SicurezzaTerrorismoSocietà

Security Terrorism Society

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

11
2020

EDUCatt

SICUREZZA, TERRORISMO E SOCIETÀ

11

Sommario

The institutional symmetry of an asymmetric conflict. A State - State rivalry throughout Daesh's Soft-Power

DANIELE MARIA BARONE

Nota autore

Daniele Maria Barone is an officer of the Italian Coast Guard and has previously worked, for more than five years, as a project manager and digital communication specialist in the private sector.

He is graduated in Marketing & Communication at IULM University and has a master's degree in International Relations at ASERI Graduate School of Economics and International Relations – Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. He specialized in homeland security and counter-terrorism studies earning an Executive Certificate in Counter-Terrorism studies at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) – Herzliya.

Given his experience in communication, economics, security, and geopolitics, his research interests are related to cyber-jihad, terrorism financing, and terrorist groups' communication strategies.

Abstract

To analyse Daesh exclusively through its skills in keeping its brand communicative and evocative, can overshadow the real goal of the organization: establish and control its borderless State. Indeed, the terrorist group is gradually erasing from the collective imaginary its image connected to a leader or an ideology but, on the contrary, it is evolving as a fully-fledged State which is consolidating its soft-power.

Through its either online or offline communication, Daesh is growing even beyond the ideology itself. The organization is progressively insinuating in its followers' psychological and sociological environments through, for instance, their spare time or their political orientation. Nowadays, the organization has acquired enough tools to understand and change the way of thinking of individuals or entire communities and it is masterly using it at its advantage.

Taking into account the exogenous (i.e. the sociological background of its supporters) and endogenous (i.e. Daesh's *modus operandi*) elements, this paper will analyze how Daesh, by exploiting its means of communication, is succeeding in being perceived as a stable entity. The paper will explain that this development is far from being a random process but represents the real inner core of the organization which, from this perspective, is keeping on being reinforced by Daesh's adaptability.

Analizzare Daesh solo attraverso la sua capacità di mantenere sempre comunicativo il suo brand può oscurare la reale finalità dell'organizzazione: creare e governare il suo Stato senza confini. L'organizzazione sta gradualmente riuscendo ad escludere dall'immaginario collettivo la sua identificazione attraverso la figura di un leader o di un'ideologia ma, al contrario, facendo leva

sul consolidamento del suo soft-power, essa viene sempre più percepita dai suoi sostenitori come un vero e proprio stato.

Il gruppo sta superando la propria ideologia, insinuandosi nell'ecosistema sociologico e psicologico dei suoi attivisti, entrando lentamente nelle loro fasi di interpretazione dell'ambiente che li circonda, dal monopolio del loro tempo libero fino ad accrescere la sua influenza ad un livello tale da diventare una valida alternativa alla burocrazia statale. Infatti, Daesh ha ormai acquisito sufficienti strumenti per conoscere ed influenzare il modo di percepire il mondo di individui e intere comunità, sfruttando questo potenziale a suo vantaggio.

Tenendo presente i fattori esogeni (il background sociologico degli attivisti) ed endogeni (il *modus operandi* messo in atto dal gruppo), quest'analisi spiegherà come Daesh, utilizzando diversi mezzi di comunicazione, sia riuscito ad accrescere la sua immagine di entità stabile. La ricerca spiegherà che questo processo non è casuale ma rappresenta il reale nucleo di Daesh e che, da questa prospettiva, la capacità di adattamento dell'organizzazione terroristica è solo uno strumento utile ad alimentare il suo soft-power.

Keywords

To date, Daesh has been dismantled, deprived of credibility, and with no remaining strong leadership but still up and unpredictable. The latest release, a few days ago, of its first piece since January 2019 from foreign language media *al-Hayat* named "The People of Zeal and Bravery"[1], the inclusivity shown by the organization in the Sahel[2], and the shift of the group's online followers to decentralized chat rooms after the Referral Action Days operation by EUROPOL on Telegram[3] it's a warning on the uselessness of kinetic actions taken against the group.

Focusing only on its ability to reshape and use at its advantage any tool to keep its community unified, loyal, and coherent, liquidity and adaptability are the only words left to define, somehow, this terrorist organization[4].

---

[1] SITE Intelligence Group (March 11, 2020) https://bit.ly/33cahPP.

[2] F. Marone (March 03, 2020) *Terrorismo ed estremismi: la prospettiva dell'intelligence italiana.* ISPI. https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/terrorismo-ed-estremismi-la-prospettiva-dellintelligence-italiana-25307.

[3] F. Borgonovo, N. Spagna (December 02, 2019) L'operazione "Referral Action Days" di Europol. ITSTIME. https://www.itstime.it/w/loperazione-referral-action-days-di-europol-federico-borgonovo-e-nicolo-spagna.

[4] T. Goudsouzian (November 22, 2016) *EXCLUSIVE: Interview with Kurdish Intel Chief Lahur Talabani.* Newsweek. http://newsweekme.com/exclusive-interview-kurdish-intel-chief-lahur-talabani.

However, by considering Daesh only through its unique skills in preserving its brand communicative and evocative, no matter any precaution or action taken by institutions or private sector[5], can overshadow the real core of the organization: **establish and control its borderless State**. As obvious and simple as it is, this should be the initial point to analyse Daesh's current communicative decentralization and its shift from a strictly hierarchical to a horizontal structure.

It's a truism that the terrorist organization is evolving and mutating its attractiveness by progressively shifting to a clandestine and privacy-centric communication ecosystem[6]. Nevertheless, in the meantime, it is also looking at the bigger picture, placing itself, step by step, on a higher and higher level, aiming at excluding in people's imaginary an identification connected to the figure of a leader or an ideology but, on the contrary, growing as a fully-fledged State. This process has already begun and it can be analysed by acknowledging the organization's **consolidated soft-power**.

1. Institutional communication and its added value to the perception of stability through soft-power

American political scientist Joseph Nye, referring to US non-coercive power, defined soft-power as follows: "… if a State can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others… if its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow"[7].

Thus, he defines hard-power as coercive power wielded through inducements or threats (i.e. military intervention, economic sanctions), while soft-power as the ability to affect others to get the expected outcomes[8].

Translating the definition of soft-power to present times, it is well known how the essential role played by digital tools in the communication ecosystem has changed diplomatic work, by reshaping either domestic or foreign policy dynamics, while designing a fragmented flow of communications which

---

[5] (Nov 22, 2019) *Referral Action Day Against Islamic State Online Terrorist Propaganda*. EUROPOL - Press Release. https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/referral-action-day-against-islamic-state-online-terrorist-propaganda.
[6] D.M. Barone (November 2019) *The decentralized finance-violent extremism nexus: ideologies, technical skills, strong and weak points*. Sicurezza Terrorismo Società. http://www.sicurezzaterrorismosocieta.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-decentralized-finance-violent-extremism-nexus_ideologies-technical-skills-strong-and-weak-points-Daniele-Barone.pdf.
[7] J.S. Nye, Jr. (1990) *Soft Power*. Foreign Policy no. 80, pp. 153-171.
[8] E.X. Li (August 20, 2018) *The Rise and Fall of Soft Power*. Foreign Policy https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power.

is empowering individuals and groups which are called to rapidly interpret unfolding events[9].

This scenario is imposing governments to constantly balance the deployment of information resources with social power (i.e. public opinion)[10], because information cannot exist in isolation. Indeed, it needs a **human recipient for facts and events to become information**[11].

In these terms, soft-power becomes very fragile and easily turned[12].

Indeed, "in today's global information age, victory may sometimes depend not on whose army wins, but on whose story wins"[13], meaning that the way state actors can convey the public's perception over any type of subject or event, both in domestic and international contexts, can make its government a weak one or a stable one[14].

In particular, institutional communication combines internal administrative communication with the institution's communication with the surrounding external community[15].

Hence, an effective institutional communication, just as in corporate communication, has to advertise a brand by building bridges to engage with the public opinion through an efficient dialogue with different audiences[16]. To keep the dialogue going with public opinion, any governmental communication service needs to be agile and adaptable to changing Governments, Ministers, departments and policy as well as the dizzying pace of technology

[9] B. Hocking, J. Melissen (July 2015) Diplomacy in the Digital Age. Clingendale https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Digital_Diplomacy_in_the_Digital%20Age_Clingendael_July2015.pdf.

[10] J. Kerry (May 6, 2013) *Digital Diplomacy: Adapting Our Diplomatic Engagement*. DipNote. http://2007-2017-blogs.state.gov/stories/2013/05/06/digital-diplomacy-adapting-our-diplomatic-engagement.html.

[11] V. Camilleri (Feb 9, 2011) *Diplomatic Reporting in the Internet Era after WikiLeaks*. E-diplomacy Panel https://www.diplomacy.edu/resources/general/diplomatic-reporting-internet-era.

[12] E.X. Li (August 20, 2018) *The Rise and Fall of Soft Power*. Foreign Policy https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power.

[13] J. Arquilla quoted by J.S. Nye Jr. (Jan 2014) *The Information Revolution and Soft Power*. Current History - Harvard University's DASH repository. https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/11738398/Nye-InformationRevolution.pdf.

[14] J. McClory (2018) *The Soft Power 30 - A Global Ranking of Soft Power*. USC CENTER ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY. https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2018.pdf.

[15] S. Elkalliny (July 2018) *Effective institutional communication within the framework of institutional learning and its applications in educational institutions*. Ain Shams University.

[16] OECD Open Government team, OGP Support unit. Communicating Open Government - A How-to Guide. OECD. https://www.oecd.org/gov/Open-Government-Guide.pdf.

and the general publics' changing behaviour or interests, attitudes and opinion to issues[17].

The constant adaptation and search for the targeted public, in this very historic moment, are getting governmental communication strategies closer and closer to a branding strategy, even though the two concepts have a very different impact on people's life. They both try to sell an image and both analyse and try to match their audiences' feelings[18].

In these terms, back to Daesh, should it be considered as a brand seller or as a **State soft-power maker?**

2. Jihadi social asylum project

"We are all ISIS" in 2016 was one of the most inflated slogans used by Daesh to exploit the inclusivity of the Islamic *ummah*,[19] pointing out its will to accept people of all colors and ethnicities and by representing jihad as the cure for marginalization, discrimination, existential angst, lost of identity or depression[20]. Indeed, humans can be understood only as a part of society, culture or history and not in isolation; the organization forces the creation of a new safe society under Islam, stressing the links between sociocultural processes taking place in a large community (especially the universal need for better governance) and mental processes taking place in the individual[21]. This occurs also by the terrorist group's emphasis on the democratic bias suffered by soft-power in international relations[22] which, by considering liberal

[17] P. Badhan (2018) *Capacity & Capability Building in the UK Government Communication Service (GCS).* Club of Venice plenary meeting. http://www.politicheeuropee.gov.it/media/4108/convergences_11_final_low_resolution_pages-2.pdf.

[18] L. Cerna (2013) *The Nature of Policy Change and Implementation: A Review of Different Theoretical Approaches.* Organization de Cooperation et de développement économiques. https://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/The%20Nature%20of%20Policy%20Change%20and%20Implementation.pdf.

[19] The whole community of Muslims bound together by religious ties.

[20] (April 22, 2016) *The Hypnotic Power of ISIS Imagery in Recruiting Western Youth.* The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE). https://www.icsve.org/the-hypnotic-power-of-isis-imagery-in-recruiting-western-youth-2.

[21] B. Gindis (November 1999) *Vygotsky's Vision: Reshaping the Practice of Special Education for the 21st Century.* Remedial and Special Education, Vol.20, No. 6. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249835236_Vygotsky's_Vision_Reshaping_the_Practice_of_Special_Education_for_the_21st_Century.

[22] S. Repucci (2020) *Freedom in the World 2020 - A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy.* Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/FIW_2020_REPORT_BOOKLET_Final.pdf.

concepts and values as being universal in their appeal[23], has also deployed tremendous hard-power to accelerate its realization.[24] This background, since the group's early stages, has granted to Daesh the necessary social ecosystem to create an easily understandable, authoritarian and conservative communication envelop, which is allowing the growth of the perceived acceptance of its legitimization as a state while constantly shadowing its purposes behind self-presumed holy purposes and ideologies.

In the beginning the way to join IS was the *hijra*,[25] living in the name of jihad by reaching Daesh's strongholds in the Middle East. Nowadays, without a land to physically place the organization, its members are called to be prepared to an exhausting fight against the *takfir*[26], with apparently no immediate outcomes. This is not only a mere adaptation to the loss of its territories. Indeed, at present times, the terrorist organization is not anymore promising something tangible to its activists scattered across the globe. In this context, the battle against non-Muslims may be a never ending one. Thus, the victory or mere satisfaction, from its members' point of view, can immediately come by choosing to become part of Daesh itself[27].

In practice, the organization has kept its initial premises, "we are all ISIS"; Daesh is not anymore perceived by its activists through the physical shape of a land, a leader, not even an ideology.

A cross-cultural assumption of similarities among its members, reinforced by the creation of an endogenously ruled stable system of preconceptions or stereotypes, are making Daesh either comfortably reachable or permanent. Daesh becomes the people who decide to join the group or **are even slightly feeling inspired by it** through the **immediate emotional rewards** they're getting, by enjoying the present.

3. "Jihadi cool". An emotionally rewarding lifestyle

Through jihad, Daesh has created its sociocultural environment, but this doesn't only come by a sentiment of revenge or hatred. The sorrow of loss, the

---

[23] V.C. Keating, K. Kaczmarska (May 11, 2017) *Conservative soft power: liberal soft power bias and the 'hidden' attraction of Russia.* Journal of International Relations and Development. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41268-017-0100-6.

[24] E. Li (August 27, 2018) The End of Soft Power?. LIMES. https://www.limesonline.com/en/the-end-of-soft-power.

[25] An Arabic word meaning "migration".

[26] Infidels in Arabic.

[27] M. Scully (March 23, 2017) Pentagon Leaders Say Soft Power Central to ISIS Strategy. Roll Call. https://www.rollcall.com/2017/03/23/pentagon-leaders-say-soft-power-central-to-isis-strategy.

joy of camaraderie and the elevation of religious experience initially seem superfluous to the jihadist cause but, on the contrary, are a huge part of jihadist dissemination and a crucial element in the making of its soft-power[28].

As analyzed by Arabic culture researcher Thomas Hegghammer[29], recruits, for example, tend to listen to jihadi music and watch jihadi videos long before they understand the doctrine or take part in any extremist discourse. This suggests that the culture underpinning Islamist militancy acts as a kind of gateway to the ideology. Even though this may seem nonsense in the rationality of behavioral economics, these features are expanding exponentially Daesh's audience and the ways of how much it becomes appealing according to its followers, becoming either touch points or a reason to constantly keep in touch with sympathizers of the terrorist organization[30].

Anashid, for instance, cappella hymns (since musical instruments are forbidden) dated from pre-Islamic times have nothing to do with jihad but usually Daesh's members listen to them in their dorms, in their cars, and largely discuss them on online chat rooms. Some use *anashid* to mentally prepare for operations. As Ayoub El Khazani[31], a 25-year-old Moroccan man who attempted a shooting attack on a Paris-bound train in 2017, listened to an *anashid on* YouTube just minutes before his failed operation.

Sentimental and self-glorifying **poetry** is another important feature of jihadist related contents. Indeed, jihadi poets have developed a vast body of radical verse. Among Daesh's most famous poet on the web, there was a Syrian woman named Ahlam al-Nasr (i.e. Dreams of Victory) who, in 2014, published a collection of her poetry entitled "The Blaze of Truth"[32].

Ru'yâ (true **dreams**) which are different from *hulm* (a meaningless everyday dream), are fundamental, inspirational, and even strategic part of the contemporary militant jihad[33], able to influence other IS members, follow-

---

[28] A. Anthony (July 23, 2017) *The art of making a jihadist*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/23/the-culture-that-makes-a-jihadi-thomas-hegghammer-interview-poetry-militancy.

[29] T. Hegghammer (2010) *The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters - Islam and the Globalization of Jihad*. https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/The_Rise_of_Muslim_Foreign_Fighters.pdf.

[30] H. McKay (April 4, 2017) 'Jihadi cool': How ISIS switched its recruitment and social media master plan. Fox News. https://www.foxnews.com/world/jihadi-cool-how-isis-switched-its-recruitment-and-social-media-master-plan.

[31] V. Chadwick (August 24, 2015) *The Erasmus terrorist network*. Politico. https://www.politico.eu/article/the-erasmus-terrorist-network.

[32] Counter Extremism Project. https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/ahlam-al-nasr.

[33] I.R. Edgar (2016) *The Dream in Islam: From Qur'anic Tradition to Jihadist Inspiration*. Berghan Books.

ers and potential ones[34]. Both leaders and soldiers say they sometimes rely on night-time visions for decision making[35]. In April 2016, Dabiq published three dream accounts purporting to have inspired Khalid El Bakraoui in his martyrdom operation on the Brussels metro killing 14 people.

Furthermore, jihadi sympathizers often follow Salafi etiquette or share the same taste for fashion or accessories (the so called "jihadi cool"), by wearing nonalcoholic perfume, avoiding gold jewelry but often using Casio F-91W watch[36] and its dozens of variations which became very popular in jihadist training camps for their resilience and affordable price in the Middle East.[37]

4. Studying and understanding the relevant public

Daesh is known for establishing wide networks of informants to gather intelligence, identify key players, recruit supporters and eliminate potential threats.

On the one hand, the widespread use of informants in IS controlled areas created mistrust between residents, pushing many to feel only forced to publicly show their loyalty to the group, on the other hand, it gives the group a better understand of the local dynamics[38]. When administering its territories in Syria and Iraq, the three defining features of Daesh's narrative dominance were: control, culture, collectivity[39].

The same happened during the latest decentralization process of the terrorist organization's propaganda, which has nowadays brought to the making of the so defined by ITSTIME "Legacy". The evolution of the group's communication strategy has brought Daesh "from being just a terrorist group, then a brand and, finally, a phenomenon that is employed for an array of

---

[34] I.R. Edgar (October 14, 2016) *The Islamic State and Dream Warfare.* Center for Security Studies. https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/bb27e0d7-4795-44b7-9b25-864b411f0716/pdf.

[35] I.R. Edgar (2008) *Overtures of Paradise: Night Dreams and Islamic Jihadist Militancy.* Journal of Medical Anthropology.

[36] S. Wesolowski (January 30, 2020) *Why Terrorists Love Casio's Iconic F-91W Watch.* Vice. https://www.vice.com/en_in/article/pkebp8/casio-f91w-watch-terrorists-ied-trigger-cost-price.

[37] A. Ritman (May 1, 2011) *My watch is 'the sign of al Qa'eda'.* The National. https://www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/my-watch-is-the-sign-of-al-qa-eda-1.474908.

[38] H. Haid (2018) *Reintegrating ISIS Supporters in Syria: Efforts, Priorities and Challenges.* ICSR King's College London Strand London WC2R 2LS United Kingdom. https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ICSR-Report-Reintegrating-ISIS-Supporters-in-Syria-Efforts-Priorities-and-Challenges.pdf.

[39] (February 19, 2020) *RE-SETTING THE AGENDA: HOW TO PUT DAESH PROPAGANDA ON THE BACKFOOT.* The Global Coalition. https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/countering-daesh-propaganda.

reasons and in numerous contexts"[40], which is making individuals feeling empowered of their choices and directly responsible for the continuation of an everlasting pan-Islamic extremist movement.

From this angle, as discussed by the Global Coalition against Daesh[41], while perhaps too much attention has been given to Daesh's online presence and operations, an important point exists regarding how Daesh empowered its community of supporters outside the Caliphate to push its narratives, its brand and product.

Indeed, Daesh hypodermic communication needle has been aiming to the ego of its online supporters to make them feel that their work was just as important as those physically fighting for the jihad, by claiming that the online network of disseminators and translators were also *mujahideen*. This both empowered and instilled loyalty in these supporters to push uncorrupted versions of what Daesh produced, allowing Daesh's propaganda and way-of-life to be pushed far and wide at a very high rate.

5. The battlefield is the services! Terrorist administration confronting State system

Ted Robert Gurr, who developed the term "relative deprivation," which links economic disparity with the propensity of individuals to resort to violent political action[42], denoted "the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the 'ought' and the 'is' of collective value satisfaction, that disposes men to violence." In other words, when individuals' expectations of economic or political goods exceed the actual distribution of those goods, political violence is more likely[43].

The inclusivity of Daesh, and Islamic terrorism in general has brought to a higher level this concept, by filling those gaps created by state administrations and building an irreplaceable bond with the population. Shortly explaining what is the *Dawa* in the Islamic community may help to understand this strategic method to gather consensus and expand. The *Dawa*'s main idea is based on the core belief that investing in educating Islamic values and social activity may bear fruit to broaden the base of public support to: expose

---

[40] M. Lombardi, D. Plebani (2019) DIGITAL *JIHAD Online Communication and Violent Extremism - From the Rise of Daesh to the "Legacy of Islamic State"*. ISPI. https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/ispi-digitaljihad_web.pdf.

[41] Global Coalition https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/mission.

[42] T.R. Gurr (1970) *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton University Press.

[43] J.A. Piazza (2006) *Terrorism and Political Violence - Rooted in Poverty? Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages*. Taylor & Francis Group. https://www.sisd.net/cms/lib/TX01001452/Centricity/Domain/170/Terrorism%20and%20Poverty.pdf.

Muslims and general public to **jihadi ideology**; provide international **logistic support** to terrorists; grant a legal and legitimate **financial resource** for local or global Islamic leaders/organizations[44].

For instance, nowadays in northern Mali, the jihadists have engaged in smuggling but have also been investing in building mosques and sharia courts, by enriching the *Dawa* infrastructure to serve the jihadi purpose[45], spreading their ideology and presenting themselves as **legitimate alternatives to the State**. Indeed, the sharia courts are popular among citizens, and perceived as more rapid, less corrupt, delivered in a manner that people can understand, and cheaper, compared to State system[46].

Same concepts elicited the potential outcomes of the killing of Baghdadi in the Middle East, which appeared "supremely unimportant" in the region, as claimed by a former Iraqi cabinet minister[47]. In Iraq and Lebanon, for example, which are in the midst of violent popular protests and the disintegration of central authority, the death of Daesh supreme leader appears to be barely relevant. More important to the citizens remains the lack of **basic services, sluggish economies, corruption and unemployment**.

6. New perspectives in counter-terrorism

As analysed, soft-power has become Daesh's real core. Its ability to win the heart and minds of supporters or sympathizers will keep on being its most important source of strength. The decentralization of the group's communication can be reassumed as the outcome of a constant perceived community or individual empowerment and the solid relationship established with its supporters through a system of trust either online or offline.

This should bring institutions to take into account of the fact that the liquidity of the Islamic State is just the mirror of its stable soft-power.

Nevertheless, these analyses could bring some interesting results on how to effectively make an impact on the perceived stability of the Islamic State.

[44] D.M. Barone (October 2018) *Jihadists' use of cryptocurrencies: undetectable ways to finance terrorism.* Sicurezza, terrorismo e società 8. http://www.sicurezzaterrorismosocieta.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Daniele-Maria-Barone-Jihadists%E2%80%99-use-of-cryptocurrencies_undetectable-ways-to-finance-terrorism.pdf.

[45] S. Shay (2012) *Somalia between Jihad and Restoration.* Transaction Publisher, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

[46] A. Blomfield (March 6, 2020) *Jihadists win hearts and minds in the Sahel by providing basic services.* The Telegraph. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/06/jihadists-win-hearts-minds-sahel-providing-basic-services.

[47] T. Goudsouzian (Nov 1, 2019) *Fighting ISIS: why soft power still matters.* Le Monde diplomatique. https://mondediplo.com/openpage/fighting-isis-why-soft-power-still-matters.

– As analysed by the Global Coalition, grassroots independent media activists in Mosul, Raqqa, and Deir Ezzour who understood Daesh's propaganda and its audiences have been able to undermine the group's credibility. In practice, they didn't try to create counter-narratives but simply started to publish news, photos and video from inside Daesh's territory which showed to the world what life was really like in the Caliphate. In this way they created a breach in the communication siege built by Daesh, giving alternative both to media to tell another side of the story happening in the Caliphate and to the people forced living in the region.

   In a figurative sense, this is the same communication siege where Daesh's supporters are stuck all across the globe. From the most insignificant jihadi-cool accessory, to the spread of extremist propaganda, many people don't need a counter-narrative to forget about jihad but an alternative point of view. This may come by just telling them the truth, same as those activists bravely did in Syria and Iraq.

– Soft-power is largely found in the power of inspiration but is also built with concrete actions taken for the benefit of citizens. Democracy promotion, support for human rights and cross-cultural efforts will only succeed if there is a more determined effort within the countries themselves to address corruption and deteriorating basic services. As long as Daesh is identified by institutions as the cause of terrorism instead of analysing the roots which are keeping the support of its members solid, there will always be room for it to come back stronger in its liquid form.

– The aspects discussed in this paper are meant to explain Daesh's pervasiveness in every-day life of an individual. This approach can modify its members' parameters of interpretation of their real social environment, indirectly allowing the terrorist group to be influential in local or international dynamics, consumers' behaviour and even political elections, largely expanding its branches over the Muslim communities, placing its narratives in every social breach and becoming indistinctly authoritative in Asian, Middle Eastern, African, and Western societies. Then, the way of using the information gathered on its targeted audience, has allowed Daesh to become strongly influential by deeply rooting its communication tactics in small and restricted contexts, to bring its followers inside its overall global communication strategy and eradicate the subjects from their previously acquired value system.

It is very important to understand the small and the bigger picture of Daesh. Even its soft-power is not a monolith, on the contrary, can become trustable in different ways which take into account **a global picture, local dynamics and a dedicated sentiment analysis of each individual**.

Nowadays, hitting Daesh's soft-power means hitting state soft-power. Daesh as a state, can be undermined by an interaction of institutions, at a domestic or international level, with communities (either online or offline), families, tribes living in small and outlying areas because, even though in its followers' perception the terrorist organization is as stable as a State, Daesh still needs to operate on pre-existent socio-cultural, religious and political realities, not as an autonomous body but as a parasite.

Bibliography

A. Anthony (July 23, 2017) *The art of making a jihadist*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/23/the-culture-that-makes-a-jihadi-thomas-hegghammer-interview-poetry-militancy.

A. Blomfield (March 6, 2020) *Jihadists win hearts and minds in the Sahel by providing basic services.* The Telegraph. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/06/jihadists-win-hearts-minds-sahel-providing-basic-services.

A. Ritman (May 1, 2011) *My watch is 'the sign of al Qa'eda'.* The National. https://www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/my-watch-is-the-sign-of-al-qa-eda-1.474908.

B. Gindis (November 1999) *Vygotsky's Vision: Reshaping the Practice of Special Education for the 21st Century.* Remedial and Special Education, Vol.20, No. 6. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249835236_Vygotsky's_Vision_Reshaping_the_Practice_of_Special_Education_for_the_21st_Century.

B. Hocking, J. Melissen (July 2015) Diplomacy in the Digital Age. Clingendale https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Digital_Diplomacy_in_the_Digital%20Age_Clingendael_July2015.pdf.

Counter Extremism Project. https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/ahlam-al-nasr.

D.M. Barone (November 2019) *The decentralized finance-violent extremism nexus: ideologies, technical skills, strong and weak points.* Sicurezza Terrorismo Società. http://www.sicurezzaterrorismosocieta.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-decentralized-finance-violent-extremism-nexus_ideologies-technical-skills-strong-and-weak-points-Daniele-Barone.pdf.

D.M. Barone (October 2018) *Jihadists' use of cryptocurrencies: undetectable ways to finance terrorism.* Sicurezza, terrorismo e società 8. http://www.sicurezzaterrorismosocieta.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Daniele-Maria-Barone-Jihadists%E2%80%99-use-of-cryptocurrencies_undetectable-ways-to-finance-terrorism.pdf.

E. Li (August 27, 2018) The End of Soft Power?. LIMES. https://www.limesonline.com/en/the-end-of-soft-power.

Europol (Nov 22, 2019) *Referral Action Day Against Islamic State Online Terrorist Propaganda.* EUROPOL - Press Release. https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/referral-action-day-against-islamic-state-online-terrorist-propaganda.

E.X. Li (August 20, 2018) *The Rise and Fall of Soft Power*. Foreign Policy https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power.

F. Borgonovo, N. Spagna (December 02, 2019) L'operazione "Referral Action Days" di Europol. ITSTIME. https://www.itstime.it/w/loperazione-referral-action-days-di-europol-federico-borgonovo-e-nicolo-spagna.

F. Marone (March 03, 2020) *Terrorismo ed estremismi: la prospettiva dell'intelligence italiana*. ISPI. https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/terrorismo-ed-estremismi-la-prospettiva-dellintelligence-italiana-25307.

H. Haid (2018) *Reintegrating ISIS Supporters in Syria: Efforts, Priorities and Challenges*. ICSR King's College London Strand London WC2R 2LS United Kingdom. https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ICSR-Report-Reintegrating-ISIS-Supporters-in-Syria-Efforts-Priorities-and-Challenges.pdf.

H. McKay (April 4, 2017) 'Jihadi cool': How ISIS switched its recruitment and social media master plan. Fox News. https://www.foxnews.com/world/jihadi-cool-how-isis-switched-its-recruitment-and-social-media-master-plan.

ICSVE (April 22, 2016) *The Hypnotic Power of ISIS Imagery in Recruiting Western Youth*. The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE). https://www.icsve.org/the-hypnotic-power-of-isis-imagery-in-recruiting-western-youth-2.

I.R. Edgar (2016) *The Dream in Islam: From Qur'anic Tradition to Jihadist Inspiration*. Berghan Books.

I.R. Edgar (October 14, 2016) *The Islamic State and Dream Warfare*. Center for Security Studies. https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/bb27e0d7-4795-44b7-9b25-864b411f0716/pdf.

I.R. Edgar (2008) *Overtures of Paradise: Night Dreams and Islamic Jihadist Militancy*. Journal of Medical Anthropology.

J. Arquilla quoted by J.S. Nye Jr. (Jan 2014) *The Information Revolution and Soft Power*. Current History - Harvard University's DASH repository. https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/11738398/Nye-InformationRevolution.pdf.

J.A. Piazza (2006) *Terrorism and Political Violence - Rooted in Poverty? Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages*. Taylor & Francis Group. https://www.sisd.net/cms/lib/TX01001452/Centricity/Domain/170/Terrorism%20and%20Poverty.pdf.

J. Kerry (May 6, 2013) *Digital Diplomacy: Adapting Our Diplomatic Engagement*. DipNote. http://2007-2017-blogs.state.gov/stories/2013/05/06/digital-diplomacy-adapting-our-diplomatic-engagement.html.

J. McClory (2018) *The Soft Power 30 - A Global Ranking of Soft Power*. USC CENTER ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY. https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2018.pdf.

J.S. Nye, Jr. (1990) *Soft Power*. Foreign Policy no. 80, pp. 153-171. Global Coalition https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/mission.

L. Cerna (2013) *The Nature of Policy Change and Implementation: A Review of Different Theoretical Approaches*. Organization de Cooperation et de développement

économiques. https://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/The%20Nature%20of%20 Policy%20Change%20and%20Implementation.pdf.

M. Lombardi, D. Plebani (2019) *DIGITAL JIHAD Online Communication and Violent Extremism - From the Rise of Daesh to the "Legacy of Islamic State".* ISPI. https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/ispi-digitaljihad_web. pdf.

M. Scully (March 23, 2017) Pentagon Leaders Say Soft Power Central to ISIS Strategy. Roll Call. https://www.rollcall.com/2017/03/23/pentagon-leaders-say-soft-power-central-to-isis-strategy.

OECD Open Government team, OGP Support unit. Communicating Open Government - A How-to Guide. OECD. https://www.oecd.org/gov/Open-Government-Guide.pdf.

P. Badhan (2018) *Capacity & Capability Building in the UK Government Communication Service (GCS).* Club of Venice plenary meeting. http://www.politicheeuropee.gov.it/media/4108/convergences_11_final_low_resolution_pages-2. pdf.

Europol (Nov 22, 2019) *Referral Action Day Against Islamic State Online Terrorist Propaganda.* EUROPOL - Press Release. https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/referral-action-day-against-islamic-state-online-terrorist-propaganda.

S. Elkalliny (July 2018) *Effective institutional communication within the framework of institutional learning and its applications in educational institutions.* Ain Shams University.

SITE Intelligence Group (March 11, 2020) https://bit.ly/33cahPP.

S. Repucci (2020) *Freedom in the World 2020 - A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy.* Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/ FIW_2020_REPORT_BOOKLET_Final.pdf.

S. Shay (2012) *Somalia between Jihad and Restoration.* Transaction Publisher, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

S. Wesolowski (January 30, 2020) *Why Terrorists Love Casio's Iconic F-91W Watch.* Vice. https://www.vice.com/en_in/article/pkebp8/casio-f91w-watch-terrorists-ied-trigger-cost-price.

The Global Coalition (February 19, 2020) *RE-SETTING THE AGENDA: HOW TO PUT DAESH PROPAGANDA ON THE BACKFOOT.* The Global Coalition. https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/countering-daesh-propaganda.

T. Goudsouzian (Nov 1, 2019) *Fighting ISIS: why soft power still matters.* Le Monde diplomatique. https://mondediplo.com/openpage/fighting-isis-why-soft-power-still-matters.

T. Goudsouzian (November 22, 2016) *EXCLUSIVE: Interview with Kurdish Intel Chief Lahur Talabani.* Newsweek. http://newsweekme.com/exclusive-interview-kurdish-intel-chief-lahur-talabani.

T.R. Gurr (1970) *Why Men Rebel.* Princeton University Press.

T. Hegghammer (2010) *The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters - Islam and the Globalization of Jihad.* https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/ The_Rise_of_Muslim_Foreign_Fighters.pdf.

V. Camilleri (Feb 9, 2011) *Diplomatic Reporting in the Internet Era after WikiLeaks.* E-diplomacy Panel https://www.diplomacy.edu/resources/general/diplomatic-re-porting-internet-era.

V. Chadwick (August 24, 2015) *The Erasmus terrorist network.* Politico. https://www.politico.eu/article/the-erasmus-terrorist-network.

V.C. Keating, K. Kaczmarska (May 11, 2017) *Conservative soft power: liberal soft power bias and the 'hidden' attraction of Russia.* Journal of International Relations and Development. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41268-017-0100-6.

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.

Euro 20,00