

## THE CARTER CENTER

*Daesh Meta-Narratives: From the Global Ummah to the Hyperlocal*

*June 2017*

### **Executive Summary**

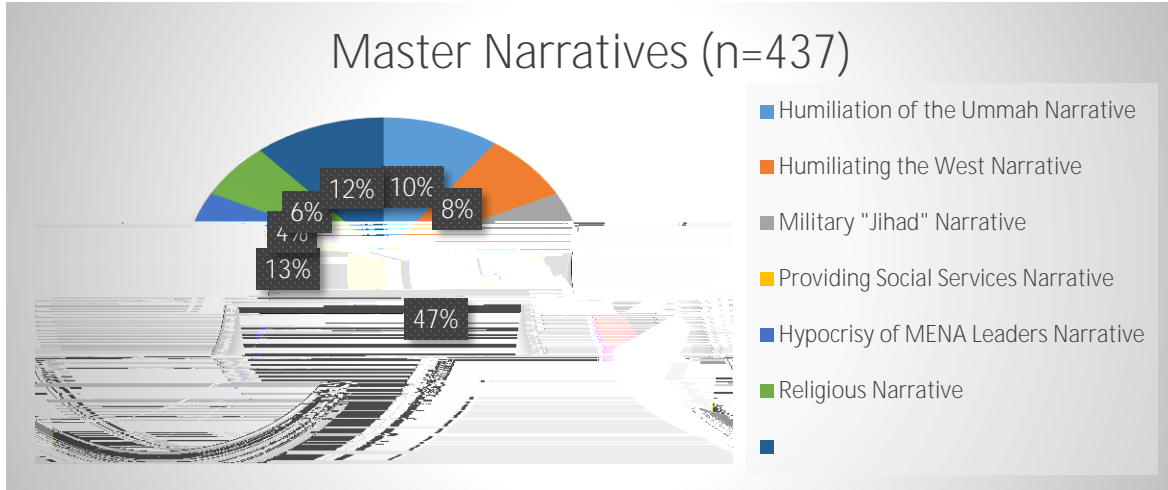
Daesh recruits and recruits disaffected young men and women on a global scale. Effective interventions to reduce recruitment and recruitment of Daesh are needed. Effective interventions to reduce recruitment and recruitment of Daesh are needed. Effective interventions to reduce recruitment and recruitment of Daesh are needed.

## Defining the Conflict: Narratives of Division

These master narratives are dialectical and mutually reinforcing. Each narrative, while distinct, functions by identifying enemies, prescribing actions, and/or providing a resolution: 1) anger over humiliation of the *Ummah* or historical grievances; 2) desire to humiliate and expose the hypocrisy of the West; 3) glorification of military jihad; 4) provision of social services and benefits to subject populations; 5) disapproval of the hypocrisy of Muslims and/or Middle East and North Africa (MENA) leaders; 6) propagation of religious/theological doctrine; and 7) ability to administer territory and provide law and order.

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Often, Daesh seeks to provide evidence for this division via decontextualized clips from Western media. Of the videos The Carter Center analyzed, about 12 percent re-appropriated Western mainstream media clips, almost half of them from the United States. The group uses these Western media clips, including images of political leaders, to illustrate that the West is at war with Islam.

Daesh emphasizes Western transgression in the Muslim world to stress historical grievances and justify attacks as a legitimate response. Videos fueled by this narrative often show in agonizing detail the bodies of children allegedly injured or killed in Coalition airstrikes.<sup>2</sup> Narratives like these assert a defensive position and seek to establish a hyper-intensified moral space for potential recruits. Battle lines are drawn and action is demanded. Most of these videos are in Arabic, but with subtitles in Western languages (especially French and English). In June 2014, Daesh

spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Cf pcpk'ucvqf . "ōVj g'vō g"j cu" come for the *Ummah* of Mohammed to wake up from its sleep, remove the garments of dishonor, and shake off the dust of j wo kncvqp" cpf " f lui tcegō" kō" uwdugs wgpv' xlf gqu." F cguj " featured scenes of destruction from Gaza and the West Bank, Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Another video, released in May 4238"cpf "kvqf "ōDmqf "hqt"Dmqf .ō"hcwtgf "ej krf tgp"qh'vj g" ōecrk j cvgō'y cmkpi "vj tqwi j "twddrg0Xkf gqu'rkng"vj gug"f ghkg" a conflict (between Islam and the West, or Islam and hypocrites or apostates), place blame, and evoke moral outrage toward enemies. Such scenes are designed to convince individuals who experienced the conflict firsthand, as well as those who feel horrified at the suffering in Syria

<sup>2</sup> The Global Coalition against Daesh was formed in 2014 to defeat Daesh in Iraq and Syria through military intervention, reduce foreign fighter flows, disrupt financing networks, stabilize liberated areas, and provide countermessaging. It now counts 86 nations as members. <http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/home/>





series advertises the benefits awaiting potential recruits, and the social justice enacted by Daesh, in succinct and precise terms. *Mujatweets* Gr kuqf g'%. 'ugvlp'F cguj ø'Tcs sc'O ctngv.'ko o gtugu'vj g" viewer in images of bins and shelves overflowing with fresh produce, meat, and fruits. In *Mujatweets* Episode #2, more than 30 children run toward a pushcart selling cotton candy and pink ice cream ó a paradise for kids ó uwi i guwxg"qh'F cguj ø'lco k{ -oriented and stable atmosphere. These episodes almost always use a subjective or first-person camera angle to put the viewer directly into the scene. Such immersion allows recruits to imagine themselves in the Islamic State.

caliphate in June 2014, it presented itself as the singular political and religious authority over all Muslims. Its brutal and shocking acts of brutality have sparked international condemnation, particularly within the Muslim community.<sup>6</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Daesh bases its ideology on a spurious and literalist understanding of Islamic texts to challenge the nation-state. It seeks to advance its agenda through innovative use of media, releasing video content that evolves, in terms of both the narratives employed and the audiences targeted. Videos in the first four months of 2017 show a