



‘Cubs of Caliphate’: Analysis of Children’ Images in ISIS Visual Propaganda

Daleen Al Ibrahim
Wuhan University

Abstract— This study investigates the children’s images reflected by ISIS visual propaganda. The qualitative content analysis was conducted on ISIS’ videos aimed at children from 2014 to 2017. The total number of videos analyzed was thirty. This study finds that ISIS’ visual propaganda reflects six main images of children: Child Soldier; Child Executioner; Child Suicide Bomber; Educated Child; Satisfied Child; Child Victim. The study concluded that ISIS brainwashes and desensitizing children to violence to form the character of the ‘jihadi junior’ capable of sniping, fighting, beheading, executing spies and even carrying suicide bombings. ISIS visual propaganda also promotes the image of the child victim, giving itself the legitimacy to respond and take revenge from its ‘enemies.’ Besides, ISIS films innovated in depicting the natural life that children live in the lands under its control; to promote the idea that the ‘land of Caliphate’ is the ideal territory to live.

Keywords— Islamic State, ISIS’ children, Visual Propaganda, children’ images, Terrorism.

I. INTRODUCTION

The priority of any terrorist organizations is to be survival, so ensuring the continuity and longevity of the group is the key. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is more complicated than other terrorist organizations in the past. The organization may be aware of the principles of recruitment developed by many armed groups around the world, but it also has expanded its form of survival. The most prominent of these developments is the changing of children’s participation in terrorism.

Although terrorist organizations using children is not a new assertion epically in conflict zones like Iraq and Syria; as many sections have been accused of utilizing children [1]. However, current literature has revealed that ISIS is using children like never before [2]. As the recruiting of children by ISIS is a relatively new development and has yet to be comprehensively examined. According to Assad Almohammad (2018), “ISIS’ use of child appears to be a multi-layered, complex, dynamic, and emergent systematic practices wherein different players carry out pre-determined assignments and cooperate to achieve the terrorist organizations immediate and transgenerational objectives [3].”

It is challenging to know the exact number of children is currently involved in ISIS, however, according to a report by the United Nations, the ISIS group recruited about five thousand children, and kidnapped about 800 - 900 children from Mosul to

strengthen ISIS ranks [4]. The report pointed out that the number of children who participated in the battles tripled during one year after the declaration of the Caliphate 2014 until the end of 2015 and during the same year also 1800 children joined ISIS at least, the majority of them were Syrians. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also documented 1,100 Syrian children less than 16 years old joined ISIS by 2017 [5].

It is recognized, that children are perceived as an essential asset for the growth and long-term survival of the Caliphate [6]. At the time that most terrorist organizations consider children as expendable, children play an active role in ISIS strategy. Recruitment of children for terrorist purposes is a highly intelligent choice. ISIS considers children as “potential better versions of the current fighters.” ISIS targets these children as an empty blank page that can be affected precisely according to the ISIS vision and objectives. Researchers see that the children are the safest aim to ISIS; they have grown up with radical values of ISIS and therefore do not need to be converted or re-educated [7]. Thus the result is an unstoppable ground force in their beliefs and loyalty to the group.

Moreover, since the rise of ISIS and throughout its ‘Caliphate’ project from 2014 to 2017, children have been targeted alongside adult fighters as a subject of its visual propaganda. ISIS proves no hesitation in releasing several videos depicting children participating in military training, engaging in combat operations and even carrying out atrocities such as executing prisoners; to reinforce the impression of ‘state-building.’ ISIS visual propaganda considerably provides the recipient with glimpses of children’s life in ISIS’ land internalizing its doctrinal positions and showing pledging the authority of the imam of Caliphate [6].

Distinct ISIS propaganda videos depict children participating in public rallies and religious lectures, and sometimes they present speeches and songs supporting ISIS ideology. Besides, children are shown to compete for the ‘honor’ to fight and die for their ‘caliphate’ and religion [8] These videos show not only the children images that ISIS reflected but also they serve as the platform by which the ISIS produce new generations of terrorists.

So, children under ISIS control play a significant role in its ideological and military agenda, yet, studies that discuss visual propaganda of ISIS’ recruiting of children appear to be limited. Therefore, this study seeks to shed light on the images of what ISIS called them ‘Cubes of Caliphate’ through analyzing videos that released by ISIS; to present a realistic picture of the

recruitment and utilizing minors in the ISIS territories. As well as, sheds light on the potential threat posed by some of these minors, not only to the West but to the entire world.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Children are the essential cornerstones on which the ISIS' alleged Caliphate is built [7]. Even though recruitment of children by terrorist groups to participate in its ranks is not a new phenomenon in itself, however, the recruit of children has been limited to carry out secondary roles or to fill the ranks. Nevertheless, ISIS treats and employs children as main actors alongside the adult fighters [6]. In its propaganda media, ISIS proudly shows its children as executioners, suicide bombers, and soldiers. ISIS also depicts children as responsible for punishing and torturing its prisoners [6].

In ISIS propaganda, the children are indicated as 'Cubs of Caliphate' that would rise to become 'Lions' in the future. Whereas, the children in ISIS found a supply of potential fighters as they are effortless to mould and indoctrinated [7]. Accordingly, most studies concluded that, whatever the children' role and location, they associated with ISIS from at least five sources: (1) internally displaced children; (2) foreign children who migrated to ISIS territory; (3) volunteer children; (4) children recruited from orphanages; (5) children taken from their parents against their will [5].

ISIS' constitutional and organizational sources extend unparalleled levels of access to potential cubs, for example, the case for children in orphanages, schools, mosque, and preaching kiosks [3]. The fights across Syria and Iraq have generated many orphans, allowing ISIS to exploit many of these children against their will as recruits. ISIS also targeted minorities, like Christians and Yazidis, as well as, Sunni Muslims in areas under its control [1]. Moreover, some foreign fighters who migrate to ISIS territories to join the group brought their families with them too. So, many of these families' children were recruited into the 'Cubs of the Caliphate' [9].

Furthermore, ISIS informally adopted children of foreign fighters killed in the fighting. Those children were described as 'Cubs of the Caliphate,' indicating that ISIS was rising them mostly for recruitment [1]. Almohammad (2018) found in his study that the indoctrination and training of foreign children are intense and the orphans are primarily recruited and trained to carry out suicide operations [3].

In ISIS' visual propaganda, desensitizing children to violence is the first tactics for recruitment. This process starts with visual exposure to acts of violence, either live (children in four and five years old forced to watch public executions, torture, amputations, and stoning) or through videos. Furthermore, they are motivated to apply forms of violence in their everyday play, such as beheading toys or carrying toy weapons. Finally, children are made to implement actual executions on prisoners [6], [10], [11]. Desensitization represents an important step to ensure that the children will be able to tolerate violent acts and stops natural feelings of disgust or fear [1]. Such emotional 'reprogramming' facilitate the acceptance of violence as a natural way of life, and eases the

participation for children in violence themselves as combatants, torturers, and executioners, and lose them the ability to feel remorse. So, this emotional 'reprogramming' will convert them into brutal fighters for ISIS in the future [8], [11], [12].

ISIS' visual releases targeted children show the way ISIS uses to attract children; by offering small gifts (such as toys and sweets) or rewards to the winners in competitions, overseeing sports activities, organizing other events where children are encouraged to recite Quranic verses, sing ISIS' songs, and wave its flag [13], [6], [1]. In another hand, some research found that, beyond gifts and rewards and other public events, ISIS has used cash as an attractive way of recruiting [13]. In the conflict regions wracked with poverty and destitution, the chance to earn a regular salary has driven recruits, young and old, to join the group [1], [7]. ISIS also engages in indirect coercion where children are forced to join its ranks out of fear. ISIS punishes and kills brutally individuals who do not adhere by its code of behavior or opposed to its ideology [14]. For older children, ISIS offers a way to discover their personal and social identity independently from their parents. Most of these children struggle with reconciling their religious and national identities, especially when they lack access to proper sources to their religion. In this situation, they are easily attracted by feelings of pride, respect, and empowerment evoked by ISIS' appeals [6].

ISIS propaganda describes children as "being happy and satisfied" with their recruiting; this type of recruitment raises questions about whether or not children know the nature of activities they have been involved [12]. The answer may be that the family remains the key influencer for children; the family cultivates and reinforces extreme ideas in their children. Tight-knit family bonds rely on the trust and respect to attract the potential recruit while normalizing the extremism occurs through integration in the upbringing and informal education of children in the home [6]. ISIS also uses its power through preachers and imams to encourage parents to register their children voluntarily in ISIS training camps [6].

ISIS videos depict children who join the training camp having been indoctrinated and trained at different levels. Moreover, those who attend ISIS schools are more likely to receive advanced training [3]. The process of recruitment locally starts at a very early age, when children attend schools controlled by ISIS. In this level, children are required to focus on religious studies. As soon as they recruited, local and foreign children are required to go through military training. They register in Islamic law (Sharia) camps where they learn religious education. The foreign children who cannot speak Arabic are required to learn language skills. The next level requires physical and military training. ISIS experts train children in urban warfare, self-defense, and the use of weapons; in short, they receive some combat-based education [6]. After training, the children fulfill actual roles according to their experience and skills. Many children would fulfill guard or patrol roles while children who were unable to achieve their duties would become suicide bombers. Moreover, those who have exceptional communication skills would take a mission as recruiters [15], [1].

According to Horgan, John G., Max Taylor, Mia Bloom, and Charlie Winter (2017), child recruits have a variety of duties in

ISIS. ISIS utilizes them for preparing food for fighters, documenting battle, helping and donating blood to the injured. ISIS also uses them as spies on the enemy and people living under its control [13]. Shweta Chopra (2017) added some are trained as spies to inform on family and friends who show no loyalty to ISIS. They are also used to spy on the enemy during the battles [10]. ISIS incites children to become Shahid (martyrs) to defeating the enemies of Islam according to ISIS ideology. Children participate in the execution, torturing, or beheading prisoners. Children also participate in combat roles after receiving military training [12].

Horgan, John G., Max Taylor, Mia Bloom, and Charlie Winter (2017) in their study summarize children's socialization into ISIS in six stages: "Seduction, Schooling, Selection, Subjugation, Specialization, and Stationing."

Seduction: that occurs through the exposure to ISIS propaganda, partaking in ISIS public events, and indirect access to recruits.

Schooling: that occurs through the exposure to the intensive ISIS indoctrination.

Selection: in this stage, ISIS sifts for child capacity to join military training or do other duties (e.g., spying).

Subjugation: the brutal treatment to the recruits through harsh military training, separation from family, wearing ISIS black uniform, and cultivate the loyalty, sacrifice, and discipline.

Specialization: reinforce the practical experience and practice specific training.

Stationing: roles' and responsibilities' allocation including, participation in public events to attract new members [13].

As expressed, the consensus of the researches conducted about ISIS' propaganda targeted children appears to be that children in ISIS are subjected ideological, physical and military training, which includes memorizing the Quran, learning religious education, practicing martial arts, and learning how to shoot by weapons. After that, children are expected to fight alongside the adult fighters on the battlefield. The Cubs of Caliphate also undertake executions as this will desensitize them to violence to become ferocious adult fighters.

III. METHODOLOGY

Since the rise of ISIS in 2014 and later, the organization has exploited the children in its propaganda. ISIS focused significantly on the children or what it called 'Cubs of Caliphate' and issued a series of short films about their activities, training, and their lives under the 'Caliphate.' It also filmed them carrying out terrible criminal acts under the supervision of ISIS members, stressing the indifference to human rights. So, this study aims to analyze the images of 'Cubs of Caliphate' that reflected in ISIS visual propaganda based on qualitative content analysis of ISIS videos aimed children from 2014 to 2017; to better understand the representations of children in ISIS organization.

Although there are various accounts and sources responsible for the dissemination of ISIS propaganda on the Internet, most of them subject to closure and deletion after a short period. Therefore, the study sample relied on videos related to children under ISIS control, that are available on the website (Jihadology website), which publishes all the visual videos of ISIS, the content in this website is not facily deleted, besides the website re-publishes the videos that are removed.

The researchers set up a one-month database for all Islamic State propaganda videos related to children on this website started from 1/1/2019 to 31/1/2019. What helped researchers to access the data is that this website publishes ISIS' videos with title, location (wilayat), and date of issue, allowing researchers to search for cached or archived versions depending on words like 'Cubs'; 'Cubs of Caliphate'; 'ISIS' Children' and so on. However, some videos have been completely removed from the Internet, and researchers have not been able to access them in any way. We also focused on videos that included children as the primary focus of the video. During the data collection period, which begins on 1/1/2019 and ends on 31/1/2019, 30 videos were collected and then were analyzed.

After analyzing these videos, the researchers classified the children's images according to six main images depicting the children on these videos: Child Soldier; Child Executioner; Child Suicide Bomber; Educated Child; Satisfied Child; Child Victim.

It is noteworthy that, most children's videos were released during 2015 and the mid-2016. They showed children as executioners and ferocious fighters trained ideologically, physically and mentally, in an attempt by ISIS to send a message that despite the alliance to end its presence, it is capable of producing a generation of fighters who would be the extension of the future "Islamic State."

It is also noted that the most extensive number of ISIS videos show children involved in the violence. That includes either child who is directly involved in violence or exposes to violence or receiving military training. Also, directing children live ordinary life are covering a significant part of ISIS visual videos, whereas, the group also wants to encourage its fighters to bring their families with them to live in its land, thus encouraging migration to the so-called 'Caliphate Land.'

The videos collected here have been produced primarily by the al-Raqqa and al-Khair states (Wilayat), where these states are considered the center of the power of the ISIS administration. Some of the videos were produced by Al Hayat Media Center, the main media arm of ISIS, which provides high-quality videos with professional technology. Some of them came from the state of Aleppo and Nineveh, or Khorasan, Kirkuk, Homs, al-Barakah and others, which indicates that ISIS trains and recruits' children in all territories they had controlled.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Child Soldier*

The visual propaganda of ISIS illustrates an essential shift in the jihadist war utilizing children. It can be said that the use of children in direct combat was not common in terrorist groups, but it seems that ISIS is alerted to the combat power that children

can provide. Since its inception, when it extended its control over areas in Syria and Iraq, ISIS aimed to encourage recruitment and training of children in special camps called 'Caliphate Camps,' where they receive full religious, physical and military training to influence them and change their thinking to accept murder and brutality.

Therefore, ISIS seeks through its visual propaganda, in the first place, to enforce the image of the 'child soldier.' These videos show the stages in which a 'child soldier' goes through its camps. Like ISIS schools, training camps are characterized by ideological education to brainwash children, where children are trained to hate the enemies of the Caliphate. For instance, the 16-minute video entitled "The Generation of Epic Battles" shows how ISIS shapes the minds of children to be future fighters and full loyal soldiers of the Caliphate. The video shows young boys from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines calling supports to join them, and at the end of the video, they throw their passports into the fire and shout "the Islamic State remains, our path is jihad."

Children also undergo physical training, where they exercise sports and practice martial arts. Then they move to the military training, where they are taught and trained to shoot with pistols, light and heavy machine guns, and rocket launchers. They are also trained to make and defuse explosive devices, ambushes, and house invasions, make an explosive belt and carry out suicide attacks. For example, the nearly 34-minute video "My father told me," stated to come from "Wilāyat al-Raqqah," documented how the 'child soldier' is being trained and prepared for the future. The release shows scenes of harsh training for children coming from Chechnya, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Turkestan, Saudi Arabia, and other Asian countries. They stay in the camp dorm, awaken late at night, attend lessons in the doctrine, and attend physical and military camp. At the end of the issue, the organization conducted practical training for the 'cubs'; they entered into an abandoned building, where several captives were handcuffed. The children shot them dead while one of them threw himself from the top of the building before the ISIS' children fired him.

The "Noble Youth" video also gave a glimpse of how the 'child soldier' shapes in the areas controlled by the ISIS. The 19-minutes video shows young children practicing martial arts, using Kalashnikov rifles and learning strict Islamic law at the school in Aleppo, Syria. Another example, "Race towards Good" propaganda video produced by Al Hayat Media Center showed dozens of Kazakh children aged between 4 and 12 years old, are dressed in ISIS uniform. They were trained with assault rifles in a training camp that primarily reflects the character of the child soldier that ISIS seeks to establish in the minds of the audience. One of the most noteworthy shots in the film is in the around 12 minute, which highlighted the level of ingenuity the children in ISIS reach in dealing with weapons, when a young Kazakh, called Abdullah, re-assembles an assault rifle quickly and effortlessly and threatens the infidels to slaughter them.

In order to reinforce the image of the child soldier, the children are given the same uniform as adults' soldiers, and sometimes wearing masks on their faces to become a 'full-fledged soldier'. In short, showing children in the camps trained and prepared as soldiers is mainly a warning message to the

world, "Be careful, we have what we need to defend ourselves; well-armed child soldiers are ready to kill our enemies." Thus, it warns the West that they were preparing for a long battle.

B. Child Executioner

The most prominent feature of ISIS' visual propaganda is the depiction of the 'Cubs of Caliphate' as heartless, cruel and brutal children with a stone face without any emotion. ISIS developed the idea of using children to liquidate their opponents to achieve its goals and terror its enemies. That indicates that ISIS does not hesitate to employ all its tools to reach its goals, spread its ideas and establish the 'alleged Caliphate.' ISIS through its videos ensures to depict children as they had absorbed the aberrant ideology which has enabled them to carry out cold-blooded criminal operations. As they appear in the ISIS videos execute and behead of prisoners or spies.

For instance, in 2/5/2015 ISIS released the video entitled "Harvest the spies", in a similar way to American motion films, one of the children wearing a black suit with the emblem of the Caliphate State, fills a magazine and puts it in the pistol and prepares it for the final stage of the operation. The 'child executioner' passes through masked fighters, then he pushed the spy to the ground, and removed the cover from his eyes, and as usual in previous ISIS' issues and before execution, the child raised his index finger to send a threatening message to the West, then fired the spy in cold blood.

In another shocking video entitled "The Crumbling Nations," the organization showed the faces of the children and wrote their nickname according to their nationality during the killing of five Kurdish fighters in Al Raqqa, Syria. The children pointed their guns towards the heads of five men wearing orange uniforms, a well-known costume for the victims of ISIS, one of the children, called "Abu al-Baraa al-Tunisi", sent a threatening message in Arabic to enemies, and after the acclaim of Allahu Akbar "God is great", they shot the hostages on their heads. Another example includes a video entitled "Uncovering the Enemy Within," showed Kazakh child executing two Russian spies. At the end the child warns the west, "I will be the one who slaughters you, O Kuffar. I will be a mujahid, insha'Allah." Another video "Made Me Alive with His Own Blood" showed a toddler boy hanging on a gun and shooting a man in his head, and an older boy catches a large knife and savagely beheaded a spy. The video "They are the Enemy So Beware of Them #4," perhaps it was the most shocking video, when the British child called Isa Dare, a four years old, appeared to be pressing the detonator for a car laden with explosives, killing four men accused of spying.

Hence, it can be said that children copy the actions of older fighters, they shot, beheaded and slaughtered with knives. Thus, ISIS exploits the tendency of imitation among the minors and draws a false image in their minds about the image of the hero. Therefore, confirms that all those who belong to the ISIS group must take off the merciful and humanity from their hearts even children. Moreover, ISIS often aims to portray the 'child executioner' as a psychological war against its enemies and to emphasize the effectiveness of their training for children, by showing the brutality they have cultivated in children.

C. Child Suicide Bomber

It can be concluded from the analysis of ISIS visual propaganda that ISIS does not hesitate to use children (especially children who have been kidnapped during their control of several areas in Iraq and Syria) whom under the age of 18 years to carry out a suicide attack against its opponents. It does not even hesitate to document this in its propaganda and glorify them as martyrs. It is unlike all terrorist organizations; ISIS is proud of filming and recording children's suicide operations. Although ISIS often does not indicate the age of suicide bombers in its videos, it is noted that it draws on young people to carry out such attacks. For example, the organization documented a number of suicide attacks carried out against Iraqi forces in the city of Mosul in a video entitled "*Caravan of Light 2*" issued by the public Media Office of the Nineveh, children soldiers appeared during the video seven times varied between armed fighters and those who carried out suicide bombings against Iraqi forces. Moreover, what controversial in this video was that ISIS broadcast footage of a young boy, not more than fourteenth, carrying out a suicide operation in the city of Mosul. Where the little boy entered the armored vehicle prepared by ISIS for the suicide operation, he was smiling despite knowing that he would face death, at the time, one of ISIS aircraft was flying in the sky to monitor the moment of operation accurately.

In another example, in mid-February 2017, ISIS launched a video entitled "*So from Their Guidance Take an Example*" by also the public Media Office of Nineveh, which includes suicide attacks against the security forces in the province of Nineveh carried out by six suicide bombers aged between (15 - 20) years. In the video, two Yazidi brothers carried out suicide operations against Iraqi forces. one named Abu Yusuf and the other Abu Al-Khattab Al-Sinjari. Amjad (Abu Yusuf) said that they received religious education and trained in a one ISIS' camp in the Levant before they have been registered in suicide bombers' lists. He also expressed his willingness to carry out a suicide attack against 'enemies of God' even if they were their parents. While his brother, Asaad (Abu Al-Khattab), adding: "God willing, my brother and I will become Inghimasi (immersed), and carry out a martyrdom operation." After that, the two children appear as they climbed into booby-trapped cars containing a large quantity of IEDs before they explode them. They smile and laugh, and then air footage showed the movement of the vehicle in the streets of Mosul until it was detonated at an Iraqi army post on the left side of the city.

It can be noted from the analysis of the previous and other videos of ISIS propaganda that ISIS succeeded in demonstrating its efficiency in washing the brains of children and indoctrinating its ideology. In the second video, the two Yazidi recruits explain how they convert to Islam, and talked about the guidance and training they received from the extremist group. In both videos above, the children, even though they were getting into cars full of explosives, appeared delighted, confident and have no fear of death that gives the viewer the psychological comfort and absolute faith cultivated

in these children. Thus, the organization took advantage of children's innocence in recruiting. They are more effortless in the process of indoctrination, where children do not show any resistance and do not have enough awareness to distinguish right from wrong; besides, they do not realize the gravity of their path.

D. Educated Child

The education field is one of the most affected sectors in Iraq and Syria after the chaos that resulted from the war. ISIS benefited from the void in education and imposed its control over schools. It was able to establish almost a monopoly in the provision of education within its territory. In contrast to the treatment of children by other terrorist organizations, which usually do not receive any education, education is an essential aspect of ISIS strategy in building the character of the "educated jihadi junior"; to turn children from passers-by to fully trained combatants.

ISIS video shows how was successfully shaping the identity of the 'educated child'; and manipulating the minds of children. For example, one sense appears in the video "*Living In the Shade of the Caliphate*," it showed children sitting with full reverence and learning from sheik about the jihad and their duties to fight and kill so-called "infidels and enemies of God." The film shows that ISIS already succeeded in washing the brains of children and planting extremist ideas in them, where the children always appear at the end of the videos, after they finish classes, threatening the enemies with death and slaughter, in an apparent reference that the children are absorbing the extremist lessons they receive from ISIS teachers.

In another example, the video "*Imam Bukhari Institute in the Tal Abyad Area*" shows the stages in which the 'educated child' image has been shaped. The child receives religious education according to the perspective of ISIS; the curriculum is focused heavily on religion science like Qur'an memorization, prayer, monotheism, jurisprudence, and creed. Besides, teaching Arabic, Math and other basic sciences. The "*Da'wah Convoy for Cubs of the Caliphate*" video proves that the "educated child character" borne fruit. Along its time, the video displays children as young as 12 years of age talking about the infidels (non-believers) and the reasons for their eradication with evidence and proves that may be unable to be provided and clarified by adults, which primarily reflects the effects of ideological indoctrination that they have learned before. Hence, as ISIS aims to form 'jihadi junior,' it also synchronously foster the importance of the 'educated jihadi junior' able to call and influence his peers as well.

So, ISIS considers the formation of the 'educated child' as part of its primary purpose of establishing the alleged Caliphate. Through educating and indoctrinating children with the creed they believe in, ISIS prepares a generation for the future, a religious and ideological educated child, as a first step in recruiting and instilling loyalty to the organization.

E. Satisfied Child

Aesthetics are used in ISIS visual propaganda to draw attention that the Caliphate is an ideal place for children to raise and live. It is found most often in ISIS videos releases, where ISIS shows that children are highly valued, and attempts to encourage the great life awaiting children within the caliphate land. ISIS propaganda also keen to depict children smiling and happy: to reflect that they live an ordinary life. For example, in the video “*Id Greetings from the Land of the Caliphate*” filmed in Al Raqqa, Syria, shows ISIS fighters from Finland, Indonesia, Belgium, UK, and other countries how happy they are to be in the land of Caliphate encouraging other Muslims to migrate with their families. The video shows colorful scenes of the smiley, happy faces of children playing at a fairground to draw attention that children live an exemplary life as innocents.

Another example, in the 6.48 minutes from the “*Die in Your Rage*” video, the film show children have fun and play in Tigris River. It shows up that life is normal and beautiful for children who are relaxing and playing with water. Also the film “*Id [al Adhā] Under the Shade of the Caliphate*” along with its duration which reaches 6.19 minutes clearly shows children playing in peace and relaxation, eating sweets, buying games, and clothes, etc.

The films demonstrate the life of the children as if they were in a ‘Real State’; they enjoy what the children enjoy in other parts of the world. ISIS films rock out in depicting a natural life that the human mind cannot imagine, they convey a message that there are people include children who can live a life like normal humans; to promote the idea that the land of Caliphate is the ideal land to migrate.

F. Child Victim

This category concerns child as a victim, specifically, child victims of international alliance aggression and Iraqi and Syrian regimes forces violation.

ISIS deliberately focuses on most of its videos, even in videos where children were not the main character, to show footage of dead children. For example, in the videos titled “*Die in Your Rage*” and “*They Left Their Beds Empty*” opening with scenes of war, destruction, dead and charred bodies of children before slitting the throats and beheading alleged spies. Therefore, arguably that ISIS used the children as victims of the bombing and the aggression of the allied forces against it and employed it to serve its propaganda purposes, aiming to provoke anger at ISIS’ enemy violations, especially since most of the children and human rights organizations were confirming violations against children in both Syria and Iraq.

Here lies the cunning of ISIS propaganda, showing the other parties break the international and humanitarian laws against children, and thus gaining sympathy by the viewer, which may give justification for its brutality as a response to the aggression against it. For instance, the video, titled “*Blood for Blood*,” ISIS intentionally shows children in combat uniform preparing

for battle after displaying footage of charred bodies of children and children walking through rubble. Thus, through its visual releases, ISIS promotes the image of the child victim, giving itself the legitimacy to respond and take revenge, and appearing as a defender against crimes committed toward its members.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

From analyzing the child’ images reflected by ISIS visual propaganda, it can be said that the phenomenon of child recruits is one of the most complex ISIS’ problems, as it is trying to recruit children in an unprecedented manner, taking advantage of the material need and lack of education. Whereas, children are brainwashed and then their sensitivity barriers are broken by training them to cut the heads of dolls and watch violence, to move to the stage of military training to form the character of the ‘jihadi junior’ capable of sniping, dismantling and reconfiguring the weapon, storming into live ammunition, and executing spies without mercy or pity. On the other hand, ISIS knows very well that military training without ‘faith cultivation’ and ‘ideological formation’ is not enough to shape the character of the ‘jihadi junior.’ Therefore, the emphasis on doctrine lessons during their stay in the camp was essential. Finally, they reach the practical stage by sending them to battlefields and pushing them to suicide operations.

Undoubtedly, the phenomenon of ‘Cubs of Caliphate involved in hostilities’ means create a group in society that knows the meaning of the crime well, trained to carry arms, absorbed false ideas at a young age, and thus constitutes a negative and destructive force to society. That requires finding solutions to reintegrate these children into society once again, to allow them to practice their normal and typical lives. Also, involve them in various activities aimed at their rehabilitation, under the supervision of trained cadres of religious leaders, psychologists, and pedagogues, with the participation of government organizations, support groups, the local community, educational institutions, and vocational training centers.

If we want to have any hope of reintegrating these children who will survive and leave ISIS, one thing is sure; the reintegrating program will require a level of coordination and creativity different from what is known to date. Reintegration will require an intersectional approach to addressing psychological trauma resulting from witnessing executions and engaging in violence. Children also need to rehabilitate their education so that they can forget about the distortion of the Islamic faith. It is good to mention that children may have problems with socialization, where they may lack the capacity for empathy and communication, which may make a return to normal life more challenging and complex.

Finally, the insistence of ISIS on the recruitment of children reveals an organizational and intellectual deficit by sending a false message that the organization’s call finds broad support to

the extent to children's faith. Therefore, the international community must enforce laws to protect children in the warzones, and raise awareness of the dangers of violations of child recruitment, and prompt intervention to free children from the environments in which they are exploited. Only then we can ensure a world in which the ISIS stop poses a serious long-range physical and ideological threat.

REFERENCES

- [1] "The Cubs of the Caliphate: How the Islamic State Attracts, Coerces and Indoctrinates Children to its Cause", Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, pp. 1-18, 2016.
- [2] A.L. Watkin, and S. Looney, "The Lions of Tomorrow: News Value Analysis of Child Images in Jihadi Magazines", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 42, no.1-2, pp. 120-40, 2019.
- [3] A. Almohammad, "ISIS Child Soldiers in Syria: The Structural and Predatory Recruitment, Enlistment, Pre-Training Indoctrination, Training, and Deployment," *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism–The Hague*, vol. 8, pp.1-29, 2018.
- [4] R. Barrett, "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign fighters and the threat of returnees," *Soufan Center*, pp. 1-41, 2017.
- [5] L. C. Rose, H. J. Carlisle, and J. D. Ellis, "Victims or Victimizers: An Analysis of Western Media Portrayal of the Islamic State's Child Soldiers and American Youth Gang Members," *The National Conference On Undergraduate Research (NCUR)*, University of Memphis, TN Memphis, Tennessee April 6-8, 2017.
- [6] "The Children in Daesh: 'Future Flag Bearers' of the 'Caliphate'," *The Carter Center*, Atlanta, Georgia, 30307, 2017.
- [7] "The Children of ISIS: The indoctrination of minors in ISIS-held territory," *National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) and the General Intelligence, and Security Service (AIVD)*, pp.1-20, 2017.
- [8] G. Vale, "Cubs in the Lions' Den: Indoctrination and Recruitment of Children Within Islamic State Territory," *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR)*, Department of War Studies, King's College London, London, United Kingdom, pp.1-40, 2018.
- [9] "Children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic", S/2018/969, *The Secretary-General, United Nations: Security Council*, New York, 1-16, 2018.
- [10] S. Chopra, "Cubs of the Caliphate and the End of the Islamic State", *ResearchGate*, pp.1-13, 2017.
- [11] T. Mehra, "Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Trends, Dynamics and Policy Responses", *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague*, vol. 7, no. 7, pp. 1-33, 2016.
- [12] K. Anderson, "'Cubs of the Caliphate': The Systematic Recruitment, Training, and Use of Children in the Islamic State." *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, pp1-51, 2016.
- [13] J. G. Horgana, M. Taylor, M. Bloom, and C. Winter, "From Cubs to Lions: A Six Stage Model of Child Socialization into the Islamic State," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 40, no. 7, pp. 645-64, 2017.
- [14] N. Benotman, and N. Malik, "The Children of Islamic State," *The Quilliam Foundation*, pp.1-100, 2016.
- [15] S. Rosiny, "Brutalisation as a Survival Strategy: How the "Islamic State" Is Prolonging Its Doomsday Battle," *GIGA Working Papers 288*, GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Hamburg, pp. 1-25, 2016..



Daleen Al Ibrahim, Ph.D. in Mass Media. Wuhan University. China. She is from Syria, born in 1987. She got her Bachelor degree in Mass Media with (very good) rate from Damascus University / Faculty of Media / Mass Media department in 2008. She positioned the first student in the related department and got the grant for the first graduate.

After that She worked full time as a teaching assistant in the Faculty of Media at Damascus University, Radio & Television department. Then she graduated with her Master in Media and communication Studies (Applied Technology in Media & Communication) with (Excellent) rate, from Damascus University/Faculty of Media in 2016.

Then, she received the Chinese government scholarships (CSC) to study PhD degree in China. During her study journey in China, she finished the graduation requirements and worked to fulfill her dissertation which related to media, terrorism and technology, and she published four research papers in this field, and some of them are indexed in Communication and Mass Media Complete database (CMMC), namely:

- 1- The media in the service of ISIS propaganda war. *Malaysian Journal of Media Studies*, 2018.
 - 2- The symbiotic relationship between media and terrorism from the past to the present. *China Media Research*, 2019. (CMMC)
 - 3- The ISIS' discourse from the rise to the collapse: Analysis of ISIS' discourse through films 'Flames of War I & II'. *Media Watch*, 2019. (CMMC)
 - 4- Framing terrorism: A comparative content analysis of ISIS news on RT Arabic and Sky News Arabia Websites, 2020. (CMMC)
- She got her Ph.D. degree in Mass Media from Wuhan University / School of Journalism and Communication in 2020.

Her research interests include terrorism in the Middle East and Arab regions, Social aspects of communication technology, and digital media technology effects.