide high-quality packaged materials that are ready to be published. More than that, the IS has multiple media departments responsible for different areas of propaganda.

Archetti (2015) discusses the IS narratives and regards them as socially constructed rhetorical devices arising from a social network, drawing a distinction between individual and collective narratives. The first cluster of narratives is connected with such spheres as identity ('who we are'), knowledge ('what we know') and action ('what we do'), and in this case, communication technologies help to extend these relationships beyond the field of face-to-face communications. Collective narratives can be promoted for specific mobilization purposes.

Fernandez (2015) focuses on the 'soft side' IS narratives aimed at demonstrating the daily life within the group and thus attracting new fighters to join their community. He also summarizes the IS propaganda in four main themes of messaging: urgency (Muslims are being slaughtered now); agency (regarding the immediate decision of a Muslim to fulfill their religious duty); authenticity (of the organization); and victory (further proof of the IS divinely sanctioned authenticity is that it is 'here to stay and growing').

Greenberg (2016) provides a review of counter-terrorism strategies and counter-narratives that can be used in fighting terrorism. They can be generally divided into two categories: first, discussions of Islam, and in this case the counter-narrative is seen as most effective when paired with religious leaders making similar efforts offline; second, counter-narratives refuting the idealization of life inside the Caliphate. Instead of a perfect, protected, peaceful life, viewers see images of rape, death, and general suffering of members of the Caliphate.

The Nature of Mass Movements

In his first book, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, the American philosopher Eric Hoffer (1961) has described and analyzed the reasons for the emergence of mass movements and the contribution of such movements to social changes. He states that all mass movements have some common features, although this does not make them homogenous. In his view, any mass movement (whether religious, national, or social) is based on something that unites its members. Does IS fit Hoffer's definition?

The first typical feature of all mass movements is the eagerness to 'do or die', fanatic willingness to sacrifice yourself or others for the sake of the certain goal. Hoffer states that, regardless their scope and philosophy, all mass movements provoke fanaticism, enthusiasm, ardent hopes, hatred, and intolerance; all such movements can trigger powerful action in certain spheres of life; all of them demand unquestionable faith and unreasonable loyalty (Hoffer 1961: 37).

The second feature typical of all mass movements is gathering with a similar manner of thinking. No matter how different the goals and philosophy of different mass

movements are, their first followers appear among people of a certain kind and attract people with the same way of thinking (*Ibid.*: 44).

The third feature that unites all the mass movements is that they all have one or several goals. According to Hoffer, although the differences between a fanatic Christian, Muslim and nationalist, or between fanatic communists and Nazis are obvious, they still have something in common. The same can be said about the power that stimulates their striving for expansion and world rule. There is no doubt that the occurrences, connected with fanatic faith, striving for power, unity and self-sacrifice, have something in common (Hoffer 1961: 37).

The IS acts according to Lasswell's propaganda theory. Defining propaganda as the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols, Lasswell (1927) has made the human–mass media interaction the central notion of his theory, and has demonstrated that propaganda should not only include attractive content, but also make a person vulnerable and susceptible to the information it transmits. The crisis of secular ideologies in the Arab world (chiefly, Pan-Arabism, Nationalism, Nasserism, Baathism, Western Liberalism, Communism), has made masses of Muslims turn to the values of a religious nature that are more understandable for them.

Wars in Iraq and Syria and the otherwise unstable economic and political situation in the region have provided the fertile ground for the propaganda of the IS. Its propaganda machine was launched at a time when the economic situation in the Muslim world was unstable and the population was socially disoriented. The final goal of establishing a 'global caliphate' requires the cultivation of beliefs about the necessity of creating this as the ideal state and type of authority.

We consider the ideas of French philosopher and sociologist Jacques Ellul vital for a full understanding of the features of the IS's media strategy. In his paper 'Propaganda: the formation of men's attitudes' (Ellul 1973) he pointed out that the most important feature of propaganda was to constantly develop and amplify beliefs that already exist in the mind of the propagandee; they (the propagandee) had to be totally immersed in the propaganda environment for it to become natural for them. Propaganda reaches the peak of success when it penetrates all spheres of a person's life, personal and public. Ellul describes establishing interconnection between a propagandist and a propagandee as the second important element in the process, a feature present in the IS propaganda. That means the establishment of the sized platform for interconnection. That is why the Islamic State focuses on the 'virtual caliphate'.

The rise of social networks has facilitated the implementation of Ellul's ideas, and his views on the propaganda theory have become incredibly relevant. It is obvious that the media space is the most favorable environment for propaganda distribution. Social networks are the places where interaction between fundamental features of propaganda can reach their peak. The most important thing is that people do not feel pressure; they have an imaginary opportunity to be an active member of communication. This opportunity decreases the level of critical perception and makes people more susceptible to propaganda.

This is the way that ideas penetrate the people's minds. They transmit the ideas by themselves, and the ideas are being transmitted through them. A propagandist must have a sufficient amount of information of good quality to make propaganda successful.

The stream of propagandistic content should be permanent in order for the propagandee to enter totally into the created reality in which connection with the real world and with the line between perceptions of truth and lies is lost.

Ellul thinks that propaganda cannot exist without supporting ideas, images, concepts, and narratives. He defines the complex of these tools as pre-propaganda, the environment that amplifies the beliefs and convictions of the propagandee. Here, the propagandee starts to depend on such tools. Further, Ellul has emphasized several paired concepts of propaganda, on which, if we imply his theory to the Islamic State's, its media strategy is based.

The first pair is 'political' – 'sociological'. If we speak about the strategy of the Islamic State in these terms, then official content, created for followers or rivals of the Islamic State is political, while the sociological stream of information is connected with the penetration of the ideas into the peoples' minds and the 'rooting' of these ideas there. Sociological propaganda is intended for the preparation of persons inspired by the idea, that is the IS fans, mentioned above. By combining the so called political and social channels, the Islamic State is drawing as much attention as possible to the 'caliphate brand'.

The next paired concepts are 'vertical propaganda' – 'horizontal propaganda'. Vertical propaganda is similar to political propaganda: this is a stream of information generated directly by the Islamic State, while horizontal propaganda describes only the content from the vertical.

The paired concepts of 'agitation' – 'integration' are dedicated to cooperation and mobilization of the followers. In terms of caliphate's propaganda, 'agitation' seeks to urge propagandees to action, moving them from passive to active supporters. 'Integrated' propaganda emphasizes the slow promotion and introduction of ideas by generating images and myths. The Islamic State also employs rational and irrational propaganda to demonstrate the force and superiority of the organization. The combination of all these methods makes the IS media strategy manipulative and efficient.

Cyberterrorism: Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes

Terrorism and its manifestations have become an international danger. All spheres of modern human life have virtual manifestations, and terrorism is not the exception; the usage of the Internet for terrorist purposes is quite common. This phenomenon requires an active and coordinated response on the part of the state and security agencies. Though the international community has recognized the threat of terrorism facilitated by the Internet, there are still no universal methods for fighting it. Methods of investigation in this sphere have not yet been developed. The same can be said about the legal principles necessary for litigation related to the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes.

Why is the Internet so popular among terrorist organizations? The wide range of content exponentially increases the audience that they can reach. Nowadays, terrorist organizations have the opportunity to freely distribute their content through the Internet. Extremists use the Internet to gain followers, make investments, and spread propaganda. The Internet is becoming the main cyberspace platform of activity for terrorists and other entities that threaten society.

In most cases the terrorists use the Internet to propagandize. The main threat of terrorist propaganda is related to the form in which it is used and the intention with which it is distributed. Cyber propaganda has numerous goals and embraces various audiences. In particular, it adapts to the probable or real followers of the extremists or to common extremist ideologies.

Propaganda in cyberspace often takes the form of multimedia communications, sharing ideology, practical instructions, explanations, justifications or support for terrorist activities. Such propaganda can involve virtual messages, presentations, and magazines, audio and video files created by the terrorist organizations or their followers. Cyber propaganda may also contain such materials as videos of violent acts of terrorism or video games that simulate such acts; these games encourage the users, who play the virtual terrorists.

The promotion of extremist rhetoric via online platforms facilitates the emergence of the acts of violence. Materials that previously had slower speed of distribution, limited to the rate of personal contact or transfer of physical media (e.g., CDs and DVDs), have now 'migrated' to the Internet and can be distributed via various popular social networks, websites, and forums. Search engines are also very attractive for the cyberterrorists, as they facilitate the process of identifying and obtaining information related to terrorism.

The Internet can be employed both to publish extremist materials and to create and maintain relationships with potential followers. Terrorist groups have started to more frequently use special password-protected platforms, known as chat groups. The question is not just about the utilization of the Internet by the terrorists since the terrorist organizations are eager to invade it and take all possible measures to do so, including creation of clandestine *cyberforums* (for the programmers and system administrators), where they can have their 'job'.

Cyber terrorism embraces different target audiences, including minors. Children account for a significant share of web-users. Terrorists distribute propaganda via the Internet in order to recruit minors. The process can occur in the form of a game; child-oriented materials include cartoons, computer games, music formats. This is the preferred technique for sites supported by the terrorist organizations or their affiliates. Some terrorist organizations have resorted to the same methods used to develop online video games for educational purposes.

Terrorists also use the Internet as an economic tool, resorting to direct engagement, e-commerce, online payment methods and charity organizations. Direct engagement or blackmailing involves the use of websites, group chats, bulk mailing and target messages to raise funds from followers. Terrorists have the opportunity to sell extremist literature, audio, or other materials appealing to their followers. Online payments can be made through specific websites or chat platforms which allow the transfer electronic money. It is often transferred by credit card or alternative methods of payment such as e-wallets or *Skype*.

Internet-based methods of payment can also be used for fraud, including credit card theft or as a part of fund fraud. The activities against Junis Tsuly that took place in the United Kingdom serve as a striking example of illegal income employment in the attempt to fund terrorism. Money from stolen credit cards was transferred in different

ways, mainly via online payment systems. This credit card theft allowed terrorists to transfer approximately 1.6 million euro to their accounts.

Nowadays, terrorists frequently choose the Internet as an alternating arena for their activity. There is a constantly growing number of options for disseminating media that offer terrorists the opportunity to distribute practical guidelines in the form of online lessons, audio and video materials, information and recommendations. These Internet platforms also provide detailed instructions, often in easily accessible multimedia format and in several languages, the topics including how to join a terrorist organization, how to make explosives, use firearms, and plan and perform terrorist acts.

The experience shows that almost every occurrence of terrorism is connected with the implementation of information technologies. Planning terrorist acts implies remote communication with several participants. It has been shown that the Islamic State combines the traditional propagandistic methods with sociological and psychological ones and uses numerous channels and platforms to implement its ideas, gain followers and perform terrorist acts.

All these manipulation methods are well-known, and jihadists have been using them for a long time to affect their audience. But the case of the Islamic State is different in its approach and scale. Even in the early stages of its development, the IS already employed propaganda tools, combining them in the media space, but when the 'Caliphate' was formed, the level and quality of the propaganda began to rapidly increase. Its original, simple propaganda has evolved into a well-adjusted and complicated mechanism.

The IS was the first terrorist organization to create a propaganda machine. Its propaganda tools include not only word bulletins, photo compositions and daily video messages, but also topical magazines and newspapers along with continuous communication via social networks and messengers, computer and virtual games. The media centers of the IS, *al-I'tisām* and *al-Furqān Foundations*, and *al-Hayāt*, produce a wide range of content. This content has led to the IS gaining the support of ideological followers, who join the jihadists and share the idea of Holy War as well as fanatics, who download posters online, create stickers for messages, compose poems and make videos, promoting the brand of the Islamic State. This type of informal propaganda is another important facet of the IS's media strategy; it prevents propaganda from being lost in a vacuum. We have already discussed the structure of the Islamic State's media strategy. Now we dwell on the channels of propaganda and types of content in terms of forms and methods of propaganda.

Basic Narratives and Images

The IS employed different content at various channels and the content is tailored to particular outlets/viewers.

Brutality was the basic feature of IS content; extreme cruelty was present in all their propagandistic channels. This image was targeted at opponents and potential enemies of the IS. As mentioned above, ostentatious acts of cruelty were a symbol of the revenge that awaits unbelievers in the superiority of the IS.

The IS managed its content efficiently, calculating in advance whose execution would have more influence on certain types of audience. For instance, the video that

contained the execution of soldiers belonging to the Syrian armed forces, posted on the Internet in September 2014, was intended for potential followers of the Islamic State and local dissidents, and was intended to demonstrate justice and punishment of unfaithful and spies.

Such executions were carried out regularly to remind the residents of the “Caliphate” what would happen if they don’t obey. The IS members were eager to keep the already conquered territories, minds and souls, as well as to occupy new areas and attract new followers. The execution of a Japanese citizen, Kenji Goto, is a striking example of video content targeted at shocking the international community. Foreign citizens’ executions undermined the international community and led to panic and fear. This situation helped the extremists draw more attention to their organization; even one narrative posted on the Internet can provoke reactions from many.

Video content was not the only tool the IS uses to demonstrate brutality. The most influential media terrorist cell published the photos of the grisly murders in the unauthorised magazines. Every issue of the IS periodicals *Dabiq* and *IS Report* contained photos and detailed descriptions of massacres.

Compassion was another concept actively employed by the terrorists to promote their content. This image was often combined with brutality and was surrounded by examples of repentance that the disbelievers should feel and recognition of disbelievers’ stupidity. Such images represented the idea of repentance, including the so-called virtual *istitab* (call for repentance). The IS showed mercy, compassion and readiness to forgive people, if they were ready to obey and to abandon their past lives and convictions. If you are ready to obey and join jihadists to take part in the “Holy War”, then you will be forgiven. The compassion narrative was frequently used to attract antagonistic elements. For instance, in April 2015 the IS posted video “From Darkness to Light”, in which soldiers of the Syrian army who had been fighting against the IS abandoned their convictions and took an oath of allegiance to the Jihad.

The image of compassion was used to attract both soldiers and civilians. The extremists were known to show special videos in schools in which teachers have taken an oath of allegiance to the Caliphate. By using the combination of compassion and brutality, the IS resorted to contrasts and showed that everyone has a choice: whether to abandon their previous convictions and choose the ‘right path’, or to accept painful death.

Drawing attention to the military achievements is the essential point of any propaganda. *War* is another image that was common for the IS. The jihadists broadcasted the events of war regularly. The ‘journalists’ from the IS’s *A’māq News Agency* dealt with it. The IS leaders paid much attention to the army, for they had to prove to the international community that their organization had the right to be called a state. The military content strengthened the spirit of the jihadists, spread panic among their enemies, and confused their antagonists.

The military narrative implementation in the cyberspace had one more goal – to make its enemies think that the IS was always in action. This was achieved by the fact that the IS thoroughly censored the information it shared. Though the IS officially stated that they disclose undistorted military information from all fronts, it can be stated

that the materials were censored according to the organization's current military and political needs.

The IS took advantage of the fact that its rivals lack access to news and intelligence sources. Thus, materials posted by the IS were used by the world mass media and by persons responsible for making decisions in the IS enemy countries. The attack at the town of Al-Ramadi in Iraq that started in April 2015 is a typical example. At that time, the IS had been concealing its intention to attack, while focusing coverage on its military actions in Baiji. Thus, the focus was shifted to a secondary front, while the main attack was concealed.

Sacrifice was also a rather popular theme of the IS's media strategy. It had something in common with brutality and was based on stereotypes about the persecutions of the Sunnis. The video of the execution of Jordanian pilot Muath Al-Kasasbeh at the beginning of 2015 is an example of this technique. The material contained both video of the execution and a compilation of interrelated shots. When the Jordanian pilot was about to die, Internet users were shown shots depicting the bombing of areas settled by Sunnis, allegedly by the royal air forces of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The IS leaders sought to remind its followers and the world about the 'just' nature of their resistance; the bombing footage served as justification for the execution according to the principle of 'a Roland for an Oliver' (talion law).

There are a great number of such examples, but we consider it inhumane to give a detailed description of them in order to prove the existence of the phenomenon in question. We can only point out that materials based on the principle of sacrifice were used to convince or remind others about the justice of war, to show the power of IS and the cruel intentions of the hostile western community. The frequency of employing the image of sacrifice was stimulated by the fact that the world's mass media picked up news about executions, spreading the message globally and instantly, making the Islamic State more and more popular.

Involvement was the most attractive narrative, originating from the nature of the mass movements mentioned above. The IS was the first terrorist group that laid so much emphasis on *unity*. It is worth mentioning that many materials distributed by the jihadists underlined the image of involvement and, at first glance, seemed to be peaceful.

The news agency *al-Hayāt* published certain photo and video content on daily basis. This content reflected the 'peaceful life' of the extremists. The shots depicted true 'fellowship' and 'fraternal affection'. Fernandez has also described videos depicting the 'soft side' of the IS: fighters: making bread, celebrating with children, offering their friends fresh pomegranates, preparing for operations, etc., stating that such videos are aimed at attracting new followers (Fernandez 2015). Such content focused the attention on the multinational community of the organization's warriors and emphasized that the IS did not differentiate between them based on their origin. These materials were available in multiple languages.

The IS was interested in obtaining followers from other countries. Propagandees saw the image of an ideal 'ummah', for which the notions of love, mutual understanding and support were dominant. Special forums and special groups in messengers like Viber or Telegram shared essays written by the jihadists in which they described com-

mon human life; too, extremist magazines were filled with the photos of terrorists playing with their children.

All these narratives were united in the last and the strongest basic image of the Islamic State, *utopism*. The image of the alternative society was a common thread throughout the whole IS media strategy. The idea was also supported by the activities of the organization at the ‘state’ level. The images created in the media space served as proof of the legitimacy and stability of the state for its followers: despite the military actions, the state kept defending its “citizens” and sticking to the utopic idea of establishing the Caliphate and eliminating evil, represented in this case by the West. As for potential rivals, such content acted as a warning about the serious intentions and superiority of the IS.

The goal of these media strategies was to strengthen the confrontation with the international community and maintain confidence in the aims of the group among its supporters. Having established the “Caliphate” in a form advantageous for them, the leaders of the IS have controlled the narrative of Islamic extremism. Ever since, they were trying to convince all the Muslims in the world that this was the only possible choice for them, allegedly set out in the Sacred Book of Muslims – the Qur’an.

This organization has fulfilled the dream of all other terrorist organizations, creating the image of a romantic utopia. It attracted young people from Islamic countries, for they were tired of the tyrant regimes of their governments. For the same reasons many jihadist cells have taken an oath of allegiance to a new ‘Caliph’ following establishment of the ‘Caliphate’. They wanted to gain access to mobilization and financial resources, for which they competed. The mass media of the IS gave detailed information about cases in which leaders of other armed groups have taken an oath to the ‘Caliphate’ as evidence proving that the fight with ‘evil’ is guided by Allah.

The focus on Islamic *eschatology* is another important distinctive feature of the IS media strategy. Every new speech of the Caliphate’s leaders stresses the proximity of Doomsday, the ‘last fight of Good and Evil’, *etc.* All of this messaging was aimed at recruiting new voluntary warriors for the organization, because ‘there was little time left for the fight’.

Conclusion

Thus, the IS assumed responsibility for all the activities against the ‘unfaithful’ and ‘crusaders’, proclaiming that all other terrorist groups were useless and insignificant, while riveting the attention of the whole world to its narrative. That is why it really seems that the Islamic State took an active part in an armed struggle, and this focus on action also affected the fight for the resources between jihadists.

The IS was the first to confirm the fact that images the extremist group creates for the potential followers are extremely important; this is the guarantee of a group's power and survival. To maintain this image, the organization used high-quality propaganda and constantly added new elements to the basic narratives (Grinin *et al.* 2016). Highly qualified experts and advanced technologies made the leaders of IS spend more on ‘jihad’, but experience showed that these tools were indispensable for the terrorists to remain relevant in the mainstream.

NOTE

¹ Terrorist organization banned in Russian Federation – *Editor's note.*

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