

# EX POST PAPER

## RAN C&N

# Workshop on jihadist propaganda and how to respond

### Summary

On 3 and 4 October 2016 the meeting of the RAN C&N working group was dedicated to the communication and propaganda techniques terrorist groups as Daesh (IS/ISIS) and Al Qaeda use. The workshop explored the key elements in their narratives. Ways to effectively counter/redirect (or offer alternatives to) these narratives, both online and offline were discussed. In this ex post paper the outcomes of the discussions during this RAN C&N meeting are boiled down into 3 pages of brief and tangible information on the *why* and *what* behind these elements and at what level you could engage with persons who might be susceptible for jihadist narratives.

This paper is produced by the RAN Centre of Excellence.

## Emotional Process

Radicalisation is an emotional and psychological process that often relies on a mix of (or the absence of) specific factors:

- a set of vulnerabilities (e.g. search for identity, belonging, pride, legitimacy)
- grievances about feeling discriminated, marginalised, isolated, not belonging or treated unjustly
- a radicaliser (a group, an individual, an online forum, etc.)
- lack of protective factors (family, job, home, support services)
- an ideology

These factors might result in a cognitive opening which extremists exploit. Radicalisation is therefore the result of the coming together of

extremist narratives and a particular state of mind that allows these narratives to take root and to be seen as the answer to personal grievances.

## Identity

At the core of the radicalisation process is mostly the search for a new or more purposed identity or life. The recruiters and propagandists of Daesh exploit this, like any other extremist group or sect looking for new members. The vulnerable individual might be looking for a stronger feeling of belonging, camaraderie, status, purpose, or thrill and adventure. In the communication of Daesh and in its approach towards possible new recruits, narratives that aim specifically to addressing these identity issues are predominant.

## Supply – Demand model

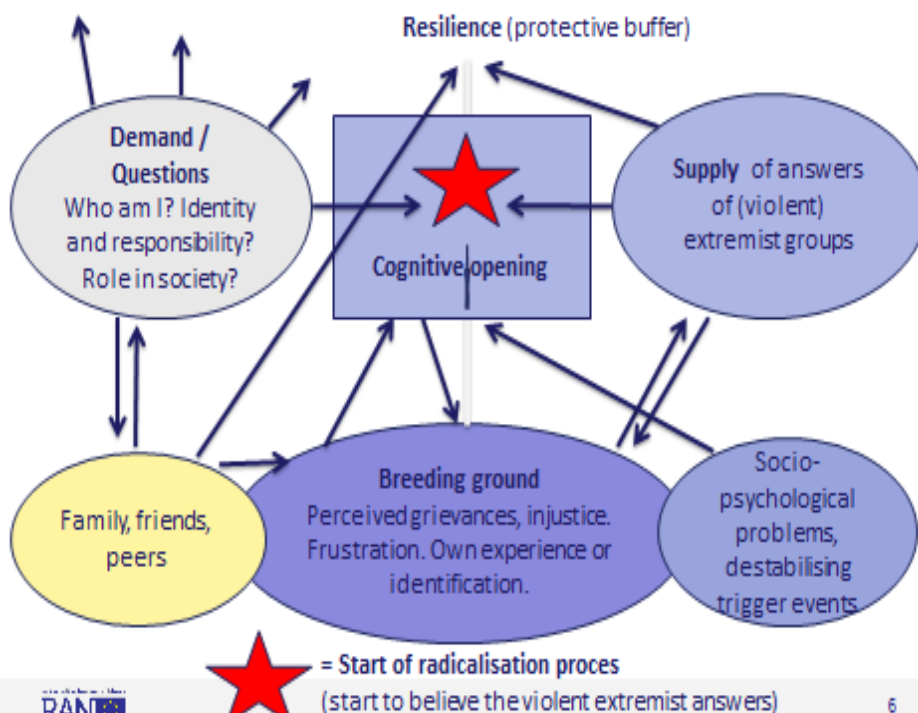


Figure 1, Supply and demand model: RecoRa (Recognising Radicalisation ) 2008. This is a visualisation of the process of supply and demand that takes place when extremist groups are recruiting.

## Key messages of Daesh's propaganda towards the west

### *You are a Muslim – you belong to us*

In the communications of Daesh the brother- and sisterhood of Muslims and the otherness or uniqueness of being a Muslim are reoccurring themes. This is directly aimed at young Muslims in western countries. It can provide them with an overarching identity much bigger than the possible not so much felt Western European identity. Many young Westerns European Muslims have feelings of not quite belonging within the society they are living.

### *You can help – we need you over here*

Parts of the communication of Daesh are about the cruelties and hardship Sunni Muslims and especially the children have to endure in Syria. The message is: They Sunnis in Iraq and Syria are only going to be saved by Daesh and Sunni Muslims in the West need to come and join them to help. The other part of this narrative is about the building of the caliphate. The caliphate promises a perfect religious life in a perfect state with clear roles for everybody. For example women are needed to help building the caliphate. They can provide for the mujahedin, teach the children or keep the other women on the right path.

### *You can be cool – come join us*

In the communication there is a large part dedicated to showcasing the supposedly 'cool and manly' actions of the fighters of Daesh. You see fit and dedicated men with AK 47s winning from the perceived bad guys. This forms an attractive offer for young men who desire "short cuts" to a higher status, wealth and easier access to women. Many of them have a criminal background. Daesh promises these men a new start with a clean sheet and a purpose in life.

### *Be a real Muslim/Mujahedin and fight*

Since Daesh is losing grounds in Syria and Iraq there is more emphasis on the value of struggle and on dying for the good cause. Part of the message is, that Islam survived after the prophet and so too will Daesh. They seem to change the identity based narratives towards security based narratives, and from a perspective of life, to a perspective of death as a martyr. Another change in narratives is the shift from calling Sunni Muslims to come and live in the caliphate towards the calling of committing attacks in Europe with whatever means available.

## What to do about it? – Engage!

At the core of a radicalisation process is mostly the search for a new or purposed identity. If you want to engage with someone who might be at risk of being recruited by Daesh you therefore need to address the identity question and the grievances.

### *General prevention*

General prevention is aimed at a young person or a group of young persons who might be at risk of being targeted by recruiters from Daesh. For general (early) prevention situations you should mainly listen to the questions and frustrations about identity. Use the skills, tools and interventions social workers have to engage with young people about their lives and identity. In this phase you do not necessarily need to talk about radicalisation or Daesh directly. Unless the person or persons you are engaging with are talking about them and their 'offers'. If so, engage them in telling you what they have seen on which websites and about what parts of the narrative of Daesh is appealing to them or their questions or thoughts about it. This can be done online and offline. Best is a combination of both.

The person engaging should be credible should know enough about identity questions and grievances and how to deal with them.

#### *Targeted prevention*

Targeted prevention is meant for a person who is probably radicalised or at least in contact with Daesh recruiters. Also this person should be listened to and be able to talk about his or her grievances and identity questions but also directly on Daesh and what they are promising. Best person to engage in this situation is somebody who knows from their own experiences what it is to be attracted to a jihadi terrorist group (a so called 'former'). He or she can relate on a level that is necessary for real engagement about what the radicalised person is thinking and what attracts him.

Offering concrete alternative actions might channel some of the anger and frustration this person is feeling. This could include becoming involved on a humanitarian or political level to address the grievances or root causes of the individual's radicalization process. Highlighting lies and inconsistencies within Daesh propaganda, preferably based on reports of individuals who went there and came back (formers), might also be useful in this context. Identifying the concrete source of the propaganda, in particular if there is a network of recruiters active in the community, is key as well. Last but not least, reach out for support and cooperate with qualified civil society groups, public services or the police depending on the gravity of the individual case.

#### Helpful reads:

- RAN ISSUE PAPER The Root Causes of Violent Extremism (<https://ec.europa.eu/home->

[https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-papers/docs/issue\\_paper\\_root-causes\\_jan2016\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf))

- <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>
- <https://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/the-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy.pdf>
- <https://jamestown.org/program/islamic-state-propaganda-key-elements-of-the-groups-messaging/>
- <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/02/isis-propaganda-war/462702/>
- <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2015/11/16/four-ways-to-counter-isis-propaganda-more-effectively/>