

S T S

ICUREZZA TERRORISMO SOCIETÀ

Security Terrorism Society

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL - Italian Team for Security, Terroristic Issues & Managing Emergencies



SICUREZZA, TERRORISMO E SOCIETÀ

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
Italian Team for Security,
Terroristic Issues & Managing Emergencies

1

ISSUE 1/2015

Milano 2015

EDUCATT - UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

SICUREZZA, TERRORISMO E SOCIETÀ
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL – Italian Team for Security, Terroristic Issues & Managing Emergencies

ISSUE I – 1/2015

Direttore Responsabile:

Matteo Vergani (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Milano e Global Terrorism Research Centre – Melbourne)

Co-Direttore e Direttore Scientifico:

Marco Lombardi (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Milano)

Comitato Scientifico:

Maria Alvanou (Lecturer at National Security School – Atene)
Cristian Barna (“Mihai Viteazul” National Intelligence Academy– Bucharest, Romania)
Claudio Bertolotti (senior strategic Analyst at CeMiSS, Military Centre for Strategic Studies – Roma)
Valerio de Divitiis (Expert on Security, Dedicated to Human Security – DEDIHS)
Chiara Fonio (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Milano)
Sajjan Gohel (London School of Economics – London)
Rovshan Ibrahimov (Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy University – Baku, Azerbaijan)
Daniel Köhler (German Institute on Radicalization and De-radicalization Studies – Berlin)
Miroslav Mareš (Masaryk University – Brno, Czech Republic)
Vittorio Emanuele Parsi (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Milano)
Anita Perešin (University of Zagreb – Croatia)
Giovanni Pisapia (Senior Security Manager, BEGOC – Baku – Azerbaijan)
Iztok Prezelj (University of Ljubljana)
Eman Ragab (Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS) – Cairo)
Riccardo Redaelli (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Milano)
Mark Sedgwick (University of Aarhus – Denmark)
Arturo Varvelli (Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale – ISPI – Milano)
Kamil Yilmaz (Independent Researcher – Turkish National Police)
Munir Zamir (Fida Management&C7 – London)
Sabina Zgaga (University of Maribor – Slovenia)
Ivo Veenkamp (Hedayah – Abu Dhabi)

Comitato Editoriale:

Gabriele Barni (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Milano)
Alessandro Burato (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Milano)
Alessia Ceresa (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Milano)
Barbara Lucini (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Milano)
Davide Scotti (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Milano)

© 2015

EDUCatt - Ente per il Diritto allo Studio Universitario dell'Università Cattolica

Largo Gemelli 1, 20123 Milano - tel. 02.7234.22.35 - fax 02.80.53.215

e-mail: editoriale.dsu@educatt.it (produzione); librario.dsu@educatt.it (distribuzione)

web: www.educatt.it/libri

Associato all'AIE – Associazione Italiana Editori

ISBN: 978-88-6780-824-3

Islamic State Communication Project

MARCO LOMBARDI¹

1. Introduction

From the very beginning, the Islamic State drew international attention because of its communication skills, especially after the proclamation of a Caliphate on 29th June 2014.

The Western interest in Islamists communication has been characterized by an astonishment which for several reasons was not at all justified:

- Historical reasons: jihadists, Al-Qaeda in particular, have always used communication as a major instrument in their struggle, making the most of new media technologies. From the beginning, special units focused on creating and spreading media products have become part of Al-Qaeda's structure. The group has recruited individuals with specific skills to evolve from rough images shot on the field by "*embedded jihadists*" to videos rich in special effects, chroma key, crawls, fade-outs and other key progress made in the world of new technologies, till the advent of Social Media.
- Specific reasons: it is enough to observe the crafty choice of the flexible Islamic State's name: ISI, when its origins were especially Iraqi (*Islamic State of Iraq*), ISIL or ISIS when it spread to Syria and the Levant, thus absorbing the mythological and symbolical references to the Sham² (*Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or Sham or Levant*), and ultimately IS, simply and

¹ Marco Lombardi is professor at the Catholic University (Milan – Italy) and director of ITSTIME

ITSTIME – Italian Team for Security, Terroristic Issues & Managing Emergencies – Department of Sociology(www.itstime.it)

E-mail address: marco.lombardi@unicatt.it

² Today Syria is just one part of Greater Syria (Sham): radical Islam considers Syria as Greater Syria, a region sitting between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates river, spreading from the edge of the Arabic desert to the Toros Dağları mountain complex, in Southern Turkey. Traditionally, this area is known as "Sham" (or Shaam) or "Levant" and it is rich in symbolism for jihadists: the Prophet Mohammed said: '*You will be split up into groups of armies. An army will be in Al-shaam, an army in Iraq, and an army in Yemen.*'" (Abdulla Ibn Hawala). For every Muslim, Syria is essentially part of a "holy geography" and, for radical islamists, it becomes an ideal and valuable terrain from where to wage violent jihad.

most efficiently *Islamic State*, when with the supranational proclamation of the Caliphate any geographical reference became pointless. The name has not just a media interest for its geopolitical connotation. It is also interesting because it reveals an explicit project: the islamists aim at founding a “State”. From its very beginning, IS showed an aspiration to create institutions and to establish the basis of a State among other states. Among other jihadist groups close to Al-Qaeda, its structure envisaging the creation of provinces is unprecedented.

Western astonishment in front of the crafty and strategic IS communication procedures is therefore a sign of the incapacity of analysts to examine the jihadi phenomenon; it is also a manifestation of shallow journalism. The Caliphate communication offered material that communication experts approached as if they were cinema or media critics. They simplified this material in small essays, summarizing length and typologies of the videos or messages, their cuts, *setting* and much more. This is useful if eventually it leads to an efficient strategy to contrast IS’ communication. If this is not the case, we are then facing an empty intellectual exercise.

In the coming notes, therefore, I will try to decipher IS communication. Focusing on its key production and its categories, I will try to understand its complex communication project which is coherent with the Caliphate’s strategy of self assertion. In this light, communication is one of IS *assets*. In other words, the real innovation introduced by IS is the fact that for the very first time we are facing a competent use of media, not just some vague technological skill, in the framework of a much more complex political and military scheme aiming at consolidating radical and Jihadi Islam on a specific geographical territory.

IS is simply pursuing its objective through a skillful and linear strategy, where fighting, mass murder, communication, economy and politics all converge in the project of building an Islamic State. In short, IS’s very DNA leads this project: a terrorist group calling itself State – organized as a State and controlling a territory where it collects taxes, offers services, envisages to coin money, approves a budget – also exercises a “legitimate” power of violence and communicates through a variety of media, thus diversifying its messages. The group shows that a State is taking form also through a shared political theory which already embodies some of the elements of a State.

It is a complex project which opposes traditional Al-Qaeda to IS. The conflict between the two groups (even if a certain kind of unity emerges in the fighters ranks called to defend Syria and Iraq from Western attacks) is evident especially on Islamic forums supporting one side or the other. Some of them, like Platform media, Tahaddi and Shumuk are closer to IS, others like Fida’ and ‘Arin to Al-Qaeda. On the other hand, for the sake of this very project, the assertion of an ideological hegemony of the IS Caliphate on any other

form of Islamic State or government is crucial. In this context, a key factor is the campaign to attract in a sort of *franchising* other AQ organizations and to bring them to pledge allegiance to Al-Baghdadi.

In the following pages, we select just some of the many messages signed by IS, providing a brief description of the different typologies of media used and of the “series” produced by the group. I focused on messages which are already well known, in order to reach a conclusion on the dangerous media strategy of the new terrorism embodied by the Caliphate.³

2. Not just Social Media: from self-promotion to recruitment

In past years, especially after the 9/11 attacks and attacks in Europe, scholars focused on analyzing international terrorism’s new features. Research on the radicalization process – or how individuals adopt deviant behaviors linked to radical or extremist ideologies – is more recent. This process ultimately strengthens when these individuals are recruited by extremist organizations which resort to violence to reach social and political objectives and tend to destabilize the society in which they are operating. Although radicalism cannot be used as a synonym of “terrorism”, the attraction exerted on individuals by radical ideologies is the first crucial step towards violent extremism. Nowadays, the phenomena affecting the Mediterranean region are deeply connected to the development of the radicalization process and the threats linked to it. They are actually boosting this radicalization process. Italy too is contributing to the strengthening of jihadists ranks and their flow towards Syria. The support comes from cells often radicalized online. Before being active in combat, these individuals provide logistics for the transfer of future fighters.

This is not new for Italy, where in the Nineties individuals were recruited to fight in the Balkans. Recruiting in the country is kicking off again, after it slowed down due to a weaker presence on our territory of organized Islamic networks, compared to the situation in other European countries. Recent migratory flows to Italy are less radicalized, they have not been incorporated in ghettos like in France, Belgium and The Netherlands. This still penalizes the recruitment to Syria from Italy where the fighters are recruited through a network of small self-organized groups rather than by activism in the mosques. Only the Islamic State has been able to exploit at best the so called Social

³ You can find at the end of this chapter a synoptic with titles and publication dates of all the videos and messages.

Media (especially Facebook and Twitter) either as a specific recruitment tool or in coordination with other media.

The power of communication within the radicalization process became evident on July 18 2013, when the news surfaced that Giuliano Delnevo died fighting in Syria against Bashar El Assad's forces. Delnevo converted to Islam in 2008. He took the name of Ibrahim and fought in Syria for about a year. His story represents a dramatic example of the effects of radicalization. On his Facebook page he made clear references to the world of jihad in Chechnya: to the Kavkaz Center, the Caucasian Emirate web page, a militant network that wants to establish a Caliphate in the Caucasian region. In one of the latest post, dated 12/2/2013, there is the picture of Abdullah Azzam⁴, apparently a model for Delnevo. Online radicalization and listening to some preachers' sermons led the young man from Genoa into fighting in Syria, alongside a great number of Arab and North African jihadists. In addition, he died there.

There are many other similar stories. Anas El Abboubi (Morocco 1992) is a resident of Brescia province, in Italy since 1999. He was active in the *Sharia4Belgium* network and he wanted to create *Sharia4Italy* and to leave for Syria, where he wanted to join Al-Qaeda and die as martyr. He wrote all this on his Facebook page. He was arrested and accused of terrorism, before even leaving the country. He was suspected of plotting attacks in Italy. He was then released and in 2014 he disappeared in Syria, where he travelled helped by an Albanian network.

A similar story is Mohamed Jarmoune's, a 20-year-old from Brescia of Moroccan origins: he got in contact online with a network of recruiters, but he did not leave the country. He was active as a computer jihadist, focused on collecting information and organizing the logistics for other jihadists. He was arrested and accused of terrorism. He was sent to prison after the investigators found on his computer information concerning an alleged plot to attack Milan synagogue.

The whole Europe is at risk under the threat of the Syrian web. In April 2014, rumors surfaced about the death in a suicide attack of Denis Mamadou Cuspert, a German who joined the jihad in Syria and fought with ISIS/L. The man, also known in his country with his rapper nom de plume Deso Dogg, took Abu Taha al-Almani as his nom de guerre upon joining the fighters ranks. Before that, he was also called Abu Maleeq. He came from a Berlin family of mixed ethnicity: his father was from Ghana. *"The Islamic nation is bleeding with the news of the martyrdom of the jihadist fighter, brother Abu*

⁴ Abdullah Yusuf Azzam (1941 – 1989) was a Palestinian theologian. He was a mentor to Osama bin Laden. He was a key inspirator, guide and organizer of violent jihad, inviting all Muslims to unite and to take back the lands of Islam to establish a Caliphate.

Talha Al Almani. May he be accepted by God,” one message posted on a Jihadi forum reports. “*His death is the result of a suicide bombing carried out by the traitorous soldiers of (Nusra chief Abu Mohammed Al) Jolani against a house in which a number of ISIL brothers were staying.*” Cuspert was already known to intelligence services. They kept the German rapper, popular in the Jihadist world for his “nasheeds” – Islamic chants –, under observation for over three years. He was already considered one of the most influential personality in promoting violent jihad. He called for attacks against Western interests online and on You Tube.

The story of Wa’el Ahmed Abd al-Fattah refers to a different part of the world. He was arrested on April 14 2014 by Egyptian authorities on his way back from Syria, where he was fighting along with hundreds of other Egyptians in Al-Nusra and ISIS’s ranks. Many of these individuals coming back to Egypt from Syria join Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, a Qaedaist group operating in Sinai and responsible of many attacks in the country.

All these stories are different from each other, but they all underline the fact that through Social Media the jihadi recruitment is supported by individual anecdotes and the testimonies of foreign fighters. This process promotes the viral nature of the media, i.e imitating extremely dangerous behaviors for young disgruntled men and women, searching for a lost identity. Meanwhile, the battle on Social Media is open.

These messages date back to July 2014. They were posted in Arabic and translated into English:

“#The_Concept_of_Lone_Wolf_Attacks The time has arrived to respond to Twitter’s management by directly attacking their employees and physically assassinating them!! Those who will carry this out are the sleepers cells of death.”

“#The_Concept_of_Lone_Wolf_Attacks Twitter management should know that if they do not stop their campaign in the virtual world, we will the bring the war to them in the real world on the ground.”

And so on, in response to Twitter blocking some of the numerous accounts spreading IS material from the battlefield. It is a lost war: accounts pop up again with slightest variations in their names. They always refer to *users* who have been identified in the U.S., Canada, Switzerland, The Netherlands, etc. The so called *foreign fighters* are well positioned also in the virtual war. The Islamic State knows that Social Media are useful but also that they are a threat to the group since they are permeable to external observers. That is why IS announced at the beginning of 2015 the launch of a message platform able to provide more “*privacy*” to its users.

As we know, these tools were widely used much before IS massively exploited them. They are in fact the deeply pervasive instruments used by a digital generation – constantly connected –, and by those young men and women who have been recruited.

Again: IS did not innovate. It made Social Media part of a complex scheme, an element of a wider media strategy developed with utmost expertise. It used them to tell a story: Social Media became virtual rooms open to the world where fighters tell their stories from the battlefield. In doing so, and by recently avoiding to post gruesome images that could run into the inattentive *providers* censorship, IS granted more time online to these stories from the battlefield. They are captivating and they focus on single individuals, thus boosting viral imitating behaviors that are crucial in the recruiting process.

3. The French: foreign fighters next door

The web is not just social networks. Social platforms are mainly used by IS to keep communication flowing in real time towards his own audience: Twitter, FB and some specific online chats are used to launch new online media products such as video, magazine, video games and music.

Similar to the “stories” published on Social Media for recruiting purpose and its viral strength is a video posted online on November 19 2014 by one of the IS *major film studio*, al Hayat media Center. The 7 minutes and 19 seconds video – “What Are You Waiting For” – features Abu Osama al-Faransi, Abu Maryam al-Farnasi and Abu Salman al-Faransi. As their names suggest, they are three French who, in French (but with Arabic and English captions) call on young Westerners to come fighting.

“Terrorize them and do not allow them to sleep due to fear and horror. There are weapons and cars available and targets ready to be hit. Even poison is available, so poison the water and food of at least one of the enemies of Allah. Kill them and spit in their faces and run over them with your cars. Do whatever you are able to do in order to humiliate them, for they deserve only this.” the French anchorman says to his young French nationals.

What is worth noticing here is the target of the video and its degree of contamination: the three men presented in quick succession by personalized banners speak perfect French; the third man is framed between a Kalashnikov and an scimitar. The video has an efficient impact, it is clear and explicit.

In this specific case, the three French anchormen strengthen the viral effect of the video: they can reach school friends, fellows back home, including their neighbors. IS Tv video is like a small neighborhood. They are also actors in a successful drama: they have been launched on the media scene

and now they can enjoy the fame we granted them through the screening of their endeavors. They shall not go back to their home (this is an added value for IS): they are “walking dead”. Going back home would be intolerable, unappreciated and inexcusable. With this video they pledge their utmost allegiance to the Caliphate.

IS communication offers targets and operational procedures. On the operational side, IS reintroduces a practice of the past (“*run over them with your cars*”) and suggests others, pondered by jihadists for long (using poison to contaminate water and food). This video represents above all a dangerous production that strengthen imitating behaviors among the disgruntled youth of the French *banlieue*, who can act locally.

They are de facto recruited as *lone wolves* fighters, turned into “*zombie*”⁵, and became the major threat for the West and its daily life.

Finally, no doubt the media production was very smart in seizing the right political moment to attack France: the very day the “*What Are You Waiting For?*” video was published, the government voted on increasing its military support in the war against IS.

4. Beheadings: the search for new formats

James Foley is not the first reporter murdered by jihad. Daniel Pearl, a *Wall Street Journal* correspondent, was beheaded on February 1st 2002. Others had the same fate, killed by Al-Zarqawi group: Nicholas Berg was beheaded on May 7 2004. He worked in telecommunication; “Jack” Armstrong and Jack Hensley worked with Gulf Supplies Commercial Services. They were beheaded the same year, in September. On August 19 2014, a video showed the beheading of James Foley, killed by the Caliphate of Al-Baghdadi, Al-Zarqawi’s heir, the man who opened the era of beheadings. This terror strategy – the kuffars’ beheadings – distinguishes IS: it is part of its identity, its brand, its origins.

On July 9 2005, al-Zawahiri wrote a 6,000-word letter to his rival Abu Musab Zarqawi: there was an evident “disagreement” between them on how to pursue Al-Qaeda policies and strategies. In the letter, Zawahiri (leader of the ideological and political branch) pointed out to Zarqawi (from the military branch) AQ in Iraq and the Middle East long term objectives. He criticized

⁵ Zombie: persons with individuals skills trained to fight. They are part of semi-structured and flexible networks, in which emotional ties and soft relationships activated by “internal” or “external” elements play a role (for example: the individuals involved in the Charlie Hebdo attack fought on the same battlefields). (It is worth noticing how Dabiq, IS magazine, suggested Charlie’s editor as one of the possible targets).

the military commander for the way he conducted the war against Americans and for the way he targeted Iraqi civilians. The details of the letter tackle up-to-date issues. As a matter of fact, Zawahiri suggested he was ready to occupy as much Iraqi territory as possible once foreign troops would have withdrawn from the country, leaving an inevitable vacuum. He wanted to establish an “Emirate”: a warning of the future Caliphate. In the same letter, Zawahiri warned Zarqawi that Muslims would have never accepted the violent images of hostages’ beheading broadcasted in Zarqawi’s videos. He told him to keep away from the practice. In 2005, the two AQ leaders discussed events which took place again ten years after the letter. It is possible to understand these events in the light of IS’ history and the direct succession from Al-Zarqawi to Al-Baghdadi. These events underline the independence of IS from AQ. The group has now its own brand and identity, with a common denominator: blood. The controversy opposing Zawahiri to Zarqawi faded away only because a targeted air raid killed the commander.

After the death of James Foley (American journalist, August 19 2014), more foreigners were beheaded: Steven Sotloff (American journalist, September 2 2014), David Haines (British aid worker, September 13 2014), Hervé Gourdel (French Alpine guide, September 24 2014), Alan Henning (British aid worker, October 3 2014), Peter Kassig (American aid worker, November 16 2014), Haruna Yukawa (Japanese employee working for a security company, January 24 2015), Kenji Goto (journalist, January 31 2015). And there is the gruesome death of the Jordan pilot Muad al-Kasaesbeh (made public on February 3).

Most of these men were murdered by “Jihadi John”: the 23-year-old rapper Abdel Majed Abdel Bary, who left London to fight in Syria in 2013.

The quick succession of these executions is striking. The media sequence keeps on going. It always presents the same ritual: a kneeling hostage, clad in the orange Guantanamo jumpsuit, compelled under threat to curse the West and then beheaded with a knife. Beheadings are steadily promoted as distinctive features of the Caliphate thus marking the continuity with Zarqawi’s project. ISIS concentrates its brutality on the kuffar, thus strengthening its threat. On February 9 2015, an IS “citizen” accused of witchcraft was beheaded with an ax, not a knife. In these case too, the use of different death tools has a symbolic and communicative impact.

IS’ aim is to terrorize the West through media products easy to spread (a short video of each murder is posted on every platform, including mobile platforms) and extremely explicit. This threat is addressed to a global audience, and inevitably it becomes news.

Something has changed on November 16 2014, when Kassig was killed. The 15-minute heinous video in which Kassig is beheaded marks a change in per-

spective: the severed head of the American is shown right away, skipping the Guantanamo jumpsuit part and the speeches. The video starts with a long introduction on IS punctuated by images showing the beheading of Syrian soldiers by IS parading armed men in fatigues. On the scene, there were also foreign fighters (French and German). They were not wearing balaclavas. The video was accurately shot and followed a detailed screenplay: the military parade, the timed executions, the severed heads placed on the top of the bodies, etc.

For some analysts, this changes indicate a search for an exit strategy, or an emergency procedure: somehow it has not been possible to follow the usual ritual (from Foley to Henning). Something “went wrong” during the execution, perhaps because Kassig, an Army veteran, held out against the representation required by the ritual.

Beside this interpretation, the video also represents a change in style, as it happened in the series featuring Cantlie: in the framework of a smart Jihadi communication, it serves a specific purpose.

The video represents something different and has multiple meanings. Beheadings are still certificates of identity for IS, along the lines of the founder Zarqawi, as we said. The threat is now even more explicit, direct and emotionally destabilizing because Kassig’s barefaced murderers are Westerners. The world exorcised death but it now looks right at it, in its utmost brutality: an unacceptable gesture channeled through the technological instruments of daily life. In this way, Western culture realizes the existence of unexpected actions of individuals born and bred in their own world, Europe: the video underlines – without invoking risks of attacks in Europe – the concrete danger for the West if IS wins over “the hearts and minds” of the European youth. It is perhaps worst than an attack. Finally, a form of dialogue is offered to Islam – also the Qaedist version of Islam – which criticizes beheadings. Beside Zawahiri in 2006, a group of British scholars recently opposed the practice and also the Turk Fethullah Gülen and the radical Jordanian Abu Qatada al-Filas-tini, who from prison openly condemned IS and the beheading of Western journalists. Arming the hands of Western fighters could help IS’ dialogue with these radical critics, in a useful strategy of confrontation with traditional AQ.

The sequence continues.

On Saturday January 24 2015, an online audio message from Kenji Goto, one of the two Japanese hostages held by IS, announced the death of Haruna Yukawa: the ritual beheading was anticipated by a video in which the two Japanese called upon their government to pay a 200 million dollar ransom. Japan had just allocated the same sum to support the international fight against the Caliphate. Even if the video just hints at the standard features of the ritual (the prisoners’ orange jumpsuit, the hooded executioner), the unfortunate companion of Yukawa holds a picture that shows his severed head placed on

his body. The barbaric ritual is not aired. This message represents somehow an innovation. On a pure communication level, it keeps a door open to a policy of ransoms negotiations, without renouncing to the grim impact. The crafty production raises the attention, keeps the suspense high, suggesting through the fate of the first Japanese what would be the destiny of his companion, the messenger. This same format is replicated on January 25, with “*The Second Public Message of ‘Kenji Goto Jogo’ to His Family and the Government of Japan*”: they use still pictures, a white background. The prisoner speaks clad in an orange jumpsuit, holding the picture of a Jordanian pilot held by IS since Christmas. In the video, Kenji announced he had 24 hours to live, still more than what had been granted to the pilot. The message put pressure on the Jordanian government, asking to release the terrorist Sajida al Rishawi in exchange of both the Japanese man and the pilot. This proves how the production is closely following international political developments. The ordeal ends on January 31st, with a 67-second video produced by al-Furqan and posted on Twitter. It shows the beheading of the Japanese journalist by the British Jihadi John, and follows the usual ritual. However, the location is different. The video could have been shot in the Aleppo region. No news is given of Muad al-Kasaesbeh, the Jordanian pilot, reported death by numerous Twitter users. Doubts linger over his fate without any confirmation from the Caliphate. Communication around the fate of the Japanese hostages followed two paths: the traditional terror instrument, featuring an executioner armed with a knife, the victim clad in an orange jumpsuit, and the service alert, aimed at negotiating. It exploits meta-communication: pictures showing other pictures. The binary approach was useful because IS has a double objective here: demonstrating the ability of exploiting media in a diversified way. It could also open a new era of innovation in the dramatic beheading performance. As a matter of fact, the audience started getting used to these images aired by a ruthless and uninterrupted Western media flow.

The sequence is dramatically broken by a 22-minute video in which the Jordan pilot Muad al-Kasaesbeh is burned alive, inside a cage.

The death of the pilot captured on December 24 2014 and the way IS advertised it sparked a furious debate. We skip here a discussion on the reactions ignited by the event – not because we consider it useless, but because we would be compelled to do it swiftly and inefficiently – and we prefer to dwell on some specific points:

- The pilot was killed on January 3: rumors and some information about his death had already circulated on Twitter. An analysis of the sequence of images (the one shown by Kenji Goto, the one where he is wearing the orange jumpsuit, the one where he is locked inside a cage, the day of his

- death) reveals a lengthy timeframe of imprisonment and a frequent use of the cage where he died.
- The pilot was already dead when the video has been aired. It is safe to say that Jordanians already knew about the murder and they acted accordingly, not paying the ransom IS asked in exchange for the pilot and Kenji Goto.
 - IS asked for the release of the terrorists Sajida al Rishawi and Al-Karbouly, who were instead immediately executed by Jordanian authorities.
 - IS surely knew from the very beginning how the ordeal would have ended: the fiction would not have lasted until the prisoners exchange.
 - A week after the pilot was captured, IS launched a Twitter hashtag in Arabic: “*Suggest a Way to Kill the Jordanian Pilot Pig*”, and a second one: “*We All Want To Slaughter Moaz*”. It was a sort of online survey on how to kill the pilot. Some suggested to behead him, others to burn him alive, others to crash his body with a bulldozer. The messages got thousands of retweets.
 - Segments and still images from the 22-minute video of the pilot’s murder were on Twitter starting from February 3rd.
 - Some segments could be aired individually:
 - the video segment in which the pilot is killed was shot in a dramatic crescendo: images of airstrikes aftermath and of pilots flying their jets are followed in quick succession by interviews to the prisoners and images of him approaching the cage, located in the middle of rubbles. All around, theatrically disposed on the surrounding rubbles are some IS armed men, dressed differently from the executioners. They all wore fatigues and desert balaclavas. The video ends with the pilot burning alive in his cage;
 - the video segment “security database” was posted on Twitter at 8:00 pm, Italian time, as a totally independent video. It shows 60 others pilots that IS threatens to kill, with these words: “*On this occasion, the Islamic State announces a reward of 100 gold dinars to whoever kills a crusader pilot. The Diwan for state security has released a list containing the names of Jordanian pilots participating in the campaign. So good tidings to whoever supports his religion and achieves a kill that will liberate him from hellfire*”.
 - The complete 22-minute video is rather complex. The two partial videos are a series of segments of the 22-minute video and reedited to render autonomous the narrative. The video is skillfully shot and carefully edited, using in succession images of the pilot’s ordeal (his capture, his imprisonment, his declarations, his death) and the images of airstrikes, their aftermath, some briefings. It is meant to suggest the haunt of more pilots. Captions on the images of the dead pilot’s body offered the theological

justification of this act: *“Ibn Taymiyya, may Allah have mercy on him said: So if horror of commonly desecrating the body is a call for them [the infidels] to believe [in Islam], or to stop their aggression, it is from here that we carry out the punishment and the allowance for legal Jihad”*⁶

- It is crucial and awfully threatening that the last images of the video are not the ones of Muad al-Kasaesbeh’s torched body, but the faces of pilots with prices on their heads.
- For the first time, media organizations discussed whether to broadcast or not the extremely bloody video: some did not air it; others broadcasted just some of the images or posted links to website which were showing the entire video. These different approaches opened a debate on the opportunity of spreading IS messages through Western media, thus raising the issue of media responsibility.

These are all the elements we should analyze to be able to assess the success of IS communication strategy: it is evident that no prisoners exchange has been possible since the very beginning, but the simple idea allowed IS to manipulate the usual beheading format (Kenji Goto videos holding his friends and then the pilot’s pictures) and to wind up with a disruptive and scorching video released a month after the pilot’s death. Everything was planned from the very beginning. They aimed at changing the previous perspective the Western audience was getting accustomed to, dragging it to empathically share the horror that locked the media in the contingency of the news.

IS as a movie director is like a cat chasing a mouse: the cat let the mouse breathe just to strike him with its strongest paw.

In this communication model dwells a message addressed to Jordan, where the opposition to IS is uncertain for many layers of the population. Among these, 3,000 to 4,000 men are fighting with the jihadists, threatening the neighboring countries, which are direct targets of the Caliphate expansion and a way to indicate where and whom to strike.

This video adds more to the already complex IS’ communication strategy. The Caliphate craves for a State. With these images it triggers an instinctive reaction to brutality. A second goal emerges: beside the foundation of a State, there is the “double radicalization”, which I will analyze in the closing chapter. In the messages sequence of the first five beheadings, the November breach with Kassig video, the two Japanese interlude and the death of the Jordan pilot we can notice an eagerly-sought objective and a specific goal:

⁶Ibn Taymiyya, considered one of the main scholars of Sunni Islam, is a founder of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. He legitimized jihad against Muslims who do not follow the Shariah, not considering them true believers despite their profession of faith.

- The first five sequences follow the same pattern in the messages as well as in the shocking rendering, worn-out and unable to captivate anymore the Tv audience;
- The scheme is broken with the video of Kassig death, out of necessity or by choice. With this breach, the production seizes the opportunity to stage more complex performances: a collective ritual with armed men in fatigue, some of them clearly Westerners. The video instills fear which is weaker because of the direct threat of many potential executioners “from home” and it is less shocking despite being supported by an accurate choreography. The movie director is promoting the series, with a sense of continuity as requested by the audience, adding innovations, changes of plot and a new perspective;
- The videos of the two Japanese are a digression, a pause to breathe. It is a pondered break: the video showing the death of the Jordanian pilot was probably already edited and the soldier already dead.
- With Muad al-Kasaesbeh the break is interrupted by a sudden and brutal leap forward. In the media logic it was expected; it aimed at making viewers fall off their chairs. It was meant to provoke emotion, to generate a spontaneous reaction caused by the image of a man burned alive (stressing the way the story was told). The video renews, in a more elaborate way, the Kassig video choreography with the presence of the armed men theatrically disposed in their fatigues. It elaborates again and proposes that same gruesome message, boosted by a crafty break in the communication flow.

On Sunday, February 15th, right after the Copenhagen attack that followed the January one in Paris against Charlie Hebdo, an IS 5-minute video – “*A message signed with blood to the Nation of the Cross*” – was released. On the shores of the Mediterranean sea (“*the coast of Wilayat Tarabulus by the Mediterranean sea*”), IS marches 21 Egyptian Copts in the Guantanamo prisoners jumpsuit, each of them paraded by a masked killer clad in black. They will be beheaded, following the usual ritual, while waves breaking on the beach turned red from their blood. The leader of the armed men, wearing fatigues and desert balaclavas as in the Kassig and Muad al-Kasaesebeh video, delivered a threatening message (“*We are South of Rome*”). This video, compared to the previous ones, does not deal directly with the murder of “Western” prisoners, but it sets a direct connection to them creating a leitmotif in the performance, by repeating the Kassig and the Jordan pilot video choreographies and the same threats. It updates what was previously presented in the November 2014 and January 2015 Black Flags Books, in which IS disclosed its strategy, i.e. to conquer Rome: the attention is drawn on what we already called two years ago the Mediterranean ring of fire that, from a logistic and operative base in Libya, has become the starting point of a more systematic attack on Southern Europe.

This sequence highlighted at the beginning of 2105 a second goal that does not replace but strengthens IS institution-building aspirations: the group aims at promoting a global and widespread conflict ignited by a comprehensible outraged reaction in Europe to IS massive production of videos. Beside the *communication strategy promoting the institutionalization of IS emerges an emotionally based communication strategy*. And we are risking to fall into these well placed IS traps.

If this is the case, IS hideous communication crescendo could only promote further radicalization either within its militants ranks or among his detractors: Western countries could soon witness violence against mosques or even worst.

In relation to this, we should further analyze the case of the Japanese journalist and the so called “fake” videos. The media product was more articulated and flexible. It sparked outrage and created suspense through post-production special effects. The issue of the “fake” Caliphate videos – fake media products – was often subject of analysis in the West. Recently it has been massively reintroduced, perhaps with some sort of justification (for example, when the 21 Copts beheading video was released).

We should make a distinction between a video in which reality is distorted by post-production techniques – it does not show reality but a representation of it – and a video presenting news from unreliable sources. In the first case, we could usefully discuss the techniques and technologies exploited, the professional skills involved, the reasons that pushed IS to produce a fake video. We could detect some operational advice that could help locate the place where the video was shot thus enabling to target it with air raids, as it happened with Zarqawi. Beside this analysis, lingering too long on this discussion can be useless: a fake video – which is likely to be so in technical terms – does not necessarily impact on the communication towards its recipients if the Caliphate’s signature is confirmed. It is part of the wider media strategy of jihadists. IS signature is in itself the proof of its communication strategy.

Even beheadings videos are part of IS media production. They are realized and channeled along a uniform strategy. Therefore, a change in perspective – even if due to unexpected events – or a video altered in post-production could give IS the opportunity to innovate and to update its media arsenal.

5. John Cantlie: prisoner, reporter, testimonial

John Cantlie, a British reporter, was kidnapped a first time on July 19 2012 while crossing the Bab al-Hawa border between Turkey and Syria. He got wounded and was released by four members of the Free Syrian Army on

July 26. On November 2012, he went back to Syria with his colleague James Foley, an American later killed by IS. No news has emerged on Cantlie until he featured in a video series – “*Lend me Your Ears*”: every episodes tackled issues crucial to the Caliphate political and media debate. In the first series, Cantlie is clad in the orange Guantanamo jumpsuit. He is sitting at a table. The background is black. He is reading a message, as the video headline suggests: “*Messages from the British Detainee John Cantlie*”.

Cantlie’s media products

Title	Episode	Released date	Length (min:sec)
Lend Me Your Ears	Introduction	18/9/2014	3:21
Lend Me Your Ears	1	23/9/2014	5:56
Lend Me Your Ears	2	29/9/2014	5:35
Lend Me Your Ears	3	12/10/2014	6:54
Lend Me Your Ears	4	16/10/2014	7:49
Lend Me Your Ears	5	25/10/2014	6:31
Inside ‘Ayn al Islam		28/10/2014	5:32
Lend Me Your Ears	6	21/11/2014	8:52
Inside Mosul		3/1/2015	8:15
From inside Halab		9/2/2015	11:59

On a communication level, Cantlie’s role evolves with the video “*Inside ‘Ayn al Islam*”. It was shot in Kobane (in the video it is used the Arabic name of the town), a city on the Turkish border under IS siege. This is the beginning of the second series. From now on, the reporter “is no more a prisoner” but an IS testimonial. He moves around with apparent freedom from public squares to local market places, walking or riding a motorcycle, to show the reality of the daily life under the Caliphate.

In the 18 September introduction, Cantlie said: “*I’m going to show you the truth as the Western media tries to drag the public back to the abyss of another war with the Islamic State*”, presenting a video series aimed at balancing the biased Western information on the Caliphate. Cantlie is wearing the usual Guantanamo jumpsuit. He is sitting at a table, reading a text. The framework is similar to a Tv political show analyzing the situation on the field (a sort of “inside the news” format). At the end of it, the reporter introduces the following episode. Until the format serves IS’ purposes, the reporter could think that the latest episode is not the final one for him.

The issues tackled by the series are not the ones debated by the wider Tv audience, but the one discussed by decision makers eager to take action against IS: the reporter insists on issues hounding the hesitant public opinion.

Here some examples from the third episode, in which the reporter states that: – *the conflict in Syria and Iraq does not make the West safer*: Cantlie threatens that a global war is moving westward, right when Western countries are debating on terrorist attacks on their territories.

- *airstrikes are leveling specific targets but the international coalition is not gaining and maintaining territories*: the West has been debating on the possibility of a ground invasion – “boots on the ground”. The issue is dramatically up-to-date because of the contrast it creates between a political choice – that cannot allow a ground invasion – and a strategic choice – pushed by the knowledge that wars are only won by fighting with boots on the ground.
- *IS lacks credible foot soldiers. Its militants are not the Syrian or Kurdish military*, able to oppose IS on the battlefield. It is the second obvious argument made to strengthen the previous one. It contributes to highlight the futility of an armed conflict against IS. It serves the group’s message. IS wants in any possible way to avoid a ground invasion. This argument also helps radicalize the internal debate abroad.
- *the weapons you are sending to your allies will eventually get into IS’ hands*: this is the third obvious argument, targeting the insiders. For the rest of the audience, it is just a remote possibility. It also strengthen complot theories that, in the first confused stages of the conflict, were the subject of private and public discussions.
- *a risk of a new Vietnam is real*: the reporter winds up his intervention invoking the specter of an old war that is still able to ignite conflict and trigger demonstrations.

At the end of October, the release of the Kobane reportage (“*Inside ‘Ayn al Islam’*”) was surprising. It is the beginning of a series of documentaries featuring the reporter, hostage of the Caliphate. He is not wearing the Guantanamo jumpsuit anymore. He is an embedded reporter, or a testimonial, showing us daily life in Kobane, thanks to a drone flying a build-in video camera. This high-quality video gets rid of the static images – rarely interrupted by digressions – we were used to. It takes us right inside IS combat reality in the Kurdish town, presenting the detailed arguments of the militants along a non compact frontline and the Western doubts on how to take back the city.

The main character, the goals, the argument are the same of the previous video, but new communication perspective are presented here: enough to arise the audience interest anew.

The first documentary released in 2015 has the same style. It is shot in the Caliphate capital, Mosul. It is the second Cantlie episode. He is not a prisoner anymore, as he was in the first episode, but he is a Caliphate testimonial. There’s a direct link with the first episode (“*Inside ‘Ain al Islam’*”) and the continuity promised is granted with a crescendo of production quality and with the growing autonomy of the reporter, who shops at the local market, moves around by car, rides a motorcycle as he would do in any other city of the world.

On February 9 2015, IS released the third episode of the Cantlie reportage series. The journalist is in Aleppo. After Mosul, the testimonial, IS anchorman, comfortably shows to his audience how the Caliphate is providing services to its citizens. The 12-minute video – “*From Inside Halab*” – was launched today on Twitter by al-Hayat Media Center. It is a reportage-style video: it starts from shooting rubbles in the city of Aleppo (using a drone with a built-in camera). It then moves on to the countryside to visit local market places. It shows diligent students at a Coranic school, busy “pizza makers”, the meeting of the Shoura council where old men are watching IS video on a LED display. Some fighters are interviewed at the end. A French fighters cheers for those who attacked Charlie Hebdo. There is nothing new compared to the previous Kobane reportage and the next video from Mosul. These videos are carefully strengthening the State building strategy, portraying a State able to provide services and welfare to its citizens, promoting the Caliphate identity. The documentary series continues. Until when? Kobane drew international attention because a battle was fought there when the first video was released. Mosul was featured in the second episodes, being the Caliphate capital. Aleppo was portrayed as the region chosen by IS as its “historical” siege. Questions arise on this media sequence: either IS conquers some new territory to justify interest for a new episode or the group needs to change the format. The media material is lacking and the audience is getting used to these documentaries. IS could also decides that his testimonial, Cantlie, served his purpose. Perhaps, the coming up of a Caliphate Tv, *KhalifaLive*, will answer these questions. It has already been revealed that Cantlie will have its own show.

In conclusion:

- The main theme of the series is Cantlie. He is a real anchorman addressing a selected audience attracted by the perverse logic that every next episode grants the reporter his survival. This suspense is strengthened in the Aleppo reportage which presented a change in the format and in the journalist’s role.
- In the second documentary series, some issues are enriched by the detailed representation of daily life under the Caliphate. They create a mismatch with what is constantly aired by Western media.
- The targeted audience is one more educated on what is going on in the Caliphate and on the consequences of the possible Western response. It is an audience actively taking part in the Western debate.

These series, of which I highlighted just some sequences, are carefully planned by communication experts who deeply understand their audience. Anything is left to chance in the IS media strategy. The media tools have for the group the same legitimacy and role of an AK47. This complex planning

is highlighted by the releasing on the fourth issue of IS magazine Dabiq, on October 22 2014, of an article signed by Cantlie, explaining his reporting.

6. Gamification and convergence

Among the “ugly” words used in every recent media research, *gamification* certainly has a crucial role. This interesting concept was introduced in 2010. It conveys the idea that through pleasant playful activities of free will, daily behaviors often tedious but necessary are channeled.

It could be useful to link to this the concept of *convergence* – traditionally different media converge on the same platform (for example, on our computer or on our mobile we often listen to radio or watch TV, we play, etc) – and the “cross breeding” of different cultural attitudes and perspectives promoted by this mix of instruments and categories.

The result is a deep involvement of the user, aiming at keeping his attention focused, at recruiting him and directing him towards an apparent problems solution linked more to pleasant and playful elements than to the efficiency of the same solution.

Today there is an open debate on video games. It highlights the exclusivity that they have in mixing together virtual and daily reality, replacing the first one with the second one: with this technique the strict correlation between virtual and real world is massively exploited. There is a reciprocity between the two spaces to inform, to direct, to experiment and break limits.

Terrorism discovered *gamification* and convergence long time ago, before they were even theorized: role-playing games, fighting games against infidels aimed at training, recruiting and strengthening the militants’ loyalty to the cause and, above all, breaking the ethical barrier governing life, have been around for decades. The first “Jihadi” cartoons showed “baby terrorists” training and kids blowing themselves up near enemy convoys, repeating their parents actions. The multi-platform products distribution had already been discovered at the time, together with the interconnection between different media products: games introducing or preceding videos.

Again, IS knew how to craftily exploit all these possibilities.

On September 16 2014, the Caliphate released a short video, “*Flames of War*”, a sophisticated *trailer* in the media campaign run for IS by al-Hayat Media Center. It is a one-minute video, decently assembled with film footage, quick but punctuated by *slow motion* images. It anticipates what would come next, creating suspense. The video proofs again IS robust media expertise and

highlights its conscious strategy intimately intertwined with the Jihadi fight that uses videos and media products on the battlefield of a global war. The strategy more than the technique is significant here. It creates an open-end video (what would be the sequel? A video game, a movie, a series?) that integrates the idea of media convergence characterizing our society. The videos, by bypassing limits imposed on contents (violent and hideous videos are censored on Social Media) manage to spread around without incurring censorship.

A few days after, “*Grand Theft Auto: Salil al-Sawarim*” was released.

The first release of “*Grand Theft Auto*” (GTA) for playstation and other platforms was in 1997. In 2004, 30 million users have been playing at it. It is a video game targeting a young audience. It is highly addictive and very successful. IS exploits this success personalizing the game for its own purposes, using a well known brand and adding its mark to it: “*Salil al-Sawarim*”. The aim is recruiting young individuals and making them jihadists instead of car thieves. The Arabic itemized list reports: “Clanking of the Swords” and is similar in tones to the video game trailer launched on September 18, not too different from commercial video game trailers.

It is a perfect example of *gamification* and convergence. “*Salil al-Sawarim*” (SaS) was the headline of a four-episode series from one of the most significant IS production company, al-Furqan. The fourth episode was released on March 17 2014 on You Tube and in 24 hours 57,000 persons viewed it. Users visited the page for an average time of 17 minutes. The video is one-hour long. It was released in different formats, including an HD one giga video. It was a great success. Users initially searched for the video on Twitter – especially from Android platforms and then from iPhones. Users looked up for it in Arabic (about 30,000 users) and in second place, but far behind in numbers, in Indonesian. The video is featuring fighting mujahedeen, IS convoys parading hailed in Homs, Raqqa and Fallujah where a drone – perhaps a Parrot AR Drone remotely controlled by an iPad – provides a 360° sky view of IS’ march from Syria to Iraq. The video is perfect and effective. It entertains and “build support”, as any other war or adventure video produced in the U.S. or Europe. The issues tackled, the main characters, the goals and the founding myths inspiring it – Jihad – are different. The game exploits the commercial success of the video to attract – with a specific product – a different target, younger and playful, facing it on his favorite and daily ground, the world of video games. The aim is to direct these individuals, entertaining them, to a specific ideology that legitimizes terrorism and jihadi values.

Once again, this is a demonstration of IS media ability. It formally grasps the communication and educational side of the *gamification* concept.

At this point, IS needed a web TV to better realize its convergence strategy.

From January 20, online forums started posting a teaser trailer⁷ promoting *Khilafalive*.

The TV has a link to a web site: *Khilafalive.info* states to be the “official website for the supporters of the Islamic State Caliphate”. The video reveals a TV schedule recalling the main characters and issues from the whole IS media system: Cantlie’s reportages, Jihadi nasheed, columns aiming at recruiting and training, news from the Caliphate. A State TV – it would perhaps collect subscription fees – is central to IS State-building strategy. It was anticipated that viewers would be able to chat online on issues tackled by TV shows.

The strategy focuses on the convergence of different message platforms, relaunching information, to attract different audience with the same goal: strengthen jihad.

Do not be surprised: we created this strategy.

7. Inspire and Dabiq: Jihadi Magazines

Inspire is the “historic” al Qaeda magazine: the first issue was released in January 2012 and the Western world fully grasped terrorists ability and their media strategy. It looks like – when printed, most of the time is downloaded online via forum or chats – a modern magazine of about 30 pages, in colors with a lot of pictures, mainly in English. It is clear that it targets a younger, modern and radical audience. It tackles promotion, recruiting and training issues, informing on military tactics and the devices to use: from the home-made bombs to Kalashnikov maintenance. *Inspire* – 13 issues released, the last one on December 24 2014 – represents a qualitative leap in the Jihadi media production and it shows the terrorist groups new “on demand” flexible structure. These groups progressively learn on their own how to focus their attention on *soft targets* with self-planned operations. It is worth noticing that *Inspire* issue number 20, from March 2013, included in the list of the 10 “most wanted” individuals Stéphane Charbonnier, Charlie Hebdo’s editor in chief, killed on January 7 2014 Paris attack.

Among the new magazines beside *Inspire*, it is worth mentioning:

- Al-Sahmikka, 31-page glossy magazine released on March 2013, featuring a veiled armed woman on its front page. The target is the feminine audience. It is a one-time attempt in the Jihadi production that proofs the attention to a women constituency, particularly relevant for IS, considered the involvement – even on an operational level – of women in the Caliphate’s struggle.
- *Dar al-Islam*, similar to *Inspire* and *Dabiq* but in French. Two issues were released: the first one on December 22 2015, – “*L’Etat islamique étend son*

⁷A teaser trailer is a short promotional video focused on a single sequence.

territoire”, and the second one on February 12 2015 – “*Qu’Allah maudisse la France*”, promoting the January attack to the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo.

The whole editorial project is a propaganda effort aimed at threatening France.

The choice of favoring English over any other language to channel the message, the use of a traditional but still modern platform, spread online, clearly highlight the strategies and the accurate direction characterizing Al-Qaeda enterprise and now IS’ project.

Dabiq is the IS version of *Inspire*. It goes beyond it.

Dabiq is a small 3,000-inhabitant Syrian town, on the Northern border with Turkey. It does not have any strategic value able to justify IS’ interest in conquering it in a battle fought on August 2014. It does have though an important religious connotation for Islam.

In one of the Sunnah⁸ of the Hadith – the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed – it is said that in this town a battle would be fought between Muslim forces and an horde of infidels in the world’s last hours, before the advent of the Messiah. There is a direct reference to this in the Kassig beheading video, released on November 16 2014, when the executioner said:

“We also remind you of the haunting words that our Sheikh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi told you: ‘The spark has been lit here in Iraq and its heat will continue to intensify by Allah’s permission until it burns the Crusader army in Dabiq. Here we are, burning the first American Crusader in Dabiq, eagerly waiting for the remainder of your armies to arrive.’”

The ancient Hadith directed IS strategy and, because of its charged symbolic values, it attracts every Muslim, especially those young men and women recruited in many different countries. After Dabiq was conquered, the town name became a sort of Islamic mantra to strengthen the fighter intent in their struggle against Crusaders.

If a name bears such potential and such promises, on a media level it is smart for IS to name its own magazine – aiming at channeling and spreading its strategy and targets and the radical Caliphate ideology – Dabiq. So this is how Dabiq was

⁸ Hadith 6924 The Last Hour would not come until the Romans would land at al-A’maq or in Dabiq. An army consisting of the best (soldiers) of the people of the earth at that time will come from Medina (to counteract them). When they will arrange themselves in ranks, the Romans would say: Do not stand between us and those (Muslims) who took prisoners from amongst us. Let us fight with them; and the Muslims would say: Nay, by Allah, we would never get aside from you and from our brethren that you may fight them. They will then fight and a third (part) of the army would run away, whom Allah will never forgive. A third (part) of the army, which would be constituted of excellent martyrs in Allah’s eye, would be killed and the third who would never be put to trial would win and they would be conquerors of Constantinople.”

founded: a modern 40/60-page magazine, rich in colors, pictures and skillfully laid out. The first issue is shorter, with 26 pages. It describes itself as “a *periodical magazine focusing on the issues of tawhid (unity), manhaj (truth-seeking), hijrah (migration), jihad (holy war) and jama’ah (community)*”, and presents pictures, reportages, information on everything related to the Islamic State. Up to this date, February 2015, Dabiq hit its goals with the release of seven issues.

The first magazine issue (July 5 2014) – “*The Return of Khilafah*” – presents and frames IS’s project, clarifying some crucial questions with the goal of attracting new fighters. It is a traditional inaugural issue, schematic, that also intends to mark its territory telling the story of all the tribes which have already pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, self-proclaimed (it is worth noticing it) Caliph.

Three weeks after (July 27 2014), notably during the month of Ramadan, the second issue has a significant headline: “*The Flood*”. It tells the story of Noah as a metaphor to threat those opposing the Caliphate with floods and destruction. It calls every Muslim to join IS and to move to the Caliphate territories. At the same time, it focuses on the relationship with other Jihadi groups not in line with IS, offering a kind of religious arbitration to solve their arguments.

The third *Dabiq* issue – “*The Call to Hijrah*” – was released on October 12. The term “*Hijrah*” refers to Mohammed and his followers journey from Mecca to Medina. It calls for every Muslim to move to Syria and Iraq and join the Caliphate’s forces.

On October 22, the fourth issue was released: “*The Failed Crusade*”: it mocks the coalition efforts – especially American’s – to fight islamists on the battlefield. On the front page, an image of Saint Peter’s Square suggests the “inevitable” targets to conquer, as IS itself put it. It is a key issue, featuring an article by the reporter and IS testimonial Cantlie; it pushes at recruiting, calling lone wolves to plan attacks in the Western countries they live in; it provides moral justifications to enslaving Yazidi women. In this regard, page 17 reads:

“Before Shaytān reveals his doubts to the weak-minded and weak hearted, one should remember that enslaving the families of the kuffār and taking their women as concubines is a firmly established aspect of the Shaṛī’ah that if one were to deny or mock, he would be denying or mocking the verses of the Qur’ān and the narrations of the Prophet (sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam), and thereby apostatizing from Islam. Finally, a number of contemporary scholars have mentioned that the desertion of slavery had led to an increase in fāhishah (adultery, fornication, etc.), because the sharī alternative to marriage is not available, so a man who cannot afford marriage to a free woman finds himself surrounded by temptation towards sin. In addition, many Muslim families who have hired maids to work at

their homes, face the fitnah of prohibited khalwah (seclusion) and resultant zinā occurring between the man and the maid, whereas if she were his concubine, this relationship would be legal. This again is from the consequences of abandoning jihād and chasing after the dunyā, wallāhul-musta’ān.”

The fifth issue of Dabiq was released on November 22 2104, with a headline suggesting a project: “*Remaining and Expanding*”. It pursues IS wider goal: to gain ground as the Islamic Caliphate and to be recognized as the strongest movement in the Qaedist world announcing its presence in Algeria, Libya, the Arabic Peninsula, Sinai and Yemen. The state-building process at the origin of the Caliphate’s strategy steadies with the aspiration to coin money: golden dinar and silver dirham.

The sixth issue of Dabiq was released at the end of the year, on December 2014: “*Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan: A Testimony From Within*”. The issue contains interviews, articles, testimonies and instructions detailing IS yearnings, bearing fruits:

In the forward, the attack against the Sydney⁹ chocolate shop.

“This month, an attack was carried out in Sydney by Man Haron Monis, a Muslim who resolved to join the mujāhidīn of the Islamic State in their war against the crusader coalition. He did not do so by undertaking the journey to the lands of the Khilāfah and fighting side-by-side with his brothers but rather, by acting alone and striking the kuffār where it would hurt them most – in their own lands and on the very streets that they presumptively walk in safety. It didn’t take much; he got hold of a gun and stormed a café taking everyone inside hostage. Yet in doing so, he prompted mass panic, brought terror to the entire nation, and triggered an evacuation of parts of Sydney’s central business district. The blessings in his efforts were apparent from the very outset. Then, as the situation developed and his identity was revealed, we saw a predictable response from the international media. They immediately began searching for anything negative that they could use against him, and subsequently began reporting numerous allegations made against him in an attempt to smear his character and, by extension, the noble cause that he was fighting for – the cause of Allah (ta’ālā).”

The article shows a keen interest to the Western media debate, mainly focused on the character of the Sydney attacker, a psychotic sexual molester. Jihadists are constantly focused on this and they often use a form of “counter-narrative”, presenting arguments fitting into the debate but from a different perspective: a leitmotif of the Jihadi communication strategy.

⁹ On December 15 and 16 the Sydney Lindt coffee shop was attacked by Haron Monis. He died along with two of the about 30 hostages.

The seventh issue of Dabiq (February 13 2015) – “*From Hypocrisy to Apostasy*” – recalls the dramatic events of the first two months of 2015: the images of the beheading of the Japanese hostages are linked to Japan getting involved with the international coalition fighting IS, the gruesome ones showing the martyrdom of the Jordanian pilot are justified showing images of the airstrikes aftermath on civilian population. It winds up promoting IS success in Egypt and Libya through interviews with jihadists and the ubiquitous Cantlie.

The eight issue of Dabiq (March 30 2015) – “*Shari’ah alone will Rule Africa*” – The magazine targets Africa claiming the attack in Tunis: this terrorist attack marks perfectly the Caliphate’s strategy of penetration in North Africa. It is a penetration at “leopard spot”, which uses several jihadist groups fragmented in the area, pressing from East to West: Dabiq confirms this analysis and highlights the strategic interest in Africa, especially North Africa.

At page 17, Dabiq claims the Bardo attack and, among other things, it writes:

“This month, the soldiers of the Khilāfah sent a forceful message to the camp of kufr and riddah, striking and terrorizing them in multiple lands, and with no visas, borders, and passports to stand in the way. Strikes were carried out in Yemen and Tunisia by men whose allegiance lies, not with a false citizenship, but with Allah, His Messenger, and the believers. They readily sacrificed themselves for the cause of Allah in their own lands, bringing massacre to the disbelievers and murtaddīn, not differentiating between them on grounds of nationalism.”

A “competent” thinking which highlights the inevitable penetration of borders and the trans-nationality of the Caliphate intended to conquer Africa, in perfect agreement with the expansion presented by the maps IS already published immediately after the proclamation in June 29 2014.

In the same issue IS returns to mention Paris and Copenhagen, signs of new terrorism of “zombie”, skilled and unpredictable returnees, today invited to come to Libya, where they could not get in Syria: IS feels reasonably sure about the political impasse that is preventing the military attack in its areas and confirms the strategic primacy of the North African countries.

Other interesting ideas are presented in this number, all particularly “ferocious” and threatening to the kuffar:

- the destruction of museums and archaeological sites, which means the impossibility of the existence of a culture other than that of jihad;
- the education of the “Lions of tomorrow”, recreating the sequences of children who kill or serve as the executioner of IS;
- the Cantlie’s counter-narratives that argued USA policy of President Obama.

The intelligent communication of terror continues, confident of being able to express as the result of correct interpretation of enemy vulnerabilities: IS – as it often is for all terrorism – is not strong on its own, but is strong for the

weakness of his enemy. In this sense, the effectiveness of this communication questions us on the constant delay that characterizes the required response to the Caliphate, by the Coalition, which claims to fight it.

Dabiq perfectly fits in the Caliphate multi-platform communication style, exploiting every online channel to spread its message even in the most traditional forms: there is one final goal, but the producer has the ability to use different media to target different audience.

8. The Caliphate “Tourism” Brochures

With regards to different media, and including the traditional ones, it doesn't come as a surprise IS' use of brochures to promote its goals. The group targets a different audience, the foreign fighters families, to lure it to the lands of the Caliphate, thus strengthening its “rising State”. *Islamic State News* is an example of this sort of standard communication. It was edited by *Alhayat Mediacenter*. It is a weekly magazine, detailing since June 2014 the Caliphate success, showing not just military results but also presenting its services to the population. In relation to this issue, the headline of the first issue is:

“Aid distribution. The Islamic State distributes flour, fish, and other form of aid to Ahlus-Sunnah families in Ewessat”; the number two opens with pictures of fruits and gold in the bazaar, with the title: “Trade flourishes under the rule of the Islamic State”; last number three: “Islamic State provides security to farmers”.

This was suggested for every single province, once again highlighting IS State structure and its collateral development process. It is technically a brochure what was posted on Twitter by @Wilaiat_Halab (the account was later blocked): a 31-page Arabic document in colors from September 2013 that shows life in Aleppo province. There's no gun and nobody is dying. The document presents economic and demographic statistics, images of placid rivers and field ready to be harvested, pictures of mechanized ovens baking bread and of children in schools under the black IS flag. The success of this strategy is also revealed through interviews with the province's citizens, claiming that finally with IS in power fuel is cheap and justice upheld:

“I recently (22/8/2014) had the opportunity to speak to a friend in Manbij, a small city in Aleppo of about 100,000 (pre-war) under exclusive Islamic State (IS) control since January 2014 (when the organization was still ISIS). He told me about how IS cadres were administering the city and about what Manbijis think about the new political order. (...) “In Manbij, people see that the IS is “getting comfortable,” and that the trappings of statehood appear stronger

every day. The IS public administration includes several types of police, courts and administrative bodies. The group provides services and undertakes development projects. IS collects taxes in the form of zakat and redistributes some of the money to the poor... Recently, IS has begun shipping fuel from fields it recently captured in Dayr al-Zawr province and selling it at fixed discounted rates in Aleppo.”

Basically, what was then reported by Cantlie in Mosul and Aleppo.

This type of communication, in the framework of a wider project, has two different goals: showing to the world life under the Caliphate and lure the foreign fighters families to its territories, to build up its population of believers.

9. The online publishing: EBooks and Black Flag Books

We cannot conclude without mentioning IS Ebook production – mainly on PDFs – distributed via Twitter with links to new volumes. In terms of editing, layout and tones, the book production has a lesser editorial quality compared to other products. It fully fits though into IS general media strategy.

This book production took centre stage on January 2015, when the Caliphate newly edited Ebook – *Islamic State 2015* – started being promoted by Twitter accounts often blocked. It is a 100-page document, written in an imperfect English with numerous information on IS.

It is divided into five sections:

- Leadership (pp. 8-21): a description of IS chain of command, its goals and the strategies to flee attacks.
- Soldiers (pp. 22-50): an explanation on how to enter IS controlled territories, the military training, the chain of command and a militant daily life.
- Services (pp. 51-64): information on the Caliphate decision to coin money, on free public transportation, education and health.
- Media (pp. 65-86): the Caliphate media strategy and its communication tools are explained, with a focus on Social Media. They are analyzed judging the effects of IS messages on the West.
- The future (pp- 87-100): this section reveals IS targets and where it plans to attack. The group asked AQIM for missiles and now is threatening Europe and Italy to use them.

Despite the astonishment which is the symptom of inattention, *Islamic State 2015* is the eighth volume of a series referring to the highly publicized “Black Flags Books”, popular on Jihadi forums.

This is the book production until now. It has increased with the progressive establishment of the Caliphate:

- Ebook 1: *Black Flags from the East* (Khorasan) (November 2012)

- Ebook 2: *Black Flags from Syria* (May 2013)
- Ebook 3: *Black Flags from Arabia* (September 2013)
- Ebook 4: *Black Flags from Persia* (Iran) (October 2014)
- Ebook 5: *Black Flags from Rome* (November 2014)
- Ebook 1: *Miracles in Syria* (2013)
- Ebook 2: *Martyrs of Syria* (2014)
- Ebook: *The Islamic State* (2015)

As you can notice, the targets are countries closer to the Caliphate, lands to potentially conquer and ripe for an ideological and operational contamination, based on the internal Muslim world divisions. Rome is an exception: it is considered the capital of Europe and the kuffar homeland. This is how the volume *Black Flags from Rome* is presented online:

“Europe is returning to the Dark Ages (due to a financial recession). Armed gangs are forming into militias for racist politicians, and a young Muslim minority is their enemy. All this while a Caliphate is growing across the Mediterranean sea next door. How does this mix of chaos lead to the conquest of Rome (the capital of Europe)?”

The project EBook that opens 2015 fits in a more complex editorial project that again highlights the group ability to use different media.

Specifically, *Islamic State 2015* is an interesting project on a communication level. Despite not being particularly polished in his quality, perhaps lower than the magazines one, being published in a rush, it often exploits Western media information and graphics fitting them into the Caliphate perspective. It does not tell anything new on the Islamic State, but puts together everything that was already online. It thus becomes an instrument for those looking to join IS and a propaganda tool to strengthen IS State aspirations.

The chapter on communication explains – indirectly – the very reasons of this new media production. On page 76 it is written that:

“The Islamic State and other Islamic groups have always had a bad experience with journalists over the years. Journalists can be spies, or agents of other governments, or they can simply be people who want a story, but when they return to their country – they will sensationalise and portray the Islamic State in a negative light. The Islamic State has imprisoned and later beheaded some journalists and activists from Western non-Muslim lands, many who later turned out to be spies or ‘ex-army’ soldiers. However, lately (end of 2014) the Islamic State has changed its position and is being alot more transparent with journalists. It is allowing them the right to travel in the Islamic State and see the services it is providing for the people.”

Full transparency is the key strategy: reorganizing the contents – not new for the insiders – providing an interpretation coherent to the Caliphate ideology ready to be presented to a wider Western audience and to potential recruits.

Cantlie and the German journalist Todenhoefer's reportages should be analyzed bearing this in mind. Their positions, even when disapproving, fit in the text as an example of IS transparency, rightly rewarding in the Islamist production interpretation. On the same issue, it is worth reading what you can find on page 80 and 81 of the book, in the section "*The Islamic State Online*":

"It is surprising to notice that the Islamic State does not have a website of its own. Its entire network of propaganda consists of the following media types:

- Professionally edited videos. (ie. al-Furqan, al-Hayat).*
- Social media accounts (ie. on Twitter).*
- Ebooks and eMagazines. (ie. Dabiq magazine).*

The Islamic State's Online world is similar to its practical real life world, in that everything is decentralised. Example: In real life, nobody knows where Khalifah Ibrahim (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi) is located, similarly no-one has one centralised website they can visit to find the Islamic State and its content. This is really important because by hiding Khalifah Ibrahim's location, no-one can easily assassinate him. Similarly, by not having a website, no-one can hack it and claim an online victory.

The Islamic State's content (videos, ebooks, social media accounts) are scattered all around the internet. Just like the different provinces of the Islamic State are scattered in different locations. Each province has its own responsibility in creating its own videos and social media accounts to share its successes. By decentralising everything from the core leadership, even if a province fails online or offline, the leadership and overall Khilafah (Caliphate) leadership project is still safe and can grow elsewhere.

Hashtags: whenever Islamic State members want to promote a cause or message, they will use hashtags (such as: #AllEyesOnISIS) to promote their campaign, message or to advertise a new release.

What we see is that even though Muslims have been trying to tell people about Islam for the past 20yrs, there have been more searches for "Islamic State" on youtube in the past 3yrs than there have been for "Islam" since youtube has ever existed.

This shows that the world is starting to search about Islam alot more now that it is a real practical entity (State) instead of just an idea. It is not the duty of Muslims to make Islam look 'cute' to the masses, but simply to convey what Allah (God) has revealed of the guidance to mankind. Many non Muslims who were against Zionism and the New World Order are rushing to Islam since the announcement of the Islamic State after seeing its strength and resilience against the evil world powers."

As you can see, these few lines written in a poor English outline a portrait already emerged in our analysis. In this specific case, they take the format of

an “autobiography”: the Caliphate tells its own story – or just a story – and it is similar to what we – who are not its followers – are writing about it.

On a communication level, it is a strong action and once again it grants a sort of stability to its State-building aspirations. It also attracts new recruits and destabilizes a Western audience, used to watch the Caliphate through codes and symbols now used by the extremists too. The West is thus forced away from the stereotypical “Jihadi bedouin” image identifying the enemy as someone very distant and different, unable to communicate.

The transparency and media plurality path – articulated by the complex IS direction – serves the purpose of fighting this very stereotype of a jihadist who, facilitating the enemy identification, is the main foe of a Caliphate that wants to become a State: an entity craving for relations.

10. Conclusion

The examples so far analyzed of the complex and well-structured IS communication clearly highlight how the group media strategy is accurate, resolute and aimed at contributing to the wider Caliphate’s goal: establishing itself as a State controlling a territory and its citizens, granting institutions and infrastructures. In this framework, the media strategy has a crucial role, perhaps not fully grasped by those who are fighting IS.

For example, it is worth noticing how counter-information and *counter-narratives* are strategies pursued more by IS than by the opposing coalition.

In this respect, on one side Cantlie is the undisputed anchorman, on the other side, there was an interesting attempt from Barak Barfi, the spokesperson of the Sotloff family (Steven Sotloff was beheaded on September 2014) to communicate directly with the islamists in Arabic, pressuring them with competent arguments on the legitimacy of beheadings. French Foreign Affairs Minister Fabius’ advice – on September 16 2014 – to call IS Daesh¹⁰ to avoid recognizing its State aspirations and to use a derogatory acronym did not succeed and it is actually weak. An “opposite” example revealing a poor oversight comes from news broadcasted on RAI on February 4 2015. They call “retaliation” the Jordanian execution of Sajida al-Rishawi and Ziad al-Karbouly¹¹.

¹⁰ Daesh (al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham) is the Arabic acronym for ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) first used in April 2013 by Iranian media and then chose by Syrian anti-IS fighters. In Arabic “Daesh” sounds like “Daes”: “one who crashes something underfoot” and also as “Dahes”: “one who sows discord”.

¹¹ Sajida a-Rishawi was sentenced to death for her role in the 2005 attacks in Amman where 60 people were killed. Al-Karbouly, an al Qaeda fighter, was on death row since 2008 because of his involvement in planning terrorist actions against Jordanian citizens in Iraq.

Other media organizations such as Ansa called it “revenge”. Both terrorists were convicted by a sovereign State’s legitimate court. Media should have talked of “enforcement of a court judgment”. They instead insisted on the emotional aspect of the event, making IS – directing the scene from behind – stronger. The counternarrative actions on the other side should involve the whole media system. Media should take responsibility for a situation in which any kind of communication is part of a wider strategic and conflicted plot where everybody is involved. We could use the same argument for a big chunk of IS communication products, channeled without filters by Western media which do not take responsibility and do not think before airing them about the effects on the audience. This is presented as freedom of expression, but it is just a dangerous and irresponsible game played in the framework of an “hybrid warfare”.

In the so-called “hybrid warfare”, where actors and battlefields are multiple, communication has a crucial role. It goes beyond traditional “*psychological warfare operations*”. At the end of January 2015, the British Army announced the introduction of a new cyber warfare unit. The Seventieth Brigade has already a nickname: “*Twitter Troops*”, and from April 1st it will try to stem IS presence on Social Media. It is an important step for military strategists. For the first time an Army officially set out kinetic activities in the virtual world (in this case, non conventional or non lethal combat operations) aiming at openly opposing IS. It will be interesting to see how, in the coming months, this new unit would coordinate with others established by allied countries.

Anonymous – the global *hacktivists* network which waged war on IS to fight it in the *cyber space* with the #OpCharlieHebdo operation, acted along similar lines after the January 7 2015 attack in Paris. Its action confirms the plurality of actors and battlefields involved in the struggle. Anonymous increased its activity at the beginning of February when it blocked hundreds of Facebook and Twitter accounts close to IS. And it posted a video on it:

“*Operation ISIS continues. [...] We are Muslims, Christians, Jews. We are hackers, crackers, hacktivists, phishers, agents, spies, or just the guy next door. [...] We are young or old, gay or straight. [...] We come from all races, countries, religions and ethnicity. United as one, divided by zero... “ISIS, we will hunt you, take down your sites, emails, accounts, and expose you. From now on, no safe place for you online. You will be treated like a virus, and we are the cure.”*”

The Web has become a crucial battlefield, willingly exploited by IS – and less by its foes – as the group explained in the *Islamic State 2015* volume.

In this cyber warfare scenario, Anonymous’ #OpCharlieHebdo initiative made noise, but in reality the *hacktivists*’ attacks started long before, in the summer of 2014, with *opIceISIS* and *OpISIS* operations, reactivated following

the Charlie Hebdo attack and pushed by media airing the February 6 Anon video. A second Anonymous campaign, NO2ISIS, was focused on attacking institutions and States accused of supporting IS with money and arms.

Less than 2,000 Facebook and Twitter accounts were identified and some Jihadi website were blocked out of 60,000 IS sympathizers' accounts registered before Foley's murder. They are now half of it because of new Social Media policies. Anon's approach is to pinpoint Jihadi website, search for their vulnerabilities, build a database, *deface* them (to change the visual appearance of a webpage), collect information on users and, as a last resort, wage a DDoS attack to force them offline. It is a real cooperative strategy. Several activists and other individuals are involved, sharing a huge amount of data on chat: the @OpCharlieHebdo account got 30,000 followers in two days.

Besides what newspapers wrote, Anon is pushing its activists not to force website offline, but to collect information that, if deemed interesting, are transferred to institutions focusing on the web. It is an significant intelligence approach, suitable to cope with the problem. Anonymous is aware that an account or a website blocked or forced offline is doomed to reemerge, with a slightly different identity. Those who wants to get information online are then forced to lose a lot of time searching, without obtaining meaningful results. We wish we could perhaps move towards a constructive cooperation – in different operational forms – between those who have decided to fight IS in the virtual world.

In the other hand, IS is active online not just on a propaganda or recruitment level. It is also planning cyber attacks: "*the Caliphate's eye*" is one of IS initiative. Through a Trojan virus it would install on PC a program, performed on background, capable of registering every keystroke or any other device input. Just some weeks ago, IS hacked and blocked for a few hours CentCom Twitter account. CentCome is the United States Central Command, headquartered in Florida. Its area of responsibility includes countries in the Middle East and Asia, from Egypt to Pakistan and Kazakhstan.

To identify Social Media accounts, to block Islamist web site, to pinpoint providers and to determine IP addresses spread everywhere on the World Wide Web does not make a lot of sense. It scores a limited victory quickly crippled by the opening of new virtual battlefields.

The nature of the Web is delocalized and virtual and this is why the best approach is to constantly monitor the online communication, to get information and to activate any possible obstruction, infiltration, counter-narrative – all of them with limited outcome – in cooperation with the private sector and the big telecommunication companies. The British intelligence called for a similar approach in 2015.

The following chart presents a summary, limited to the examples discussed, to outline codifications, targets, goals and strategies explaining the Caliphate media production.

Summary of the communication strategies of IS

Typology	Target	Aims	Strategy	Preferred Medium
Social Media (FB, Twitter, etc.)	Potential supporters, radical Islamists, etc.	Radicalizations and recruitment	Promote viral and imitated behaviors; <i>story telling</i>	Social Media
Comunicazione dell'orrore (beheading)	The enemies of the Caliphate, Western audiences at large	Terrorize and threaten	Show the brutality of the death, promote affective reactions	Video
Counter-information (Cantlie: Lend Me Your Ears and reportages)	Western audiences interested and competent	Promote discussion on IS insisting on topics critical for the Western public agenda	Promote counter-narratives: ricontestualizzazione dei contenuti nella prospettiva di IS	Video
Information (Islamic State News and other brochures)	Families of (potential) supporters; Western audiences critical intervention against IS	Normalization: spread news that highlight the normalcy of everyday life in the Caliphate	recontextualization and reframing of IS contents; promoting the normalcy of everyday life in the Caliphate	Pdf
Magazines, EBooks (Dabiq, Inspire, etc.)	Members of IS, foreign fighters and Western audiences interested and competent	Clarify and address the theological, political and tactical issues	Use of a medium "traditional" medium for a plurality of strategies	Pdf
Gamification (Grand Theft Auto: Salil al-Sawarim)	"Digital youth", not just Islamists	Socialize the Caliphate and IS	Use gaming as a vehicle for socialization and normalization	Gaming
Convergece (KhilafaLive, gamification,...	Distribution of all topics already used by communication of IS by applying to a wide public, which will find "niche areas" for specific languages and time (agenda)			Web TV

From this analysis it clearly emerges how a complex media strategy is not accidental. On the contrary, it belongs to the world of widespread and pervasive global communication.

Not recognizing this simple fact, or to be shocked by IS exploitation of technologies, is a sign of a frequent cultural lag and of the ethnocentrism through which the West too often ranks its foes just because they fight in "flip-flops". It thus produces a vulnerability. It is evident that IS media project is structured and organized in an efficient and competent system pursuing specific strategies (for example the *al-Hayat Media Centre* trade mark). It is also clear that jihadists have been expert in the use of media technologies for years now. They invested money and expertise in the media warfare.

IS qualitative leap forward is represented by its complex media production simultaneously advancing on different levels. It is important to highlight how communication – not just the one concerning IS – is characterized

by a relationship process. Every type of competent communication leaves marks describing its own recipients, the source, the distribution process, etc. This represents a sort of vulnerability for those generating this information, if someone is interested in interfering with it. This is why the “astonishment” I mentioned at the beginning of this research is not justified.

In general terms, it is worth remembering how reality is defined by a pervasive communication: the public agenda amplified by the media coincides every day more with the political agenda and the gap between the “representation” of reality and “reality” itself is significantly smaller, especially in the context of an emotional communication pursued by default by Western media and following a precise strategy by the Caliphate.

With regard to the complex Caliphate communication strategy it is evident that its main goal is the State-building process, the establishment of a State entity internationally recognized. In this framework, media production is one of the most crucial component, even if it is not the most important.

The increased dramatization and frequency of IS media production in the past months suggests a second goal: promoting new form of radicalization not just aimed at recruiting *foreign fighters*, but also at pushing the conflict fostered by Western reactions to IS messages. IS is trying to trigger an indirect effect searching for a reaction from Caliphate foes, the European citizens: IS wants to start a violent conflict between “Islam” and the “West” through terrorist attacks and also through shocking Western citizens. IS aims at establishing itself as a State and at the same time at upsetting with its violence Western society fostering every possible form of conflict based on ethnical and religious radicalism. Together with a *institutionalized communication strategy promoting the institutionalization of the Caliphate*, IS uses also a *communication strategy aimed at triggering emotions*: we are facing two dangerous IS traps.

The second model of communication, centered on “beheadings”, is directed towards a “*double radicalization*” process: on one hand it pursues new followers and fighters. The grisly death of the Jordanian pilot is a response to those who bombed IS villages. The Western outrage is not shared everywhere. The video promotes a form of radicalization we are growing accustomed to and is directed towards recruiting. On the other hand, the video sparks the outrage of a European audience and ignites a violent reaction towards an enemy identified as an “animal” (a frequent term used by the media) but characterized by its Islamic ideology. The result is a second form of radicalization affecting a part of the Western and European world, compelled to react. Some signs of this radicalization are:

- On February 4 and 5 there was a failed attempt to burn the Cultural Islamic Center in Massa Lombarda: “The Cultural Center window sill was set on fire at around 4:30. The building is located between via Marchetti and via Quadri. An object and some cloth imbued with an inflammable

liquid were left behind. The fire damaged a window, some prayers rugs and smoke darkened the building walls.”;

- Fear and discomfort are growing, especially among young individuals prone to looking for a violent response. We cannot provide numbers, but at the beginning of January many parents were worried: their sons and daughters, from 14 to 20-year-old, showed fear in front of Arabic-speaking individuals and asked what they should do to go and fight IS;
- There’s an inevitable radicalization of the European political debate in every single member State. It opens the way to xenophobia and racism which are weakening governments’ ability to find a unified approach against the Caliphate;
- The declarations of traditionally influential imams (The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayeb, said the killers themselves deserved to be “*killed, crucified or to have their limbs amputated.*” February 4th 2015) did not achieve any result: moderate Islam could not communicate anymore with IS. The Caliphate is exposing the imams’ weakness inside radical Islam, it drags them as Islam champions in the conflicts emerging in the West. The group is “beheading” them on a figurative point of view¹².

Both strategies aim at establishing the Caliphate as the leading group in the Jihadi world, divided in many smaller movements, often in disagreement between themselves, but searching for a new leadership to threaten Europe (identified as the weak plurality in the West) and finding in IS’ destabilizing power its legitimacy.

If, as it is possible, this is linked to the Caliphate expansion problems and to its ability in tapping its foes vulnerabilities, constantly attracting them into its traps, we should expect an increase of the hybrid warfare intensity.

In the framework of a media conflict and a hybrid warfare, the response to IS should develop specific contrasting strategies where actors and media instruments mix together and where communication becomes the real and virtual battlefield.

We should also find an accurate response to general problems, i.e the web ungovernability and the lack of regulations able to define the scope of action and shared norms; we should think about Western media responsibility now that IS is using Western media platforms to spread its information; we should tackle the issue of a more open cultural approach – empathetic and analytical – to reduce our vulnerability and to adapt our response to IS attack capability. We should avoid what has already happened in the past: IS cannot affect with its media strategy our information system, our political and public agendas.

Beside these specific goals, because of the existence of IS “conflict strategy”, we should pursue an actual and not just a communicative coordination with Muslims distancing themselves from radicals.

¹² Data detailing the situation in general terms are not optimistic: 92 per cent of Saudis on August 2014 considered IS compliant with the values of Islamic law.

Time line of the media products analyzed

Title	Typology	Date
Different products on Social Media, FB, Twitter	Post, stories, etc.	Continuous release
Salil al-Sawarim	Video	173/2014
Islamic State News – 3 numeri	Magazine	June 2014
Dabiq, #1	Magazine	15/7/2014
Dabiq, #2	Magazine	27/7/2104
Beheading of James Foley	Video	19/8/2014
The Aleppo Province	Brochure	September 2014
Beheading of Steven Sotloff	Video	2/9/2014
Beheading of David Haines	Video	13/9/2014
Salil al-Sawarim IV	Video	18/9/2014
Flame of Wars	Video trailer	18/9/2014
Grand Theft Auto: Salil al-Sawarim	Trailer, videogame	18/9/2014
Lend Me Your Ears Premessa - Cantlie	Video	18/9/2014
Lend Me Your Ears 1 – Cantlie	Video	23/9/2014
Beheading of Hervé Gourdel	Video	24/9/2014
Lend Me Your Ears 2 - Cantlie	Video	29/9/2014
Beheading of Alan Henning	Video	19/9/2014
Lend Me Your Ears 3 - Cantlie	Video	3/10/2014
Dabiq, #3	Magazine	12/10/2014
Dabiq, #4	Magazine	22/10/2014
Lend Me Your Ears 4 - Cantlie	Video	16/10/2014
Lend Me Your Ears 5 - Cantlie	Video	25/10/2014
Inside 'Ayn al Islam - Cantlie	Video	28/10/2014
Beheading of Peter Kassig	Video	16/11/2014
What Are You Waiting For - al-Hayat Media Center	Video	19/11/2014
Lend Me Your Ears 6 - Cantlie	Video	21/11/2014
Dabiq#5	Magazine	22/11/2014
Dabiq, #6	Magazine	29/12/2014
Inside Mosul - Cantlie	Video	3/1/2015
KhilafaLive	Web TV	20/1/2015 announcement
Beheading of Haruna Yukawa	Video	24/12015
The Second Public Message of 'Kenji Goto Jogo' to His Family and the Government of Japan	Video	27/1/2015
Beheading of Kenji Goto	Video	31/1/2015
Islamic State 2015	Ebook	2/2/2015 (on Twitter 15/1/2015)
Martyrdom of Muad al-Kasaesbeh	Video	3/2/2015
From inside Halab - Cantlie	Video	9/2/2015
Dabiq, #7	Magazine	13/2/2015
A Message Signed In Blood To The Nation Of The Cross	Video	15/2/2015
Dabiq, #8	Magazine	30/3/2015

La Rivista semestrale *Sicurezza, Terrorismo e Società* intende la *Sicurezza* come una condizione che risulta dallo stabilizzarsi e dal mantenersi di misure proattive capaci di promuovere il benessere e la qualità della vita dei cittadini e la vitalità democratica delle istituzioni; affronta il fenomeno del *Terrorismo* come un processo complesso, di lungo periodo, che affonda le sue radici nelle dimensioni culturale, religiosa, politica ed economica che caratterizzano i sistemi sociali; propone alla *Società* – quella degli studiosi e degli operatori e quella ampia di cittadini e istituzioni – strumenti di comprensione, analisi e scenari di tali fenomeni e indirizzi di gestione delle crisi.

Sicurezza, Terrorismo e Società si avvale dei contributi di studiosi, policy maker, analisti, operatori della sicurezza e dei media interessati all'ambito della sicurezza, del terrorismo e del crisis management. Essa si rivolge a tutti coloro che operano in tali settori, volendo rappresentare un momento di confronto partecipativo e aperto al dibattito.

La rivista ospita contributi in più lingue, preferendo l'italiano e l'inglese, per ciascuno dei quali è pubblicato un Executive Summary in entrambe le lingue. La redazione sollecita particolarmente contributi interdisciplinari, commenti, analisi e ricerche attenti alle principali tendenze provenienti dal mondo delle pratiche.

Sicurezza, Terrorismo e Società è un semestrale che pubblica 2 numeri all'anno. Oltre ai due numeri programmati possono essere previsti e pubblicati numeri speciali.

EDUCatt - Ente per il Diritto allo Studio Universitario dell'Università Cattolica
Largo Gemelli 1, 20123 Milano - tel. 02.72342235 - fax 02.80.53.215
e-mail: editoriale.dsu@educatt.it (produzione) - librario.dsu@educatt.it (distribuzione)
redazione: redazione@itstime.it
web: www.sicurezzaerrorismosocieta.it
ISBN: 978-88-6780-824-3



Euro 20,00