

# **Media Jihad Campaign: The Islamic State's Response to Deplatforming**

**Cyber Desk Insight**

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# Media Jihad Campaign: The Islamic State's Response to Deplatforming

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## Abstract

The article examines the recent media jihad campaign "Supporting Ribat and Jihad" conducted by the Islamic State and its online supporters, focusing on the concept of media jihad and its significance in response to deplatforming efforts. The article also explores the Islamic State's transition from centralized to decentralized media, which on one hand, has enabled the organization to sustain a strong online presence, posing challenges for security agencies in countering terrorist activities on the internet. On the other hand, it serves as an indication of the survival mode the Islamic State finds itself in within the physical realm. The article emphasizes the importance of media jihad in the Islamic State's overall strategy and its role in maintaining the group's overall visibility and influence.

**Keywords:** Media Jihad; Islamic State; online campaign, deplatforming; Cyber-Terrorism

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## **Introduction**

In June 2023, there was an upsurge in online chatter among supporters of the Islamic State (IS). This resurgence was driven by a campaign called “Supporting Ribat and Jihad,” which aimed to mobilize support for media jihad and defend the Islamic State’s online platforms. The increased emphasis on media jihad can be attributed as a response to recent intensified efforts to take down online platforms and accounts (deplatforming) associated with the Islamic State and its supporters.

The rationale of the media campaign is best explained in published posters on the Islamic State’s encrypted platform on Rocketchat: “They have tried to destroy the media of the Islamic State over the past years, but they have not been able to do so”...“In response to the continued attempt by the kuffar and Murtaddin to delete our accounts on telegram and other platforms, we announce the launch of the new campaign.”

- Announcement -  
Dhul-Qa’dah 1444 H

# HALUMMU


In response to the continuous attempts by the kuffar and murtaddin to delete our accounts on Telegram and other platforms, we announce the launch of the new campaign:

**#Supporting\_Ribat\_and\_Jihad**  
**#المناصرة\_رباط\_وجهاد**

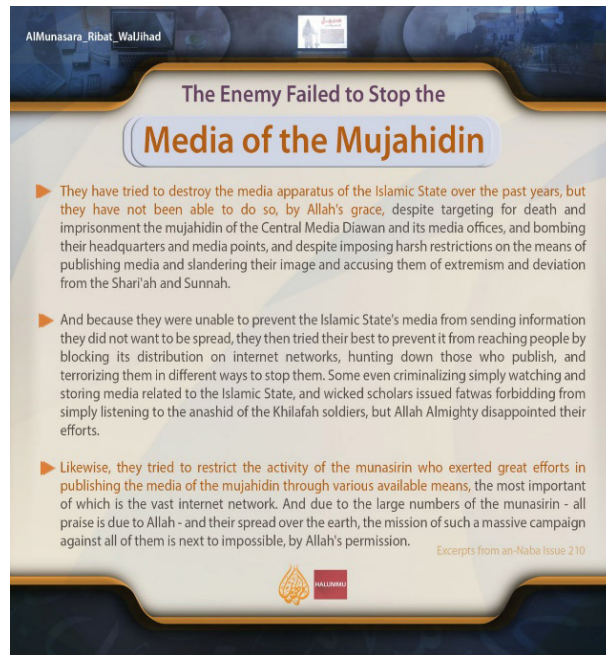
We ask all our supporters to spread our campaign and media to as many platforms and accounts as possible and show our enemies that the Islamic State is Baqiya wa Tatamadad Bi-ithnillah

If you would like to take part in our campaign, or if you want to be added to the channels, contact us on:

Campaign Contact bot + join channels:

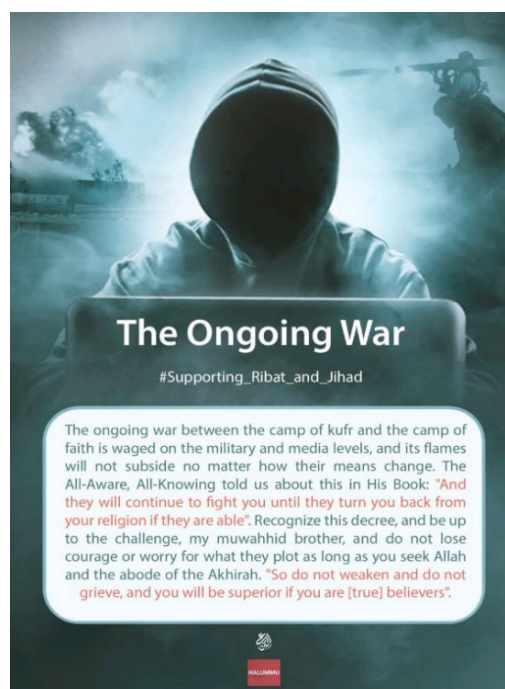
 [https://t.me/Ribat\\_Jihad\\_bot](https://t.me/Ribat_Jihad_bot)

BarakAllahu Feekum



Images: Posters published on the Islamic State's encrypted platform on Rocketchat, as part of the #supporting\_Ribat\_and\_Jihad campaign.

The aim of the campaign is to emphasize the significance of media jihad, particularly during challenging times when Hijra (migration to jihadist fighting arenas) is difficult. The media was given a prominent role in the fight, as exemplified in a poster: "The ongoing war between the camp of the disbelievers and the camp of faith is fought on both military and media level."





**Images: Posters published on the Islamic State’s encrypted platform on Rocketchat, as part of the #supporting\_Ribat\_and\_Jihad campaign.**

During the campaign, media institutions affiliated with the Islamic State called upon supporters to distribute the messages across various online platforms, including mainstream social media. Their aim was to encourage individuals to actively participate in the campaign and contribute to the cause, stating: “The campaign, supporting Ribat and Jihad, aims to promote the religion and defend the worshipers of Allah, the Mujahideen.” “The battle today is at your arena...your brothers are busy, so be for them helpers and supporters.” (Telegram)

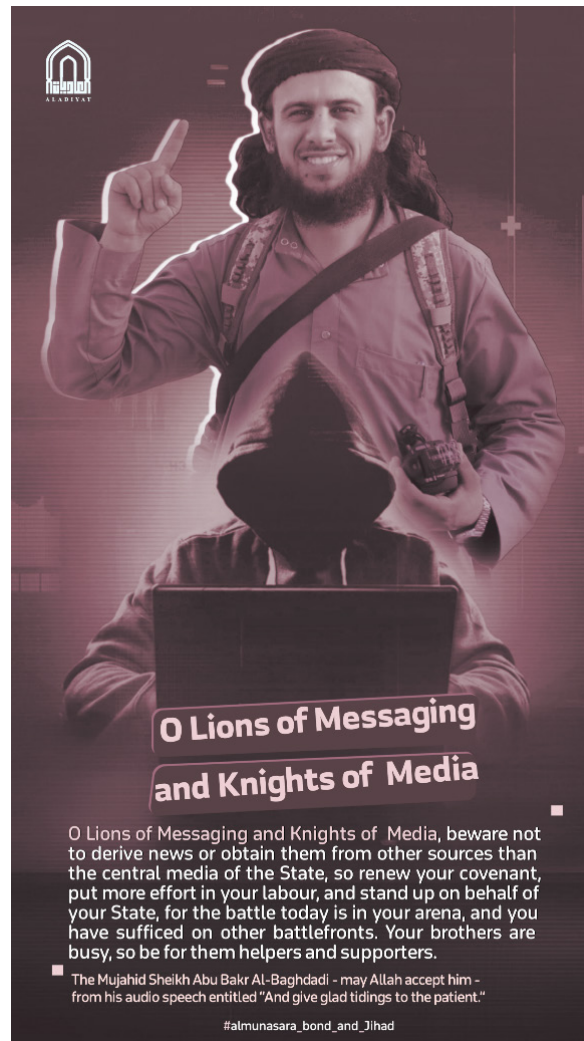
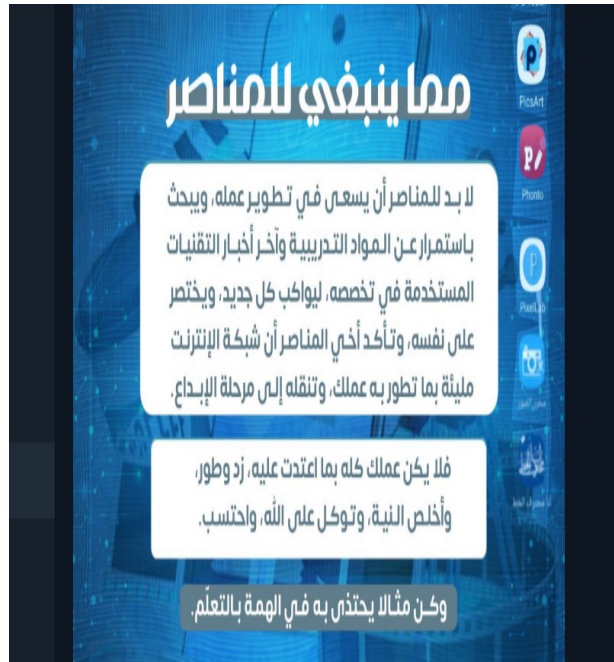


Image: poster published on the Islamic State's linked Telegram channel.

Among the main messages of the campaign was to emphasize the fundamental duty of supporters to engage in media jihad. These materials (posters, videos, posts, etc.) provided detailed guidance to supporters, outlining ways in which they could contribute to the campaign. Notably, supporters were encouraged to develop their own creative content. Furthermore, a dedicated Telegram bot was made available to facilitate engagement, allowing individuals to take on additional responsibilities within the campaign.





Images: Example of posters distributed on a Telegram bot dedicated to the media Jihad campaign.

Additional strategies to encourage involvement can be observed through the publications of Ansar Production (affiliated with the Islamic State), which showcases the top five advocacy designs of the month on a darknet website associated with the organization. This initiative aims to stimulate active participation and interaction among Islamic State's supporters. In another example, the Al-Battar Foundation, also affiliated with the Islamic State, recently released a video titled 'Al-Manasra, Ribat wa Jihad,' urging its supporters to mobilize for online Jihad. The video emphasizes the importance of digital warfare as a means to further their radical agenda.



Image: Ansar Production – best designs of the month on Ilam Darknet website.

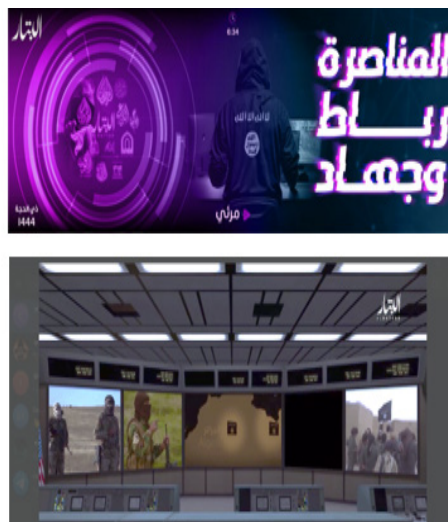


Image: Banner and print screen from Al-Battar Foundation video titled ' Al-Manasra, Ribat wa Jihad published on Telegram.

### **The Media Jihad Narrative**

The narrative of a media Jihad or media war has been an integral part of the global jihad war arena since its inception, particularly within Al-Qaeda and further intensified with the establishment of the Islamic State.

During the Islamic Caliphate era in Iraq and Syria (2014-2018), the Islamic State organization managed its communications strategy and message dissemination through a designated office, utilizing multiple communication platforms. However, as the organization faced losses in manpower, financing, and management capabilities, its ability to maintain an extensive communications network declined. The fall of the caliphate further impacted its media operations. In response, the significance of media within the global jihad fight increased, serving as a means to keep the Islamic State 'alive' and visible despite operational setbacks. Consequently, the responsibility for content creation shifted from the main official outlets to online supporters. These informal institutions guided supporters in generating content, often echoing formal publications such as the Al-Naba weekly magazine. Supporters of the Islamic State, through informal channels, continue to produce content in various languages, creating videos, posters, audio recordings, and even apps.<sup>1</sup>

The transition from centralized media to decentralized media was a key component in facilitating the Islamic State's ability to maintain an online presence. This decentralized approach is posing a significant difficulty for security agencies and other organizations aiming to neutralize terrorist activities on the internet.

In fact, the June 2023 campaign was not the first time that the Islamic State and its supporters launched a campaign as a response to deplatforming. At the beginning of 2022, they launched a media jihad campaign directed by the Islamic State's official publication, Al-Naba. The campaign encouraged followers to persist in their online incitement efforts under the title "continue your incitement." The campaign gained significant momentum online, with over 1,200 posts on various social media platforms, mainly Twitter and Facebook, under the hashtag 'مكضي رحمت\_اول صاوا' (Continue\_Your\_Incitement)."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, many other posts focused on the hashtag itself, indicating that the popularity of the hashtag held greater importance in this case than the actual content. "In the aftermath of the barbaric deletion and silencing of our mouths on social media, supporters of the Caliphate on Twitter platform within hours managed to publish more than 700 tweets under the hashtag "Continue\_Your\_Incitement" "We confirm our victory in the media war" (IS supporter on Rocketchat).<sup>3</sup>

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1 JEREMY B.Y.(2022,January 13) ISIS Bot Army Adapts to Survive Online Cyberslaughter: Haberefeld Daniel & Eitan Azani. JPOST. Retrieved from: <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-692462>

2 @DanielHaberefeld (2021, January, 21) ICT Research update. Retrieved from: [https://twitter.com/ICT\\_org/status/1484476356138315779?s=20](https://twitter.com/ICT_org/status/1484476356138315779?s=20)

3 @DanielHaberefeld (2021, January, 21) ICT Research update. Retrieved from: [https://twitter.com/ICT\\_org/status/1484476356138315779?s=20](https://twitter.com/ICT_org/status/1484476356138315779?s=20)

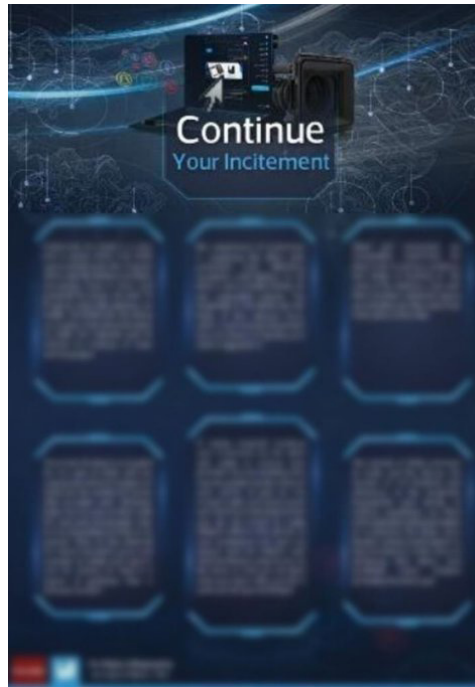


Image: Al-Naba 2022 "Continue your Incitement" campaign.



Image: Supporters poster echoing the campaign.

A year earlier, in May 2021, Al-Naba launched a similar campaign titled "The Media War," which aimed to highlight the important role of media jihad alongside physical warfare. This campaign not only sought to provide legitimacy to the ongoing media jihad efforts conducted by supporters of the Islamic State, but also urged them to unite their efforts: "to unite the ranks... in assisting the Islamic State" (Al-Naba). The

campaign publications were additionally translated into various languages and shared across multiple online platforms affiliated with the Islamic State."<sup>4</sup>



**Image: AL-Naba campaign on Media War 2021.**

Overall, the Islamic State media campaign system has both top-down and bottom-up factions, collaborating in synergy to achieve their objectives. In a bottom-up campaign, the initiative primarily comes from supporter's institutions or individuals operating independently. These campaigns are characterized by decentralized decision-making and a high level of autonomy among participants. The content and messaging are often created by supporters, and dissemination occurs through various channels, including social media platforms and encrypted messaging apps. The Islamic State's recent media jihad campaign "Supporting Ribat and Jihad" is driven by supporters and informal institutions, exemplifying a bottom-up approach.

On the other hand, top-down campaigns are centrally directed and controlled by the leadership or official media institutions of the Islamic State usually through the Al-Naba weekly magazine. The strategy, messaging and coordination of activities, are dictated from the top, with supporters playing the role of executing the campaign objectives and echoing its messages. This was exemplified in the previous media jihad campaigns in 2022 and 2021, as mentioned above, and in many other cases (such as the "Free the Prisoners campaign").

It should be noted that the significance of media jihad extends beyond the current campaign. An example that gained attention recently was in March 2023 when the Islamic State's "Voice of Khurasan," an un-official online magazine, published a comprehensive seven-page article on the media war. The article emphasized that media jihad can be "sometimes more severe and painful than the bullets fired by mujahideen, piercing the chests of the disbelievers and apostates."

4 Haberfeld D.& Azani E. (2021) Trends in Cyber-Terrorism 2021. ICT. Retrieved from: <https://ict.org.il/trends-in-cyber-terrorism-2021/>



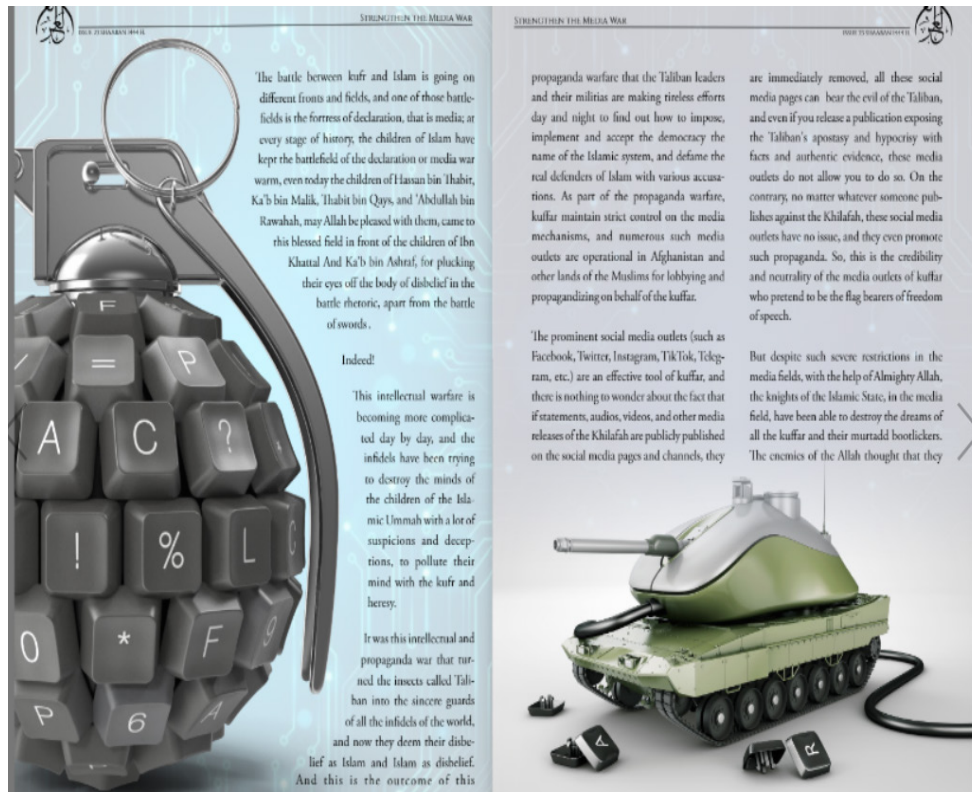


Image: "Voice of Khurasan" article on Media War.

## **Learning Competition: Between Deplatforming and Media Jihad**

Deplatforming has become a vital tool in the ongoing fight against online terrorism. However, it is important to acknowledge that alone, deplatforming is not sufficient in reducing the online presence of terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State. Following each deplatforming operation, Islamic State and its supporters exhibit resilience by employing a range of strategies, both conventional and innovative, to overcome the challenges posed by deplatforming efforts. These adaptive measures enable them to effectively propagate their extremist ideologies while utilizing technologies.<sup>5</sup>

Islamic State supporters present a multi-platform approach, effectively utilizing various media platforms simultaneously. Such an example is the simultaneous use of the Darknet websites Telegram, Rocketchat, Element, and other platforms in the evolving media landscape.<sup>6</sup> It is worth mentioning that the media institutions operated by supporters, particularly those involved in cybersecurity such as Afaq or Qimam Electronic Foundation (Qef), play a crucial role in facilitating the transition from one platform to another.<sup>7</sup>

5 JEREMY B.Y.(2022,January 13) ISIS Bot Army Adapts to Survive Online Cyberslaughter: Haberdaniel Daniel & Eitan Azani. JPOST. Retrieved from: <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-692462>

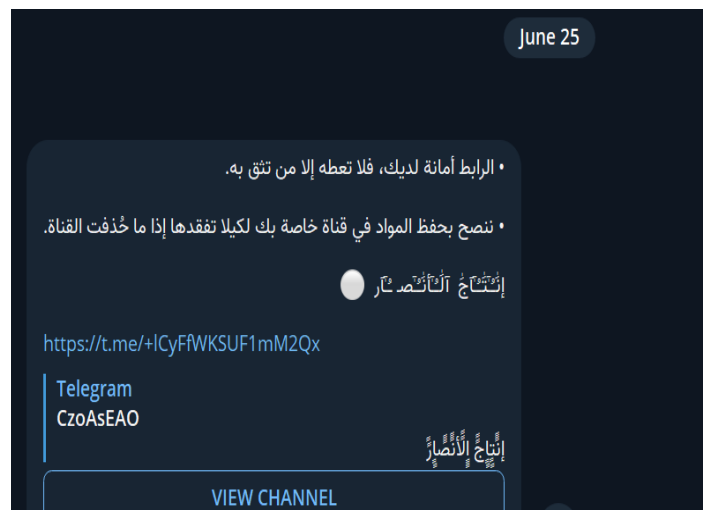
6 Haberdaniel D.& Azani E. (2021) Trends in Cyber-Terrorism 2021. ICT. Retrieved from: <https://ict.org.il/trends-in-cyber-terrorism-2021/>

7 Haberdaniel D. & Azani E. (2022). "The end of the Islamic State's Cyber Security Unit Afaq?". ICT. Rederived from: <https://ict.org.il/islamic-state-cyber-security-unit-afaq/>

This coordinated and adaptive approach ensures that supporters maintain their online activities and messaging despite targeted efforts to paralyze their presence on specific platforms.

Islamic State and its supporters respond to deplatforming campaigns by exploiting a variety of technological tools such as Telegram bots. Among others, Telegram bots assist in generating and disseminating relevant information, including sending new links to social media groups and chats (there are also other less known platforms that enable similar options; however, telegram bots are becoming the most effective tool). This enables Islamic State supporters to quickly regroup and reconnect, effectively overcoming the impact of deplatforming.<sup>8</sup>

Another, more conventional response to deplatforming campaigns is the acquisition of fake or virtual numbers for social media usage. These fake numbers allow Islamic State supporters to connect to social media platforms without revealing their true identities. This aligns with the ongoing chatter on cybersecurity principles such as the use of VPN, Tor, and other security settings that enhance anonymity. By obtaining fake numbers, Islamic State supporters can bypass identity verification processes and maintain their online presence despite deplatforming efforts. This strategy showcases their adaptability and determination to disseminate propaganda while prioritizing their anonymity and online security. The effectiveness of such measures is highlighted by the fact that several arrests have been made of Islamic State supporters involved in media jihad. For example, in February 2023, two teenagers were arrested in Singapore after creating and disseminating an Islamic State-inspired video game.<sup>9</sup>



**Image: Example of a bot that sends new links to Islamic State Telegram channels.**

8 JEREMY B.Y.(2022,January 13) ISIS Bot Army Adapts to Survive Online Cyberslaughter: Habermeld Daniel & Eitan Azani. JPOST. Retrieved from: <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-692462>

9 Lim K. (2023, February, 21). "Singapore warns of radicalisation via gaming as 2 teens issued orders under ISA law" Retrieved from: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/article/3210987/singapore-warns-radicalisation-gaming-2-teens-hit-controversial-isa-law>

I have been using fake sms-verification numbers for creating a twitter and instagram account. I used [juicysms.com](http://juicysms.com) and [smsvpa.com](http://smsvpa.com) (cheapest) since both these sites accept monero. Access the sites with a VPN (or TOR) and pay with crypto (monero is best) for maximum privacy.

Dont bother with websites giving out free sms-verification numbers - these have in 100% of cases been used by others before you, so you will just waste your time.

These websites sell a one-time confirmation code sms for 0.2-2 \$ price depending on the country of the phone number.

once you create a twitter account using a fake sms verification number (and a fake email and using a VPN), immediatly remove your phone number from your profile and turn on two-factor authentication (2-factor authentication chrome/firefox extensions exists that can be used - no need for any mobile phone). This way, twitter will never again ask for you phone number (important since you can never again access the sms verifaciton phone number.

**Image: Islamic State supporter on Rocketchat discussing the use of a fake number to gain access to social media.**

To conclude, deplatforming campaigns have some success in “buying time,” however they have also inadvertently fueled the motivation of Islamic State supporters to intensify their pursuit of media jihad. Over the past two years, we have witnessed a surge in media jihad campaigns, propelled by the urgency to reclaim their online presence and amplify their messages. These campaigns serve as evidence to their determination to disseminate radical propaganda.

## **Conclusions**

Following the fall of the Caliphate, the primary online activities of the Islamic State are carried out mostly by its supporters who produce and disseminate propaganda on behalf of the organization (The voice of Islamic State leadership remains conveyed through the Al-Naba weekly magazine, along with a limited number of formal media institutions). This shift in responsibility from official channels to supporters has become dominant in the post-Caliphate era. Supporters play a critical role in generating and distributing content, contributing to the ongoing media efforts of the Islamic State.

It is through this adaptive approach that the Islamic State continues to operate in the online sphere, adapting to disruptions and maintaining its presence despite efforts to dismantle its networks mainly through deplatforming. The organization’s ability to leverage its supporters and their institutions has been instrumental in its resilience and survival in the face of online challenges. Even though, it may also reflect vulnerabilities within the organization’s official ranks, media institutions, and military setbacks.

The Islamic State organization implements the “Remaining and Expanding” strategy not only in physical spaces but also in the media domain. While striving to maintain its presence in existing platforms, the group also focuses on reorganizing and expanding onto new platforms. This is achieved by transferring power and influence to supporting institutions that operate across a wide range of media platforms and enhance their engagement through campaigns such as the recent media jihad – “Supporting Ribat and Jihad,” which presumably will not be the last media jihad campaign that we will



encounter.

The real test lies ahead as the development and widespread use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the online domain presents new challenges for both extremist groups and security agencies. Both parties are now engaged in a continuous learning process, adapting to the evolving capabilities of AI and engaging in a competitive race to stay ahead. This dynamic learning competition further intensifies the battle in the online landscape.