

Countering Islamist Extremist Narratives: A Strategic Briefing



By Jonathan Russell and Haras Rafiq



Quilliam is a counter-extremism think tank. We are an independent not-for-profit organisation based in London that focuses on Islamist radicalisation, extremism, terrorism and how to counter these phenomena. Our work involves research, outreach and advocacy, all combining to fulfil our mission to challenge the narratives that perpetuate extremism of all kinds and the ideologies that underpin these narratives.

Jonathan Russell is Quilliam's Head of Policy. He holds a BA in Arabic, German and Persian from the University of Exeter and an MSc in the History of International Relations at the London School of Economics. As Head of Policy, he is responsible for maintaining Quilliam's position as a non-partisan counter-extremism think-tank and leads on all policy work. Jonathan has written papers for Quilliam on The Effectiveness of Al Qaeda (2013), a White Paper on Prevent (2014) and Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7 (2015). He features regularly in the UK print and broadcast media.

Haras Rafiq is Quilliam's Managing Director and an Executive Board Member. He is currently a member of Prime Minister David Cameron's Community Engagement Forum (CEF) Task Force and was formerly a member of the UK Government's task force looking at countering extremism in response to the 2005 terrorist bombings in London, as well as being a peer mentor for IDeA – advising regional government.

The authors would like to thank Nazish Khan, Felix Stewart, Julia Ebner and Verbalisation whose support was helpful for the writing of this report. The authors also thank Maajid Nawaz and Noman Benotman, whose guidance and expertise was invaluable.

For further information contact Quilliam:

Email: information@quilliamfoundation.org

Tel: +44 (0)207 182 7280

www.quilliamfoundation.org

Countering Islamist Extremist Narratives: A Strategic Briefing, January 2016

© Quilliam 2016 – All rights reserved

ISBN number – 978-1-906603-22-9

The majority of this report was written as part of Quilliam's evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee's (HASC) inquiry on Countering Extremism¹. In addition to the analysis of the Islamist narrative and the strategic framework required to counter it, this strategic briefing includes three case studies of counter-narratives put together by Quilliam (not included in the HASC submission), and recommendations based on experience, expertise and these case studies for future counter-narrative approaches.

Islamist Narratives

1. Narrative is central to radicalisation, extremism and terrorism. In its simplest incarnation, the Islamist narrative is "Islam is under attack and we must defend it". In terrorism, it is used to promote violence, in extremism it is used to promote values that are antithetical to human rights norms, and in radicalisation it is used to exploit vulnerable people and recruit them to the cause. This narrative is sufficiently broad to apply to populations all over the world, to local and international conflicts, and to oppose domestic and foreign policies. It is sufficiently malleable to apply to group and personal grievances, both real and perceived.
2. The Islamist narrative must be tackled as a counter-extremism priority, because failure to do so will make other counter-extremism work less effective, and operations in other spheres less effective too. We must consider that both military action in Iraq and the lack of military action in Bosnia, and indeed both approaches in Syria, were seen as evidence of the above narrative. Domestically, counter-terrorism legislation, the Prevent Strategy and personal unemployment have all been grievances that have been exploited in this narrative.
3. ISIS is currently using this broad Islamist narrative to recruit local populations, establish its predominance over other terrorist organisations, and radicalise Western Muslim

¹ Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry on Countering Extremism, Written Evidence by Quilliam Foundation <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/countering-extremism/written/25722.pdf>

populations. Having claimed to establish a Caliphate in 2014, its variation on the above narrative for local populations is “The Iraqi and Syrian governments, in cahoots with the Crusader-Zionist-Shia alliance, opposed Sunni Islam and did not provide basic services. Join the Caliphate because we will defend you and provide for you;” to members of other terrorist groups, its developed narrative is “Our Caliphate is the only effective means of defending Islam from both the near-enemy and the far-enemy;” and to Western Muslim populations, the variation on the narrative is “You are not welcome in the West because you are Muslim and it is your duty to join our Caliphate as it is the only way we can defend Islam.”

4. According to the recent Quilliam report *Virtual Caliphate*, ISIS publishes more than 30 unique pieces of propaganda each day, and its broader narrative can be stratified into six sub-themes: Brutality; Mercy; War; Victimhood; Belonging; and Utopianism.² In this, ISIS monopolises the notions of winning (through its war narrative) and losing (through its victimhood narrative), and thereby shuts down the space for opposition to the group. Only by countering the broad Islamist narrative, and how ISIS uses it in its propaganda to radicalise and recruit, will we be able to make progress in our foreign policy priorities for pursuing peace and stability in the region.
5. Domestically, counter-extremism work in general and the Prevent strategy in particular has been accused of suffering from a perception deficit.³ Counter-extremism, some of which is centred on engagement with Muslim communities, or requires Muslim community involvement as part of a broader civil society response, must improve its perception if it is to be effective. But on closer analysis of this perception deficit, it is clear that there is an orchestrated self-styled Preventing Prevent lobby, which seeks to undermine counter-extremism work by fitting it to the broader Islamist narrative as detailed above, and perpetuating opposition to all counter-extremism without proposing

² Winter, Charlie, *The Virtual Caliphate*, Quilliam Foundation (2015) <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/the-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy.pdf>

³ Russell, Jonathan and Theodosiou, Alex, *Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7*, Quilliam Foundation (2015) <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/counter-extremism-a-decade-on-from-7-7.pdf>

an alternative. Thus, without exposing and dismantling the Islamist narrative first, it is clear that other counter-extremism approaches are unlikely to be successful.

6. The Islamist narrative is underpinned and reinforced by, most prominently, the Salafi-jihadi ideology. Effective countering of the Islamist narrative must necessarily engage with and challenge the Salafi-jihadi ideology. The elements of this ideology are politicised manipulations of the Islamic faith, each build on the last, take violent and exclusivist interpretations of otherwise neutral Islamic notions, claim to represent “the true Islam”, and thereby make it more difficult for the Islamist narrative to be challenged. In particular, it considers:
 - a. literalism rather than freedom to interpret scripture;
 - b. governance based on this literalism;
 - c. opposition to *shirk* (polytheism), which is considered to be anything that contests this mode of governance;
 - d. *Al-wala' wa-l-bara'* (loyalty and disavowal) which makes a clear delineation between Muslims and non-Muslims, and permits certain behaviours towards the latter
 - e. *takfir* (excommunication) which places Muslims who don't agree with this mode of governance in the camp of non-Muslims and legitimises violence against them;
 - f. *jihad* (struggle but interpreted as violence), which becomes the method to implement this vision of governance both defensively and offensively;
 - g. *Istishhad* (martyrdom), which permits suicide terrorism within this interpretation of *jihad* as a literal declaration of faith; and
 - h. an absolute moral certitude that these actions are divinely mandated and, in the case of ISIS, only permissible to be delivered by this group.
7. Non-violent Islamist groups share the Islamist narrative that is perpetuated by terrorist groups like Islamic State and many also agree with elements of the Salafi-jihadi ideology that legitimises it, even if they disagree with the use of violence to pursue this vision (in the case of groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in the UK), consider military coups a more appropriate strategy (in the case of groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir), or believe that while violence is mandated, consider ISIS an illegitimate caliphate (in the case of groups like Al Qaeda). Lone actors and cells may also buy into the narrative and the ideology to a greater

or lesser extent and be motivated to commit acts of terrorism in Western countries. While air strikes might be considered an appropriate strategy to degrade and destroy ISIS, counter-terrorism laws might be prudent to proscribe Al Qaeda, and surveillance could be considered wise to prevent attacks by lone actors and cells, these top-down approaches will be insufficient to counter the appeal of all of these groups. These will also be inappropriate and disproportionate if seeking to counter the influence of non-violent groups that are either deemed to play the mood music to which suicide bombers dance, or more broadly considered detrimental to community cohesion. By contrast, countering the narrative that they all share and the ideology that they promote, is an appropriate, proportionate, and likely more effective way of ensuring that there is no atmosphere in which a jihadist insurgency can thrive.

8. The Islamist narrative has been normalised in the United Kingdom, and other European countries, over the last two decades due to the influence of non-violent Islamist organisations, and the foreign policy priorities of some Middle Eastern countries to spread Salafi doctrine in British mosques, madrassahs, community groups and other educational settings. For this reason, their 'Islamic' notions have politicised connotations in the minds of many British Muslims, rendering them unable to question the ideology even if they do not subscribe to the violence it is used to promote. Counter-extremism work, when seeking to challenge the Islamist narrative and Salafi-jihadi ideology, must consider the educational structures and foreign funding that perpetuate that which we must all counter.

Countering Islamist Narratives

9. Counter-extremism approaches have predominately focused negatively on extremists or positively on those vulnerable to radicalisation, but very little on the different aspects of the radicalisation process itself, whether that is the narrative, the grievances or the identity crisis it exploits, or the ideology that underpins it. Counter-narrative approaches must fill this gap.

10. Counter-narratives must be developed following obtaining an in-depth understanding of the various tenets of the Islamist narrative and the Salafi-jihadi ideology, as well as an appreciation of how it is used to manipulate the 22 different aspects that constitute vulnerability, as documented in the Extremist Risk Guidance issued for the Channel Vulnerability Assessment⁴. Counter-narratives must respond to each of these aspects as well as more up-to-date output from terrorist organisations such as ISIS. For this reason, it is important to consider the narrative variance within ISIS’s propaganda output and target counter-narratives to this. While over 50% of ISIS’s propaganda concern the “utopia” narrative⁵, existing counter-narratives focus on the “brutality” aspect (which accounts for less than 5% of ISIS output), and there is little suggestion that this is likely to be effective to dissuade the target audience from extremism and terrorism.
11. All counter-narratives, both online and offline, must ideally first conduct robust target audience analysis to ascertain the most appropriate message, and the most effective language, messenger, tone, and format to achieve the behavioural change desired. These aspects may be different depending on age group, gender, grievance expressed, and level of pre-existing commitment to the Islamist narrative, whether that is someone in the process of radicalisation (ranging from vulnerable, family member, empathiser, sympathiser, supporter, activist, member, violent member to dangerous member) or in the deradicalisation process (ranging from disengaged member, disenfranchised member, disturbed member, through to deradicalised former).
12. Once the target audience analysis and counter-narrative creation is complete, campaigns should consider the best dissemination strategy, again in relation to the target audience in order to improve the likelihood of achieving the desired behavioural change. This must consider the format, platform and messenger for dissemination (as distinct from these

⁴ *Channel Duty Guidance: Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism*, HMG (2015) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425189/Channel_Duty_Guidance_April_2015.pdf

⁵ Winter, Charlie, *Documenting the Virtual Caliphate*, Quilliam Foundation, July 2015 <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL-documenting-the-virtual-caliphate.pdf>

aspects in the content creation), and may consider different phases of dissemination. If they are to be effective, the challenge for counter-narratives is to penetrate the echo chambers of the various target audiences without reinforcing them, and some compromise on language and message may be necessary to achieve this.

13. Beyond countering the narratives detailed above, it is advisable that alternative narratives are developed. Counter-narratives may be seen as negatively framed and may concede ground to extremist organisations. By contrast, alternative narratives can help set the agenda and engage the target audiences by, amongst other things, promoting liberalism, suggesting the synergy between Islam and human rights, endorsing human rights- and rule of law-friendly approaches to grievances, action instead of inaction, and humanitarian responses to perceived suffering.
14. Government must be aware that its policies and actions in other related fields can have an impact on counter-extremism work in general and counter-narrative work in particular. Notwithstanding other important reasons, it is in this regard that government must: uphold human rights norms in all policy so as to maintain the moral high ground, and not exacerbate the grievances that the Islamist narrative exploits; communicate foreign policy and counter-terrorism policy clearly so as to minimise its exploitation by the Islamist narrative in the radicalisation process; consider the merits of allegiances with foreign governments with questionable human rights records and/or support for extremism and terrorism so as to be consistent in their tackling of extremism; commit to tackling extremism of all kinds, not just Islamist extremism, so that polarisation of communities does not perpetuate and the negative symbiotic relationship between Islamist and far-right or anti-Muslim extremism is systematically dismantled; and desecuritize counter-extremism policy where possible so as to ensure that domestic grievances often listed by those vulnerable to radicalisation are not magnified before the narratives are countered.
15. Different aspects of counter-narrative work will be best carried out by different stakeholders if it is to be most effective. While governments have pursued some counter-

narrative work overtly themselves, they have met limited success, largely due to the existing negative perception of governments by the target audience. Government can bypass this by operating discreetly, or by simply setting the strategic direction, perhaps with requisite structures, funding, training and resources, to encourage civil society to carry this out. On the other hand, some civil society responses have been poorly funded, poorly researched, and without requisite business acumen, despite having noble intentions. Technology companies have shown a willingness to invest in countering extremist narratives that use their platforms to spread extremism, but often lack the knowledge of extremism. Some of the best examples of counter-narrative campaigns have been products of public-private-3rd sector partnerships, and this is to be recommended.

16. Counter-narrative work must be consistently monitored and evaluated. For the first time, given the predominately online nature of this approach, counter-extremism work can use web-based analytic tools to evaluate its primary and secondary effectiveness. It is important that this goes beyond countering the number of impressions and views, to consider the positive engagement metrics such as likes, retweets and shares, as well as the value of these various engagements (ie whether the intended target audience has engaged with the counter-narrative). Beyond this, it is vital that campaigns are evaluated for the behavioural change they engender, and counter-narrative work must preemptively consider drawing a base line of expected behaviour of its target audience, as well as off-ramps and engagement with secondary material that would constitute success.
17. Both government-led and civil society-led counter-narrative strategy must learn from neighbouring problem areas such as recruitment to gangs, messaging from other extremist organisations, and strategic communications challenges in the public and private sectors in order to improve all aspects of this approach. In particular, counter-narrative work can learn from behavioural change approaches carried out by the Ministry of Defence and others in counter-insurgency strategies.

18. It is important that counter-narratives are not simply seen as an online approach. While the Internet gives new opportunities for communication, mobilisation, and evaluation (for extremists and counter-extremists alike), effective approaches will comprehensively bridge the gap between online and offline activity. There is a desperate need to apply this counter-narrative theory to other ungoverned spaces such as schools, universities, mosques, prisons and communities.

Case Study - #NotAnotherBrother

#NotAnotherBrother was a campaign put together by Quilliam and Verbalisation and is an example of successful collaboration between private and 3rd sectors.⁶



Expert input on the project came from those whose experience includes military, behavioural science, extremism, strategic communications, advertising, creative arts, counter-extremism policy, teaching, psychological operations and political campaigning.

The project was a direct consequence of (both published and unpublished) Quilliam and Verbalisation research on the Islamist narrative, the Salafi-Jihadi ideology, ISIS's

⁶ The various films for the #NotAnotherBrother campaign can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljIQ0ctzyZE&list=PLyCnHE3hgntzaUH-S_36lfNZowpzUF8e

propaganda output, the radicalisation process, and strategic communications approaches to preventing radicalisation.

Extensive target audience analysis was completed to isolate the intended target audience for the campaign, namely those who support, sympathise or empathise with the Islamist narrative and the Salafi-jihadi ideology, or aspects of it, even if they do not act violently as a result of their views.

The objective was to encourage this target audience to go beyond condemning ISIS to moving away from their commitment (at whatever level that may be) to the Islamist narrative and the Salafi-Jihadi ideology, in order to reduce the number of British citizens joining ISIS as foreign terrorist fighters.

Verbalisation considered the most appropriate language, message and format required to contribute to the desired behavioural change for the target audience. In this, it was decided that the video would:

- be 100 seconds long;
- increase the perceived costs and reduce the perceived rewards of joining ISIS;
- increase the perceived rewards and reduce the perceived costs of not joining ISIS;
- demonstrate links between the target audience's extreme words and jihadists' actions;
- use the most accessible language and images for 16-24 year old British Muslims; and
- mimic ISIS's production values.

After putting together the script, considering the non-verbal elements required for production to achieve the above, and the other creative elements of the project, we came together to discuss delivery. This was to ensure that it got a significant number of views, a significant number of high value views (ie within the intended target audience), to consider what we could do, at the point of delivery, to achieve the intended behavioural change, and to consider how we could use the campaign for other target audiences. We decided to:

- extend the content beyond the 100 second video to include a four minute video. This would be used to monitor target audience retention and deliver a more extensive message to those who had already watched the shorter video;
- produce several 10 second trailers and 15 tweet cards to drive traffic towards the main video;
- develop a grey dissemination strategy to best engage our target audience. This involved:
 - not including Quilliam's brand as the author;
 - instead building a digital infrastructure around the #NotAnotherBrother brand;
 - identifying and engaging 100 twitter accounts whom our target audience followed to encourage debate;
 - using 20 pre-scripted tweets to penetrate the echo chamber;
 - releasing the tweet cards and trailers to drive traffic to the 100 second video;
 - sending copies of the letter featured in the film to journalists;
 - authoring a BuzzFeed article of the 8 best counter-narrative videos; and
 - one week of testing and refinement during this phase.
- develop a white strategy to widen the reception. This involved:
 - Quilliam taking credit for it so as to help promote the video globally;
 - engaging mainstream print and broadcast media in the UK and around the world;
 - issuing a press release to our regular readers;
 - engaging policy makers with a tangible example of a counter-narrative;
 - using #NotAnotherBrother in school workshops to inspire creativity;
 - creating postcards to give to young people in schools; and
 - considering an outdoor campaign with billboard posters.

The project has been hailed as a success, and we have since evaluated the campaign to consider whether it achieved what it sought to achieve and whether there was anything we could have done differently. We are proud of the following results:

- 5,000 “high quality views” during the grey phase of the campaign;
- 10% engagement from the 100 key twitter accounts;
- 500,000 impressions within the first week of the white strategy;
- 70,000 views on YouTube alone (with 50,000 in the first week);
- 1000s of views in Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and Syria (ISIS’s main recruiting ground);
- viewers in 192 different countries;
- 27 million impressions on Twitter alone;
- TV coverage across the world including in Columbia, Israel and Iran; and
- newspaper coverage including in The Guardian, Washington Post, Huffington Post and Middle East Eye.

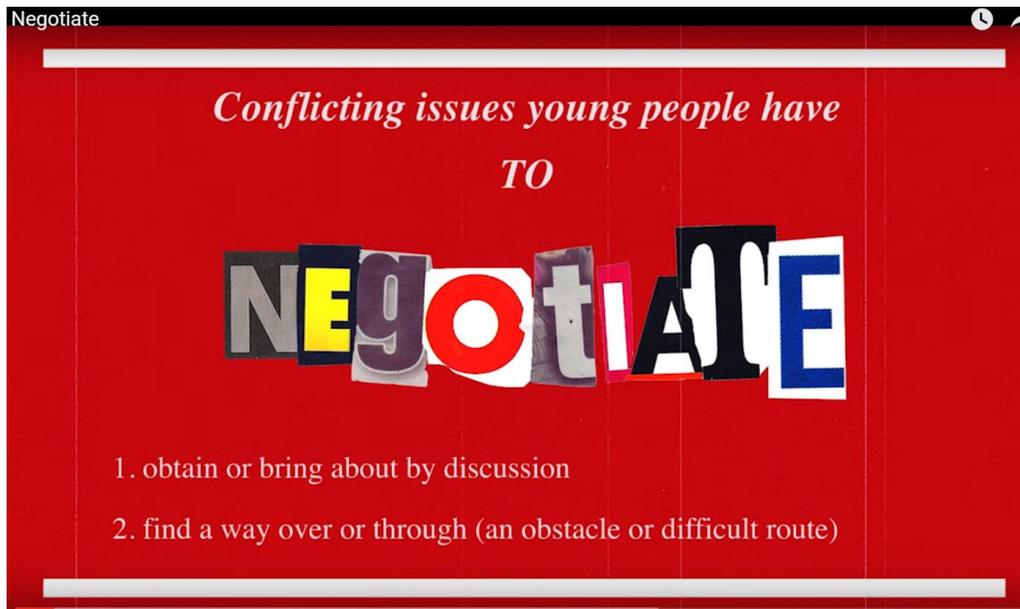
Following evaluation, we would consider the following for future campaigns:

- using technology to further identify our target audience online, beyond looking at who their key influencers were;
- extending the grey phase of the campaign to increase the value of the views;
- introducing an additional phase to the campaign that mimicked ISIS’s dissemination strategy not simply its production values, in order to reach those who directly or indirectly support ISIS, and increase the value of the views; and
- developing further secondary engagement material for target audience members who watched and liked the video, to increase the likelihood of behavioural change.

Case Study - Negotiate

Negotiate is a short counter-narrative film, made by students for students, that discusses identity crisis, one aspect of vulnerability that is exploited by extremists in the radicalisation process. The Islamist narrative, while broad enough to be applicable to a

very wide target audience, can be fit to personal situations and seemingly provide simple answers to very complex situations.⁷



Negotiate was a student-led initiative in which Quilliam facilitated the different, practical aspects of the film. The written material came from students from schools in several parts of London. It reflected their personal stories and experiences.

The three student actresses featured in the film were from the National Youth Theatre's Production, Homegrown, which was a play about radicalisation and banned due to its apparently extremist nature. The actresses wanted to be involved in an artistic project that opened up the debate about Islamism. As Quilliam disagrees with banning material or artistic projects on this basis, but rather empowering young people to be able to effectively question extremist narratives and be creative in their approach to this, we decided to take a new approach to outreach work in schools.

⁷ The film for the Negotiate campaign can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpuqDgTXzZs>

This approach involved seeing students as potential counter-extremists, rather than potentially vulnerable to radicalisation, and therefore sought to inspire them to be creative in tackling radicalisation and extremism of all kinds.

Quilliam's creative arts team ran student workshops, at which some of the written material used in the film was put together. This 'Spoken Word,' or 'Slam Poetry' genre of writing is currently very popular with 14-18 year olds and is one of the UK's fastest growing art forms. Its urban roots and accessible nature mirrors the nature of radicalisation artistically and effectively, and the students agreed that this genre was more accessible to them and the broader target audience of our counter-narratives.

The title was selected by the students to reflect all the issues they had to negotiate in modern life. These issues ranged from religion, culture, social media, depression, sexuality and academic pressures. The students identified that these things could make someone vulnerable to bullying, eating disorders, self-harming and radicalisation, and insisted that an overt focus on radicalisation that did not consider other elements of their growing up would be futile and ineffective.

The mood and the tone of the film was meant to have an overwhelming and almost confusing element to reflect the bombardment of the different issues and factors that had to be negotiated, quite often on a daily basis.

Different motifs in the film came directly from the workshops with the students. One of the students, whose parents spoke no English, made reference to the film *Pakheezah* because his mother used to watch it on repeat. The reference to 'ain't no size in a burqa sister,' was a direct quote from what was said to a teenage Muslim girl by a fellow male Muslim student because she was anxious about her body image and the pressure from the media to be thin.

These issues were brought to light in a verbatim recording session with the students. This was an intense four-hour session and was identified by the students as the most important aspect of this workshop as the participants stated that they felt they could not confide in anyone else.

The students and Quilliam agreed to use the actual recording in the film, so other students that might watch it may not feel as isolated in their point of view. The voices were distorted to preserve their anonymity.

The objectives of the film were:

- To give students a platform to be able express their views and feelings without judgment;
- To help young people consider the different aspects of vulnerability to radicalisation;
- To consider students as partners in counter-extremism and to inspire them creatively;
- To engage more effectively with our target audience in the future, by using material that was made by young people;
- To use the arts to inspire social cohesion, by inviting all the young people that took part in the film to attend the Quilliam Summer Ball to see the premiere of the film;
- To build trust outside of the classroom and be a contact point for vulnerable students, separate from state structures and free from judgement;
- To share the findings and learning from the sessions and use them effectively for other programmes and campaigns. For example Quilliam's work with Integrate Bristol saw the Negotiate video as a starting point for their student-led film, leading to effective engagement and inspiring further creativity; and
- To put into practice what we know about Islamism and focusing on young people's personal grievances on a sensitive micro level.

The film has been successfully used for subsequent outreach work and achieved the following outcomes:

- The Independent interviewed one of the students that took part and was interested in the unique approach of using a transmedia approach to tackle aspects of radicalisation;
- Quilliam feels very privileged to have gained the trust of the young students and being able to source different contacts and make the alternative narratives coming from an authentic source; and

- We have showed that combining the arts with Quilliam’s expertise and sensitivity is a successful combination, which we plan to apply further in the future.

Case Study - #NousSommesUnis

#NousSommesUnis was Quilliam’s immediate response to the Paris attacks of 13 November 2015. The past has shown that terror attacks can cause polarisation, hatred and rising divisions, all of which might play into the hands of ISIS’s narratives and recruiting strategies. Knowing that the days immediately succeeding the attacks could be crucial to shape narratives that might prevail for years or even decades, Quilliam staff went to the targeted spots in Paris to create an alternative narrative that could help to fill this vacuum.⁸



Under the motto “Nous Sommes Unis” (“We are united”), the video aimed at reinforcing a message of peace and solidarity that would counter both ISIS’s narrative of the West being at war with Islam and the National Front’s narrative of all Muslims siding with ISIS. The “nous” (“we”) was therefore meant to include people from all ethnic and religious

⁸ The film for Quilliam’s #NousSommesUnis campaign can be viewed here: <https://t.co/VXJuxeL945>

backgrounds, showing that Muslims and non-Muslims, Europeans and non-Europeans, French speakers and non-French speakers all remain united after the attacks. The clip's message was therefore that IS will not achieve its goals of polarising and dividing "us" because "we" will not give in to fear and hatred.

Quilliam's aim was also to show that the attacks should not be considered an attack against the West or an attack against non-Muslims; but an attack against humanity. The clip therefore sought to demonstrate in a very authentic, human setting that Muslims and non-Muslims alike were mourning the victims and condemning the attacks.

The 150 second video therefore showed:

- People from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds condemning IS and showing solidarity with its victims in different languages;
- Anti-ISIS placards written by the people in the clip; and
- Pictures of joy, courage, fearlessness and unity after the attacks.

In view of the time pressure, #NousSommesUnis was one of Quilliam's first clips that was not produced in cooperation with a professional video production firm. Being a non-staged, spontaneous project, the clip was thus 100% dependent on the people Quilliam encountered on the ground. The video's only stylistic device was the authenticity of these people and its most powerful dimension was its humanity.

Although the clip's message was addressed at everyone, it targeted in particular young people in France, the United Kingdom and America. Its aim was to encourage young Muslims and non-Muslims to remain united and to not give in to fear and hatred by showing that "our" love is stronger than ISIS' hatred. While we gathered over 90 minutes of footage on the streets of Paris, we knew that brevity was important to engage the target audience with our key messages.

By housing a dedicated counter-narrative team, Quilliam was able to make a snap assessment of the unfolding narratives, what was the appropriate message and deliver quickly to shape the public debate and capture the zeitgeist. The simple, but effective

frame work of Message (unity and humanity), Messenger (people of all backgrounds) and Medium (150 second video on Facebook), informed the strategic composition of this video's response.

The rationale behind naming the clip #NousSommesUnis was to piggyback on the virality of this existing hashtag and enabled us to get the film to a mass market audience that was already interested in this current event.

The clip's dissemination focused on social media, in particular Facebook, where it achieved over 100,000 views within the first week after its release. To date, our #NousSommesUnis video has received over 175,000 views, over 1,000 likes, over 250 shares and around 50 comments.

Recommendations

19. Counter-narratives must focus on the Salafi-Jihadi ideological underpinnings of the Islamist narrative which protect it from all criticism. This means working with Muslim reformers to undermine the certainty of the ideology and provide alternative interpretations of Islam that are synonymous with human rights and accessible to ISIS's target audience. These approaches must counter the aspects of the ideology detailed in paragraph 8 and offer alternatives that are firmly rooted in both Islamic values and in human rights values.
20. Government must ensure that it avoids: vilifying Islamic values or Muslims; partnering, funding or promoting those who propagate aspects of the Islamist narrative or the Salafi-Jihadi ideology; and forgoing human rights norms in counter-terrorism legislation, counter-extremism policy, foreign policy and domestic policy. In so doing, it must instead promote the liberalisation of these domains to ensure that the grievances that are exploited by extremists are not unwittingly exacerbated and that counter-narrative approaches are not derailed.

21. Counter-extremism practitioners must engage with those in the public sector, such as in the Ministry of Defence, those in the private sector, such as technology companies, those in the 3rd sector, such as counter-extremism organisations, and academics focusing on counter-radicalisation, behavioural science, and strategic communications, to build stronger coalitions to counter extremist narratives more effectively.
22. Counter-narrative campaigns must prioritise target audience analysis, behavioural change approaches, effective dissemination strategies, and evaluation techniques ahead of content creation. During campaign assembly, counter-narratives must consider finding the most appropriate message, messenger, language, tone, format, and medium for the specified target audience to achieve the specified behavioural change.
23. Dissemination of counter-narratives and alternative narratives, whether online, offline, or both, is the central element for the effectiveness of a campaign. Further research and experimentation is necessary to improve campaigns' abilities to penetrate echo chambers, influence target audiences, and effect behavioural change.
24. Promoting this approach online and offline must be a priority for this government as part of its new counter-extremism strategy. Given that it is most effectively led by civil society, government must consider helping to build coalitions and empower organisations to do this, and build the necessary capacity to contest the prowess of extremist groups and individuals online and in other ungoverned spaces.