

## THE TERROR TIMES: MAJOR NEW ISD REPORT ON UNOFFICIAL ISLAMIC STATE NEWS OUTLETS

### ISD finds dozens of pro-Islamic State pages across social media platforms spreading propaganda to over 100,000 followers, reaching millions

A [new report from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#), authored by Moustafa Ayad, Nadeem Khan and Aymenn al-Tamimi, uncovers the depth and breadth of the network of “news outlets” providing support to the Islamic State online.

The report explains how these outlets position themselves as a counterbalance to mainstream media, providing an “independent” perspective on conflict zones where they prey on sectarian divides and promote local Islamic State affiliates.

The report also details how the outlets develop contingency plans to allow them to rapidly reconstitute in the case of takedowns, effectively evading moderation across social media platforms including Facebook and Telegram. It also unveils the 43-emoji code used by the network to describe types of attacks and enemies of the group, as well as evading content moderation.

#### Key findings include:

- Pro-Islamic State alternative news outlets are operating multi-platform, multi-lingual disinformation operations under the guise of “media” and “media personalities”. **ISD found 38 such outlets** across Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, TikTok and Instagram, with a collective following of 108,268.
- Videos shared by the Islamic State networks on Facebook garnered **over 1 million views** over a year, more than 20 times their follower base, indicating a broad audience for this content.
- Legacy Islamic State outlets appear to be shedding their known branding to spread their “news” further on social media. An alternative news outlet with 8 entities and 21,000 followers across Facebook and Telegram is seemingly linked to the Moata News Agency, a pro-Islamic State outlet that has been a key unofficial support outlet for the group since 2016.
- Outlets have increasingly focussed on supporting flows of fighters to Africa, creating outlets in regional languages such as Hausa, echoing official calls to travel to Africa and creating heat maps of locations across the continent where fighters could go.

## Key recommendations

ISD has provided a clear set of recommendations for platforms looking to combat the issue of Islamic State-supporting content, including:

- Expert moderation and human-led tracking of accounts, especially in smaller and less profitable markets. This is the only way to stop the circumvention of takedowns.
- Developing a cross-platform coordination structure to delete these networks, rather than focussing on single actors.
- Enhanced capabilities for artificial intelligence to recognise “broken text” posting, a format used by all the outlets to get controversial terms past moderation mechanisms.
- While platforms such as Facebook and Twitter continue to play pivotal roles in assisting independent media outlets globally, they are being taken advantage of by Islamic State supporters who present themselves as “independent” and “objective” news. Greater verification of media sources is required.

ISD has also developed a set of recommendations for national government and civil society stakeholders, namely:

- Designing, developing and deploying digital comprehension activities and programmes to build resilience to and understanding of the types of misinformation and disinformation that exist on the internet.
- Governments should leverage the narrative bank provided by pro-Islamic State outlets to enhance their strategic communications and build out engagement programming to address the fears/anxieties of Sunni populations globally.
- More rigorous media training for officials and analysts that speak about the threat of the Islamic State on mainstream media, to circumvent the ability of these outlets to e.g. repurpose government narratives about Islamic State’s strength.
- Coordination among governments and civil society organisations to enhance engagement, creating working groups across different governorates and ensuring that local voices are heard and supported, with the aim of addressing fractious narratives.

Interviews with the authors are available on request. The [report is available](#) from the [ISD website](#).

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