



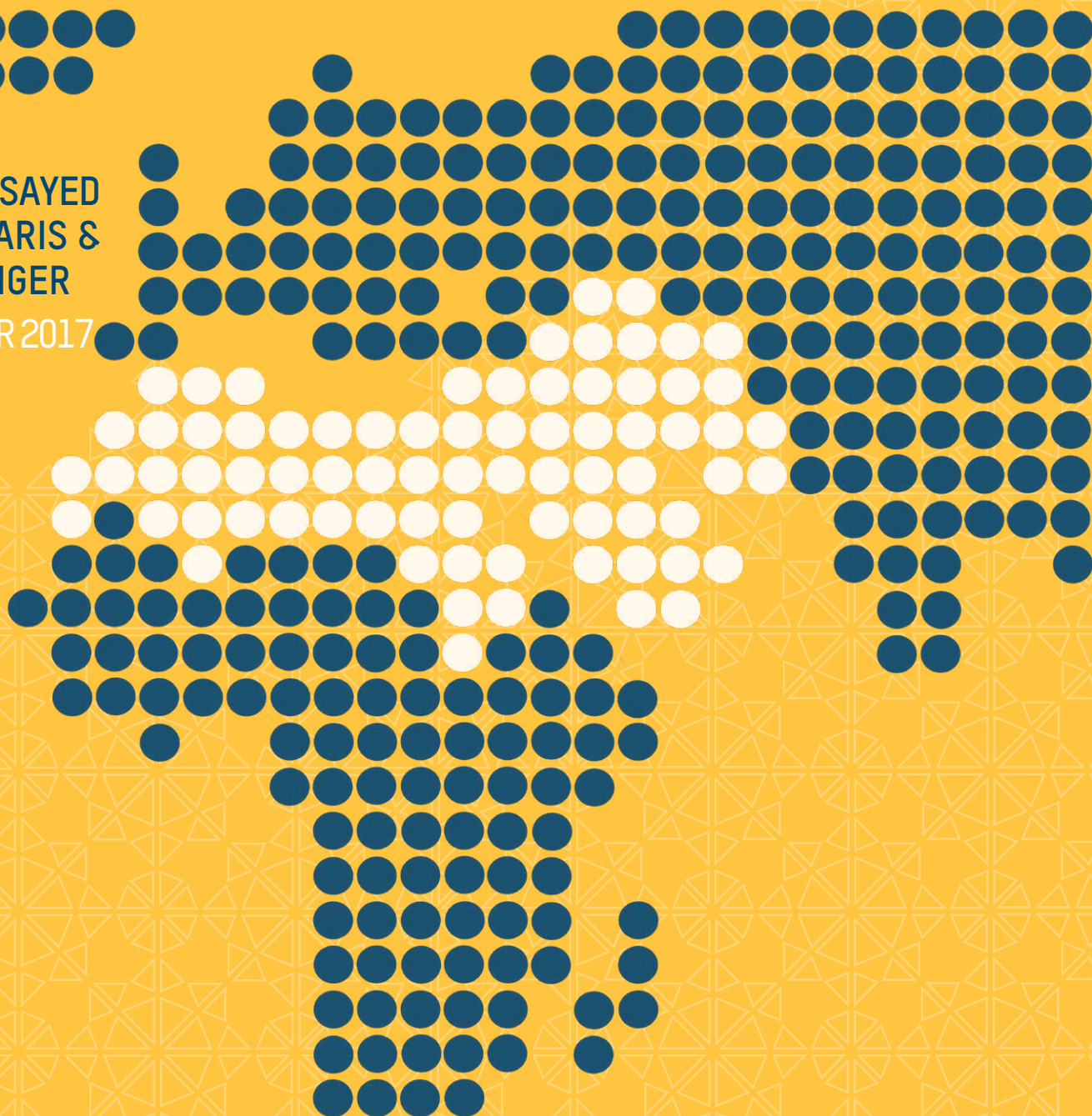
Hedayah  
countering violent extremism

# UNDERMINING VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

## A HOW-TO GUIDE

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## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This Guide is the follow-on product of the “Expert Workshop on Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Collection of Counter-Narratives for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), held 31 July –2 August 2017 in Marrakech, Morocco.

This Guide and the annex of counter-narratives are available and accessible through Hedayah’s existing Counter-Narrative Library ([www.cn-library.com](http://www.cn-library.com)). For more information on the project, please see Annex A. For access to the Counter-Narrative Library, please contact [cnlibrary.admin@hedayah.ae](mailto:cnlibrary.admin@hedayah.ae).

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## EXPERTS (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

As part of this project, Hedayah convened an expert workshop where leading experts from the region, including academics, practitioners and government officials, came together to develop the collection of counter-narratives and case studies. The following experts attended the workshop and contributed to the review of this report:

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## INTRODUCTION

The Middle East and North African (MENA) region has historically suffered from various forms of violent extremism and terrorism, and there are a number of different terrorist groups operating in the region. In the current context, the rise of Daesh<sup>1</sup> has been one of the main security concerns for MENA governments, populations and communities. Daesh's ability to recruit from the populations of the MENA region has been alarming; a large number of foreign terrorist fighters, for example, have come from MENA countries (Benmelech & Klor, 2016; Bremmer, 2017).

At the same time, the Internet provides violent extremists and terrorists with various platforms to promote violence, disseminate their propaganda and recruit individuals to fight for their cause. Social media has amplified the scope, reach and speed by which radicalization and recruitment can take place. Daesh has been known to leverage social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to spread its message. Daesh has also used other forms of online communications channels to distribute its propaganda, such as through its English-language magazine Dabiq and its replacement Rumiyah after July 2016.

Still, offline forms of communications also play significant roles in how messages are disseminated, by groups such as Daesh. Although substantial attention has been given to Daesh's online media strategy, during the height of its territorial control in Iraq and Syria, its offline strategy has been described by Charlie Winter as "more persuasive" than the online component (Winter, 2016). The offline propaganda of Daesh has included radio station broadcasts, news bulletins in medical clinics, and "history" lessons in its makeshift schools and educational facilities (Winter, 2016; Iraqi Institution for Development, 2015). Therefore, the challenge to counter the narratives of Daesh is twofold: how to undermine the growing extremist propaganda in cyberspace and how to reduce its appeal in the discourse taking place offline.

In this context, this Guide aims to provide assistance for practitioners, policymakers, governments, civil society and community organizations in the MENA region to produce better and more effective alternative and counter-narratives to Daesh. The Guide also provides a collection of examples of existing, open-source counter-narratives that are available in English, Arabic and French. Although this Guide focuses on Daesh as a case study, other terrorist organizations that exist within the MENA region have similar strategies, ideologies and narratives to Daesh. With some nuanced differences, the guidance in this report may be adapted and used in efforts that seek to counter the messages of various terrorist organizations.

This Guide was devised through several sources and methods: 1) desktop research on the threats of violent extremism, the narratives of Daesh, and existing counter-narratives from the region; 2) an expert workshop on "Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Collection of Counter-Narratives for CVE" hosted by Hedayah and Search for Common Ground from 31 July-2 August 2017 in Marrakesh, Morocco; and 3) a consultation process with regional experts and policymakers. It should be noted that the following framework is based on Hedayah's report, *Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in South East Asia: A How-To Guide*, which is the first in the series of several regional Guides on developing alternative and counter-narratives (Zeiger, 2016). The framework in the original How-To Guide was developed in consultation with counter-narrative experts, academics and government officials, and underwent a robust peer review process. Thus, the

<sup>1</sup> This report will refer to this group as Daesh, which is an acronym for the group's name in Arabic ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fi 'l-Iraq wa-sh-Sham (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). Using this term is a counter-narrative of sorts in and of itself; the group dislikes the term Daesh because it is similar to Arabic words meaning "one who crushes something underfoot" or "one who sows discord" (Oakley & Chakrabarti, 2017).



South East Asia Guide provides a good foundational framework for this and any subsequent How-To Guides.

At the beginning, Daesh gained control over territory in Iraq and Syria quite rapidly, meaning that counter-terrorism (CT) and countering violent extremism (CVE) strategies focused on preventing Daesh from increasing their numbers for their armies and gaining physical territory for their so-called “caliphate”. However, with the fall of key strongholds of Mosul in July 2017 and of Raqqa in October 2017, Daesh may look to its other territorial claims in the MENA region—such as those in Egypt (Sinai), Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen—to establish its next base of operations. In addition to having a continued presence in Iraq and Syria, Daesh also remains a direct threat in terms of carrying out operations in other MENA countries. For example, in Tunisia, Daesh attacked soft targets at the Bardo National Museum and Sousse resort hotels in 2015, and in June 2017 there was a foiled attack planned against Mecca’s Grand Mosque in Saudi Arabia (“‘Suicide Attack’ on Grand Mosque,” 2017).

These recent developments also have implications for counter-narratives and messaging. As such, future counter-narrative campaigns in MENA should put less emphasis on preventing radicalized individuals from traveling to the so-called “caliphate” and more emphasis on: 1) preventing individuals and small cells from carrying out attacks in their home countries; 2) reintegrating returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), both disillusioned and those wishing to carry out attacks at home; and 3) preventing migration to other Daesh strongholds both inside and outside the region. However, it should be noted that since this Guide and the collection of counter-narratives was initiated in July 2017, and Daesh’s shift in propaganda tactics is still relatively new, the existing examples of counter-narratives do not necessarily always reflect the next phase of counter-narratives necessary to defeat Daesh. Still, existing counter-narratives that address previous Daesh propaganda strategies may provide inspiration and insight for practitioners and policymakers, so they are included in this collection.



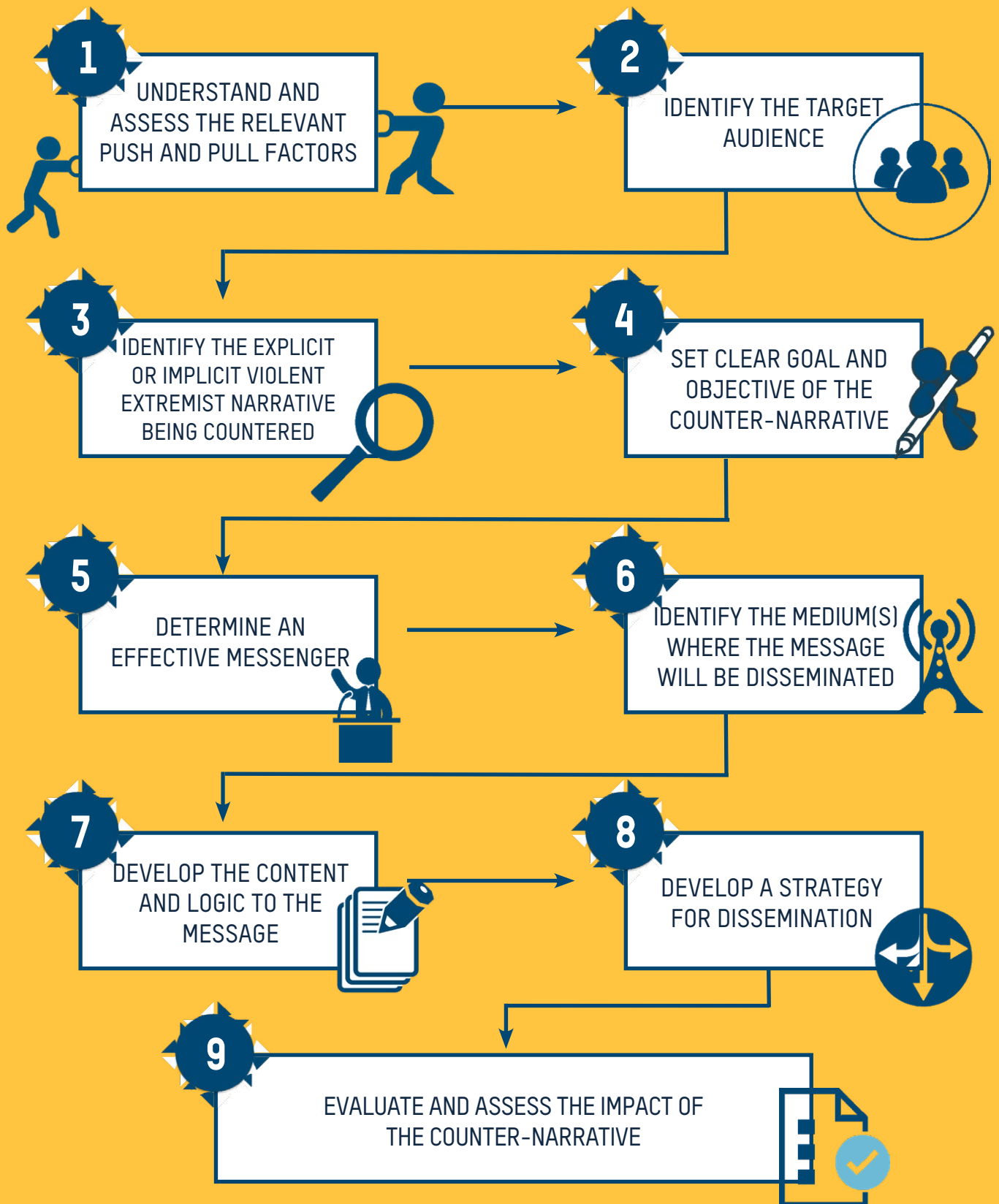
## WHAT IS “COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM” (CVE)?

In the spectrum of counter-terrorism approaches, the “soft” or “preventive” strategies, policies and programs that identify and challenge the “push” and “pull” factors of radicalization and recruitment are described as “countering violent extremism” or CVE programs and policies.

For the purposes of this How-to Guide, CVE describes both the longer-term prevention strategies that address potential macro socio-economic and political factors, and the specifically-designed targeted interventions that take place at both the community and individual level (to include psycho-social counseling for at-risk individuals as well as detainees) (Original text box from Zeiger, 2016).

# DEVELOPING A COUNTER-NARRATIVE

In developing alternative and counter-narratives against violent extremists, there are nine main steps to developing a good counter-narrative (Zeiger, 2016, p.3):



# 1 UNDERSTAND AND ASSESS RELEVANT PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

In preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), a contextual understanding of the local drivers of radicalization is the critical first step in devising any intervention. According to USAID (2011), the drivers of radicalization are described as “push and pull factors.” “Push factors” are factors that make an environment more conducive to violent extremism, including structural conditions such as (real or perceived) lack of access to education or employment, poverty, social marginalization, poor governance, government repression or corruption. For the purposes of this report, the “push” factors for the Middle East and North Africa are classified as socio-economic, political and cultural. The second set of factors, “pull factors” are psychosocial conditions that drive an individual to violent extremism. In this report, the “pull” factors for the MENA region are categorized as social/psychological, economic, and religious/cultural. Notably, recent literature has also described “push” factors as “structural factors” and “pull” factors as a combination of “individual incentives” and a third category of “enabling factors” such as mentors or charismatic religious leaders (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2016). However, for the purposes of this report the framework of USAID will be applied, and the third category of “enabling factors” is included under “pull factors.”

Focusing on the MENA region, experts at the Marrakesh workshop discussed and debated relevant examples in regards to both “push” and “pull” factors that drew vulnerable individuals and groups towards violence. Based on these discussions, a number of push and pull factors were identified for the region and highlighted in the figure below:

PUSH FACTORS	PULL FACTORS
<p><u>Socio-economic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social and economic marginalization of religious, ethnic, linguistic, gender and cultural minorities;</li> <li>• Lack of social justice or appropriate criminal justice responses;</li> <li>• Reduced opportunities for employment; and</li> <li>• Frustration and dissatisfaction due to low and unacceptable standard of living (family, education and work).</li> </ul> <p><u>Political</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture of conspiracy theories overlapped with grievances of actual or perceived injustice;</li> <li>• Feelings of political victimhood due to long history of colonization;</li> <li>• Lack of trust and attachment to the State institutions and policies, particularly among youth; and</li> </ul>	<p><u>Social /Psychological</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social prestige – obtaining a leading position or role;</li> <li>• Opportunities to achieve vengeance;</li> <li>• Attraction to violence (finding it appealing);</li> <li>• Sense of belonging, purpose, self-realization and fulfilment;</li> <li>• Role models or charismatic leaders replacing father figures;</li> <li>• Demonstration of dominance or desire to be a hero (ambition and power); and</li> <li>• Seeking family unity with relatives who are in the “caliphate”.</li> </ul> <p><u>Economic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities for financial rewards; and</li> <li>• Access to job or life opportunities.</li> </ul>



PUSH FACTORS	PULL FACTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corruption (administrative corruption and violation of law) and misconduct against citizens and particularly by security forces; absence of accountability for these actions.</li> </ul> <p><u>Cultural</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of religious awareness/religious culture due to decline of proper religious education among religious leaders and community members;</li> <li>• Perceived ideological struggle (religious vs. secular) and perception that secular society is “corrupting” religious society;</li> <li>• Diminishing role of parents in educational, psychological and social support;</li> <li>• Lack of critical thinking skills in schools;</li> <li>• Lack of entertainment and recreational spaces such as arts and cultural activities;</li> <li>• Decline in the role of education as means for social advancement; and</li> <li>• Negative peer influences within communities and neighbourhoods.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Religious and Cultural</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expression of religion (as an alternative for religious institutions);</li> <li>• Expression of tribal and cultural identity;</li> <li>• Role of persuasive (online) religious leaders promoting “jihad”;</li> <li>• Idealizing the narrative of dreams of living under the “caliphate” as a path to heaven through engaging in a war on infidels;</li> <li>• Influence of news, images and videos depicting a better life under the “caliphate” disseminated via social media; and</li> <li>• Supporting oppressed Muslims worldwide, and opportunities for revenge against the enemies.</li> </ul>

**Figure 1: Potential Push and Pull Factors from the Middle East and North Africa.**

*Note: These factors are based on the discussions by experts at the workshop in Marrakesh. These factors should not be considered comprehensive, but can differ across countries, and can be real or perceived grievances.*

In this step, establishing a baseline for the local culture, religion, society and economics is important 1) to avoid the fallacy of incorrectly assuming populations are “vulnerable” without evidence of radicalization when choosing the target audience, and 2) to choose the target audience that might be most influenced by the counter-narrative.

## 2 IDENTIFY THE TARGET AUDIENCE

After understanding the push and pull factors of what could cause an individual to join a group like Daesh, the next step is to determine the target audience of a counter-narrative campaign. The framework devised in Hedayah's first How-To Guide takes a marketing approach to counter-narratives that defines the target audience as the core and central component of the campaign itself. Knowing the audience that should be reached by the campaign helps in determining the content of the message, the medium used and the messenger to convey the intended message.

Daesh not only tailors various messages to specific target audiences, it also makes those messages available in a variety of languages. If terrorist organizations are specifying their messages to fit narrowly defined and specific audiences, counter-messages and alternative messages should adopt similar strategies that fit the local context.

Since societies within the MENA region are diverse, a description of the specific target audience is needed prior to planning an alternative or counter-narrative campaign. This description should ideally include gender, age, education, location, priority interests and online activities to ensure that campaigns are tailored for the target audience (Tuck & Silverman, 2016). A categorization of target audiences for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region may include:

### GENERAL AUDIENCE

Counter-narratives tailored for a general audience may emphasize shared cultural or historical values, may underline common themes of humanity and/or global citizenship, or may emphasize peace, tolerance, and solidarity (Briggs & Feve, 2013). Campaigns for a general audience could also include messages that open debates about difficult subjects (e.g. violence, religion, politics). This may also provide an opportunity to include an offline component to the campaign that facilitates constructive and productive engagement with those subjects (Hemmingson & Castro, 2017). For the MENA region, the general audience is a Muslim-majority audience, and therefore messages aimed at the general population may include religious aspects. For example, these messages may aim to improve the knowledge of specific principles in Islam that are misrepresented in terrorist narratives. Since the MENA region is diverse in terms of religious, ethnic, cultural, social and sectarian backgrounds, subsets of the general audience could also be targeted by counter-narrative campaigns, including ethnic or religious minorities.

### KEY INFLUENCERS

This category includes the influential people in a community such as tribal or community leaders, teachers, peer groups, family members or social workers. In other words, key influencers are the people that may have the best ability to impact more "vulnerable" individuals. However, key influencers may lack the knowledge of how to engage and counter-message, and therefore counter-narrative campaigns may aim to build the knowledge and skills of these key influencers.

### SYMPATHIZERS

In this category, the target audience are individuals who do not actively or vocally support violent extremism, but may be sympathetic to some of the arguments made in their propaganda due to the distinctive cultural, social, and historical context of the region. Sympathizers are passive in their support for violent extremism—they may not act when faced with messages of violent extremism, but silently agree with those messages. This category also includes individuals that are "at risk" of radicalization or actively viewing and engaging with violent extremist propaganda both offline and online.

### JUSTIFIERS

This category includes individuals at risk who actively justify the actions of terrorist groups. In the context of the MENA region, this category includes Muslims who justify violent extremist activities, or Muslims that believe that defending Islam violently and actively is not only a legitimate responsibility for a state or religious authority, but also an individual obligation in all contexts. For example, this may include individuals who agree with the so-called “global jihad” narrative as a response to the “West is waging a war on Islam” and who think that violent extremist groups like Al Qaeda and Daesh are “acting in defense of Islam and that their actions [of violence] are morally and religiously justified” (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017, pp. 266-267).

### PERPETRATORS AND TERRORISTS

This target audience is the most challenging in terms of counter-narratives, as they are comprised of dedicated individuals who are actively involved in incitement and participation of violent activities to achieve their political, ideological or religious objectives. This includes individuals or groups convicted of terrorism, or in the context of Daesh, joining the “caliphate” and participating in its activities.

## 3 IDENTIFY THE EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT NARRATIVE BEING COUNTERED

As a third component of assessing the local context, it is important to understand the basic themes and logic of the narratives and propaganda used by terrorists. In the section below, some of the core types of narratives used towards populations in the Middle East and North Africa are summarized. However, these are illustrative examples, and the list of narratives should not be seen as a comprehensive assessment of all narratives employed by Daesh.

### Types of Narratives Used by Daesh

According to Zgryziewicz (2016), the most common types of narrative themes used by Daesh in the MENA region are political, religious and social. For the purposes of this report, the framework has been expanded to include:

POLITICAL &  
MILITARY  
NARRATIVES

RELIGIOUS &  
IDEOLOGICAL  
NARRATIVES

SOCIAL &  
PERSONAL  
NARRATIVES

### Political and Military Narratives

Political and military narratives utilize statements of political or military objectives and justify violence to achieve change. Arguably, political and military narratives are the most central to Daesh media and propaganda strategy, which is the case both before and after their defeats in Mosul and Raqqa. In a study by Frissen & d’Haenens (2017), Daesh’s rhetoric in its English magazine Dabiq has shifted from religiously-focused narratives to politically-focused narratives over the course of the first 14 issues, perhaps in anticipation of losing territory in Iraq and Syria. The below section provides several examples of political and military narratives used by Daesh.

#### 1. Establishing and maintaining the “caliphate.”

Daesh’s aspirations to establish the so-called “caliphate” as a political alternative to the State structure of the rest of the world was one of its core

messages prior to the fall of Mosul and Raqqa. In its efforts to promote their own state-system, Daesh propaganda has showcased the services provided for the community and the security forces that protect the “ummah.” Here, the “ummah” refers to an entire community linked together through religious, cultural and historic affiliations. According to Abbadi (2017), Daesh’s narrative builds on many of the significant changes to political, economic, social and cultural structures the MENA region over the past several decades. Daesh claims their “caliphate” is an inevitable response and alternative to Western powers exercising oppression over Muslims. This narrative may especially resonate with some grievances held and expressed in the MENA region. However, since the fall of Mosul and Raqqa, the idea of the centralized “caliphate” in Iraq and Syria has shifted from a physical place to a nostalgic vision that will serve as a model in the next wave of Daesh propaganda (Zeiger, 2017). Holding this physical territory in the past “will be sufficient for [Daesh] to boast in years to come of the jihadist utopia that once was” and will serve as a model for physical strongholds outside of Iraq and Syria (Winter, 2017).

## **2. Defending Islam against Attack.**

This type of military narrative emphasizes that Islam is under attack and needs to be defended. According to Aaron Zelin (2016a) Daesh claims of “war against Islam” has been extended from assaults upon common Muslims to now focus on the Global Coalition’s attacks against the foundation of its “caliphate” and particularly its adversaries from countries from the region that have joined this Coalition such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. In this narrative, Daesh seeks to demonstrate that the outside world is against Muslims, and reinforces the vision of one Muslim “ummah.”

## **3. The New Frontier.**

Part of Daesh’s military narrative, particularly in the MENA region, is to highlight the acquisition of new territories (Zelin, 2015), a narrative that has become more significant after Daesh losing hold of territories in Mosul and Raqqa. This was also highlighted in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s audio released on 28 September 2017 where he addresses his “caliphate” by arguing “not to see the loss of territory as a defeat of the group,” and instead calls his followers to action so that “the lives of jihadis lost in Mosul and in Raqqa... [w]ould not be in vain” (Dwyer, 2017). With losses in the core of its “caliphate,” Daesh will likely turn to its non-Iraqi or Syrian wiliyats in the MENA region such as Egypt (Wiliyat Sinai), Algeria (Wilayat al-Jazair), Tunisia, Libya (Wilayat Tarabulus, al-Barqa, and al-Fezza), Saudi Arabia (Wilayat al-Haramayn), and Yemen (Wilayat Sana’a) (Counter Extremism Project, 2017).

Daesh demonstrates this shift in military strategy by killing its enemies in the heart of their homelands. For example, there have been domestic attacks in Egypt, such as in northern Sinai on police forces in July 2017 (“ISIS claims attack in Egypt’s Sinai,” 2017), or in Alexandria and Tanta on Palm Sunday against two Coptic Christian churches simultaneously (Awad, 2017). In Saudi Arabia, three suicide bombings occurred in a single day in July 2016, including one attack at the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina – the second holiest site in Islam—where four security guards were killed. Daesh attacks also took place against Shia targets in Saudi Arabia and against a Shia-affiliated Al-Sadiq mosque in Kuwait.



## Religious or Ideological Narrative

The second type of narrative includes religious and ideological appeals and arguments. The promotion of religious narratives by Daesh is done through their own claims to “da’wa”, meaning they invite non-Muslims to follow Allah, and call for people to “go back” to what they claim to be the “true” Islam. Religious arguments reference both the Qur’an and Hadith in order to establish religious authority and legitimacy to their claims, to gain more support and recruits, and to justify the use of violence against their enemies. Some examples of Daesh’s religious arguments include:

### 1. “Jihad” as an individual obligation.

Daesh argues that the concept of “jihad” is to be an individual obligation (“fard ayn”) not a communal obligation (“fard kifayah”), and the religious duty of all Muslims. For Daesh, “jihad” is a form of physical violence that is seen as the only legitimate method to demonstrate an individual’s true faith (Comerford, 2015). This argument, in combination with the obligation felt by Muslims to act on both real and perceived injustices, such as the suffering of Muslims in Palestine, Syria or Iraq, is one reason that Daesh’s concept of “jihad” may resonate with vulnerable Muslims. For Daesh, the concept of “jihad” also requires a physical commitment. Evidence of this is al-Baghdadi’s speech on the declaration of the “caliphate” where he stated “A life of ‘jihad’ is impossible until you pack your belongings and move to the caliphate” (Schmid, 2015).

### 2. Claiming purity of Islam.

Daesh claims to have the most “pure” form of Islam, and uses multiple strands of narratives to strengthen their claim (Abadi, 2017). For example, Daesh has claimed power to issue Islamic edicts (“fatwas”<sup>2</sup>), and its self-proclaimed “caliph” Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi claims to have Islamic qualification to issue “fatwas” because he holds a PhD in Islamic Studies in Arabic (Faisal, 2015). Daesh also claims legal and moral authority over its followers through its declaration and enactment of a penal code of “hudud” or punishments for crimes. For example, Daesh’s penal code includes the punishment of death for blasphemy against Allah and Prophet Mohammed and Islam; the punishment of stoning until death for adultery committed by married; cutting off the hand for theft; and 80 lashes for - drinking alcohol and slandering (Saul, 2015). Daesh also reinforces a culture that sets moral standards, enforced by “hisbah,” or moral policing. “Rijaal al-hisbah”<sup>3</sup> burn cigarettes, destroy alcohol or forbidden products, and carry out public executions or punishments for crimes. All of these actions reinforce Daesh’s claim that their form of Islam is the most legitimate religious authority for all Muslims.

### 3. Declaring people non-Muslim (“takfir”<sup>4</sup>)

Declaring somebody as a “kafir” reinforces the polarizing narrative of Daesh to exclude others from their utopian vision of society. In a textual analysis of Dabiq magazines, the most frequently cited Surah of the Qur’an is “At-Tawbah,” which is known controversially for discourse on war against non-Muslims (Frissen & d’Haenens, 2017). According to Daesh, those included in the categorization of “kafir” may include: “Twelver Shiites; all parties based on communism, sec-

<sup>2</sup> A “fatwa” is the opinion of Muslim scholars based upon the jurisprudence of Islam.

<sup>3</sup> “Rijaal al-hisbah” are men who guard against moral infringements and denounce “evil” actions in public.

<sup>4</sup> “Takfir” is a theological declaration that a Muslim has become an apostate or a person is an infidel or an act or idea constitutes a disbelief in Islam.

ularism, nationalism and liberalism; proponents of democracy and those who participate in its process; all governments that do not rule by the 'shariah' and members of its military, police officers, intelligence, executive and judiciary apparatuses; all those who seek to judge by civil laws; those who mock and insult the Prophet and his noble family members; all Baathist; all leaders of Islamic Party of Iraq, not its ordinary members; and all practitioners of sorcery" (M. H. Hassan, 2015). To reinforce this narrative, it is also worth mentioning that language used by Daesh to describe its enemies is extremely derogatory. For example, Daesh describes the Kurdish forces as "the atheist Kurds" or ("al kurdiyya al il-hadiyya") and refers to Shia in a contemptuous way by "rejectionists" ("Rafidha") and "the Evil Shiites" (H. Hassan, 2016). Daesh also argues that Yazidis are "people who worship the Shaitan instead of Allah" (Faisal, 2015). For Daesh, declaring people non-Muslim also refers to other religions considered to be "People of the Book" by mainstream interpretations of Islam, such as Christianity and Judaism, but also Hinduism, Buddhism and atheism.

#### 4. Calling for Immigration or "hijrah."

In alignment with their political and military objectives, Daesh claims there is a religious obligation to immigrate if a Muslim living in a place of oppression and where one cannot practice their religion. An example of this is the 2014 call by Daesh's leader for all Muslims to "rush to your state" and if possible, perform hijrah to the Islamic State" (CNN, 2014). However, it should be noted that in the context of their military defeat at Mosul and Raqqa, the "hijrah" narrative has changed, encouraging sympathizers to stay in their home countries and commit lone wolf attacks, or migrating to other territories elsewhere (Baulke, 2016). This can also be seen in trends of textual analysis of Dabiq, for example, where research suggests that Daesh narratives have shifted to emphasize the power of localized military action of the "wiliyats" over global military action against the West (Frissen & d'Haenens, 2017).

### Social and Heroic Narratives

The third narrative type utilized by Daesh in the MENA region is concerned with social and heroic arguments. At times, the social and heroic narratives may contain underlying religious language and themes, but are not direct religious arguments. According to a report analyzing Daesh Twitter propaganda in Arabic, Daesh narratives focus mainly on non-religious arguments (78.3% in their sample) (Al Mesbar, 2016). Moreover, the same report suggests that Daesh Twitter activity utilizes emotional tactics rather than logic: 42% of Tweets use of images and 21.3% of Tweets use videos that manipulate emotions compared to 14.3% of texts and 1.4% that use scholarly logic (Al Mesbar, 2016). As such, the social and heroic narrative category should also receive some attention in terms of developing counter-narratives. Some of the core social and heroic themes in Daesh narratives are outlined below:

#### 1. Utopia.

Part of Daesh's vision of the "caliphate" and their main social argument is the promotion of their territory as a utopian vision of the perfect place to reside and defend. As Charlie Winter found in his 2015 study of Daesh propaganda through the Quilliam Foundation, over 50% of Daesh narratives in their dataset made reference to visions of the "caliphate" as a utopian society, and he argues that "Islamic State's millenarian promise is the fulcrum of its global appeal" (Winter, 2015, p.30). Their utopian promise is reinforced by propaganda

that portrays good governance of Daesh leadership and the non-disruption of daily activities, even while living under conflict. Examples of this include: regular meetings with different community leaders and local brokers, providing job opportunities at the local education centers, publishing annual community calendars, paving roads, opening markets, providing electricity and water, putting up road signs and supporting agricultural activities (Winter, 2015; Zelin, 2016b). As the vision of the “caliphate” shifts after the fall of Mosul and Raqqa, it would be expected for Daesh to continue to emphasize the utopian vision in territories held outside Iraq and Syria. For example, in Libya (Wilayat Tarabulus), in the town of Sirte, Daesh has drawn attention in its propaganda to the re-establishment of daily life and trade through local industries (brick and marble, fruit harvests, fish trade, and pastry industries), the establishment of office and school supply stores, and a car repair shop (Zelin, 2016b).

## 2. Identity and socialization.

The social narratives are designed to fill a void where there may be a lack of identity, and encourage audiences to feel significant and purposeful when joining Daesh. In this regard, Daesh reinforces cultural elements that are part of everyday life in the MENA region that create a sense of belonging and community. For example, Daesh images portray Ramadan iftar gatherings, highlight aspects of life with extended families, and focus on children playing or being in school. A sense of brotherhood and sisterhood is a core theme of Daesh propaganda, and fighters of various nationalities are regularly shown praying, fighting and celebrating together (The Carter Center, 2017). Social narratives may also include promises of romance, marriage or starting a family (Tarras-Wahlberg, 2017).

## 3. Sense of adventure.

One of the main social narratives employed by Daesh is the attraction of the “caliphate” as a place to achieve adventure, prestige, and to be a hero. Within many of Daesh’s narratives, its fighters are often characterized as “heroic defenders of the Muslim world” (Schmid, 2015, p5). This coupled with images and videos of fighters using various weapons and being involved in military battles are persuasive for potential recruits that are interested in joining Daesh for the thrill. For many of Daesh’s female recruits, the opportunity to leave home and join the caliphate, coupled with the promise of finding love and a husband is a key message within Daesh’s propaganda.

# 4 SET CLEAR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE COUNTER-NARRATIVE

The first three steps in this Guide help to define the local context. The next step revolves around carefully defining the goals and objectives for counter-narratives and campaigns. Having clear goals and realistic objectives contribute to developing more focused campaigns capable of fostering decisive changes in behaviors or attitudes of target audiences. In addition, well-chosen goals and objectives are crucial as they relate directly to evaluating the impact of the campaign after implementation and dissemination.



A sepia-toned photograph of a park setting. In the foreground, a man sits on a wooden bench with a metal frame, using a laptop. Behind him, a woman sits on the same bench, also working on a laptop. A man stands in the background near a stone wall and a chain-link fence. The scene is outdoors with trees and foliage visible.

## GOALS OF ONLINE COUNTER-NARRATIVE CAMPAIGNS

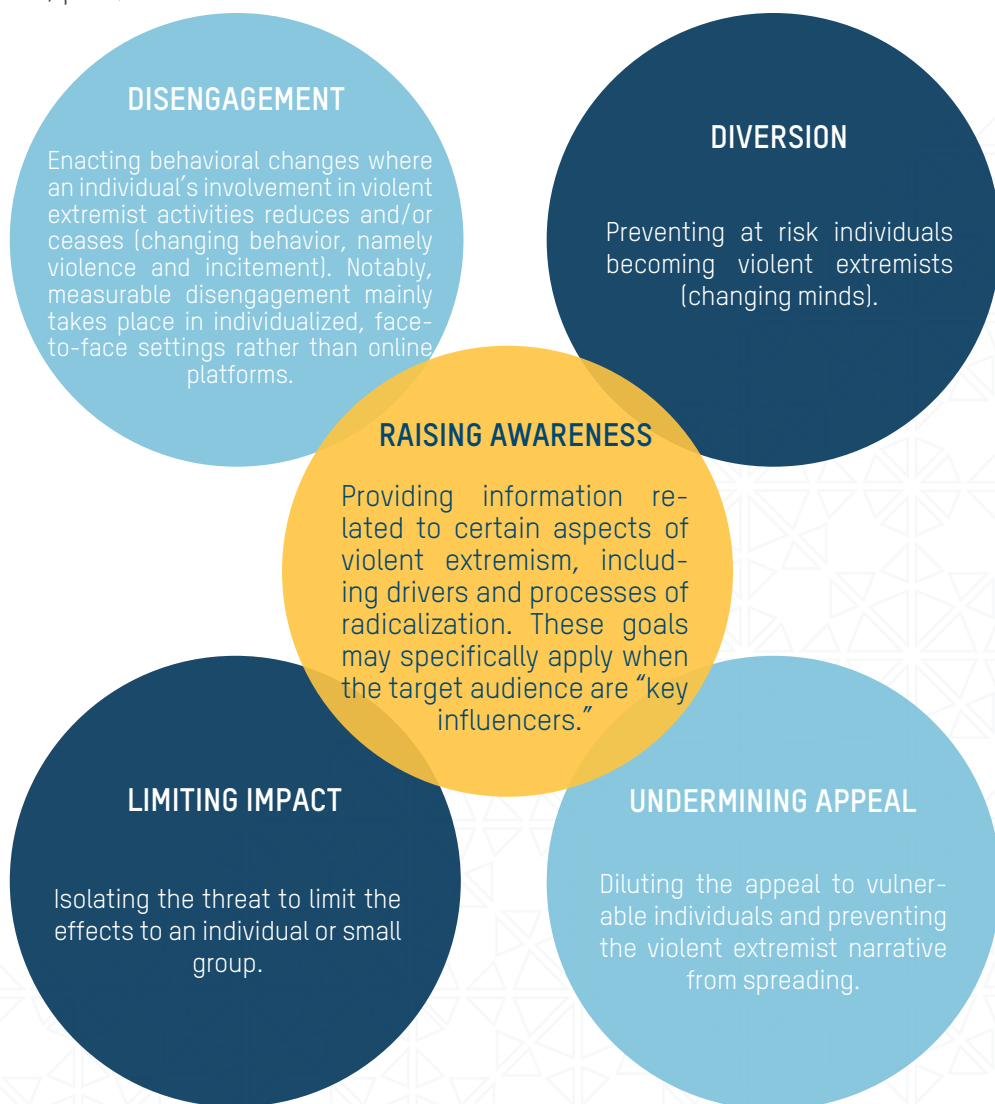
There is very little research showing the relationship between online and social media campaigns in general and the influence of these campaigns on actual behavioral changes.

Therefore, it is recommended that online counter-narrative campaigns set realistic goals that focus on attitudinal, rather than behavioral, changes.

It is also recommended that further in-depth statistics should be applied to measure the impact of a counter-narrative that aims to achieve a behavioral change.



Goals and objectives need to describe the change intended by the counter-narrative, both in terms of attitude and in terms of behavior. For counter-narratives in the MENA region, some of these changes may include the following (Zeiger, 2016, p.12):



It is also useful to break goals into more digestible sub-goals or specific objectives that are measurable and realistic within the time-frame planned for the campaign.

## RELATING GOALS TO IMPACT

Measuring the impact of the counter-narratives should be embedded in the process from the outset. Key indicators should be chosen with respect to each goal/objective defined here before the campaign starts. For clear examples of types of indicators, see step 9 on measuring and evaluating your campaign.

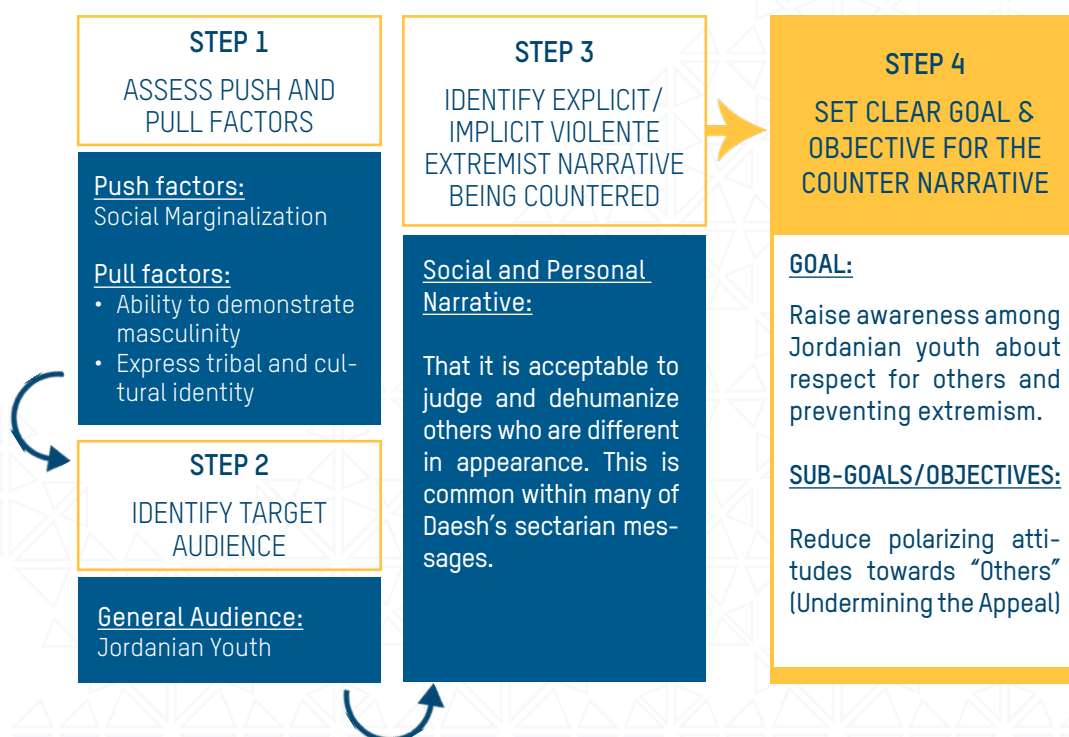


## Setting Goals and Objectives Case Study

### “Judging Others”

#### Description:

The Community Media Network produced a series of radio and television videos in Arabic to be broadcast on the radio, TV and YouTube in Jordan.<sup>5</sup> The target audience identified for this campaign is General Majority-Muslim audience and particularly Jordanian youth. This particular radio broadcast recording, “Judging Others,” is a conversation between a mother and her son. The conversation outlines a situation where the son is judging another boy because he has long hair. During the conversation, it is revealed that the boy with long hair removes a large stone from the pathway of cars, likely saving lives. As a result, the mother points out how appearances do not matter, and actions speak much louder than words.



For more, the “Judging Others” radio broadcast can be found here:

<http://bit.ly/2iSsJpP>

<sup>5</sup> These series of radio and television videos were built after conversations with young men and women in Jordan. The TV series, through 1-2 minute recordings and videos, were aired on the AmmanetTV channel until June 2017, and are now available on YouTube.

## 5 DETERMINE AN EFFECTIVE MESSENGER

Determining effective messengers is crucial to how the message is delivered, and to whether the message will resonate with the target audience in the way it is intended. Some of the questions that should be asked prior to determining the right messenger include:

### QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE THE RIGHT MESSENGER

- What is the relationship between the messenger and the target audience?
- What is the credibility of that messenger with the target audience?
- What is the potential for that messenger to change attitudes?
- What is the potential for that messenger to change behaviors?
- What are the potential negative effects or risks associated with choosing that particular messenger?

Potential messengers vary across target audiences, and can include peer groups, families, teachers, community leaders, religious authorities, politicians, celebrities and sports stars. Campaign designers may want to convene focus groups with samples of their target audience prior to starting their campaigns to establish baselines and test whether or not the messenger is the most effective in their context. Practical examples of the potential categories of messengers for the Middle East and North Africa will be described throughout following sections.

### Families

The families' of individuals who travelled to Iraq and Syria to join Daesh as well as returnees can play an important role not only in bringing back those who have already travelled, but also in preventing others from traveling and persuading individuals not to leave. Family bonds in the MENA region are particularly strong, especially the relationships between youth and their parents. Family relationships in the MENA region have been shown to be important factors for individuals to reconsider their acts and choices related to terrorism. There are examples in which the relationships with parents, particularly mothers, are shown to persuade individuals to return from Daesh territory. For example, the story of 26-year-old Daesh defector Muhammad al-Sulayti from Saudi Arabia, stated that "the tears of my mother over the phone" was the main reason why he returned home after joining Daesh ("Daesh From Inside (8)," 2015).

Siblings are also important family members that can be powerful messengers, both for recruitment and for counter-recruitment. For example, a CNN interview titled "Losing Your Brother to ISIS" captured a plea of Mohammed Chaib to his elder brother, Hicham Chaib, whom he lost when he joined Daesh and ended up to be a "brutal and prolific" executioner (Holmes, Benallal, & Van Heerden, 2016). During the interview, Mohammed expressed feelings of sadness and anger towards a brother he no longer knew. The final message Mohamed had for Hicham concluded that "Think hard because you have a family here... your own mother thinks about you every night and cries always about you. Your father is old, he also always loves you... think about the consequences for your family because they are enormous" (Holmes et al., 2016).



## Victims and Survivors

Victims and survivors of terrorism can be powerful credible messengers, as “survivors can portray the harsh reality of terrorist violence, and their stories may spread seeds of doubt among potential recruits, current terrorists and supporters, forcing them to question their motivations” (Pizzuto, 2013). For example, Nadia Murad gave her testimony before the United Nations of the suffering she underwent at the hands of Daesh, being raped and treated as a slave. Murad led a crucial campaign in Egypt, meeting with the Egyptian President and Head of Al-Azhar, and explaining how Daesh “commit[s] rape and genocide crimes in the name of Islam” (Mahmoud, 2015). In the Egyptian context, Murad’s story also initiated a discussion amongst religious scholars to debate uncomfortable questions about theological justifications for slavery in Islam.

## Defectors and Formers (Former Violent Extremists)

Former violent extremists or Daesh “defectors” can have a strong role to play in messaging campaigns against Daesh, when used in the right situational context. Having participated in terrorism, formers and defectors are best placed to describe the negative consequences of terrorism and the reality on the ground of living under Daesh to potentially dissuade others from joining the cause. Based on the testimonies of Daesh defectors, a report by Neumann (2015) highlights four key messages that defectors can deliver to counter Daesh propaganda:

1. **Infighting:** Suggesting that Daesh is more interested in fighting fellow Muslims than the Assad government;
2. **Brutality:** Suggesting that Daesh is involved in brutality and atrocities against Muslims;
3. **Corruption and un-Islamic Behaviors:** Highlighting acts of corruption and un-Islamic behaviors committed by Daesh; and
4. **Quality of Life:** Highlighting the fact that life under Daesh is harsh and disappointing.

In Saudi Arabia, an Arabic TV program titled “Our Worries” (Hmomonah) hosted a series of national TV interviews with defectors under the titles “Experiences of Deluded and Deceived Young Men” and “From Inside Daesh,” which were mainly conducted with the Saudi returnees from fighting in Iraq and Syria. The stories of these defectors reveal the atrocities conducted by Daesh to include the death and displacement of innocent people and the rape of women in Syria (“Deluded Young Men (6),” 2014), and were broadcasted on television for a Saudi audience. Similarly, in an interview with three Syrian women who fled Daesh from Raqqa describe the lives they led under Daesh rule, to include recruiting other women and strict enforcement of rules such as not wearing cosmetics. In describing the brutality of the terrorist group, one defector stated that Daesh “would cut off heads, and put the heads on the streets, or display bodies where everyone, even children, can see them. It was too much” (Engel, 2015).

## Religious Leaders

Especially in the context of the MENA region, religious leaders have the ability to refute the religious and ideological narratives of Daesh by contradicting the appeals they make to justify violence in the name of Islam. Culturally speaking, popular religious figures are deeply respected by their local followers, and the



## RELIGIOUS LEADERS AS MESSENGERS

Religious leaders can message in creative ways, not only in a mosque setting. For example, Al Azhar was the first to offer “Fatwa kiosks” fatwas on the go for subway commuters. This initiative aims at encouraging people to seek advice on religious issues from Al Azhar and not from extremist groups such as Daesh.

guidance provided by these figures bear significant weight in the communities. There are many Islamic scholars who have been engaged in countering Daesh propaganda from the MENA region. For example, Sheikh Usama al-Sayyid Al-Azhari is an Azhari scholar that presents a TV show called “Visions” (“Ro’a”) where he refutes the religious and ideological claims of groups like Daesh. Al Azhari has been recently assigned to take the lead on the Egyptian President’s initiative titled “electronic army” to counter Daesh propaganda online through dedicating official pages on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter in Arabic and English (Alsisi, 2017).

It is also worth mentioning that religious leaders in the MENA region are not limited to Islamic Scholars; Christian and Jewish religious leaders can also be effective messengers. For example, a joint letter from leaders of different religions draws on God’s commandments to Muslims and Christians to love Him and to love their neighbors, referring to their brothers and sisters from the Abrahamic faiths (“A Common Word,” n.d.). Another example would be the visit of Pope Francis to Egypt and Al-Azhar in March 2017, which came after two brutal bombings in two churches in December 2016. Middle Eastern affairs expert Augustus Richard Norton described the visit: “Given the Pope’s stature and position, the major contribution he might make is distinguishing the violent terrorism of groups like ISIS from mainstream Islam” (Farid, 2017).

## Youth

Since young people usually listen to their peers, meaningful engagement of youth leaders as positive agents of change can be an important asset not only as messengers but also to shape an alternative discourse against Daesh’s propaganda. Examples of youth-led initiatives from the MENA region are the “Pro-active Dam” and “North Center for Education” initiatives in Tetouan, Morocco. In these initiatives, Moroccan youth-leaders have been working on the ground to counter radicalization by providing compelling content that resonates with local audiences from youth, particularly in areas that are sources of terrorist groups’ recruitment (“Civil Society in Tetouan, Morocco Counters Daesh Ideology,” 2016). They do this by providing opportunities to gain an education while also providing extra curricula support through locally-based centers. In this regard, youth are often credible messengers due to their ability to connect with their peers and speak directly about the grievances they face.

## Grassroots, Civil Society and Community Actors

Numerous actors including non-governmental organizations and civil society actors have an important role to play in amplifying local voices. These actors can have access to at-risk audiences, but often have very limited resources for developing an alternative or counter-narrative campaign. An example of a grassroots organization is Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently (RBSS), an activist journalist group in Syria, which provides footage of life in the “caliphate.” They have released several videos highlighting citizens in Daesh-controlled territories waiting in long lines for basic goods. RBSS can be seen as a credible messenger because they are perceived as “from the people” and are able to disseminate information about what is happening in Raqqa in ways that others cannot.



## Governments and International Organizations

In the context of the MENA region, where governments play a central role in the lives of their citizens, governments may be effective messengers against violent extremism. Moreover, in some contexts citizens look to their political leaders also for leadership on religion, as politics and religion are often intertwined in the MENA context. Governments in the region have also access to resources and funding and can be successful when utilized properly. It should be noted that the inclusion of non-government and media partners can boost the credibility of a message delivered by a government-sponsored entity. In the MENA region there are a number of government-led or international organization-led messaging hubs and platforms, which are listed below:



### **Al Sakinah (KSA)**

Arabic for “Tranquility,” Al Sakinah is run by an independent NGO, focuses on partnering with Islamic scholars to engage with individuals seeking religious knowledge, and is supported by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs of Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs - KSA, 2017). Website: <http://en.assakina.com>



### **Sawt Al-Hikma (OIC)**

This Center for Dialogue, Peace and Understanding (CDPU), or “The Voice of Wisdom” is a regional platform by the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) dedicated to counter-messaging to delegitimize extremist discourse on social media and the Internet. This includes producing a series of 90-second videos in Arabic and English. Website: <http://www.oic-cdpu.org/>



### **Sawab Center (UAE and US)**

This is a joint initiative by the UAE and the US governments to combat online propaganda of Daesh and to promote positive alternatives on its social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sawabcenter>



### **Al Rabita Al Muhammedyya of Muslim Scholars (Morocco)**

This organization has a dedicated website in Arabic that works on promoting religious awareness in the Moroccan society through 14 centers and an online library that has many publications that focus on deconstructing extremist narratives and particularly Daesh. Website: <http://www.arrabita.ma/default.aspx>



### **Etidal (KSA)**

As the Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology and recently launched during the Islamic American Summit in May 2017, Etidal seeks to refute the exclusion discourse of groups like Daesh and consolidate the concepts of moderation and coexistence in MENA societies. Website: <https://etidal.org/>

On the other hand, governments are not always the most powerful messenger against violent extremism; if an individual feels grievances against their govern-



## 6 DEVELOP THE CONTENT AND LOGIC OF THE MESSAGE

ment that they are unable to reconcile, messages from governments may be perceived as hypocritical or false, which is counterproductive to the counter-narrative campaign. In this regard, it is important for governments to assess their own roles and limits in counter-narratives, and where necessary leave some of the more direct counter-messages to other actors that may have more influence over the target audience.

Once the goals and messenger have been determined, a clear and multi-layered message must be outlined to ensure it resonates with the intended audience. This only happens when content-creators understand their target audience and can develop a product and/or message that resonates with them. Further, when developing content for alternative or counter-narrative campaigns, the tone of the message is as crucial as the content and messenger itself.

Experts at the Marrakesh workshop portrayed and discussed diverse types of alternative and counter-narratives drawing on local, regional and international good practices. The following section provides some suggestions and examples of the various types of messages that can be used when developing content for alternative or counter-narrative campaigns.

TYPES OF COUNTER-NARRATIVES IN MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA			
TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE	COUNTRY
GOOD PRACTICE AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL			
Positive or Alternative Narratives	These narratives focus on providing a proactive and alternative story that is more attractive than terrorism. In the MENA region, these messages may include peace, tolerance and inter-faith or inter-sectarian dialogue.	Etidal – Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology launched a titled “ <a href="#">#LifeWithoutExtremism</a> ” that aims at promoting “Life” instead of death and extremism. The video campaign poses questions about an individual’s daily life that motivates people to reconsider how they view others in the context of extremism. The video intends for the viewer to see others they interact with on a daily basis as human—not through the lens of religious, sectarian or ethnic differences.	Saudi Arabia
		<a href="#">#WhatIsYourStory</a> An online campaign called “Shu Ostak” (What is your story?), which aims to counter violent extremism by promoting short films about young heroes in their societies, and offering a living example of counter extremism and fanaticism based on true stories. One of the campaigns is about a Lebanese Shiite girl who has invited a Sunni girl to pray together	Lebanon and Iraq

## CREATING RESONANT CONTENT

Analyzing your audience through in depth interviews, surveys or focus groups can help further refine content and provide essential information to develop compelling content.



TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE	COUNTRY
		in each other's mosques despite the sectarian tensions. The narrative offers a positive example of how to handle differences between individuals in society through concrete action.	
Emotional and Ethical Narratives	This type of narratives appeals to the "pull" factors that may impact an individual at an emotional or psychological level.	Search for Common Ground produced a video series titled <a href="#">"Building Bridges in Morocco"</a> that brings together the "victim" and "aggressor" to share their emotional experiences. Al Mortada, an Imam at a local mosque in Northern Morocco, discusses how a visit to a local church on International Tolerance Day led to receiving threats on his life. As a result, Al Mortada decided to meet his aggressor (named "X") to better understand his motivations and to attempt to overcome their differences. "Al Mortada and X" video has set an example of forgiveness, tolerance and understanding to be followed in their communities.	Morocco
Exposing Myths and Mis-information	This type of narratives aims at exposing the fallacies and hypocrisies of violent extremist groups.	<p><a href="#">"Black Crows"</a> is a 20-part drama production uses the influence of television in the Arab world to highlight the true nature of life within Daesh. The stories are taken from documented cases as well as through interviews with former Daesh members. With a special focus on women recruits, the plot follows the different motivations people have to join the group (power, religion, dictatorship, poverty, etc.). This is combined with a display of the inhumane acts the organization is involved in and advocating for. It shows the inherent corruption within the leadership of the organization and the lack of agency that recruits have within it.</p> <p>One of the main plots is the process of recruitment of children for suicide bombers. It sheds light on a number of brutal criminal activities, including but not limited to: mass murder, the murder of fellow Muslims, rape, abductions and involvement in drug activity.</p>	Saudi Arabia



TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE	COUNTRY
		The actors come from different Arab countries and use both their colloquial dialects and modern standard Arabic.	
		<a href="#">#DaeshLiesExposed</a> is a Sawab Center campaign focused on testimonies of Daesh defectors with the objective of encouraging those who are thinking about defecting to defect, to demonstrate the false claims of Daesh, and to demonstrate that Daesh is not infallible. It aims at raising awareness of negative impact of joining Daesh.	United Arab Emirates
Humor and Sarcastic Narratives	This type of narrative uses humor and satire to mock and de-legitimize the violent extremist symbols and narratives.	Many shows and videos have used laughter to fight Daesh's violent acts. For example, " <a href="#">Selfie</a> " a TV show that mocks Daesh in one of its episodes as the star comedian, Al Qasabi, wanted to set up a Daesh-style terrorist group where he satirizes life under Daesh to include "girls market". Al-Qasbi responded to death threats received from Daesh with laughter after the episode was broadcasted (Gani, 2015).	Saudi Arabia
Religious or Ideological Narratives	This type of narrative refutes the ideological or religious claims and provides interpretations of religious text that do not justify violence.	Religious and ideological narratives provided at <a href="#">AlAzhar's Observatory for Combating Extremism</a> produced in 9 different languages. Al Azhar, Sunni World's oldest seat of Islamic learning and the highest Islamic Authority in Egypt operates through schools, university faculties and research institutes. This observatory is an online portal that provides correction of misconceptions about Islam and refutations and replies to terrorist ideologies.	Egypt



## 7 IDENTIFY THE MEDIUM(S) WHERE THE MESSAGE WILL BE DISSEMINATED

After identifying the target audience and their vulnerabilities, setting clear goals and objectives, and establishing the messenger, the vehicle of dissemination for potentially both online/offline platforms must be determined. Key medium(s) to be considered for disseminating alternative and counter-narrative campaigns are, but not limited to:



### SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND MESSAGING APPS

*Often combined with other forms of communications (such as videos, GIFs or photos), social media platforms are an effective way to share content online. In MENA, Facebook is the most popular platform, with the most active countries being UAE and Tunisia. Twitter is the second-most used platform, with the most active countries in terms of number of Tweets from Saudi Arabia and Egypt (Salem, 2017). Instagram is also popular in the UAE, Bahrain, Lebanon and Kuwait (Salem, 2017). YouTube is used frequently in the MENA region, especially in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, accessed primarily through smartphones ("YouTube at 10 years old," 2015). Messaging and free call apps such as WhatsApp, Hangouts, Skype, Viber, Snapchat, Telegram and We-Chat are all popular in the MENA region. An example of a campaign designed for social media is the Facebook Page "Taadudiya" that shares short stories and films about young heroes in the Middle East, accompanied by the hashtag #WhatIsYourStory (<https://www.facebook.com/taadudiya/>).*



### WEBSITES AND DISCUSSION FORUMS

*Websites can be crucial resources for disseminating more informative and lengthy content. An example is the Assakina Campaign ("E-army to counter extremism and Terrorism," 2017), an online website that provides one-to-one interventions with individuals and contains an online database of religious guidance to answer questions on Islamic belief (40,000 digital, audio and video materials) for users primarily in Saudi Arabia.*

### RADIO PROGRAMS

*Radio broadcasts have been popular across the MENA region, but particularly in the Gulf, Egypt and Lebanon reaching over 2/3 of the public according to Mideast Media ("Radio-Media Industries in The Middle East," 2016.). An example of an initiative in Bahrain is the Arabic radio program "Knowledge is Power – Al Maa'rifa Quwwa" (AlRuwalli, 2017). The program aims to educate families about terrorist organizations false propaganda and discuss various issues related to violent extremism.*



### TELEVISION, ARABIC DRAMA SERIES, FILM AND CINEMA

*Short video clips, drama series and full-length films are another form of media that reaches a large audience in the MENA region. One example from the MENA region is "Black Crows", a drama series portraying the brutality of life under the Daesh launched by a Saudi-owned television channel during Ramadan in 2017 ("Saudi-owned TV drama fights Daesh propaganda," 2017). It is also worth mentioning that YouTube has recently launched a new hub called "Mosalsalat" which features more than 500 Arabic television series from across the Middle East and North Africa ("YouTube Launches Hub for Arabic TV Series 'Mosalsalat,'" 2016).*



### FACE-TO-FACE ENGAGEMENT

*While there is a large focus on social and online media engagement, direct social interaction should not be forgotten. This includes religious lectures, public events, concerts, conferences and debate programs. Popular within the MENA region are small gatherings where community members communicate and share knowledge known as a “majlis.” Convened in both formal and semi-formal settings, this is a cultural tradition where elders can guide and teach the younger generation and discuss any questions they may have. Another example from the MENA region of face-to-face engagements is Al Azhar’s “Fatwa kiosks”. Here, Islamic Scholars play a crucial role in offline religious counter-messaging by encouraging people to seek advice on religious issues from Al Azhar and not from extremist groups such as Daesh (Michaelson, 2017).*



### OTHER OFFLINE PLATFORMS

*include print media such as billboards and signage, books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, and cartoons as well as SMS. For example, printed copies of “The Qur’an – with References to the Bible, A Contemporary Understanding” can be used as counter narrative to highlight the vast similarities between Islam and Christianity subsequently instilling a message of unity. Another example is Haqiqah magazine, available also online, which aims to expose the falsity of Daesh narratives. Haqiqah follows a similar design and style of the Dabiq magazine, and utilizes flashy images to entice a certain target audience to open its pages.*



## 8 DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR DISSEMINATION

When determining an appropriate strategy for disseminating your message, some of the key recommendations are:



**Utilize networks of non-government, organizations, civil society, and media partners.** Do not forget to collaborate with the private sector.

**Consider how material can be repackaged and disseminated on various platforms for a broader reach.** For example, a blog post could be condensed to one sentence and combined with a photo for Instagram.



**Consider the timing/launch of the campaign and how the target audience will interact with the message during that timeline.** For example, TV Drama series are often launched during Ramadan because families often stay at home and watch TV together.

**Use teasers to build anticipation and excitement before the launch, especially with narratives aired on radio and television.**



**On social media, use appealing and catchy hashtags that highlight the core message.**

**Ensure two-way communication between messengers and target audience.** Provide a way for the target audience to receive more information, or interact with the message if there is a call to action (non-violent).



**Consider the language of the message, and provide translation and subtitles where relevant for broader reach.**

## 9 EVALUATE THE IMPACT

Finally, in order to ensure sustainability, it is important that there is an evaluation of the impact of the counter-narrative. The evaluation should link back to the goals and objectives that were set for the counter-narrative in Step 4. For each goal/objective, there should be one or several indicators that are developed to articulate how the campaign did or did not meet the stated goal/objective. A 2016 report by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) outlines three ways in which online counter-narratives can be measured: awareness, engagement and impact (Silverman, et. al, 2016). Building on these categories in ISD's report, some examples of key indicators for each of these categories (to also include offline measurements) are:

### AWARENESS

- Number of people that were sensitized through the campaign (i.e. where it was advertised)
- Number of people willing to participate in a public event or lecture
- Number of "Impressions" on Twitter
- "Reach" on Facebook
- Projected viewership of TV program
- Potential number of visitors to a location where a billboard or sign is displayed

### ENGAGEMENT

- Number of people who viewed/played a video on YouTube
- Number of "Likes" for a Facebook post or page
- Number of link clicks
- Retweets or shares on Twitter or Facebook
- Call-ins to a live streaming TV show
- Number of people in attendance at a public event or concert

### IMPACT

- Sustained engagement by users such as replies on Twitter
- Shares with comments on Facebook
- Qualitative analysis of comments and discussions on YouTube
- Content scoring, which applies a numerical value to the content and works backward through the viewers' journey to how they reached the content (Isham & Bodo, 2016)

*Data collected on these platforms can also be disaggregated by gender and age and country to help narrow whether or not the campaign was reaching the intended target audience.*





## SOCIAL MEDIA COMMENTS AS INDICATORS OF IMPACT

Engage with those writing critical comments on social media. A deeper analysis of these comments could be useful at the evaluation stage and help change and tailor the counter-narrative campaigns to be more effective.

## ALTERNATIVE AND COUNTER-NARRATIVE CASE STUDIES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION AND OUTSIDE

### Methodology

During the workshop hosted in Marrakesh, experts were divided into groups and tasked with providing a detailed analysis of a specific counter-narratives based on the 9 steps in this guide. The case studies were chosen based by the experts, who identified the most relevant examples of counter-narratives that were resonant with MENA audiences (even for the examples from outside the region).



### CASE STUDY #1: “SHU USTAK #1” | Lebanon

#### 1. ASSESS THE RELEVANT PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

- Push factors:**
- Sectarianism, particularly in the context of Daesh’s attack on southern Dahiya, a large Shia area within Lebanon.
  - Environment of hatred and fear due to security situation.
- Pull factors:**
- Loyalty to one’s community and sect
  - Lack of role models
  - Seeking a sense of identity and belonging

#### 2. IDENTIFY TARGET AUDIENCE

The primary target audience of this campaign was the population of Lebanon, but also similar countries suffering sectarian tensions. The secondary target audience was Arab youth from 18-39 and particularly on people who are vulnerable to radicalization.

#### 3. IDENTIFY THE EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVE BEING COUNTERED

The aim of this campaign was to counter the Daesh narratives that feature sectarian conflict and the “Us vs. Them” rhetoric that argues the Sunni community is under attack from the Shi’a forces and militias.

#### 4. SET CLEAR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF COUNTER-NARRATIVES

Goals and objectives of the campaign were to change attitudes and views of Lebanese society towards other sects, and to increase the positive media and social media discourse about pluralism and coexistence in the Arab world.



## 5. DETERMINE AN EFFECTIVE MESSENGER(S)

Dalia Mokdad, the primary messenger for this campaign is considered an effective and authentic messenger because she is a youth activist, clearly belongs to a Beirut community, and has exposure to the issues being addressed throughout the campaign. The video also highlighted diversity by featuring two Muslim women: one “hijabi” and the other one is not wearing hijab.

## 6. IDENTIFY MEDIUM(S) WHERE THE MESSAGE WILL BE DISSEMINATED.

The social media platforms identified for dissemination were Facebook and Twitter. Initially, the campaign started on Facebook due to the initial target audience being the Lebanese community. The campaign was then disseminated via Twitter and later via YouTube through the Ta’adudiya channel which was key factor behind the campaigns reach across various countries.

## 7. DEVELOP THE CONTENT AND LOGIC OF THE MESSAGE

Shu Ustak focused on delivering the message that various religious sects can and do live in harmony with one another. This campaign highlighted that inter-sect relations and diversity are a central component of Lebanese communities.

## 8. DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR DISSEMINATION

Due to the popularity of Facebook amongst Lebanese youth, the campaign was first disseminated online on Facebook. It was later expanded later to include Twitter to reach youth in other Arab countries (e.g. the Gulf). For maximum exposure, the campaign was also disseminated offline through events such as awareness raising sessions in Lebanon and abroad. Additionally, local and international offline platforms were used to reach a wider audience, for example, DW TV Tele Lumiere, Future TV, Shabab Magazine, Bashaer Radio and Fajr Radio.

## 9. EVALUATE AND ASSESS THE IMPACT OF THE ALTERNATIVE OR COUNTER-NARRATIVE AND REVISE APPROACH ACCORDINGLY TO MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

Some of the key indicators used to evaluate and assess the impact are as follows:

### AWARENESS

Reach (views and impressions) – more than 2 million views in 4 months – 1 million in the first month. It is worth noting that as of November 2017, the video has over 2.8 million views.

### ENGAGEMENT

Active online engagement included 15k likes and 1.6 k shares.

*When reassessing the campaign, some adjustments were identified for consideration such as performing a shift in target audience for the success and expansion of campaign to reach the entire Arab world. In addition, instead of asking people to film their own stories, they were asked to tell their stories and this is due to limited capacity to film these stories.*





## CASE STUDY #2: HAQIQAH DIGITAL MAGAZINE | U.K.

### 1. ASSESS THE RELEVANT PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

- Push factors:**
- Feelings of frustration
  - Exclusion and marginalization
- Pull factors:**
- Seeking adventure
  - Sense of identity
  - A way to resolve sins, or making up for living in a Western society
  - Opportunity to carry out acts of revenge
  - Opportunities for romance
  - Heroism or salvation

### 2. IDENTIFY TARGET AUDIENCE

The primary target audience of this counter-narrative is identified as 3rd and 4th generations of British Muslim youth particularly in the 15-24 age range (both men and women).

### 3. IDENTIFY THE EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVE BEING COUNTERED

The aim of this campaign was to counter Daesh propaganda that promotes 1) a “caliphate” in Iraq and Syria, 2) the obligations of pledges of allegiance to Daesh, and 3) “fitna” or sedition rebellion using violence.

### 4. SET CLEAR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF COUNTER-NARRATIVES

The overarching goal of the narrative is to break the vicious cycle of recruitment to Daesh. Sub-goals and objectives included:

1. educating Muslim youth about the reality of extremist movements;
2. increasing the credibility of British Muslim scholars;
3. underpinning weaknesses and hypocrisies of Daesh narratives; and
4. dissuading young British Muslims from joining Daesh.

### 5. DETERMINE AN EFFECTIVE MESSENGER(S)

This particular narratives required primary messengers that were identified as male and female British Muslim scholars/imams as well as key influencers such as family members, school teachers, and journalists.

### 6. IDENTIFY MEDIUM(S) WHERE THE MESSAGE WILL BE DISSEMINATED.

A dedicated website has been developed for this counter-narrative at [www.haqiqah.org](http://www.haqiqah.org). Additional opportunities for dissemination include social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Notably, the magazine look-and-feel is modeled similarly to Dabiq magazine, and utilizes similar fonts and color schemes to attract audiences to its content.

## 7. DEVELOP THE CONTENT AND LOGIC OF THE MESSAGE

The content for this counter-narrative features a contextualized religious discourse that is capable of distancing Islam from Daesh as well as deepening the sense of identity and attachment for British Muslims. Since Muslim youth are being misled and their innocence is being preyed upon as they are forced to accept lies backed up by a misleading propaganda, Haqiqah which means “the Truth” aims at bringing together senior Islamic scholars from Britain to explain the truth of Islam and expose the lies of Daesh.

## 8. DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR DISSEMINATION

The campaign was primarily disseminated online, but will also be considered for broader offline forums to include open house events that will utilize face-to-face messengers; flyers that can be distributed in subway stations; and wall charts and billboards to be used in schools and mosques.

## 9. EVALUATE AND ASSESS THE IMPACT OF THE ALTERNATIVE OR COUNTER-NARRATIVE AND REVISE APPROACH ACCORDINGLY TO MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

The campaign has not yet been measured, but some of the key indicators that will be used to evaluate and assess the impact are as follows:

### AWARENESS

Reach (views and impressions) – that can be obtained through digital platforms analytics as well as questionnaires and surveys.

### IMPACT

The potential change in religious views can be measured through survey and interviews with people that reach Haqiqah, or through an analysis of the commentary.



### CASE STUDY #3: “AL MORTADA AND X VIDEO” | Morocco

#### 1. ASSESS THE RELEVANT PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

- Push factors:**
- Lack of proper training in religious schools
  - Environment fuelling sectarianism and religious conflict
  - Lack of knowledge of the others
  - Conservative and culturally-closed environment coupled with a lack of knowledge of the outside communities
  - Economic marginalization, poverty and isolation
  - Sense of alienation
- Pull factors:**
- Sense of belonging
  - Attraction to culturally conservative environment

#### 2. IDENTIFY TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for this campaign was youth between the ages of 15–25. These include youth at religious schools as well as those with limited education who are more susceptible to violent extremist narratives.

#### 3. IDENTIFY THE EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVE BEING COUNTERED

The aim of this campaign was to counter Daesh’s narrative against those who are different in religion or ethnicity.

#### 4. SET CLEAR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF COUNTER-NARRATIVES

The goals and objectives included:

1. promote a more tolerant religious discourse;
2. promote values of co-existence; and
3. instil values of citizenship.

#### 5. DETERMINE AN EFFECTIVE MESSENGER(S)

As an inspirational young role model and religious leader, Al Mortada, was chosen as the key messenger for this campaign.

#### 6. IDENTIFY MEDIUM(S) WHERE THE MESSAGE WILL BE DISSEMINATED.

The medium for the narrative was a video, and this narrative was primarily disseminated online across Search for Common Ground – Morocco website and various social media platforms.

#### 7. DEVELOP THE CONTENT AND LOGIC OF THE MESSAGE

The content of the campaign was developed to address specific issues within Al Hoceima, a conservative area within Morocco. It aimed to highlight the importance of accepting one another differences. Additionally, the campaign was developed to allow the aggressor (X) to interact with the victim of a verbal attack (Al Mortada), to allow both to express their opinions and convictions aimed at promoting dialogue.



## 8. DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR DISSEMINATION

The strategy began with disseminating the video online via social media platforms. This campaign also included an offline element, where the messenger (Al Mortada) engaged in discourse with the target audience directly.

## 9. EVALUATE AND ASSESS THE IMPACT OF THE ALTERNATIVE OR COUNTER-NARRATIVE AND REVISE APPROACH ACCORDINGLY TO MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

This counter-narrative was not yet evaluated. However, the main methods that could be used to evaluate the campaign are:

### AWARENESS

Potential reach in terms of viewership on social media page (Facebook followers).

### ENGAGEMENT

Number of times video was shared on social media.

### IMPACT

Quality of discourse and discussion during offline debates by Al Mortada



#### CASE STUDY #4: ZAIN COMMERCIAL | Kuwait

### 1. IDENTIFY THE POTENTIAL PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

- Push factors:**
- Lack of religious awareness within the MENA region
  - Exclusion/marginalization amongst some communities within MENA
- Pull factors:**
- Sense of fulfilment by carrying out a terrorist attack
  - Increased sense of belonging or identity in a community

### 2. IDENTIFY TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience identified for this campaign was the "general audience" in the MENA region.

### 3. IDENTIFY THE EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVE BEING COUNTERED

This campaign aimed at tackling Daesh's narrative of justifying acts of violence as religiously and morally acceptable. Additionally, it uses religious examples to contradict Daesh's narrative of divided communities.

### 4. SET CLEAR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF COUNTER-NARRATIVES

The main goal of the message was to promote peace and tolerance, and to change knowledge that there is not a "way out" for terrorism. It aims to do this by providing an option for the transition from violence to love, from isolation to integration with society.

### 5. DETERMINE AN EFFECTIVE MESSENGER(S)

The primary messenger for this narrative was a popular Arab Singer Hussain Al Jassmi from the United Arab Emirates. Additionally, the video showed clips of victims of terrorism as a way to highlight the human face of the consequences of violence and terrorism. The commercial was produced by Zain, a Kuwaiti communications company that provides mobile services.

### 6. IDENTIFY MEDIUM (S) WHERE THE MESSAGE WILL BE DISSEMINATED.

The medium was a video commercial and accompanying song with lyrics in Arabic. The music of the video is in a popular Arabic style that utilizes religious themes and wording.

## 7. DEVELOP THE CONTENT AND LOGIC OF THE MESSAGE

The content and logic of this campaign use two core themes. First, the video promotes a sense of inclusiveness and belonging, delivering a message to the potential terrorist that they can return to society. The lead singer offers his hand to a potential suicide bomber, with the line “confront your enemies with love, not war.” The video also appeals to emotions by juxtaposing the story of the potential suicide bomber with images of a bride who survived an attack on a wedding hall in Jordan and a father whose son was killed in an attack in Baghdad (Iraq). This message highlights that the victims of terrorism are real people. The final message of the video is “Let’s bomb violence with mercy,” emphasizing that love, peace, tolerance, patience and mercy are core values of Islam and Middle Eastern society, not violence or terrorism.

## 8. DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR DISSEMINATION

The commercial was disseminated on Arabic TV channels during the month of Ramadan in May 2017 during popular television shows. This strategy was important because this is a month in which TV viewership within MENA increased due to reduced working hours. The video was also posted on YouTube, and disseminated across various social media platforms in association with Zain, the communications company that produced the advertisement.

## 9. EVALUATE AND ASSESS THE IMPACT OF THE ALTERNATIVE OR COUNTER-NARRATIVE AND REVISE APPROACH ACCORDINGLY TO MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

The key indicators used to evaluate and assess the impact are as follows:

### **AWARENESS**

Reach (views on YouTube) – a number of 10,800,207 views as of October 2017

### **ENGAGEMENT**

Active online engagement included a number of 10,345 Comments on YouTube as well as pro and against comments on Twitter.

### **IMPACT**

While this was not yet conducted, one way to measure impact would be through a qualitative assessment of the comments on YouTube, and the positive/negative association of those comments with the commercial.

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# **ANNEX**

## **Annex 1**

About the Project

## **Annex 2**

Counter-Narrative Details

## ANNEX 1: ABOUT THE PROJECT

This project serves to enhance Hedayah's Counter-Narrative Library by adding a collection that focuses on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This project aims to collate, collect and analyze counter-narratives in English, Arabic and French coming from and targeted at audiences in the region.

The project consisted of several main steps:

### An expert workshop on "Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Collection of Counter-Narratives for CVE"

hosted by Hedayah and Search for Common Ground from 31 July-2 August 2017. The workshop served as a way to collect relevant counter-narratives, discuss good practices and lessons learned from the region, and identify case studies that were most effective for the region.



### The development of this "How-To Guide" that serves as a toolkit for practitioners and policymakers in the region.

The "How-To Guide" will also be translated and published in Arabic. The "How-To Guide" features an Annex 2 of examples of counter-narratives for MENA against Daesh.



### A regional collection for MENA online, made available in Hedayah's Counter-Narrative Library.

The collection includes links to relevant resources for MENA, highlights each of the counter-narratives in Annex 2 in more detail, and links to the sources and videos for those counter-narratives available online.

Hedayah is grateful to the United States Department of State for sponsoring this project.

### About Hedayah's Counter-Narrative Library

As part of its efforts to develop better practices and strategies for counter-narratives, Hedayah launched its Counter-Narrative Library in October 2016. The Library is a comprehensive portal where governments, practitioners and civil society can access content, toolkits and good practices to counter the narratives of all forms of violent extremism. The password-protected Library includes videos, movies, TV shows, cartoons, books, websites, magazines, blogs, social media campaigns, news articles and many other examples of counter-narratives. The original collection focused on open-source counter-narratives to Al Qaeda. At the time, the project was supported by 8 countries, led by the government of the Netherlands, and handed over to Hedayah in July 2015. The current Library features two regional collections (South East Asia and MENA), and one thematic

collection (Daesh Defectors). Hedayah plans to add a regional collection for East and Horn of Africa in early 2018.

The key objectives of the counter-narrative library are to:

- Provide a resource for CVE practitioners for effective counter-narrative content
- Provide a mechanism for feedback and debate on counter-narrative content and dissemination amongst individuals using the content
- Provide a platform for new messages and counter-messages to be shared across contexts and cultures, as well as within regions and countries

Hedayah's Counter-Narrative Library can be found at [www.cn-library.com](http://www.cn-library.com).

For more information about the Library, contact [CNLibrary.Admin@hedayah.ae](mailto:CNLibrary.Admin@hedayah.ae).

## ANNEX B: COUNTER-NARRATIVES

The contents of Annex B are not available to the general public in order to protect the messengers and messages of the counter-narratives identified in the Annex. If you are interested in obtaining a copy of the full report [including Annex B], kindly send an email to [info@hedayah.ae](mailto:info@hedayah.ae) with your name, contact details, reason for access and credentials. Hedayah reserves the right to refuse access to Annex B to any individual for organization for any reason.

The contents of Annex B are also available in Hedayah's Counter-Narrative Library. For those interested in accessing the Counter-Narrative Library, kindly contact the administrator at [cnlibrary.admin@hedayah.ae](mailto:cnlibrary.admin@hedayah.ae).



## ABOUT HEDAYAH

Hedayah was created in response to the growing desire from members of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and the wider international community for the establishment of an independent, multilateral center devoted to dialogue and communications, capacity building programs, research and analysis to counter violent extremism in all of its forms and manifestations.

During the ministerial-level launch of the GCTF in New York in September 2011, the UAE offered to serve as the host of the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism. In December 2012 Hedayah was inaugurated with its headquarters in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Hedayah aims to be the premier international center for expertise and experience to counter violent extremism by promoting understanding and sharing good practice to effectively serve as the true global center to counter violent extremism.



**Hedayah**  
countering violent extremism