

# Deeper understanding of ISIS propaganda can help in the fight against terrorism

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Though their time in active service may be done, many American veterans are finding new ways to serve their country from home. Douglas Wilbur, a retired major in the U.S. Army and a doctoral student in the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri, is continuing the fight against ISIS by studying the Islamic militant organization's propaganda texts and communication strategies. His work could help the military in the fight against terrorism.

In his article, Wilbur argues that ISIS [propaganda](#) is a form of strategic communication and that analyzing their materials through a neo-institutional framework (a theory that examines how a group's cultural norms and rules guide their choices,) can help researchers and military better investigate extreme propagandists' techniques and develop ways to combat them. Though most Americans do not have the background knowledge needed to read ISIS propaganda, Wilbur's time serving in Iraq helped him decipher the text. Wilbur says successfully analyzing ISIS propaganda can reveal the organization's goals, and then experts can work to combat them.

"Propaganda isn't just one guy putting together a magazine or a pamphlet; it's a form of strategic communication, which means the organization is very deliberate about it," Wilbur said. "Propaganda often is developed to support the goals of the organization at the time."

As an information operations officer in the Army, Wilbur frequently encountered ISIS propaganda and was well-informed of their methods

and tactics. Based on his experience in the Army, Wilbur wanted to perform a serious analysis of ISIS propaganda using scholarly scientific methods that he acquired through higher education.

"In the military, I was engaged in anti-propaganda efforts, but I wasn't doing it from a scientific perspective," Wilbur said. "So when I came to Mizzou, I came to become a social scientist. We learned the scientific method and how to apply it, and now I have better methods of analysis. The skills I learned at Mizzou are helping me fight ISIS."

Currently, Wilbur is working on pieces about contingency theory, which states that the best action for an organization depends on the situation; he has plans to pursue the link between propaganda and strategic communication in his dissertation. Wilbur also is an alumnus of Missouri Governor Eric Greitens' program, 'The Mission Continues,' which empowers veterans adjusting to life at home to find purpose through community service.

**More information:** Douglas Wilbur, Propaganda's Place in Strategic Communication: The Case of ISIL's Dabiq Magazine, *International Journal of Strategic Communication* (2017). [DOI: 10.1080/1553118X.2017.1317636](https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2017.1317636)

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