

Ibn Taymiyyah's Medieval Inghimas Tactics as Daesh's Modern Propaganda Instrument

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Abstract

Inghimas originated from the work of the medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyyah as an asymmetric and practicable “jihad” (holy war) tactic. This was intended to be a means for plunging destructively into the “infidel” enemy’s frontlines for “benefitting the cause of Muslims” and “serving Islam”. The other objectives behind the use of this tactic were to inspire fellow Muslims to fight, and to earn “martyrdom at the hands of the enemy”. Based on its scholarly justification and apparent repurposing potential, this original paper investigates whether Daesh as a modern jihadist organization has additionally reinvented inghimas for the fulfillment of ends that extend beyond its originally intended military purpose. Methodologically relying on thorough research that involved studying various open-source primary and secondary resources, this paper reveals that Daesh has, indeed, adapted inghimas to the production of audio, video, and text propaganda suited to 21st-century digital media. Thus, this tactic in all its various forms, and even its practitioners, are presented tactfully for public consumption in important ways. Such propaganda pertains to either claiming responsibility for recent assaults or urging further attacks, aimed at different audiences. The group thus exploits inghimas for vital outreach purposes in the digital era, in addition to its physical military utility. Effective countering of such a lethal tactic will require nothing short of deconstructing its scholarly foundations. This study carries both academic and policy significance as it sheds light on an unaddressed international security predicament, whose continued neglect will have dangerous consequences for jihadist radicalization and recruitment.

Keywords: Ibn Taymiyyah, *inghimas*, Daesh, propaganda, tactic, attack.

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Author's Note

Throughout this research paper, I have intentionally avoided reproducing commonly used English acronyms, that is, “IS” (Islamic State), “ISIS” (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), “IS-KP” (Islamic State-Khorasan Province), and “ISIS-K” (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria-Khorasan). This is because such terms lend religious legitimacy to the violent Salafist entity and its Central Asian affiliate, which partly constitutes what they seek the most.

Instead, I have opted for “Daesh” and “Daesh-Khorasan.” Daesh is the Arabic acronym for “al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa al-Sham:” the transliteration of the English phrase “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.” According to Shakir Mustafa, teaching professor of Arabic at Northeastern University, the term “Daesh” rhymes with or indicates several evil words and concepts in the Arabic language. Examples include “*fahish* (committer of heinous crimes),” “*dahis* (the one who hits others with a vehicle),” “*daeick* (crusher, crumbler),” and “*dahish* (shocker).” Notably, Daesh sounds so insulting to the jihadist group that in 2014, it threatened to “cut the tongue” of anyone who used this term publicly.** Thus, its use is also an important symbolic means of resisting the organization’s Islamist narrative.***

** Nicole Meir, “Now we say ‘the Islamic State group’ instead of ISIL,” *The Associated Press*, July 31, 2015, <https://www.ap.org/the-definitive-source/announcements/now-we-say-the-islamic-state-group-instead-of-isil/>.

*** Such resistance through careful use of language is also important because it helps delegitimize Daesh so that it cannot easily misuse the name of Islam for new recruitments—which otherwise becomes difficult with terms like “Islamic State”.

1. Introduction

For ease of understanding, the Arabic terms that appear in this paper are defined here at the outset. The most frequently occurring term is *inghimas*, which means the act of plunging recklessly into a real or perceived enemy, or daredevil fighting. Next, an *inghimasi* (plural: *inghimasis*) is a daredevil fighter or practitioner of *inghimas*. Further, in the jihadist vocabulary, *istishhad*, literally, is a martyrdom-seeking operation, commonly known as suicide bombing. An *istishhadi* (plural: *istishhadis*) is a conventional suicide terrorist, or one who practices *istishhad*. *Inghimasis* and *istishhadis* are two different types of violent extremist operatives. The former may detonate their explosives in case they are wearing them, however, it is possible only after a firefight, when ammunition has been exhausted.¹

Centuries after having been presented as a warfare concept by the 13th-century influential Islamist scholar and jurist Ibn Taymiyyah, *inghimas* remains as relevant today as it was when first propounded. Although in Islamic history, the notorious Kharijites—or *Khawarij*—who murdered the fourth Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib (the Prophet's first cousin) were the first group of militants to have initiated the practice of *inghimas* attacks as Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh have highlighted,² it was not until Ibn Taymiyyah that this significant battlefield tactic was presented doctrinally in written form. Etymologically derived from the Arabic root word *ghamasa*,³ meaning to “go deep in,” the practice entails

¹ In general, being an *inghimasi* does *not* entail wearing an explosive vest. However, even if some *inghimasis* happen to wear explosives, they detonate them only after surviving a reckless operation, when death has become certain to them *at the hands of the enemy*, which means that they would be shot dead anyway by other people. Hence, the theorization on suicide terrorism or *istishhad* does not apply to *inghimas* conceptually.

² Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hasan Abu Hanieh, *Infatuated with Martyrdom: Female Jihadism from Al-Qaeda to the 'Islamic State'* (Ammar, Jordan: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Jordan & Iraq, 2017)

³ Mehdi Laghmani, *Analysis and Assessment of Islamic State's Military Strategy in Iraq (2011-2015)* (Exeter, England: University of Exeter, 2019)

plunging into enemy lines on the battlefield—alone or with a few companions—to kill as many people as possible.

In its basic form as outlined by Ibn Taymiyyah, *inghimas* means taking a knife and rushing to stab an enemy, endangering one's own life in the process.

In his original 48-page influential treatise titled, *A Principle Regarding Plunging into the Enemy, and Is It Permitted?*, the medieval jurist, who is revered and often quoted by jihadist organizations even today, discussed this unconventional tactic. He sanctioned it as permissible and even desirable for a Muslim fighter during jihad in the event of the Muslim forces becoming outnumbered by the adversary army, even if the fighter is aware that it may result in their own death. Since the intention is to benefit Islam and Muslims, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, *inghimas* is not suicide as long as it inflicts harm upon the enemy.⁴ Moreover, there exists a possibility of surviving such a high-risk operation. Additionally, the 14th-century scholar Ahmad Ibrahim Muhammad al-Dimashqi al-Dumyati—who is more commonly known as Ibn an-Nahhas—in his literary work, *The Book of Jihad*, wrote an entire chapter on *inghimas* which lends further credibility to this warfare tactic.

For the *inghimas* fighter or *inghimasi*, there are three major motivations or purposes behind this daring commando act: (a) to inflict maximum damage upon the enemy forces; (b) to inspire fellow Muslims to fight; (c) to achieve the desirable goal of martyrdom.⁵

⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, *Counter-Terrorism Reference Curriculum*, ed. Sajjan Gohel and Peter Forster (Brussels, Belgium: Belgium, 2020)

⁵ Meir Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam: Piety, Power and Politics* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

In his influential treatise, Ibn Taymiyyah discusses three scenarios to which *inghimas*, in his view, is applicable, demonstrating that the tactic is different from conventional suicide operations:

1. *Like [in the case of] a man who storms the ranks of the infidels and penetrates them. Scholars call this “plunging into the enemy,” since [the man] is swallowed up in them like a thing that gets submersed in something that engulfs it.*
2. *And like a man who kills an infidel officer among his friends, for instance, by pouncing on him publicly, if he [can] get him by deceit, thinking he can kill him and take him unawares like that.*
3. *And [like] a man whose comrades have fled and so he is fighting the enemy alone or with a few others, and yet this is inflicting harm on the enemy, despite the fact they know they are likely to be killed.⁶*

It is important to keep in view the religio-political context in which Ibn Taymiyyah produced his work on *inghimas* and other writings on jihad. In the backdrop of the East Asian Mongols' invasion of the Middle Eastern Abbasid caliphate leading to the fall of Baghdad in 1258, the puritanical cleric from the present-day border region of Syria and Türkiye, refused to accept the invaders as “real Muslims” even after them having embraced Islam. He issued a *fatwa* (legal ruling) advocating the Mongols' rejection on religious grounds and the launching of *inghimas* attacks as a part of jihad by the defending Arab forces against such “false Muslims.”⁷

Although in his book titled *Ibn Taymiyyah in the Literature of Contemporary Jihadists*, Nigerian Salafist preacher Jabir Sani Maihula argues that Ibn Taymiyyah had called only for “defensive jihad,” militants from the

⁶ Rebecca Molloy, “Deconstructing Ibn Taymiyyah's View on Suicidal Mission,” *CTC Sentinel* 2, no. 3 (March, 2009)

⁷ NATO, *Counter-Terrorism Reference Curriculum*.

20th-century radical Egyptian Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj to the members of Daesh maintain that the jurist's approach was offensive because even though the Mongols had become Muslim, they failed to practice the *shariah* (Islamic law). By means of such imagined theological reasoning, modern jihadists are able to practice *inghimas*⁸ in their operations against fellow Muslims, such as members of the Kurdish, Syrian, and Iraqi armies. This is achieved by mounting daredevil attacks, and then leveraging them for propaganda purposes, as evident from Daesh's textual and videographic sources.

As opposed to the variety of works on conventional suicide terrorism (*istishhad*) in which death is usually certain, there is a striking dearth of literature on the crucial warfare concept of *inghimas*, despite its evident importance in the jihadists' tactic playbook. This lack of scholarly attention is particularly glaring with regard to its high propaganda value for the 21st century's major jihadist outfit, Daesh, which this paper reveals to have capitalized on this concept enormously. This analytical article thus addresses the important research gap, implying a lack of investigation into whether and to what extent *inghimas* has been repurposed strategically. It leverages thorough research comprising open-source primary and secondary materials, which all confirm *inghimas*' propaganda worth for Daesh.

This paper, thus, generates the innovative finding that this modern jihadist organization has incredibly extended the application of the multi-purpose

⁸ *Inghimas*—deployed as a battlefield and non-battlefield attack tactic as well as a jihadist propaganda vehicle—when practiced against fellow Muslims, is preceded by *takfir* (the labeling of a Muslim as an infidel). This means that *takfir* constitutes the basis of *inghimas*: without declaring the Mongols false Muslims, Ibn Taymiyyah could not have sanctioned such an extreme operation against them. This notion of *takfir* also explains why the controversial ideologue himself serves as a propaganda instrument for groups like Daesh, quoted in their discourse that rationalizes attacks against Muslims by similarly branding them infidels.

inghimas tactic beyond combat in the physical realm— by also relying heavily on it for propaganda purposes in its official rhetoric. These propaganda purposes pertain to either encouraging supporters and fighters but intimidating enemies by claiming responsibility for *past* attacks, or, urging followers to conduct *future* assaults using the same modus operandi. Moreover, the article finds that the scholarly sources wherefrom Daesh derives its justification for *inghimas* operations have never been deconstructed in a theological manner for discrediting the practical use of this lethal tactic physically and propagandistically.

2. Propaganda Values of Inghima's Three Propaganda-Rich Modern Forms

It should be noted that Ibn Taymiyyah had not suggested guns and vehicles for carrying out *inghimas* attacks which are used today. These modern manifestations benefit from advanced firearm and motor vehicle technologies that did not exist in the cleric's era. Since the title of his medieval work from which *inghimas* emerged refers to it as *A Principle Regarding Plunging into the Enemy...*, this concept is essentially a broad "principle," which implies that it may be applied to modern settings according to the era's progress in weaponry.

Thus, *inghimas* has proven to be of extensive practical use to Daesh, considering that in the 21st century, it can be executed easily and combined flexibly with the organization's other major terror- spreading tactic of suicide bombing, causing massive damage to the enemy, as Laghmari explains in his thesis.⁹ In fact, Daesh's endless utilization of *inghimas* has surpassed its relatively limited use by al- Qaeda and the erstwhile Jabhat al-Nusra in the past.

⁹ Mehdi Laghmari, *Analysis and Assessment of Islamic State*.

Nevertheless, its propaganda worth is perhaps even greater than its practical utility for the violent Islamist organization.

This massive propaganda value of the otherwise relatively low-cost operation of *inghimas* emanates from the strong impact it leaves on varying audiences through digital platforms, as noted terrorism analyst Charlie Winter has revealed.¹⁰ The tactic innovatively combines messianic heroism that buoys the morale of Daesh's fighters and supporters and pure terror that lowers the confidence of its enemies, while incentivizing recruitment for potential recruits with ample inspiration.¹¹

An *inghimas* operation in any form is a deadly theatrical event that can grab the audience's attention for longer periods, unlike a suicide bombing. It also instantaneously generates photographs and videos¹² that will remain alive in people's consciousness for years, expanding the "virtual blast radius"¹³ massively. Colquhoun argues that in the age of social media,¹⁴ *inghimas* attacks prove most suitable for achieving the impact Daesh seeks to create. This powerful impact explains why the organization is always swift to claim responsibility for these operations worldwide, exhibiting its immense pride in them.

Given *inghimas*' suitability to digital media that aptly serves propaganda purposes, Daesh has relied significantly on this unconventional and asymmetric

¹⁰ Charlie Winter, "Suicide Tactics and the Islamic State," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)*, January 10, 2017, <https://icct.nl/publication/suicide-tactics-and-islamic-state>.

¹¹ Remy Mahzam, "Rumiyah – Jihadist Propaganda and Information Warfare in Cyberspace," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis* 9, no. 3 (2017): 8-14

¹² Remy Mahzam, "Rumiyah – Jihadist Propaganda and Information Warfare in Cyberspace."

¹³ Nafees Hamid, "I Studied the Brains of Potential Terrorists. Here is what I Learned," *NYT Opinion*, March 3, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDAq69OEP44>.

¹⁴ Cameron Calquhoun, "Inghimasi – The Secret ISIS Tactic Designed for the Digital Age," *Bellingcat*, December 1, 2016, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2016/12/01/inghimasi-secret-isis-tactic-designed-digital-age/>.

warfare tactic in two ways: by claiming responsibility for recently carried out assaults, and urging more international attacks using this *modus operandi*. Addressing both these uses, for ease of study, this paper divides *inghimas* into three forms that are practiced in the 21st century, leveraging the advanced killing tools available. Each of the following forms carries exceptional propaganda worth that uniquely enables Daesh to reach out to its supporters, enemies, and potential recruits in different ways:

- a) Organizational *inghimas* in military settings
- b) Organizational *inghimas* in non-military settings
- c) Lone-actor *inghimas* in non-military settings

The following subsections illustrate the propaganda values of these three modern forms in detail:

2.1. Organizational *Inghimas* in Military Settings

Released in December 2016, in the fourth issue of its former online monthly English magazine, *Rumiyah*, Daesh described a traditional *inghimas* operation as one involving a single or a few *inghimasis* plunging into “a large army of non-believers in search of martyrdom or causing damage to them.”¹⁵

Besides this martyrdom rhetoric, the ideological value of this tactic is evident for Daesh, since the group traces it straight to Ibn Taymiyyah, who remains the organization’s most heavily cited religious scholar. Moreover, the 14th-century scholar Ibn an-Nahhas al-Dimashqi al-Dumyati’s work on *inghimas* is another historical source for Daesh to propagandize the employment of this act as “Islamic” during warfare. Most importantly, as Rowley has highlighted, the Qur’anic verse 2:207 is also exploited to justify *inghimas*, which states: “And

¹⁵ Muhammad Hannif Hassan, “An Analysis of Bai’ah Al-Mawt (Pledge of Death) in Jihadist Groups’ Practice and Islamic Tradition,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis* 14, no. 3 (2022): 24-30

among people there are those who sell their lives seeking the pleasure of God. And God is Immensely Kind to the servants.”¹⁶

Despite Daesh having made maximum use of *inghimas* in the physical and propaganda realms, the aforementioned scholars' works wherein the concept is rooted have not been adequately deconstructed and a counter-narrative widely disseminated. Similarly, progressive reinterpretations of the Qur'an have also not been produced and popularized at par with the Islamists' ones in order to help delegitimize this deadly concept. The absence of this important counter-extremism work keeps *inghimas* ever-relevant for jihadists. What lends the tactic additional credibility in terms of propaganda is its association with whom Daesh refers to as the late “Sheikh” Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founding leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq—before this organization ultimately evolved into Daesh in April 2013.

Reportedly, he was so interested in this tactic that he wanted to impart training on it to his fighters, hence, Daesh understandably proclaims him as a “source of inspiration” for *inghimasis*.¹⁷

Media releases by Daesh's Amaq News Agency have frequently featured the *inghimas* modus operandi from infiltration into enemy ranks, to violent confrontation exhausting the *inghimasis*' ammunition, to the detonation of explosive vests. These explosions serve to create holes in the enemy defenses for follow-on regular fighters, maximizing the chances for victory in the battle. However, what reflects *inghimas*' propaganda value for Daesh most significantly

¹⁶ John Rowley, “The Inghamasi: ISIL's New Way of War,” *Small Wars Journal*, 2016, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-inghamasi-isil%E2%80%99s-new-way-of-war>.

¹⁷ “Inghimasi Fighters: Terrorist Organizations Return to Previous Modus Operandi,” *Future for Advanced Research Studies*, March 26, 2017, <https://futureuae.com/en/Mainpage/Item/2623/inghimasi-fighters-terrorist-organizations-return-to-previous-modus-operandi>.

is the official video released by its media office in Kirkuk, Iraq, in August 2015. This 10-minute video—a magnum opus—was titled *Inghimasis: Pride of the Ummah* (the worldwide Muslim community).¹⁸

The video declares fortified buildings as the target of *inghimas* attacks while drawing upon Ibn Taymiyyah's work to pronounce key enemy leaders as another legitimate target. The video boasts of these recklessly plunging operations as “a lethal weapon by which to make the enemy shudder...,” while also adding, “As such, just one *inghimas* fighter can make an entire army collapse.”¹⁹ In a clear move to intimidate Daesh's enemies, *Pride of the Ummah* describes the attacks conducted against American troops until August 2015 in Iraq in the following words:

*Inghimasi operations cause the enemy to shudder at the sound of their weapons— such that half of the Crusader American army, which participated in the war against Muslims, were afflicted with psychological disorders. Many of them committed suicide after their friends were ripped to shreds at the hands of the inghimasis and istishhadis.*²⁰

Besides targeting U.S., Iraqi, Syrian, and Kurdish troops by combining *inghimas* with other tactics on the battlefield, Daesh has also fully utilized it to attack the enemy forces' military bases in Iraq and Syria before propagandizing these operations. For example, the group carried out an *inghimas* operation in February 2015 at Ayn al-Asad airbase, hosting both Iraqi and U.S. troops in Iraq's western province of al-Anbar. The post-attack

¹⁸ John Rowley, “The Inghamasi: ISIL's New Way of War.”

¹⁹ Charlie Winter, “Suicide Tactics and the Islamic State.”

²⁰ John Rowley, “The Inghamasi: ISIL's New Way of War.”

statement released officially by Daesh praised the successful operation against the forces in the base, which housed both “Crusaders and *rafida*” (meaning “rejectors,” a derogatory term for Shia Muslims, which was used to demean those serving in the Iraqi army).²¹

Recounting the activities by the *inghimasis*, the statement further noted that the attack caused the burning of a helicopter and the “death of a number of apostates including a major” (the word “apostates” was used to describe the Sunni Muslim members of the Iraqi army). After the fighters exhausted their ammunition, they “detonated their explosive belts in the midst of the polytheists (referring to all the enemies collectively),” in order to “kill a[n additional] number of them.”²² This constitutes just one example from Iraq in which Daesh fully exploited the *inghimas* tactic for propaganda purposes, after having leveraged it to cause physical destruction.

The propaganda worth of all the three forms of *inghimas* owes itself to the powerful psychological intimidation they produce for Daesh’s enemies, given that the *inghimasis* have every intention to die while fighting²³ and are focused on inflicting the maximum amount of damage. For instance, with regard to this form of the tactic in military settings, *Pride of the Ummah* plays news reports of an army base and the Kurdish Asayish headquarters in Syria that were both destroyed by seven fighters who were themselves “martyred” at the end of the operation.²⁴

²¹ Cameron Calquhoun, “Inghimasi – The Secret ISIS Tactic Designed for the Digital Age.”

²² Cameron Calquhoun, “Inghimasi – The Secret ISIS Tactic Designed for the Digital Age.”; This is another example that differentiates *inghimasis* from *istishhadis*.

²³ “Inghimasi Fighters,” *Future for Advanced Research Studies*

²⁴ John Rowley, “The Inghimasi: ISIL’s New Way of War.”

Portraying the *inghimas* fighters as those infused with such a sacrificial commitment, or “selfless devotion to God,” in turn, likely attracts potential recruits as being capable of achieving the same results that will ultimately be “rewarded with heaven.” Moreover, like the following two modern forms of *inghimas*, this classical form practiced in military settings provides a morale boost for Daesh’s fighters and supporters, as Mahzam has argued.²⁵ Ultimately, the militant organization keeps itself relevant by milking the propaganda value of this form of the tactic through online means.

2.2. Organizational Inghimas in Non-Military Settings

This innovative form combines the organizational teamwork of traditional battlefield *inghimas* with the non-military settings of the lone-actor attacks (which will be analyzed next). In a similar pattern, this form has been practiced in warzone areas as well as in Western countries and against Western-linked targets overseas.

According to Hashim, Daesh as a highly organized jihadist group has proved itself to be capable of “mass casualty urban terrorist assaults,” given its functional expertise and logistic strength.²⁶ For organizing such long, attention-grabbing attacks inside—or against the citizens of—the Coalition states that have been fighting Daesh in Iraq, Syria, and Libya as part of Operation Inherent Resolve, the organization established a sophisticated “external operations” subdepartment within its larger Security Department, which ultimately dispatches small strike teams toward non-military targets.²⁷

²⁵ Remy Mahzam, “Rumiyah – Jihadist Propaganda and Information Warfare in Cyberspace.”

²⁶ Ahmed Salah Hashim, “Cities Under Siege: Mass Casualty Urban Terrorism Assaults,” *Policy Report S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies* (2016)

²⁷ Ahmed Salah Hashim, “Cities Under Siege: Mass Casualty Urban Terrorism Assaults.”

It is important to note that such *inghimas* operations achieve high death tolls for two main reasons. The first reason is the selection of soft targets such as nearly unprotected crowds or congregations in cities; and the second one is the modus operandi of these attacks that includes *inghimasis* staying alive for as many hours as possible,²⁸ shooting civilians until ammunition is exhausted, and detonating explosive vests at the end, thereby causing even more deaths. Although there is a high potential that local law enforcement would shoot dead the militants in a firefight before they might detonate their vests thus preventing suicide, nevertheless, if executed, this method not only inflicts greater damage but also garners longer-lasting media attention than conventional suicide bombings. It also provides so much fodder for the ensuing responsibility-claiming propaganda that potential recruits are likely to be inspired to join Daesh, repeat the same acts of “bravery and devotion,” and similarly earn “high ranks in heaven as martyrs in the way of God.”

For instance, the Daesh-Khorasan Tajik *inghimasi* who carried out the June 2022 high-profile Sikh temple attack in Kabul, Afghanistan—in revenge for two Indian politicians’ remarks meant to insult the Holy Prophet of Islam²⁹—was eulogized by Daesh’s local as well as its central media outlets. Although this spectacular assault was not against Western targets in response to their operations against Daesh Central in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, it still carried high propaganda value. This is because the underlying theme was “killing infidels who wrong Muslims”—in this case, the Afghan Sikhs who are religiously connected to India where the two politicians made the problematic remarks.

²⁸ Cameron Calquhoun, “Inghimasi – The Secret ISIS Tactic Designed for the Digital Age.”

²⁹ Uran Botobekov, “ISIS ‘Pursuing Big Policy’ Aimed at Sparking US Civil War through Lone Wolf Attacks,” *HS Today*, September 27, 2022, <https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-khorasan-urges-lone-wolf-attacks-in-order-to-spark-u-s-civil-war/>.

In this regard, the propagandist for Daesh-Khorasan's Tajik jihadists who oversees multiple media channels for the organization, known as Yusuf Tajiki, published a follow-up 12-minute audio message on his Telegram channel. He proclaimed: "The famous and fearless Lion of Almighty God, Tajik commander Abdullah Abu Muhammad al-Tajiki, carried out an [*inghimas*] attack on the Sikh temple in Kabul and sacrificed himself to protect the values of Islam."³⁰ His dreams of sacrificing himself while defending Islam and then meeting God in the highest gardens of paradise were thereby fulfilled, according to Tajiki. Thus, the latter used this incident to encourage Central Asian Muslims to similarly "embark on the divine path" by becoming recruited in Daesh-Khorasan. Similarly, Daesh-Khorasan's *Voice of Khorasan* magazine in English glorified this *inghimas* operation in its unusually long editorial, while Daesh Central's Amaq and Nashir news agencies praised it as a "sophisticated attack."³¹

The propaganda worth of this form of *inghimas* launched by well-trained Daesh fighters in non-military settings remains similarly evident in the aftermath of jihadist operations executed in Western territories or against Western targets. After the spectacular Paris attacks of November 2015 that also involved hostage-taking by one of the two groups of *inghimasis* (the third group being *istishhadis*), Daesh released a statement claiming responsibility: "God helped our brothers and gave them what they wished for [martyrdom]—they triggered their belts in the midst of these infidels after they exhausted their ammunition."³²

Likewise, Daesh's *inghimasis* in March 2015 attacked Tunisia's landmark national museum in the capital Tunis, taking hostages and killing 21 people—

³⁰ Uran Botobekov, "ISIS 'Pursuing Big Policy'."

³¹ Uran Botobekov, "ISIS 'Pursuing Big Policy'."

³² Cameron Calquhoun, "Inghimasi – The Secret ISIS Tactic Designed for the Digital Age."

mostly European tourists—at the spot. Afterward, Daesh claimed responsibility for the operation in a statement and posted an audio message on jihadist websites, praising the dead fighters as “knights” for their “blessed invasion of one of the dens of infidels and vice in Muslim Tunisia.”³³ The organization also described the attack as a siege on “citizens of the Crusader countries,”³⁴ implying revenge from the European members of the Coalition fighting Daesh in the Middle East and North Africa region.

It is evident that these complex, coordinated, and long *inghimas* operations are uniquely ideal for propaganda purposes, as they stage deadly dramas, keeping electronic and social media hooked for hours. The ensuing official statements issued by Daesh attempt to deepen the purported “Muslims versus Infidels perpetual conflict” and attract vulnerable young Muslims to join and earn “heaven,” while giving the terrifying impression that such deadly attacks will be repeated in the future.

2.3. Lone-Actor Inghimas in Non-Military Settings

A lone-actor attack, also called a lone-wolf attack, is one in which a self-radicalized individual commits an act of violence on their own initiative without the physical aid or training of a militant group—the only contribution of the organization is providing remote inspiration and online instruction. Since there is a political basis for the lone individual’s violent act, it is classified as a terrorist attack, as per a U.S. Department of Justice official document.³⁵ Importantly, these

³³ “Tunisia Museum Attack: ISIS claimed responsibility,” *Canadian Broadcasting Cooperation (CBC)*, March 20, 2015, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/tunisia-museum-attack-isis-claims-responsibility-1.3001002>.

³⁴ “Tunisia Attack Kills at least 38 at Beach Resort Hotel,” *The New York Times*, June 27, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/27/world/africa/gunmen-attack-hotel-in-sousse-tunisia.html>.

³⁵ Mark Hamm, “Lone Wolf Terrorism in America,” *US Office of Justice Programs*, 2013, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/lone-wolf-terrorism-america>.

modern assaults, like the previously mentioned forms, conform to the same medieval concept of *inghimas* by Ibn Taymiyyah, that is, *plunging into* the enemy.³⁶ This is why propaganda-rich lone-actor assaults, such as vehicle ramming, mass stabbing, and public shooting, constitute a third form of *inghimas* carried out in non-military scenarios.

Like the previous form of the tactic, this form too is based on the logic of taking revenge from Western countries for their anti-Daesh military campaigns, and for earning martyrdom.³⁷ In this regard, Daesh's former American member, Abu Hamza al-Amriki, appealed to Muslims in a video to mount lone-actor *inghimas* attacks inside America for avenging the "uncontrolled bombing of [the Iraqi city of] Mosul by the United States."³⁸ Moreover, Daesh-Khorasan's Uzbek group's propagandist and chief strategist, Abu Khorasan al-Mujahid, exhorted supporters in his Telegram audio messages to conduct lone-actor attacks in what he called *Dar al-Kufr* (meaning the "house of infidelity," which refers to Western countries that are not governed by Islamic laws). Al-Mujahid instructed: "The life of the American and European infidels should turn into hell as our Caliph (Daesh chief) issued a *fatwa* to take revenge."³⁹

A simple cost-and-benefit analysis elucidates why Daesh focuses on lone-actor *inghimas* assaults as a means of propaganda—producing audio, video, and text instructions for its followers to conduct these operations. The costs to the organization for such attacks are nearly zero—all it has to ensure is to provide

³⁶ James Black, Alexandra Hall, Giacomo Persi Paoli and Rich Warnes, "Troubled Waters: A Snapshot of Security Challenges in the Mediterranean Region," *RAND Corporation* (2017)

³⁷ Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hasan Abu Hanieh, *Infatuated with Martyrdom*.

³⁸ Tammy Wait, "NYC Truck Attack, What We Know – 'Done for ISIS', 8 dead (multi-video)," *American Security Today*, November 1, 2017, <https://americansecuritytoday.com/nyc-truck-attack-know-done-isis-8-dead-multi-video/>.

³⁹ Uran Botobekov, "ISIS 'Pursuing Big Policy'."

online inspiration and issue instructions regarding the selection of tools and targets. Any ideologically motivated and radicalized individual in the West can then acquire a cheap rudimentary weapon and conceive of a simple plot to execute the attack without any prior combat training.⁴⁰ The chances of “pre-attack detection” are also minimal because these acts of violence are completely random and unpredictable, as noted terrorism scholar Mia Bloom has highlighted.⁴¹

As for the benefits Daesh receives from such lone-actor assaults, these include their threats keeping its enemies intimidated, and once such an operation has actually happened its “shock value”⁴² being massive. Ultimately, these low-cost but potentially high-profile attacks keep Daesh constantly relevant through news media of the digital age. This explains why much of the jihadist organization’s propaganda is centered around encouraging lone-actor *inghimas* attacks.

The weapons to be used in these operations have been paid much attention in Daesh’s propaganda materials, which provide a range of options for executing these attacks. Practically, they have been performed with one or more of three weapons, namely firearms, knives, and vehicles, depending on what is accessible in a given country. According to Mahzam’s research, the main thrust of the propaganda centered around such Western-oriented *inghimas* is

⁴⁰ Joby Warrick and Souad Mekhennet, “A Battered ISIS Grows Ever More Dependent on Lone Wolves, Simple Plans,” *The Washington Post*, April 8, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/a-battered-isis-grows-ever-more-dependent-on-lone-wolves-simple-plans/2017/07/19/3eef9e8-6bfa-11e7-96ab-5f38140b38cc_story.html.

⁴¹ Mia Bloom, “Vehicle Ramming: The Evolution of a Terrorist Tactic Inside the US,” *Just Security*, July 16, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/71431/vehicle-ramming-the-evolution-of-a-terrorist-tactic-inside-the-us/>.

⁴² Brian Jenkins and Bruce Butterworth, *An Analysis of Vehicle-Ramming as a Terrorist Tactic* (Security Perspective, Mineta Transportation Institute, San Jose: San Jose State University, 2018)

to instigate Daesh's followers to use "simple and readily accessible materials,"⁴³ to carry out a campaign of so-called "just terror operations"⁴⁴ (meaning that these actions are "just") against the inhabitants of *Dar al-Kufr*.

This incitement is also evident from the eight-minute video, aptly titled *What Are You Waiting For?*, released by Daesh's al-Hayat Media Center in November 2015. In the video, the French propagandist and recruiter, Abu Salman al-Faranci, exhorted followers in France to carry out domestic lone-actor attacks in every possible way in case they were unable to migrate to Daesh-controlled territory in Syria. He advised: "Terrorize them and do not allow them to sleep due to fear and horror. There are weapons and cars available and targets ready to be hit."⁴⁵

An example of one such weapon that Daesh's propaganda image on its affiliated "Cyber Caliphate" channel displayed is the firearm,⁴⁶ which was used by each of the *inghimasis* in the San Bernardino shooting in California, in December 2015. Later, a broadcast by the militant group called the shooters "soldiers of the Caliphate," whose "light weapons... led to the deaths of 14 disbelievers."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, because for such *inghimas* operations, knives and vehicles are even easier to acquire and use, Daesh has dedicated greater propaganda material to these more basic weapons. Its former online

⁴³ Remy Mahzam, "Rumiyah – Jihadist Propaganda and Information Warfare in Cyberspace."

⁴⁴ Remy Mahzam, "Rumiyah – Jihadist Propaganda and Information Warfare in Cyberspace."

⁴⁵ Duncan Gardham, "ISIL Issued Warning to 'Filthy French'," *Politico*, November 17, 2015, <https://www.politico.eu/article/paris-terrorist-attacks-isil-issued-warning-to-filthy-french/>.

⁴⁶ X User Status - Rukmini Callimachi, July 15, 2016, https://twitter.com/rcallimachi/status/753780614998859778?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etwetembed%7Ctwterm%5E753780614998859778%7Ctwgr%5E96fbb52facd62a13594122893e212bef1c036f6%7Ctwcn%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3.

⁴⁷ X User Status - Rukmini Callimachi, Islamic State Says 'Soldiers of Caliphate' Attacked in San Bernardino 2015

English-language magazine *Rumiyah* has provided comprehensive instructions on executing knife and vehicle attacks as well as on selecting targets.⁴⁸

Further official material that reveals the propaganda value of knife and vehicle operations surfaced in September 2014 when Daesh's high-profile spokesperson and its then leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's close aide, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, urged lone-actor attacks against Western civilians. His statement read: "If you are not able to find an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) or a bullet, then single out the disbelieving American, Frenchman [sic] or any of their allies. Smash his [sic] head with a rock or slaughter him with a knife or run him over with your car..."⁴⁹ Similarly, in a May 2017 video, Daesh's American fighter, Abu Hamza al-Amriki, exhorted followers to assault civilians with knives and vehicles domestically in the West. Evoking eschatological imagery, he incited: "Are you incapable of stabbing an infidel with a knife, throwing him [sic] off of a building, or running him over with a car? Liberate yourself from hellfire by killing an infidel."⁵⁰

Such propaganda regarding potential assaults appears further intimidating when the on-ground results are considered, such as the June 2017 attack in London, wherein three assailants rammed a high-speed van into crowds. Afterward, they exited the vehicle to randomly stab people, killing seven pedestrians. The responsibility was not only claimed by Daesh but that this operation had also followed the aforementioned May 2017 call to conduct *inghimas* assaults by using knives and motor vehicles. This is merely one

⁴⁸ Remy Mahzam, "Rumiyah – Jihadist Propaganda and Information Warfare in Cyberspace."

⁴⁹ "Inghimasi Fighters," *Future for Advanced Research Studies*

⁵⁰ Seamus Hughes, Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, and Bennett Clifford, "A New American Leader Rises in ISIS," *The Atlantic* April 29, 2020

example out of several where attacks actually occurred after the dissemination of online instructions, which explains why Daesh has produced lone-actor assault-related propaganda through three mediums, that is, audio, video, and text.

3. Inghimasis as Instruments of Propaganda

According to the assassinated Iraqi political violence expert Hisham al-Hashimi, *inghimasis* are a “special faction” of Daesh who are so committed to their missions that they may either win or die while fighting, but are never captured alive or retreat.⁵¹ Through these “main players,” Daesh successfully captured and kept under its control territories throughout the Middle East,⁵² which demonstrates the immense military importance of these unconventional fighters.

On the propaganda account, since the operations carried out by the *inghimasis* are complex and lengthy, they successfully generate intimidating visual content and hold media attention for hours, thereby supplying the organization with the metaphorical oxygen of publicity.⁵³ Hence, it is not surprising that Daesh’s online materials exploit Qur’anic verses and the works of medieval scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn an-Nahhas to validate the role of the supremely useful *inghimasis*—for the purpose of attracting new recruits.⁵⁴

Given the crucial importance of these operatives, they indeed hold a special place within Daesh’s military and propaganda hierarchy, as Rowley

⁵¹ Hamza Mustafa, “Inghimasis . . . Fourth Generation of ISIS’s Bombers,” *AAWSAT Archive*, July 10, 2016

⁵² Hamza Mustafa, “Inghimasis . . . Fourth Generation of ISIS’s Bombers.”

⁵³ Cameron Calquhoun, “Inghimasi – The Secret ISIS Tactic Designed for the Digital Age.”

⁵⁴ Hamza Mustafa, “Inghimasis . . . Fourth Generation of ISIS’s Bombers.”

explains.⁵⁵ It can well be argued that the organization's heavy military dependence on the *inghimasis*' is proportionate to the substantial propaganda it produces in favor of these elite "immersionist" fighters. For instance, the Amaq News Agency featured them multiple times a week when Daesh was controlling territories in Iraq and Syria.⁵⁶ Additionally, the number of monthly operations by these battalions was also recorded annually by the Agency.⁵⁷

It is pertinent to note that the importance Daesh accords to the confrontational *inghimasis* in its propaganda materials is even greater than that it does to the non-confrontational *istishhadis*, though it views both types of operatives respectfully.⁵⁸ Since the *inghimasis*' job is to stay alive for as long as possible in order to inflict maximum damage upon the enemy in a battle, they possess higher physical and combat capabilities than the *istishhadis* who are only required to detonate their explosives in a gathering, killing themselves immediately along with their victims in an uncomplicated suicidal operation.

Thus, Daesh qualitatively differentiates between the two types of operatives and takes such great pride in the former that it actually made the effort to produce a special documentary called *Inghimasis: Pride of the Ummah*, as referenced in the previous section. This video not only exhibited the enormous propaganda value of these elite commandos but also described the superior qualities they must possess: "strong faith in God, good manners, altruism or unselfishness, and the love of sacrifice for the sake of God."⁵⁹ Indeed, within Daesh, the *inghimasi* is the loftiest title that a soldier can possibly earn, as reported

⁵⁵ John Rowley, "The Inghamasi: ISIL's New Way of War."

⁵⁶ John Rowley, "The Inghamasi: ISIL's New Way of War."

⁵⁷ "Inghimasi Fighters," *Future for Advanced Research Studies*

⁵⁸ "Inghimasi Fighters," *Future for Advanced Research Studies*

⁵⁹ John Rowley, "The Inghamasi: ISIL's New Way of War."

by Ibrahim from Syria.⁶⁰ Understandably, it is also believed that these fighters “striving in the path of God” will be rewarded with the “highest rooms”⁶¹ of paradise, which makes them objects of envy in jihadist circles.

The fact that Daesh has formally provided in its registration form the option of enlisting as an *inghimasi* to its new recruits⁶² reveals that the group is greatly confident about the effectiveness of its propaganda, therefore, it expects that newcomers would already be familiar with and able to select this fighting category. Indeed, given the jihadist organization’s substantial publicity efforts surrounding the *inghimasis*, the appeal appears to be massive for recruits with regard to both this world and the Hereafter. Additionally, these fighters serve as powerful propaganda instruments for terrifying and threatening enemy forces, as is evident from the destructive results achieved by their marauding operations captured in the video, *Pride of the Ummah*.

4. Conclusion

Ibn Taymiyyah prescribed the unconventional *inghimas* tactic as an important part of what he considered jihad against “infidel forces” centuries ago. Indeed, due to its scholarly justification and adaptability to various settings, it continues to be employed in the so-called jihad waged by modern Islamist militant organizations, such as Daesh. What this research has primarily discovered is that given the 21st century of fifth-generation warfare in which social media plays a vital role, *inghimas* has additionally proven to be a

⁶⁰ John Rowley, “The Inghamasi: ISIL’s New Way of War.”

⁶¹ Uran Botobekov, “ISIS ‘Pursuing Big Policy.’”

⁶² David and Nate Rosenblatt, “Appendix II: The ISIS Registration Form – Translated, in *All Jihad Is Local (Volume II): ISIS in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula* (International Security, Washington, DC: New America, 2018)

powerful propaganda instrument having optical richness and even theatrical qualities, which implies that Daesh has extended its application to a new realm. Through its significant use of this tactic, the group engages in violent activity and then proudly claims it, only to produce more propaganda material around this operation for urging further attacks afterward. Such propaganda production is facilitated by *inghimas*' worldly and "eschatological" worth as contained in Daesh's Salafist-jihadist discourse.

Thus, Daesh's strategy includes the exploitation of this innovative tactic as much in the cyber realm as in the physical one in order to have the intended effects on various audiences. By leveraging *inghimas* for territorial control as well as influence expansion, the organization has been successful in proverbially killing two birds with one stone. This is why it is understandable that Daesh has made efforts to export this low-cost but high-impact tactic physically and propagandistically across continents.

Inferring from the past, it is highly likely that Daesh will continue to rely on the medieval *inghimas* as an invaluable means for receiving publicity. As a matter of fact, the further technology progresses, the more creatively this propaganda-rich tactic can be leveraged for encouraging followers, intimidating enemies, and attracting potential recruits. As the former al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri wrote to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in a 2005 letter that "more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media,"⁶³ it is evident from the study of *inghimas* that Daesh is aware of this reality and playing its cards accordingly.

⁶³ Remy Mahzam, "Rumiyah – Jihadist Propaganda and Information Warfare in Cyberspace."

Counterterrorism policymakers are advised to take due notice of the usage of the lethal yet conspicuously under-studied *inghimas* concept that serves as an entire chapter on modern Islamist violent extremism, considering the immense propaganda value bestowed by new media. Indeed, this dilemma, which has ramifications for terrorist radicalization and recruitment in the present day, needs to be viewed in a historical light, and the very scholarly sources which modern jihadists derive inspiration from must be discredited decisively before this battlefield tactic and propaganda instrument may be rendered irrelevant. The need to carry out this challenging but inescapable task is more urgent today than ever, given the growing list of encrypted messaging services, anonymous sharing portals, and social media platforms that Daesh is known to exploit. The longer the delay in deconstructing the theological foundations of *inghimas* and disseminating the counter-narrative, the greater the number of innocent lives worldwide that remain at risk of these reckless operations.