



ICT
International Institute
for Counter-Terrorism
With the Support of Keren Daniel

ICT Jihadi Monitoring Group

INSIGHTS

Jihadist Propaganda in Syria in the Month of Ramadan: The “Daimeh 2” Program

Dr. Michael Barak

Jihadist organizations attribute considerable importance to their media system by virtue of its function as a central platform for indoctrination, waging psychological warfare against the enemy, challenging “other” narratives and strengthening the self-esteem of members of the jihadist community. Many senior members of the Salafi-jihadist movement, including the leader of Al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, emphasized more than once the importance of the media arena and defined it as an integral part of the jihad arena in the field.¹ A clear expression of these efforts was evident during the month of Ramadan, which began on May 26 and ended on June 24, among jihad fighters associated with Al-Qaeda throughout the Syrian arena with the launch of a unique Web series titled, “Daimeh 2”.

The media network of jihad operatives can be considered ‘sectoral’ media, which is limited to a community with a unique identity distinct from the majority population. It deals with unique content that differs from that which appears in the general media, and it includes targeted texts, motifs and symbols relevant to the jihadist community. These symbols are intertwined with news stories and provide symbolic, and sometimes transcendental, meaning to everyday events. Thus, sectoral media channels fill unique roles that are not necessarily filled by the general media. The first role is that of ‘cultural transmission’ – namely, media channels function as a conduit for the transmission of information about events relevant to the community, including celebrations or social events. What is distinctive about this role is that it transmits information about the community and not about external issues.² At the same time, the sectoral media can function as a sentinel, a kind of community guard that detects dangers and threats to the community. In this role, the sectoral media protects the interests of the community. Another central role that the media may take upon itself is that of a ‘community booster’ by presenting the minority in a positive light and hiding, or even ignoring, its negative aspects. This role serves two purposes: the first purpose is internal by boosting the self-esteem of community members, thereby strengthening the communal identity of the individual, and the second purpose is external by cultivating the public image of the community in the eyes of the

¹ For example, see statements made by Ayman al-Zawahiri on the subject:

August 19, 2015: <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/08/ayman-al-zawahiri-importance-jihadist-media.php>

² Ines Gabel, “The National-Religious Community and the Media: A Love-Hate Relationship”, The Chaim Herzog Institute for Media, Politics and Society: The Sectoral Media in Israel Series, Issue no. 4, May 2006, p. 11.

external society. These three roles contribute to the development of a community consciousness with common characteristics and admirable qualities. The community's public image and the qualities attributed to it are central components of the individual's self-identity.³

In honor of the month of the month of Ramadan, jihad operatives in Syria associated with Al-Qaeda, led by **Sheikh Abdullah al-Muhaysini**,⁴ launched a talk show called "Daimeh 2" for the second consecutive year. The first ten episodes in the series that were broadcast during the first ten days of Ramadan achieved a stunning exposure of 100,000 views. In general, jihad activists held a preliminary campaign among Web surfers before the series was screened. In the promo for the program, which was broadcast on May 7, the show's moderator, **Khitab al-'Ubaydi**, excitedly announced that the concept of the new program is to give viewers the privilege of choosing the program's guests - whether clerics, military commanders, jihad fighters, etc. – and asking them questions in three languages (Arabic, Turkish and English) through the YouTube channel and the Telegram channel, @SHAMM1.⁵ In addition, the producers of the series published graphs, including an assemblage of viewers' preferences regarding the identity of the guests in the series based on "likes". For example, 357 viewers wanted to host Abu Mohammad al-Julani, the military leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and the former leader of Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria. The program itself accurately expresses the three roles that characterize the "sectoral media," as mentioned above.

دائمه ٢
@daimeh2

Following

like 357 : 1- أبو محمد الجولاني :
like 162 : 2- مصلح العلياني :
like 139 : 3- أبو مارية القحطاني :
like 129 : 4- الآخرون من التركستان :

Translate from Arabic

Retweet 1 Likes 13

5:20 AM - 10 May 2017

1 13 13



³ Ibid.

⁴ A member of the Shura Council of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (an umbrella organization of Syrian rebels) and a Saudi cleric who migrated to Syria and became an influential figure among jihadists in Syria. .

⁵ May 7, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVOGTSIn0jE> ; Telegram channel Episodes of the program were also uploaded to the Facebook social network: <https://www.facebook.com/daimeh2/>

From left to right: Khitab al-'Ubaydi, the program's moderator, asking viewers to post questions to a Telegram channel, some of which will be answered by the guests of the “Daimeh 2” program; a graph showing viewers' preferences regarding the identity of the guests in the series

At the beginning of the first episode, which was broadcast on May 28 and had over 30,000 views, al-Muhaysini explained that the program is essentially different from official jihad publications and from the way that arenas of jihad are covered by Arab media channels due to, among other things, its ability to provide first-hand exposure to issues that do not receive sufficient attention and its willingness to deal with questions of interest to the viewing public. The first chapter was, therefore, devoted to viewers' questions that were directed to several jihad activists in Syria who were described as “snapists” due to their experience in using Snapchat, a photo-sharing application popular among jihad activists.⁶ According to the “snapists”, Snapchat serves as an important dawah tool for strengthening the connection with supporters, instilling the concept of jihad and presenting a true picture of what is going on in the arena of jihad in Syria. In general, according to those interviewed and Sheikh al-Muhaysini, social networks have become an integral part of dawah.⁷



The banner produced in honor of the first episode of the “Daimeh 2” series: “Snapists but Mujahideen”

⁶ The applications allows users to send photos, record video clips, add text and drawing, and set the duration.

⁷ May 28, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zttI2ZT4l6I&list>; Telegram channel

In the second episode, which had close to over 30,000 views, **Sheikh Abu Maria al-Qahtani**, the former head of the Shura Council of Al-Nusra Front and a current senior commander in Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, was interviewed, marking his first public appearance. In the interview, he emphasized the importance of adherence to jihad as a single tool for real change in the region despite the difficult battle, expressed criticism against political Islam such as the Muslim Brotherhood for taking part in democratic elections, condemned the Islamic State's treatment of other jihadists that - in his opinion - harms efforts to topple the local regimes, discussed the contribution of Uyghur fighters who migrated from western China to Syria, and more. In another episode, **Abu al-Fath al-Ferghali**, another senior member of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and a former member of Ahrar al-Sham, was interviewed (drawing approximately 12,000 views) and emphasized the importance of maintaining an oath of allegiance to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.⁸ In the next episodes of the series, civilians who lost their relatives as a result of the civil war were interviewed. They expressed determination to continue the armed struggle against the Syrian regime despite the tragedy that befell them.⁹ Another episode focused on Syrian refugees who became handicapped as a result of the war and were provided wheelchairs by Sheikh al-Muhaysini in order to ease their distress.¹⁰

In episode 13, which drew approximately 17,000 views, **Bilal Abdul Kareem**, an American journalist who converted to Islam and is considered a popular figure among jihadist groups, was interviewed. This interview, like the rest of the interviews, was carried out in a lighthearted tone during *Iftar*, the meal eaten to break the fast. In the beginning of the interview, Bilal spoke about the process of his conversion to Islam and about the Islamic principle of the Oneness of God as a motivation for this process. He discussed his impressions from his coverage in Libya and Syria during the outbreak of the Arab Spring. He also said that he was amazed to discover how eager the inhabitants of Libya and Syria were to turn their countries into an Islamic state and to enforce shari'a, something that was not reflected in the official media. In addition, he harshly criticized the biased coverage by the western media, especially the American media, of events in Syria and also criticized its agenda to present jihadists as terrorists instead of trying to understand their motivations.¹¹ In the following

⁸ June 3, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nX4jWaXCc64&list=>; Telegram channel

⁹ May 31, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fqROF8FVkl&list>; Telegram channel

¹⁰ June 4, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnRY_hkZzn0&list; Telegram channel

¹¹ June 10, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZX74ygZvA0&list>; Telegram channel

episode, the interview focused on Kurds throughout Muslim history, in various Kurdish organizations such as the PKK and the YPG. For example, a Kurdish guest noted that the Zionists bear responsibility for the rift between the Kurds for spreading the concept of nationalism among Muslims, which was designed to weaken Islam.¹²

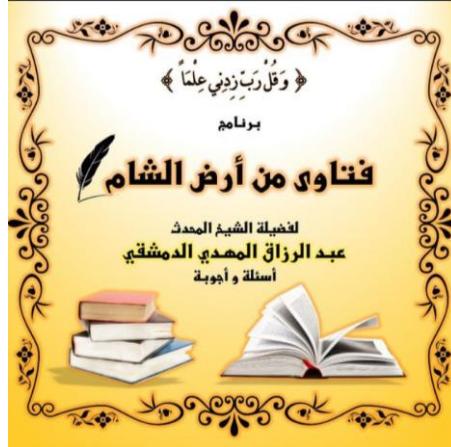


The journalist, Bilal Abdul Kareem, being interviewed for the “Daimeh 2” program and criticizing journalists in the West, especially in the US, for their biased coverage of jihadists and for describing them in the media as terrorists

Another expression of the efforts being made to strengthen the ties between jihad activists and their supporters in Syria during the month of Ramadan was evident on the Telegram account, “Clerics from the Land of Al-Sham” (over 1,900 members) belonging to **Sheikh Abd al-Razzaz al-Mahdi**, a prominent Salafi-jihadist cleric in Syria, member of the Shura Council of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and colleague of al-Muhaysini. On this unique Telegram channel, al-Mahdi answers questions by visitors on various religious issues within 24 hours, such as marital law, the meaning of certain Hadiths, clarification of the treatment to be shown towards various Muslim groups, and more, whether in writing or in audio recordings. For example, one member of the channel asked for a religious-legal opinion regarding Muslims who support watching series that are broadcast during the nights of

¹² June 13, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBtHZybN0ww>; Telegram channel

Ramadan on the Saudi Arabian MBC satellite channels since they include immoral content that is contrary to Islam. Al-Mahdi responded that it is strictly forbidden to watch those channels, viewers must leave the viewing room when they are screened and they must warn their family members not to watch those channels. On another topic, al-Mahdi responded regarding the treatment that must be shown towards non-Salafist Muslim groups. For example, he noted that it is possible to hold a dialogue with members of the Muslim Brotherhood because they are closer in thought to Salafi-jihadists while Shi'ites should be avoided as they are hostile to Sunnis.¹³



The logo of the Telegram channel “Clerics from the Land of Al-Sham” belonging to Sheikh Abd al-Razzaz al-Mahdi

The “Daimeh 2” program, which is integrated into the media system of jihad activists associated with Al-Qaeda in Syria, led by Sheikh Abdullah al-Muhaysini, has received enthusiastic and positive reactions mainly among Web surfers in and outside Syria, civilian and jihadists. The producers of the series even conducted an opinion poll on Twitter on June 17 regarding the viewing public’s level of satisfaction with the series. 55% of them described the series as excellent and an improvement over last year’s series, while only 8% described it as weak (see graph).¹⁴ In fact, jihadists’ access to viewers without a filter or a buffer through the online series “Daimeh 2”, their presentation as non-terrorists,

¹³ June 5, 2017. Telegram channel

¹⁴ June 17, 2017. <https://twitter.com/daimeh2/status/876191877057458176>

and the lighthearted manner in which the interviews are conducted are designed to foster empathy and understanding for their agenda among the viewers. For example, the final episode in the series included "bloopers" by the program's moderator designed to make the viewers laugh. In general, the "Daimeh 2" series is well-suited to the characteristics of the "sectoral media" of the jihadist community. First, it conveys to viewers the feelings of jihadists about what is happening in the region. Second, it warns about the dangers and threats posed to the community, such as the Western media's biased coverage of the events in Syria and its description of jihadists as terrorists. Third, it presents jihadists in a positive light as serving the will of the Syrian people.

ABOUT THE ICT

Founded in 1996, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) is one of the leading academic institutes for counter-terrorism in the world, facilitating international cooperation in the global struggle against terrorism. ICT is an independent think tank providing expertise in terrorism, counter-terrorism, homeland security, threat vulnerability and risk assessment, intelligence analysis and national security and defense policy. ICT is a non-profit organization located at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel which relies exclusively on private donations and revenue from events, projects and programs.

ABOUT THE JIHADI MONITORING GROUP

The Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group (JWMG) is a specialized research and analysis team at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). Composed of researchers fluent in Arabic, the JWMG monitors websites that support and serve the Global Jihad organizations. The unique characteristic of JWMG publications is the team's integration of diverse materials from a wide variety of Arabic sources. JWMG connects each source to larger trends, providing a complete understanding of events on both a local and a global scale.

[Click here for a list of online JWMG publications](#)

For tailored research please contact us at JWMG@ict.org.il.