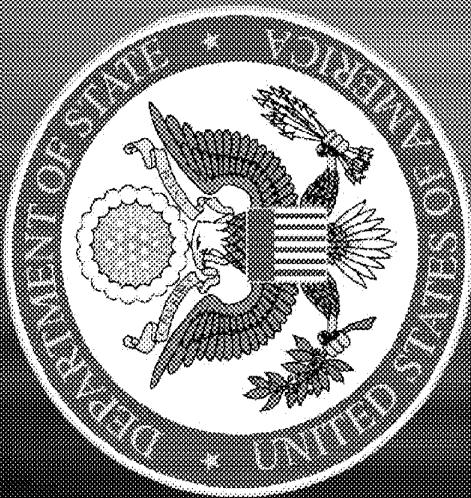


RELEASE IN FULL

UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO



# Counternarrative Messaging Strategies



U.S. Department of State

June 2015

(Unclassified//FOUO)

## Counternarrative Messaging Strategies

June 2015

## (U//FOUO) INTRODUCTION

(U//FOUO) The interagency Information Coordination Cell (ICC) employs a range of techniques to influence violent extremists, their sympathizers, and at-risk audiences. This framework provides a guide for communicators to design and implement strategies and tactics to counter violent extremist narratives and propaganda online. This framework also recognizes the limitations of online engagement and does not include a comprehensive list of more technological messaging tactics.

(U//FOUO) Conveying key messages through human-interest stories that elicit emotional reactions from a target audience is one of the most effective ways for strategic communicators to implement this framework. Personal anecdotes that humanize issues can make messages resonate more with an audience that may be disconnected or unfamiliar with them. Thus, counterterrorism narratives can be enhanced with strong visual imagery that generates an emotional reaction, which can help audiences internalize a message. For example, stories about individuals' experiences in extremist groups can demonstrate that life in such groups is less glamorous or moral than portrayed, possibly encouraging potential fighters to stay home.

Counternarrative Strategy	Objective	Tactic	Description	
<b>Direct Messaging</b>				
Sometimes referred to as "counter-messaging," direct messaging attempts to undermine the appeal of the adversary's narrative and to sow discord among extremists.				
<b>Refutation</b>	Examples: Support refutations of DAESH's (ISIS/ISIL's) claims of a caliphate; expose DAESH's false promises of battlefield glory; provide visual evidence of DAESH's failure to provide basic social services; demonstrate DAESH's competition with other terrorist groups.	Dismantling or proving false the adversary's ideology or assertions to instill doubt in the extremist agenda.	Use Facts	Maximizing the use of empirical data, statistics and established history to buttress arguments; exposing errors of fact and logic by opponents
			Poke Holes	Countering selective weak points through aggressive and detailed criticism rather than answering every argument point-by-point
			Challenge	Confronting the adversary head-on by using assertive language to deny their charges, turning their words against them and challenging them with uncomfortable questions

June 2015

Counternarrative Messaging Strategies

(Unclassified//FOUO)

Counternarrative Strategy		Objective	Tactic	Description
			Highlight Say-Do Gap	Demonstrating that the words or rhetoric of the adversary are in stark contrast to their actions
			Counterbalance Emotions	Neutralizing emotional arguments by adversaries while, on a judicious basis, exerting an opposite influence by stoking emotions against the adversary
			Expose Falsehoods	Providing compelling evidence that photos, allegations, and quotes are fabricated or untrue
<b>Denigration</b>	Examples: Demonstrate the hypocrisy of DAESH's worldview; expose its actual focus on worldly gains; expose its exploitation of children; deride DAESH leadership for hiding out while others do the fighting; emphasize DAESH's inability to grow beyond its extreme minority of supporters.	Undermining the adversary's claims to moral authority. Deriding the group, its leaders, actions, and beliefs to make it appear foolish and deprive it of its mystique.	Deride authority	Using mockery or sarcasm; undercutting the adversary in front of the wider audience
			Challenge claims	Confronting the adversary head-on by using assertive language to deny their charges, turning their words against them, and challenging them with uncomfortable questions
			Highlight Say-Do Gap	Demonstrating that the words or rhetoric of the adversary are in stark contrast to their actions

(Unclassified//FOUO)

Counternarrative Messaging Strategies

June 2015

Counternarrative Strategy		Objective	Tactic	Description
			Shame	Sharing or using personal information about an individual extremist for the purpose of attacking his moral character or embarrassing the person in front of a wider audience
<b>Indirect Messaging</b>				
Indirect messaging attempts to divert and redirect audiences from an adversary's narrative, and may provide alternative narratives.				
<b>Promotion</b>	Examples: Statistically contrast DAESH's insignificance with overwhelming positive trends; highlight affirming statements by validators, such as government, religious, and community actors; reference positive community activism against violent extremism; launch hashtag counter-campaigns	Advancing alternative narratives that emphasize solidarity, common causes, and shared values to unite non-participatory audiences against violent extremism; inoculating audiences to the adversary's narrative.	Create Authenticity/ Rapport	Establishing legitimacy and credibility by using language that connects or resonates with the audience (i.e. proverbs, common aphorisms and literary analogies)
			Create Brands	Using catch phrases to highlight core counternarrative themes and engrain these ideas in the minds of the adversary and wider audience
			Repurpose	Repackaging useful material, particularly positive material, to focus the attention of the adversary and the wider audience on the counternarrative
	Examples: Highlight heroic individual acts against violent extremism; promote positive	Providing alternative narratives that offer competing theological or ideological worldviews and	Redirection	Turning the adversary's line of attack to core counternarrative themes

(Unclassified//FOUO)

Counternarrative Messaging Strategies

June 2015

Counternarrative Strategy		Objective	Tactic	Description
	<p>role models who hijack DAESH's rhetoric; expose DAESH's incompetence.</p>	<p>solutions that supplant the adversary's narrative</p>	<p>Use Sarcasm or Parody</p>	<p>Producing both humorous and non-humorous exaggerated imitations of propaganda that the adversary intended to be serious. The imitations are intended to promote the core counternarrative themes.</p>
<p><b>Acknowledgement</b></p>	<p>Examples: Explain the underlying causes of DAESH's violent symptoms; provide creative forums for expression of grievances.</p>	<p>Recognizing suffering and extending sympathy to counter the adversary's attempts at demonization. This may include referencing past restitution or accountability.</p>	<p>Acknowledge grievances</p>	<p>Being able to acknowledge the grievances of others and acknowledge that the West has experienced failings as appropriate, while pointing to the overall positive balance sheet.</p>
<p><b>Strategic Non-Response</b></p>	<p>Examples: Avoid amplifying the false conspiracy theory of DAESH-US cooperation.</p>	<p>Also known as "strategic silence." The strategy of not responding or delaying is most effective when the negative message is getting zero traction or a third party is or will effectively counter message.</p>	<p>Do Nothing</p>	