Research Note

The Utility of Disabled Fighters in the Islamic State[1]
by Chelsea Daymon

Abstract

Traditionally, terrorism and individuals with disabilities are portrayed in roles of victimization with disabled individuals being either the target or decoy in attacks. The self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) has altered this concept by using individuals with disabilities for recruitment, propaganda, and mobilization purposes. This Research Note explores ISIS's use of disabled fighters through an analysis of online content, consisting of videos collected off the encrypted messaging platform Telegram, along with open-source Internet sites, bearing in mind the concepts of Entertainment-Education and the use of persuasive messaging. I argue that ISIS is using its own method of Entertainment-Education, employing persuasive narrative aimed at disabled individuals, while also using them as propaganda tools. Additionally, highlighting disabled fighters in their media products, offers disabled individuals a collective identity consisting of usefulness and agency in the group, either as recruitment spokesmen, shaming able-bodied individuals into action, or as attackers.

Keywords: Islamic State, terrorist recruitment, propaganda, disabled individuals

Introduction

Historically, individuals with disabilities have been observed in roles of victimization.[2] However, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) has changed this notion, using individuals with disabilities for propaganda, recruitment purposes, and as attackers.[3] Since the battle of Mosul, an increased use of disabled fighters, as foot soldiers, and SVBIED (Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device) attackers has been observed.[4]

From a disability studies standpoint, we could extrapolate that disabled individuals in ISIS maintain an appearance of usefulness within the group, fulfilling a number of roles and purposes. As Gruenewald, Karlamangla, Greendale, Singer and Seeman note, "social relations and activity may be important sources of feelings of usefulness,"[5] in this case, potentially increasing thoughts of empowerment in individuals with disabilities, who may feel marginalized or unsure of their role in the militant group.

Alternatively, from a terror group's perspective, individuals with disabilities provide operatives presumed to be less detectable. In 2008, two women with Down's syndrome were used in remote-controlled suicide attacks on Baghdad markets, attributed to al-Qaeda,[6] while Comalli, on Boko Haram argues that individuals with disabilities "were often used in suicide missions because they were less likely to attract attention," thus using disabled individuals provides the benefit of surprise.[7]

This Research Note seeks to explore ISIS's use of disabled fighters through an analysis of online content, consisting of videos and audience engagement, collected off the encrypted messaging platform, Telegram. Videos and images from open-source Internet sites were also collected. Furthermore, concepts of Entertainment-Education and the use of persuasive messaging are assessed, since the group uses these approaches to frame disabled individuals in their media. I argue that ISIS is using their own form of Entertainment-Education, utilizing persuasive narratives to provide disabled individuals in the group with usefulness and agency, while also using them as propaganda tools to recruit and mobilize able-bodied individuals into action.

Telegram

Telegram is a cross-platform, cloud-based[8], instant messaging service, enabling users to send chats, self-destructing messages, documents, videos, photos, gifs, stickers, audio files, and other content all embedded in the application (app). Internal file sharing features allow up to 1.5 GB per file, offering one of the largest file sharing sizes on social media and messaging platforms.[9] Telegram has channels, operating one-way (unidirectional), with central administrators (admins) controlling the dissemination of content. Channel members can only view this material, cannot interact with it, and are not privy to who the other channel members are. Alternatively, Telegram groups are multi-directional, enabling members to interact with other members, share material, comment on posts, and view other members in the group. Telegram also offers the "Secret Chat" option, where users can interact with one another on a one-to-one basis. This option allows users to create a timer where once read; a secret chat will automatically self-destruct on both the sender and recipient's end. Furthermore, Telegram does not store secret chats, offering a secure messaging option.[10] Because of these features and the security Telegram offers, it has become ISIS's communication platform of choice.[11]

Methods

Online content featuring disabled fighters was collected off the encrypted messaging platform, Telegram, as well as open-source Internet sites. This content consists of videos, images, and supporter posts from pro-ISIS Telegram groups. These posts appeared shortly after the release of the videos analyzed in this study, offering examples of audience engagement, along with how certain elements in videos were received.

Six videos featuring disabled fighters were considered. While they most certainly do not represent all ISIS content featuring disabled individuals, with the findings of this research note not being generalizable to the overall population, they do provide an understanding of the utility of disabled fighters in the group. This assumption is made on the basis that each video was analyzed looking at how disabled individuals were portrayed (in what roles), along with the narrative content (when available) used.

The videos span from 2015 – 2018, including "From Who Excused to Those Not Excused," (2015), "Inside the *Khilafah* (Caliphate) 6," (2017), "Inside the *Khilafah* 7," (2018), a video released from the Yemeni *Wilayat* (province or governorate), Bayda, (2018), "The Assault of the *Muwahideen* (the monotheists);" (2018), and "The Assault of the *Muwahideen* 3," (2018). Even though "From Who Excused to Those Not Excused," (2015), is the earliest example in the collection, it was included because it shows a shift in how disabled individuals are represented from then (in more municipal roles) and now (more combative roles).

All content was analyzed bearing in mind the concepts of Entertainment-Education and how persuasive messaging is used, looking for thematic patterns and roles attributed to disabled individuals in the group.

Disabled Fighters

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines a disability as something that impairs, limits activity, or constrains an individual's participation.[12] The U.S. federal government defines an individual with a disability as, someone who has a physical or mental impairment that confines one, if not more of their life behaviors, is known to have such an impairment, and has a record of it.[13] Bearing in mind these classifications, this article will use the WHO's definition of a disability, considering a disability as something that impairs, constrains, and restricts an individual's participation in activity. Thus, ISIS fighters with visual or perceivable impairments, such as the loss of limbs, the use of wheelchairs, crutches, along with other impairments, such as deafness, will be considered.

Conventionally, when a soldier or fighter becomes disabled, his career on the battlefield tends to be over. Mehrullah Safi's case is a good example. His career as an Afghan soldier ended when a rocket-propelled grenade exploded near him, severing his leg.[14] To make a living, he found work selling mobile phone cards on the streets, expressing that he served his country without regrets, however "when I see my wounds have no value for my government, then I do regret it."[15]

Social identity theory suggests that individuals distinguish themselves based on their group memberships and that these memberships offer pride, belonging, and self-esteem.[16] Additionally, notions of self become categorized within the group, fostering in-group unity at the expense of an out-group.[17] Conflicts are prime examples where concepts of in-groups and out-groups are prevalent. Group membership or someone's "organizational identity may be more pervasive and important than ascribed identities based on gender, age, ethnicity, race, or nationality,"[18] likely fostering a desire to define individualistic roles within groups, along with usefulness to them. As Safi's case displays, serving his country (his in-group) against an out-group was a source of pride. After his injury, he saw himself as useless to the organization (his government), which he identified with, creating feelings of regret and resentment towards his in-group.

The psychological process of group cohesion usually bonds individuals to a group and the members within it. However, since social identity is based on positive intergroup experiences, when there is a loss of cohesion, conflict, or feelings of ostracization, an individual's initial in-group can become an out-group.[19] Safi's circumstances demonstrate this. When considering groups with nefarious intentions, group cohesion and in-group identity is of great importance. Thus, an organization will benefit in the long-run by utilizing all of its members in ways that solidify group cohesion and feelings of usefulness.

History has shown that with a lack of able-bodied combatants, groups sometimes resort to unconventional fighters. Six weeks into the battle of Mosul, Iraqi forces estimated that close to 1,000 ISIS fighters were killed,[20] however with continued fighting and more concern regarding the civilian death count, the actual number of ISIS losses is unknown. Nonetheless, an increased use of unconventional fighters by ISIS was witnessed during the battle of Mosul onwards, including the use of older adults and children.[21]

During the American Civil War, the Union army experienced a lack of men for the front lines. Due to scarcity in manpower, in 1863 the "Invalid Corps" was established with over 24 regiments made mostly of men disabled by injuries or sickness.[22] The Corps was sectioned into two battalions grounded on member's physical abilities.[23] The First Battalion consisting of men with disabilities that were less severe, with responsibilities, such as combat and garrison duty, while the Second Battalion, contained men with disabilities of a higher severity, offering opportunities to clerk, nurse, and cook for the army.[24] As Reznick argues, the story of the Invalid Corps represents "the broader experience of disability during and after the Civil War, addressing such questions as how the nation responded to the human wreckage of the conflict and how members of the Corps themselves fought not only to restore the Union but also to retain their dignity as Americans and as human beings."[25]

This outlook aligns with the core values of critical disability studies, which aim to alter established views on individuals with disabilities as victims "who should adjust to the world around them."[26] While, the cultural model of disability looks at the experience of individuals from a societal context, understanding how the experience is perceived culturally, along with the positives, negatives, discriminatory, physical, or psychological pain associated with having a disability.[27] Murphy, an anthropologist by trade and someone who suffered from "a paralytic illness,"[28] argues that "disability is defined by society and given meaning by culture," making it a "social malady."[29] Capitalizing off ostracizing feelings, by providing positive reinforcements of usefulness within a society, while fostering group cohesion of all its members, creates a persuasive tool, whereby disabled individuals are given utility and functions within a group. Mobilizing individuals into different roles is also achieved by encouraging disabled individuals to take part in various actions, while shaming those that are able-bodied for not.

When studying persuasive narratives, O'Keefe notes that function-matched narratives have a higher likelihood of persuasion, as opposed to unmatched narratives, because these messages are relatable to their audience and "speak to what people want."[30-32] By highlighting fighters with disabilities, using relatable characters, and showing their usefulness to the group and its goals, ISIS is using a persuasive narrative playbook, similar to narrative persuasion techniques found in entertainment education.

Entertainment-Education and Social Cognitive Theory

Entertainment-Education (E-E) is a tool used to establish social change[33] often in health communication campaigns, or campaigns aimed at changing people's behavior. E-E is assumed to "stand on its own" when considering its narrative quality, with successful campaigns attracting audiences because of the captivating stories they tell, as opposed to their educational or persuasive nature.[34] These stories can be in the form of fiction or nonfiction,[35] using a subtle balance of educational information woven into entertainment,[36] the aim being to influence the behavior of individuals through relatable accounts. The advantages of E-E narratives are that they target individuals on a personal level, as well as at the group level, intertwining individualistic notions with social identity.

Social cognitive theory (SCT)[37] is usually used to explain the impact of entertainment-education on the behavior, beliefs, and attitudes of individuals.[38] SCT holds that changes in behavior are enacted via an individual's sense of personal control or self-efficacy.[39] If an individual perceives that they can take actions to resolve an issue, seeing that the behavior is in their reach, they are more likely to try, and in the process develop a greater sense of commitment to their choice.[40-41] By persuasively using E-E to empower individuals toward a desired outcome, there is a higher likelihood viewers will sense that they have the self-efficacy to act, obtaining desired results.

Additionally, through the use of entrancing stories, E-E utilized persuasive messages without making the persuasion obvious. As Green, Brock, and Kaufman suggest, a major element of a media production is its ability to transport an individual away from everyday life and into the story being told.[42] ISIS media employs the persuasive concepts found in E-E, to positively reinforce roles for disabled individuals in the group, while also using them as propaganda tools, imparting messages to supporters and opponents alike.

ISIS Online Content

Six videos featuring disabled fighters were analyzed, looking at how the disabled individuals were portrayed, and the narrative content used. Many of the videos feature disabled individuals in roles of active battle, whether on the battlefield, or about to commit an SVBIED attack. Others feature disabled members of ISIS as municipal workers, recruiters, or executioners. The earliest video in the collection, "From Who Excused to Those Not Excused," highlights disabled individual in more municipal roles, while later videos emphasize disabled individuals in more militaristic roles, displaying a shift in how they are portrayed in propaganda.

From Who Excused to Those Not Excused

In March of 2015, two deaf fighters were featured in a video titled "From Who Excused to Those Not Excused," where they direct their message to "the deaf and mute" of the "Islamic world." The fighters mention that they are brothers who work as traffic police in the self-proclaimed Islamic State, with the video showing them going about this job. One of the brothers, Abu 'Abdur-Rahman, declares "to the Muslims in Europe, both Arab and non-Arab, the way is open before you for you to come to the land of the *Khilafah* (Caliphate), and the Islamic State is expanding."[43] March of 2015 was a time when recruitment, the encouragement of migration (*hijrah)*, and state building were still goals of the Islamic State[44] with Abu 'Abdur-Rahman's statement reflecting this.

Further in the video, the brothers are featured in military roles where they are shown launching missiles at Peshmerga barracks. Thus, the video not only attempts to recruit individuals who are deaf and mute to the Islamic State, but also shows the various roles available to disabled individuals who might consider migration.

Inside the Khilafah 6

"Inside the *Khilafah* 6," released in December of 2017,[45] and one of eight videos in a series (as of December 2018), features Abu Salih al-Amriki, an amputee, American fighter (according to his *kunya* or nom de guerre). Instead of being portrayed as a victim, al-Amriki is the star in the four minute and 16 second video, where he calls on individuals with disabilities to "rise with one leg or no legs. Rise from your sitting and strike the *kufar* (unbelievers/infidels)."[46] He goes on to challenge "brothers" with or without limbs "to a race towards

the gates of *jannah* (paradise)," while he threatens Trump and calls on supporters in America to do attacks at home.[47] This video utilizes al-Amriki in a role of mobilization to action. By highlighting a disabled fighter in a position of strength, the video seeks to encourage other individuals to commit attacks where they are. This not only displays a persuasive message of mobilization, but also reflects a shift in ISIS's military strategy from encouraging immigration to the Islamic State, to urging supporters to take actions 'at home.'

Inside the Khilafah 7

In the next installment of the series, five disabled individuals appear in "Inside the *Khilafah* 7," released in February of 2018.[48] The beginning of the video frames the overall context of the narrative when the narrator states that "the sons of the *Khilafah* rose as one body despite their wounds in response to the call of *jihad*."[49] Around the beginning of the 20 minute and 20 second video a fighter is pushed in a wheelchair, while his companion calls on others to "support" the religion and move "onwards towards *jannah* (paradise)," while battlefield images of amputee fighters on crutches are featured throughout the film, in addition to what appears to be a women fighting on the battlefield.[50] At 50 minutes and 50 seconds into the video, Abu 'Abdillah al-Shami, a wheelchair-confined fighter is featured with the video's narrator stating that al-Shami was "a man among the men of resolve. He was not held back by obstacles, nor by the tears of a loved one, nor the hopeful plea of an affectionate and merciful companion,"[51] the "obstacles" presumably being his disability. Further in the segment, it is al-Shami's personal statement that offers insight on disabled fighters in the Islamic Sates:

> "*I advise you to fear Allah, and I advise you to be steadfast, my brothers. By Allah, by Allah, the best path and the quickest path to Jannah (paradise) is to carry out an istishhadi (martyrdom) operation. I advise you to carry out istishhadi operations. I advise you to march forth behind Amirul-Muminin (Commander of the Faithful). Go after the atheist and apostate PKK. Deal with them and with all the religions of Kufr (unbelievers/infidels), my brothers. By Allah, we are not suffering hardships. By Allah, we are enjoying blessings that no one knows of except Allah. It's true that I'm disabled, but I've been given a lot of suggestions in terms of areas I could work in. By Allah, I'm not doing this out of weakness, or because of any anguish or suffering. By Allah, it is only due to my desire to meet Allah* (emphasis added)."[52]

Al-Shami's words point to him having been directed towards roles within the group, appropriate to his disabled status. In this case, his role was to carry out a SVBIED attack.

The Assault of the Muwahideen and The Assault of the Muwahideen 3

The first installment of "The Assault of the *Muwahideen*," was released in October 2018, while "The Assault of the *Muwahideen* 3," was released in December 2018. Both videos come from the Barakah province and show disabled individuals actively fighting on the frontlines. The first video features six disabled fighters with the more memorable scenes being a one-legged man who looks to be in his 20s, getting into an armored vehicle destined for the frontlines, while in a different scene, a one-armed fighter operates an automatic weapon during an attack. In "The Assault of the *Muwahideen* 3," a man with a prosthetic leg is shown fighting on the battlefield among his brothers in arms. The two videos are actively highlighting disabled fighters, while portraying their utility in roles of combat, where able-bodied members of ISIS fight side-by-side with disabled fighters.

ISIS is also using individuals with disabilities as executioners. A handful of images and videos, for example images released in 2016 by the *al-Hayat* media wing out of the Libyan *Wilayat* of Sirte, purportedly shows a wheelchair-bound fighter executing an alleged spy by crucifixion,[53] while a video released in May of 2018, from the Yemeni *Wilayat,* Bayda, also displays a wheelchair-bound fighter executing a prisoner by gunshot.[54] These images and videos display individuals with disabilities in roles of power where notions of victimhood are reversed.

Furthermore, they offer visual narratives that incorporate empowering, persuasive messaging aimed at a specific audience through a modification of E-E. By displaying fighters with disabilities in roles that are not only useful, but in some cases powerful, these videos employ influential messaging, incorporating social identity and group cohesion. Moreover, these media products imply that disabled fighters present aspects of utility to

ISIS, whether as martyrs, spokesmen, or in other roles, in turn providing disabled individuals with feelings of usefulness and a collective purpose.

Audience Engagement

After the release of "Inside the *Khilafah* 7," audience engagement in Telegram groups was observed by the author. Supporters shared screenshots and montages of disabled fighters featured in videos and official ISIS propaganda releases. These images were accompanied by sentiments reflecting praise, pride, along with shaming able-bodied individuals who were not answering the call to *jihad*.

A post on February 14, 2018 in the *Dabiq* group, shows three images of an amputee fighter on crutches with the remark, "A slap in the face of anyone who left *jihad* without (a valid) excuse," (see Figure 1) while another post on March 18, 2018, in the *Ansar-ul-Haqq* group features an image of Abu 'Abdillah al-Shami and praises "Inside the *Khilafah* 7" (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Example post in the *Dabiq* group, February 14, 2018
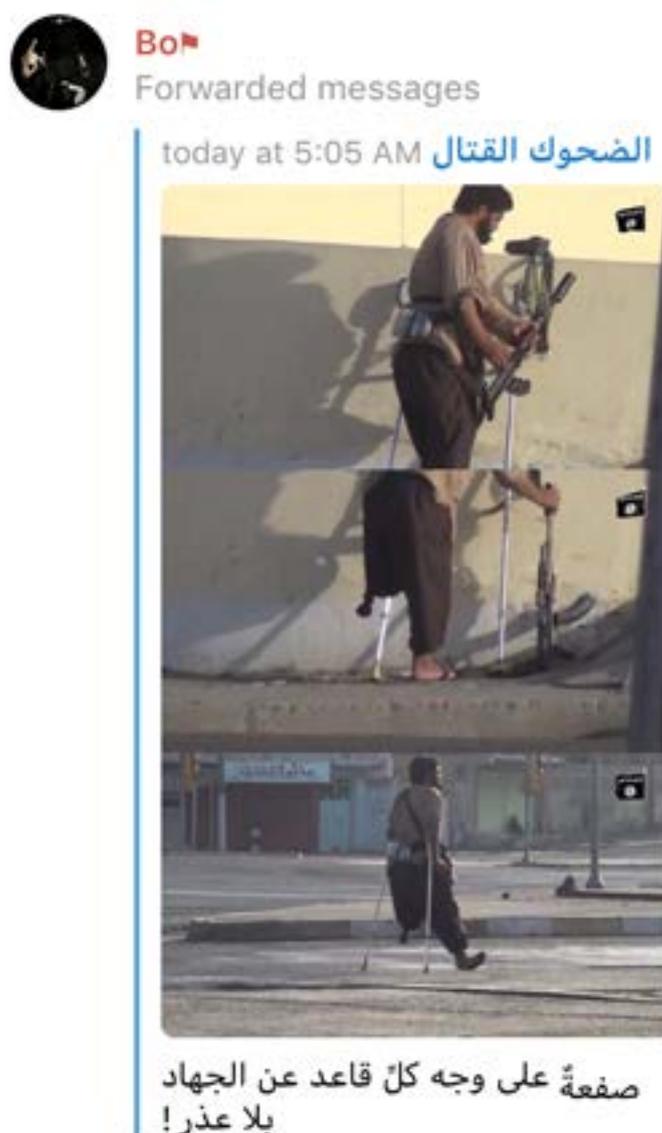
"A slap in the face of anyone who left jihad without (a valid) excuse."

Figure 2: Example post in the *Ansar-ul-Haqq* group March 18, 2018

"Release: Inside 7 (is) the most stupendous, words cannot describe it, it shows the (wonders of) giving, sacrifice, redemption, and great (rare) heroic acts rarely found elsewhere except within the Islamic State that makes (real) men…"

These posts suggest encouragement of mobilization into action, along with mobilization of ideas and shared beliefs. Concepts of heroic deeds, what makes "real men," as well as shaming those who are able-bodied for not taking up arms, is implied. The persuasive messages within "Inside the *Khilafah* 7" have not been lost on the audience, who not only advance the narratives within the video, but also enforce similar messages in real time among like-minded individuals. Supporters encourage the mobilization of able-bodied individuals through tactics of shame, while disabled fighters are revered for their courageous efforts towards the cause.

Implications and Future Trends in Terrorism

ISIS's use of disabled fighters implies that disabled individuals present aspects of utility to the group, in turn delivering feelings of usefulness and identity to disabled members. While there could be a number of reasons why this is taking place (loss of able-bodied fighters or an "all hands on deck" scenario), it is clear that ISIS is increasingly capitalizing on the use of disabled individuals in their media, something not seen in such a capacity with other terror organizations. Groups like the Taliban and Boko Haram are known to use disabled individuals as suicide attackers, however in Taliban propaganda, the perpetrators are not featured in the group's media products[55] and in many cases their identities remain unknown.[56] This suggests that for ISIS, the utility of disabled individuals goes beyond cannon fodder and into the realms of propaganda tools.

In Aggarwal's analysis of "The Caravan/Procession of Lights 2," another video featuring a disabled fighter, he argues that disabled individuals exemplify ISIS's "value of steadfastness despite affliction."[57] This could also be said about the ways in which disabled fighters are presented in "From Who Excused to Those Not Excused," "Inside the *Khilafah* 6," "Inside the *Khilafah* 7," "The Assault of the *Muwahideen*," "The Assault of the *Muwahideen* 3," along with videos showing disabled executioners. These videos not only provide examples of roles within the group that disabled individual might seek to explore, but send powerful messages to opponents, as well as supporters.

Narratives aimed at supporters suggest that disabled fighters are exemplified for their heroic actions despite their afflictions, while they are also used as a shaming mechanism to recruit able-bodied individuals into action. The overall message sent to opponents is that ISIS, regardless of its loss of territory and manpower, remains

a viable threat, since all members, including those that might be deemed unconventional fighters, are willing to answer the call. Furthermore, there is no indication that ISIS utilizes disabled individuals in high-ranking, decision-making processes,[58] implying that their main utility falls within the realms of propaganda, recruitment, and as battlefield replacements for able-bodied combatants.

When considering future trends in terrorism, ISIS's use of disabled individuals marks a new trend in terrorism, where the typical profile of a fighter, has changed. Horgan, Bloom, Daymon, Kaczkowski, and Tiflati demonstrate that ISIS is also using older adults as suicide bombers, in SVBIED attacks, and for recruitment purposes, particularly with the onslaught of the battle of Mosul.[59] ISIS is also known for its unprecedented mobilization of children in martyrdom operations.[60] Thus, the group is utilizing individuals in roles not normally associated with common conceptions of fighters. This in part may be due to a high loss of fighters on the battlefield and the Coalition's attempts to eradicate ISIS, producing an "all hands on deck" effect.

Research shows that terror groups learn from one another, applying organizational learning to further their agendas, gain news skills, recruit, and become better equipped in their terror tactics.[61] This suggests that future groups may apply similar strategies, utilizing disabled individuals and other unconventional fighters in the group, in their media products, and as attackers. Exploiting all members of an organization; the young, old, and disabled, offers increased manpower, especially when a group has suffered losses.

From a security standpoint, ISIS's use of disabled and unconventional fighters poses a threat not customarily associated with terrorism, thus providing thoughtworthy implication to current security measures. Take for example the expedited Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) screening measures at airports for passengers that are 75 years or older. They allow seniors to leave their shoes on, along with a light jacket during the screening process.[62] For individuals with disabilities, the TSA permits them to also leave their shoes on during screening procedures, while further accommodations are made on a case-to-case basis.[63] Additionally, as Comalli displays, the threat that individuals with disabilities present is often overlooked, consequently providing an advantage in attack planning, which includes the element of surprise.[64]

ISIS's use of unconventional fighters, including disabled individuals, should be considered when reviewing security procedures since they present new complications to measures already in place. Finally, the group's increased use of children, older adults, and disabled fighters into roles of mobilization, signals an age where conventional fighters are not the only ones carrying out operations, thus opening the door to further study on this phenomenon.

From a counter-messaging perspective, ISIS's use of disabled individuals offers a challenging undertaking, since they are drawing on a marginalized community in the Middle East where having a disability is taboo.[65] By offering disable individuals with useful roles, giving them agency, purpose, and a sense of belonging, ISIS is challenging conventional norms, even if the groups' main purpose is utilizing disabled individuals as propaganda tools or suicide attackers. A means of countering these media products is to highlight the use of disabled fighters as a sign of desperation. If a group resorts to using its most vulnerable members, it sends a signal that it has lost many of its able-bodied fighters, consequently showing weakness. From a recruitment standpoint, no one wants to join a losing battle.

While this study is limited in its scope of analyzed content, it highlights ISIS's use of disabled fighters and the many roles they play. Examining a larger collection of media content, across a greater span of time, would allow for more generalizable results, however with violent extremist content being flagged and taken down fairly quickly, many resources that were once available to researchers online no longer exist, making the task difficult.

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Notes

[1] This research was partly conducted and funded from the Minerva Research initiative Documenting the Virtual Caliphate Minerva #N00014-16-1-3174 and the office of naval research. All opinions are exclusively those of the author and do not represent the Department of Defense or the Navy. I would also like thank J.M. Berger, Dr. Mia Bloom, Dr. Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, Dr. William McCants, Dr. Weeda Mehran, and Dr. Craig Whiteside for advising and/or discussing issues on this topic with me, Dr. Tillman Russell for assistance on the first draft, and Dr. Hicham Tiflati for translation support.

[2] Terrorism and disability has been associated with the killing of wheelchair-bound Leon Klinghoffer, in the 1985 cruise ship hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* by Palestinian terrorists, (see, Jennifer Latson (2015) "A Murder That Shcoker the World, at Sea and on Stage," *Time*, accessed May 4, 2018, http://time.com/4055773/achille-lauro/) the targeted killing of wheelchair-confined Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, by an Israeli airstrike in 2004, (see, James Bennet (2004) "Leader of Hamas Killed by Missile in Israeli Strike," *The New York Times*, accessed May 4, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/22/world/leader-of-hamas-killed-by-missile-in-israeli-strike.html) and in 2008, the use of two women with Down's syndrome in remote-controlled suicide attacks on Baghdad markets (see, Michael Howard (2008) "Bombs Strapped to Down's Syndrome Women Kill Scores in Baghdad Markets," *The Guardian*, accessed on May 4, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/02/iraq.international1), the later example rendering the perpetrators into victims by taking away their agency through the use of remotely detonated devices and Down's syndrome presenting intellectual incapacities in those with the disability (see, Jamie O. Edgin, "Cognition in Down Syndrome: A Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience Perspective," *WIREs Cogn Sci*, Vol. 4, (2013), pp. 307-317 and "Understanding Intellectual Disability and Health," University of Hertfordshire, accessed December 19, 2018, http://www.intellectualdisability.info/intellectual-disability).

[3] See, "ISIS uses disabled terrorists to fight on front lines" (2017), *The Baghdad Post* (accessed June 13, 2018), http://www.the-baghdadpost.com/EN/story/16641/ISIS-uses-disabled-terrorists-to-fight-on-front-lines, Bridget Johnson (2018), "What's Behind ISIS' Recent Video Use of Jihadists with Disabilities," *Homeland Security Today US* (accessed on May 5, 2018). https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/terrorism-study/whats-behind-isis-recent-video-use-jihadists-disabilities/ and Alexander Korenkov, "Terrorists with Disabilities," *The Counter Terrorist: Journal for Law Enforcement, Intelligence & Special Operations Professionals*, Vol. 11, Issue 3, (2018). Pp. 26-33.

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[5] Tara L. Gruenewald, Arun S. Karlamangla, Gail A. Greendale, Burton H. Singer, and Teresa E. Seeman, "Feelings of Usefulness to others, Disability, and Mortality in Older Adults: The MacArthur Study of Successful Aging," *The Journal of Gerontology*, Vol. 62, Issue 1, (2007), p. 29.

[6] Michael Howard (2008) "Bombs Strapped to Down's Syndrome Women Kill Scores in Baghdad Markets," *The Guardian* (accessed on May 4, 2018) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/02/iraq.international1

[7] Virginia Comolli, *Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist Insurgency* (London, U.K.: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 2015), p. 77.

[8] Cross-platform refers to Telegram operating on multiple computers, phones, and tablets with different operating or software packages, while users can access Telegram on demand through Telegram's Internet cloud servers. Thus, wherever there is an Internet connection, users can access the platform.

[9] See Telegram, "Sending Files on Steroids – And More," (accessed May 29, 2019) https://telegram.org/blog/files-on-steroids

[10] Rhiannon Williams (2014) "What is Telegram: The New WhatsApp?," *The Telegraph*, (accessed April 4, 2018) http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/10658647/What-is-Telegram-the-new-WhatsApp.html.

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[12] See, "Disabilities," *World Health Organization*, (accessed May 14, 2018). http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/

[13] See, "Frequently Asked Questions," *United States Department of labor*, (accessed on May 14, 2018). https://www.dol.gov/odep/faqs/general.htm#3

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[15] Ibid.

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[17] Ibid

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[31] If an individual has high self-monitoring characteristic, meaning they control or regulate their self-presentation, modifying their behavior "to fit situational considerations," higher value will be attributed to qualities presenting self-image, with image-oriented appeals being more agreeable. Daniel J. O'Keefe, *Persuasion: Theory and Research, Third Edition*, p. 39.

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[53] See, Jack Moore (2016). "ISIS Releases Images of Wheelchair-bound Executioner 'Crucifying Spy' In Libya's Sirte," *Newsweek*, (accessed May 3, 2018) http://www.newsweek.com/isis-releases-images-wheelchair-bound-executioner-crucifying-spy-libyas-sirte-422477

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[57] Neil Krishan Aggarwal, *Media Persuasion in the Islamic State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 187.

[58] To the best of the researchers' knowledge and after consulting with scholars, J.M. Berger, Dr. William McCants, and Dr. Craig Whiteside, there are no known high-ranking ISIS members who came into their positions with visible disabilities, as opposed to gaining ones while in their positions due to fighting, airstrikes, or attacks.

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