

Daesh Media Strategies: The Role of our Community Leaders
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Introduction

Daesh has capitalized on the political vacuum created by failed states and the failure of national governments to address core sociopolitical grievances, more specifically the disenfranchisement of youth and marginalization of particular segments of the population. Driven by a deep discontent and estrangement from their own societies, thousands of youth have joined Daesh in the search for an idealistic society. Daesh has taken advantage of these feelings of disenfranchisement in its recruitment by emphasizing the need for a society that addresses Muslim grievances across the globe.

Daesh’s systematic misrepresentation of religious doctrines and manipulation of political grievances serve as tactics to legitimize violence and attract new recruits. Even though their barbaric practices violate every Islamic law, it uses out of context religious texts to establish its authority and justify jihad as a morally and Islamically justifiable act. By re-contextualizing Quranic references, Daesh taps into the Muslim imagination to reminisce about the glory days of Muslim power. Apocalyptic in style, Daesh asks its target audience to relive Islamic history, the times of persecution, and the times of glory that God promised the community if they remained steadfast. This sympathetic figuration revives a nostalgic

humiliation and transgression of the ummah b) humiliating the west c) military jihad d) providing social services within Daesh controlled territory e) hypocrisy of Muslim and MENA leaders f) the ability to administer territory by providing security, law, and order and lastly, g) espousing purely theological motivations. Their main narrative is heavily dependent on their target audience and media channel.

Daesh uses tech savvy online campaigns and sophisticated video production techniques in its propaganda to recruit and attract young foreign fighters. Ayman Al Zawahiri, leader of Al Qaeda Central said in 2005, “We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. We are in a media battle for the heart and minds of our umma.” Daesh digital propaganda videos are of high production value and share stylistic similarities of Hollywood action movies. For Daesh, being seen is as important as being heard in the branding of its caliphate project. Using social media to draw on vulnerable and disenfranchised youth, Daesh attempts to propagate its ideology and build identification with its target audience. Their use of various languages, stories of converts and foreign Muslim fighters project an image of acceptance in which everyone is seemingly united under the banner of Islam regardless of race, socio-economic status, physical disability, and country of origin. In one of his sermons, Baghdadi states, “the Islamic State is a state where the Arabs and non- Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers.” These types of propaganda videos tap into the socio-economic grievances of potential recruits and provide an alternative to their respective communities.

The Role of Muslim Community Leaders in Countering Daesh

Muslim religious and community leaders have an important role to play in discrediting and preventing violent extremism as they hold unique positions of authority, credibility, and communal ties. Our religious and community leaders must be proactive and identify the problems and solutions while recognizing the specific role that they can play in providing alternative avenues for expressing grievances, while promoting community based activities that respond to localized needs. This will foster greater inclusion and sense of belonging in vulnerable youth.

Muslim religious leaders have been condemning violence, but seldom do they discredit the religious militant ideology propagated by Daesh using diverse online social tools. Many of the responses from religious leaders have relied on traditional forms of communication that are neither engaging nor attractive to the youth. The primary focus has been on Quranic verses and long sermons (many times in classical Arabic). Some religious leaders also have published long manifestos to condemn Daesh. While these actions **ETQ** Tm00

