ual: university of the arts london
london college of communication

The promotion of terror through otherness?

A conceptualisation of the digital terro-media system of Islamic State:

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The communicative dimension of terrorism

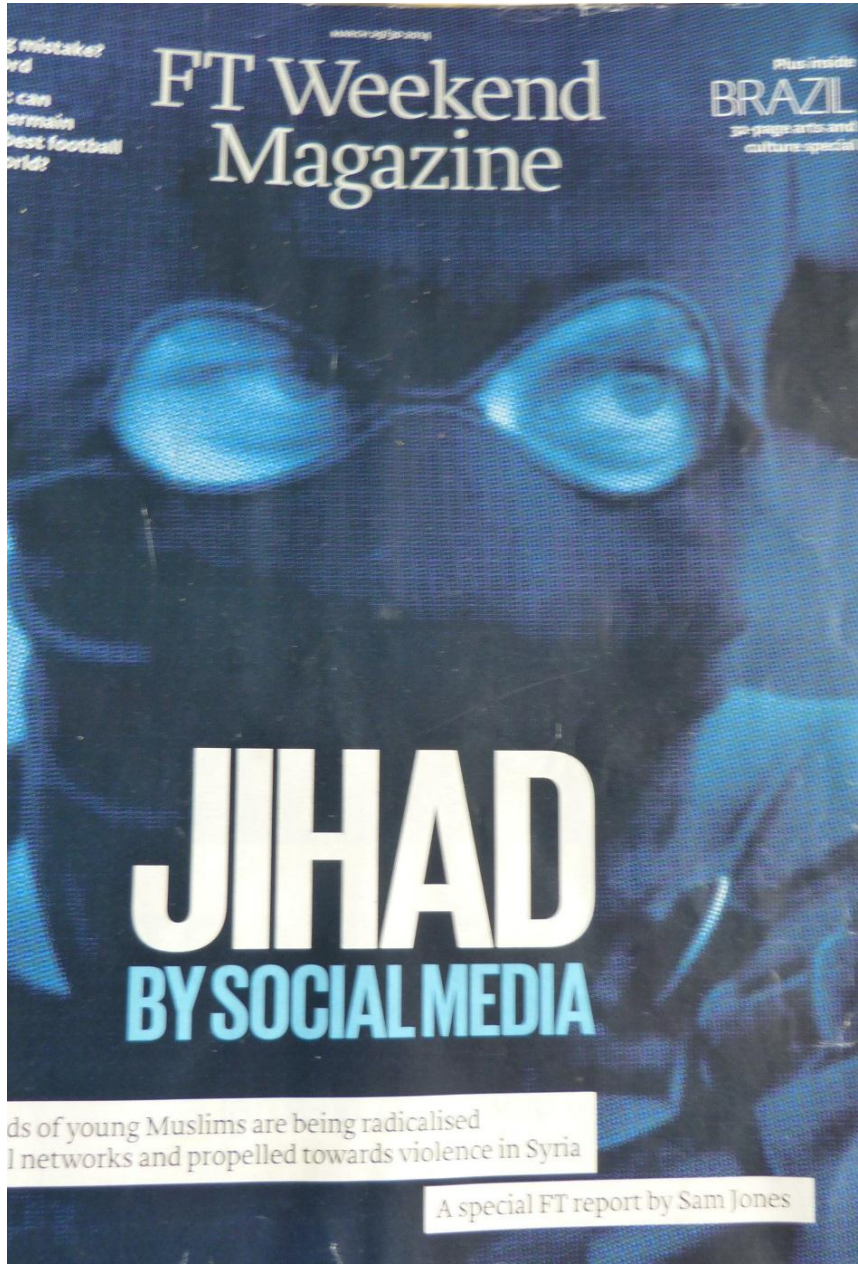
- Communication of terrorism:
  Alleged symbiotic interdependence of media and terrorism (Rada, 1985; Clutterbuck, 1981; Schmidt and Graaf, 1982 and which is contested (Wieviorka, 1988)
- Terrorism as communication:
  A process that is communicative and rhetorical. (Heath, 2008: Matusitz, 2013)
- Communication as terrorism:
  Reflected in law enforcement against communicative crimes. A digital terro-media system?

A digital other

- From 2014 , a media mythology/orthodoxy emerges of an extreme digital other, a black box of social media communications that takes young people from the streets of West Yorkshire and East London to Syria.

- “A huge proportion of them use social media.” (Jones, 2014).

- This extreme digital other is presented as incomprehensible and IS are “masters of the digital universe” (Atwan, 2015:15) and deploy “vast numbers of digital fighters” (Cohen, 2015: 53).



Research Questions

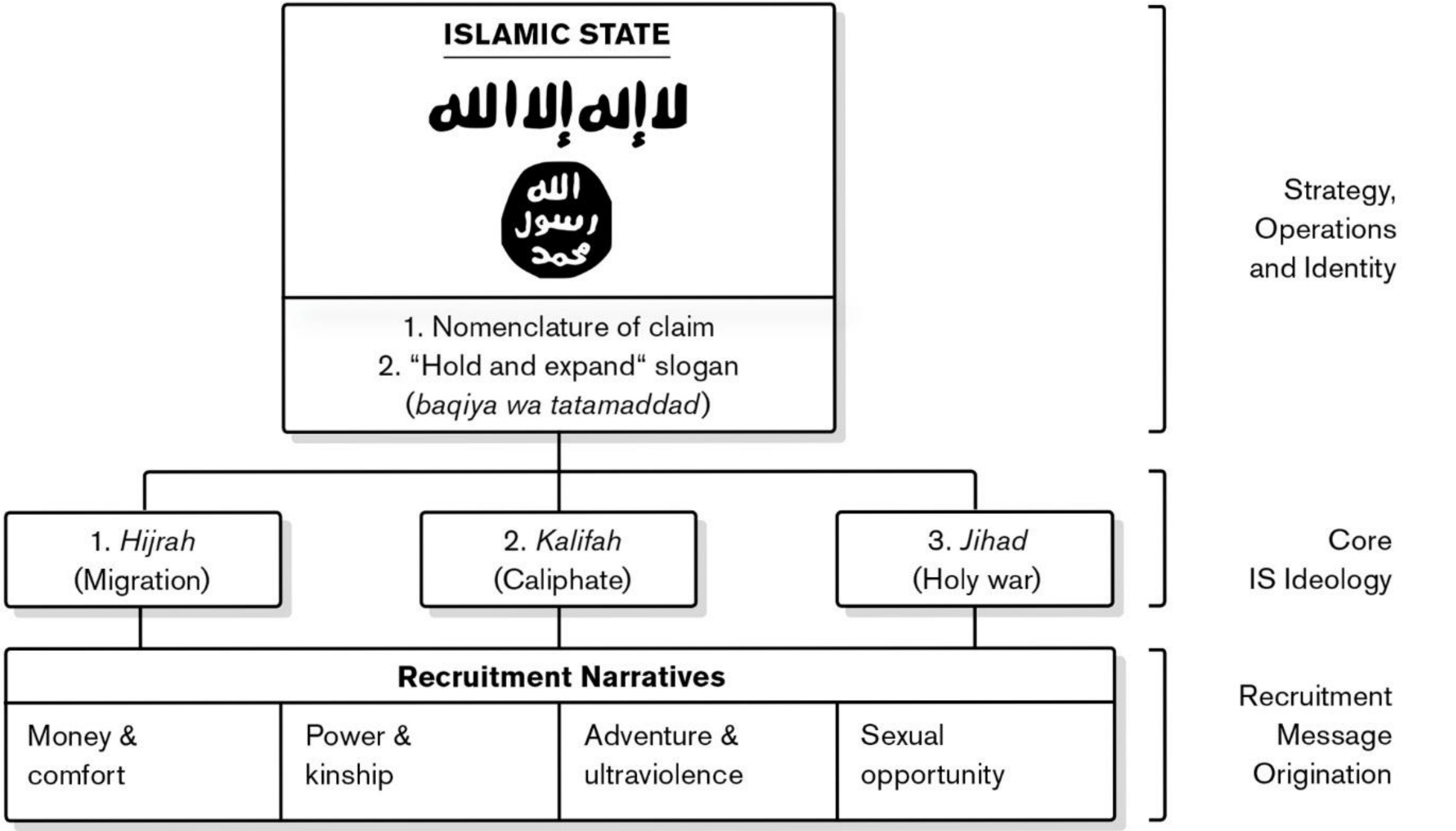
- RQ 1: What rhetoric and messages are used in the communications of Islamic State?

- RQ2: What media systems is used by Islamic State?

Methodology

1. Historical institutionalism approach (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Sandhu, 2015; Bentele and Wiesenburg, 2016) approach to define the case/institution, agents of support, ideas/messages, mechanisms of communication and outcomes.

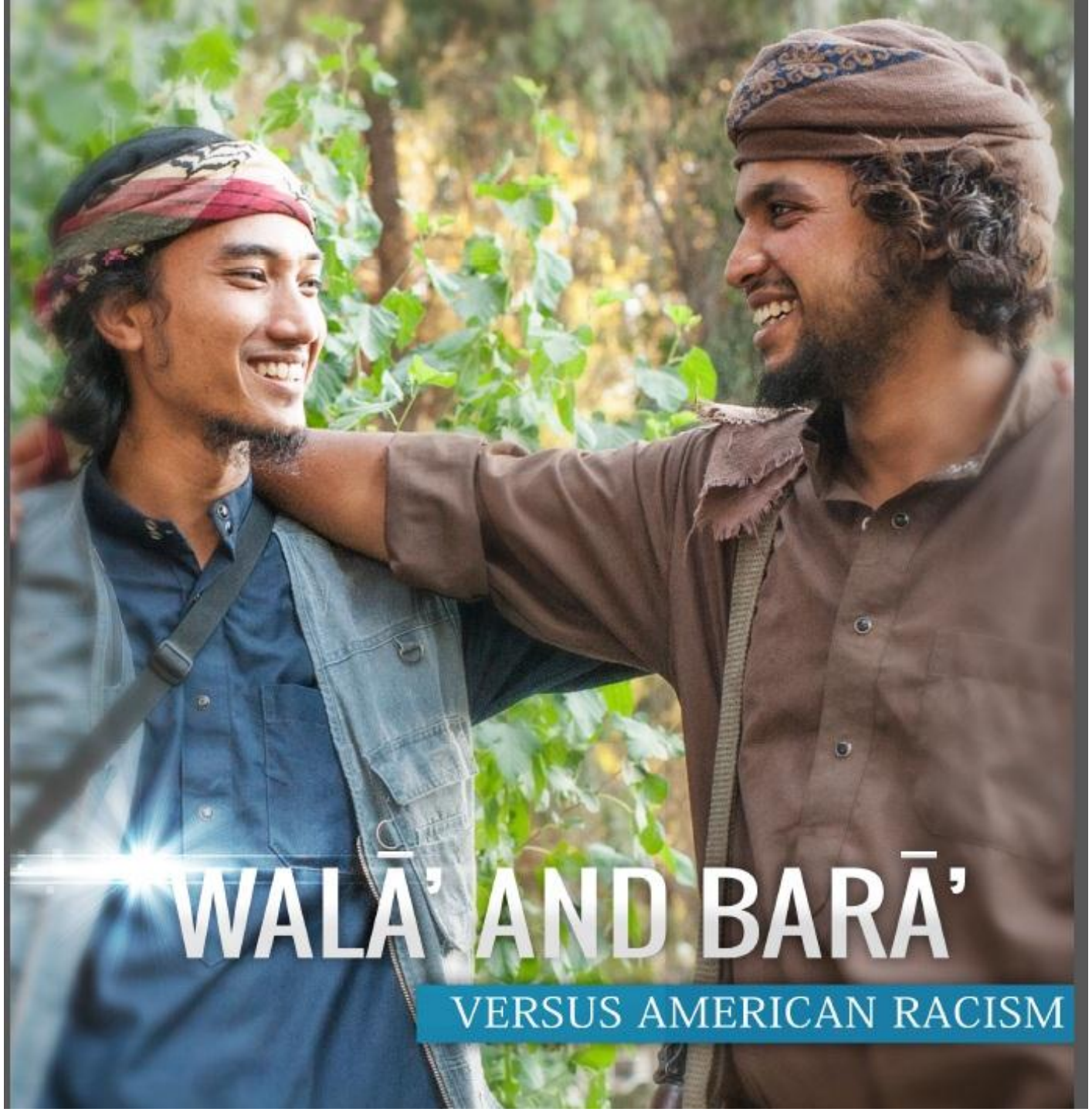
2. Contemporary historical examination of documents and communications artefacts against social context.


ISLAMIC STATE
لا إله إلا الله
الله
رسول
محمد
1. Nomenclature of claim
2. "Hold and expand" slogan
(baqiya wa tatamaddad)
1. Hijrah
(Migration)
2. Kalifah
(Caliphate)
3. Jihad
(Holy war)
Recruitment Narratives
Money & comfort
Power & kinship
Adventure & ultraviolence
Sexual opportunity
Strategy, Operations and Identity
Core IS Ideology
Recruitment Message Origination

Verbal Channel:

Rhetoric of inclusion versus experience of exclusion
(as others in West)

Dabiq Issue 11



Media & Distribution System
Islamic State Institute of Public Information – Abu Mohammed al-Adnani

Verbal Content

- Dabiq magazine
- Radio
- Dawn of Glad Tidings radio app.
- Ajnad Media Foundation *nasheeds* or anthems

Visual Content

- Al-Hayat Media Center videos
- Al-Furqan Media Center videos
- Al I'tsam Media videos

Audiences

Disengaged	Sympathetic	Committed

Scan & listen
Empathise & engage

→

Engage
Customised to individual interests

→

Action
Migrate to caliphate to wage holy war

Online automation, algorithms and personal engagement with potential recruits

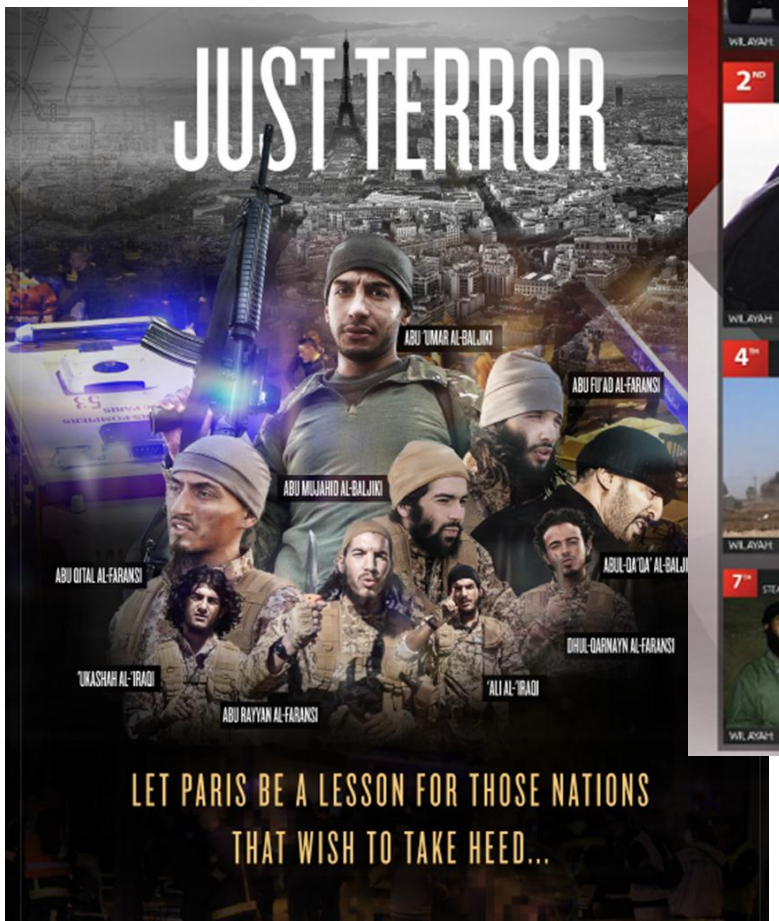
Recruitment Messages Packaging and Distribution

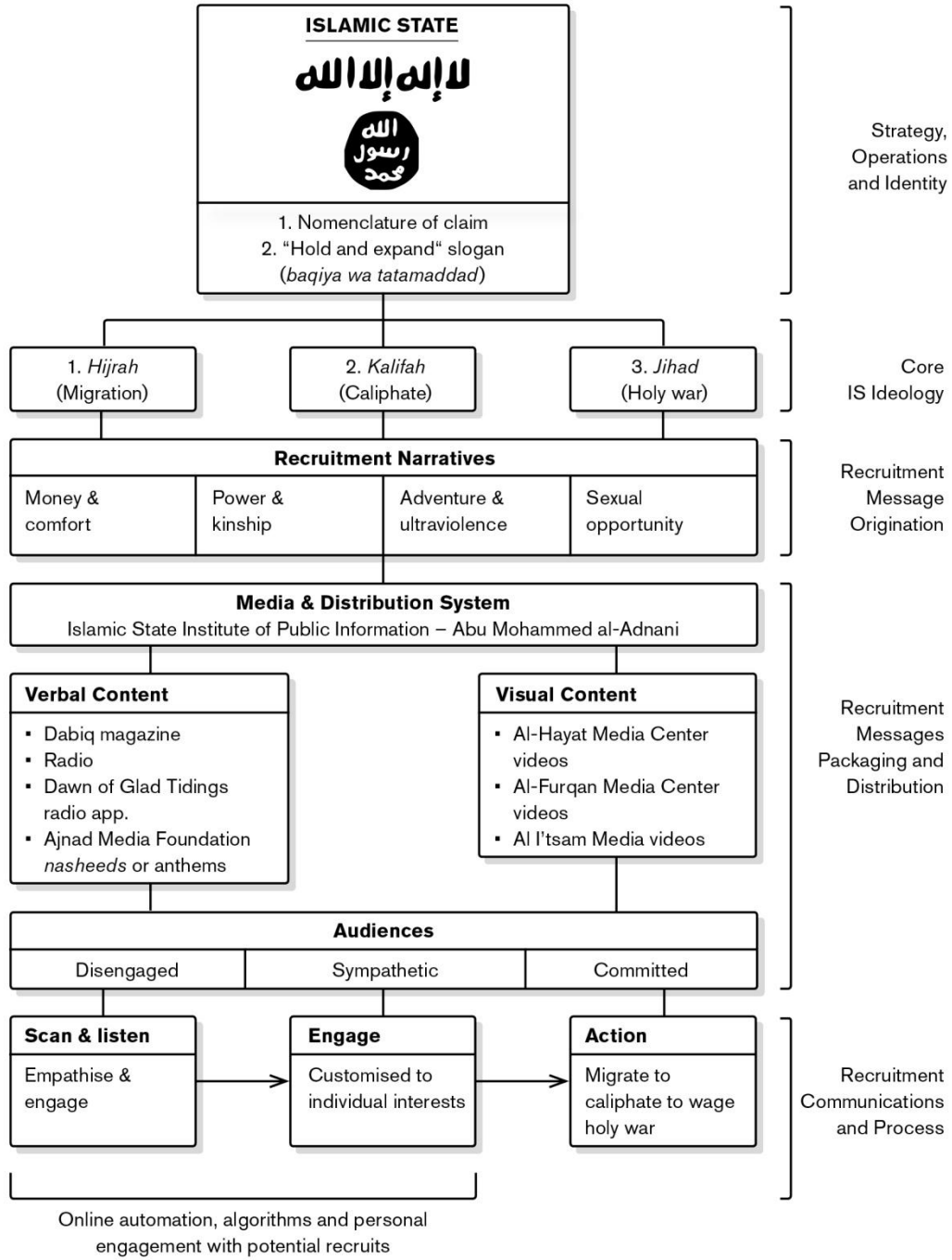
Recruitment Communications and Process

Visual Channel:

1. Rhetoric of empowerment, statehood, dignity - and revenge for exclusion and humiliation - via digital artefacts of fear.

2. Encouraging to sympathetic audience and terrifying to the disengaged.

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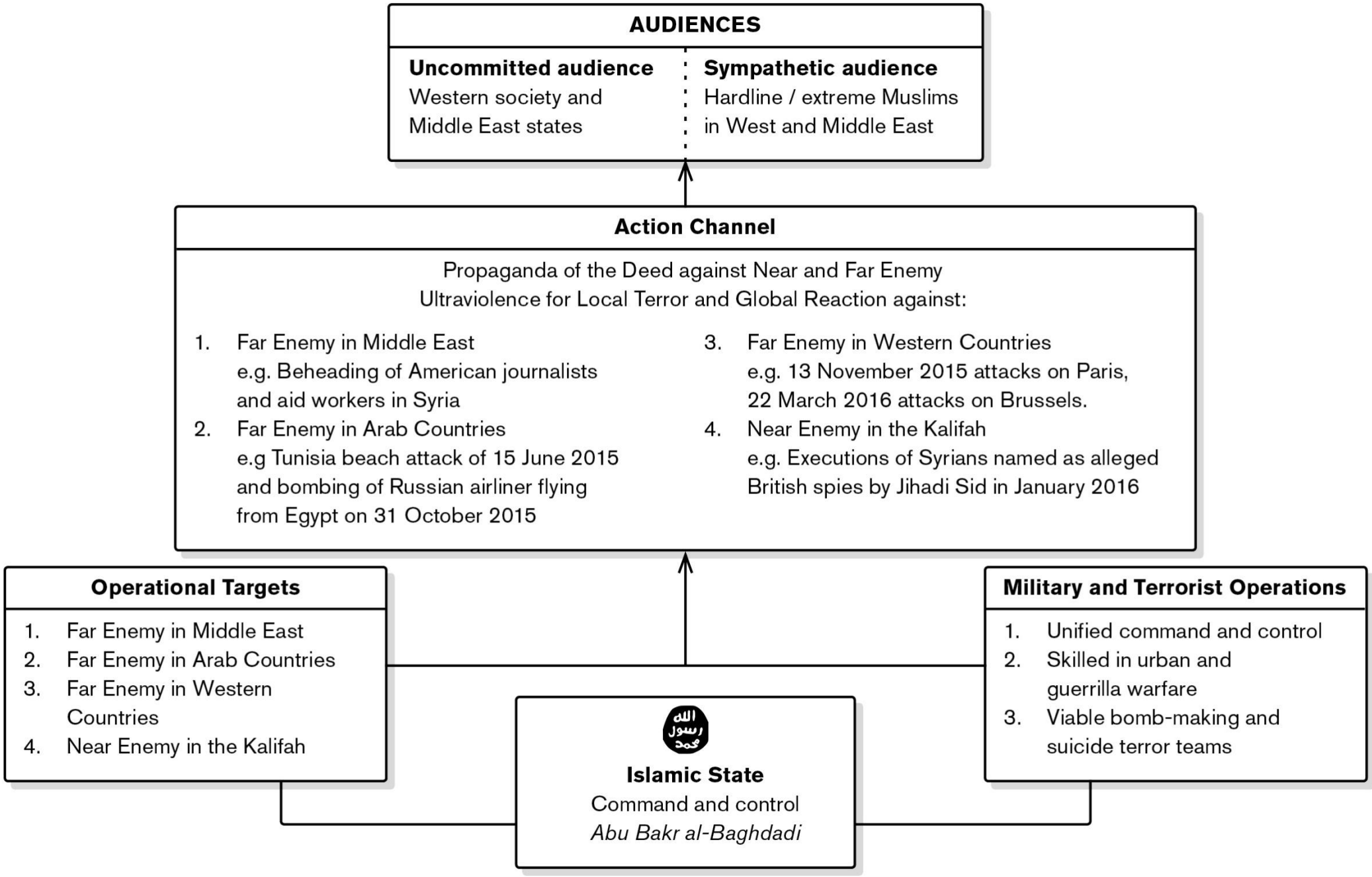
ESCAPE
ARTISTS
This is generation easyJet.
easyJet
£49

CP&G 3G
4:20 PM
Christopher
32
Shared Interests
Shared Friends
AT&T
5:00 PM
100%
tinder
It's a Match!
You and Sarah have liked each other.
Send a Message
or
Keep Playing
CP&G 3G
4:20 PM
tinder
Jennifer, 23
25
8

Conclusion and Implications

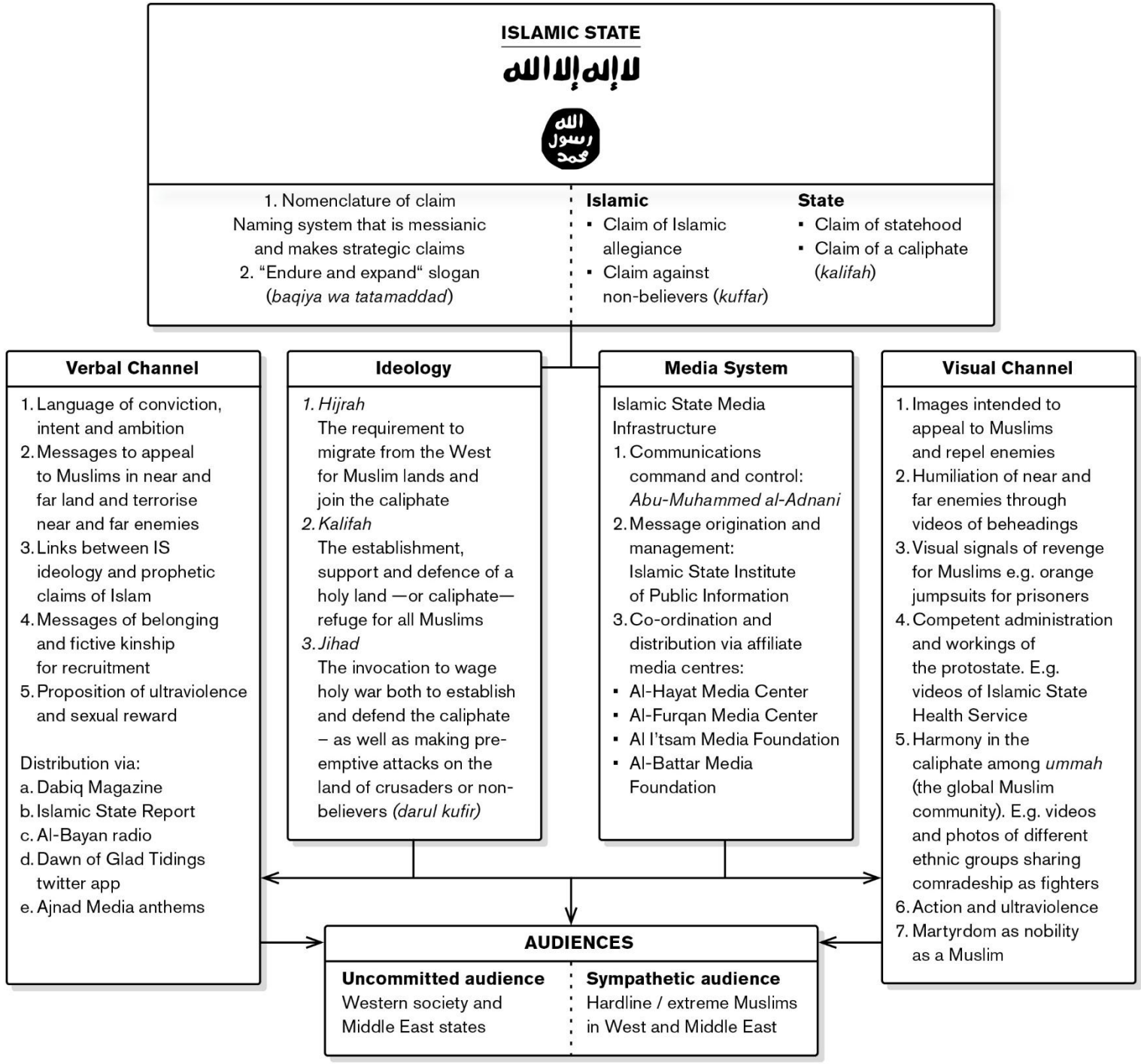
- The duality of IS communications differentially targets uncommitted/disengaged and sympathetic audiences in ways that generate fear, alienation and suspicion in uncommitted and inclusion, power and sense of success in sympathetic and committed audiences.
- IS rhetoric annexes aspects of otherness imposed on Muslims in the West
- The aim appears to be to exploit otherness for strategic gain by achieving irreconcilable separateness between the uncommitted audience and the audience that is sympathetic and committed to IS.


AUDIENCES
Uncommitted audience
Western society and
Middle East states
Sympathetic audience
Hardline / extreme Muslims
in West and Middle East
Action Channel
Propaganda of the Deed against Near and Far Enemy
Ultraviolence for Local Terror and Global Reaction against:
1. Far Enemy in Middle East
e.g. Beheading of American journalists
and aid workers in Syria
2. Far Enemy in Arab Countries
e.g Tunisia beach attack of 15 June 2015
and bombing of Russian airliner flying
from Egypt on 31 October 2015
3. Far Enemy in Western Countries
e.g. 13 November 2015 attacks on Paris,
22 March 2016 attacks on Brussels.
4. Near Enemy in the Kalifah
e.g. Executions of Syrians named as alleged
British spies by Jihadi Sid in January 2016
Operational Targets
1. Far Enemy in Middle East
2. Far Enemy in Arab Countries
3. Far Enemy in Western
Countries
4. Near Enemy in the Kalifah
Military and Terrorist Operations
1. Unified command and control
2. Skilled in urban and
guerrilla warfare
3. Viable bomb-making and
suicide terror teams
الله
رسول
محمد
Islamic State
Command and control
Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

Conclusion and Implications

- IS rhetoric encourages internalisation of self-image of the stigma of otherness in young Muslims (in terms used by Wolfgang Lipp in *Sociololgy of Deviance*, 1977) and offers redemption via paternal charisma of IS leadership or heroic charisma of action.

“A person can very well build up their identity by actively adopting the very features that are normally viewed as marks of culpable outsiderhood. This self stigmatization is the source of all charisma.”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لا إله إلا الله
الله رسول محمد
1. Nomenclature of claim
Naming system that is messianic and makes strategic claims
2. "Endure and expand" slogan (baqiya wa tatamaddad)
Islamic
▪ Claim of Islamic allegiance
▪ Claim against non-believers (kuffar)
State
▪ Claim of statehood
▪ Claim of a caliphate (kalifah)
Verbal Channel
1. Language of conviction, intent and ambition
2. Messages to appeal to Muslims in near and far land and terrorise near and far enemies
3. Links between IS ideology and prophetic claims of Islam
4. Messages of belonging and fictive kinship for recruitment
5. Proposition of ultraviolence and sexual reward
Distribution via:
a. Dabiq Magazine
b. Islamic State Report
c. Al-Bayan radio
d. Dawn of Glad Tidings twitter app
e. Ajnad Media anthems
Ideology
1. Hijrah
The requirement to migrate from the West for Muslim lands and join the caliphate
2. Kalifah
The establishment, support and defence of a holy land —or caliphate— refuge for all Muslims
3. Jihad
The invocation to wage holy war both to establish and defend the caliphate – as well as making pre-emptive attacks on the land of crusaders or non-believers (darul kufir)
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Islamic State Media Infrastructure
1. Communications command and control: Abu-Muhammed al-Adnani
2. Message origination and management: Islamic State Institute of Public Information
3. Co-ordination and distribution via affiliate media centres:
▪ Al-Hayat Media Center
▪ Al-Furqan Media Center
▪ Al I'tsam Media Foundation
▪ Al-Battar Media Foundation
Visual Channel
1. Images intended to appeal to Muslims and repel enemies
2. Humiliation of near and far enemies through videos of beheadings
3. Visual signals of revenge for Muslims e.g. orange jumpsuits for prisoners
4. Competent administration and workings of the protostate. E.g. videos of Islamic State Health Service
5. Harmony in the caliphate among ummah (the global Muslim community). E.g. videos and photos of different ethnic groups sharing comradeship as fighters
6. Action and ultraviolence
7. Martyrdom as nobility as a Muslim
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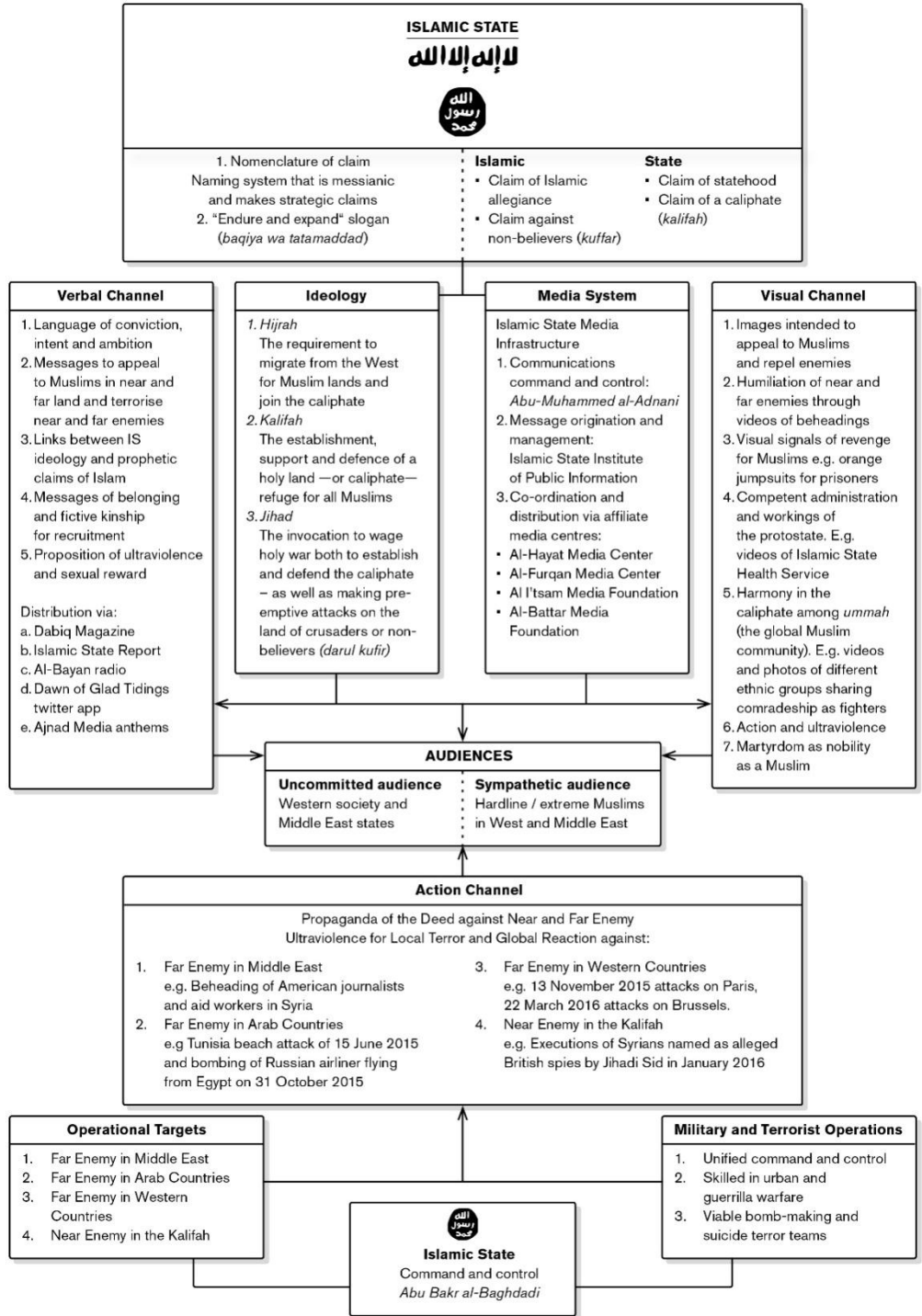
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Evolving Seriality of Islamic Terror

Group	Leader	Personal Style	Propaganda Approach
Hizbullah	Hassan Nasrallah (1992-present)	Political, wide-ranging, charismatic and subtle charm. A cleric but not overtly religious or fiery in style, emphasising Arab dignity. Reasonable style seeking legitimisation of cause.	Segmented for multiple audiences. Interviews with Western media such as The New Yorker, Washington Post plus video interview with Julian Assange for Wikileaks.
Al-Qaeda	Osama Bin Laden (1988-2011)	Educated, modest, sound strategic thinker. Not overtly religious. Committed to propaganda of the deed against near land and far land enemies.	Indirect via media initially, including interviews. Repetition of mantras on death cult and human sacrifice (death is truth and ultimate destiny). Release of videos to Al Jazeera and others came later.
Al-Qaeda in Iraq	Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (2004-2006)	Ill-educated, criminal, headstrong and a poor communicator. Highly dogmatic and extreme with experience as terrorist leader in homeland of Jordan.	Relied on violence and visual depictions of beheadings etc. to communicate power and induce fear.
Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula	Nasir al-Wuhayshi (2009-2015)	Yemini served as secretary to Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and had lengthy combat experience. Killed by US drone strike in June 2015 in Yemen.	Used video to make threats of violence in order to defend Islam. AQAP has published Inspire magazine in English under al-Malahem Media since 2010.

Introduction

The would-be bombers of Walthamstow

By Dominic Casciani
BBC News

8 July 2010 | UK

Found Guilty: Ibrahim Savant, Arafat Waheed Khan and Waheed Zaman

Image 2 of 2

A tape found in the prayer room