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ISIS MEDIA REBOOT

A Special SITE Report on the State of ISIS Propaganda



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I INTRODUCTION

For the first time since September 16, 2017, the Islamic State (ISIS/IS) resumed its publication of English-language statements for both formal communiques and ‘Amaq News Agency statements. The developments mark further milestones for a media machine that, despite its recent decline in wake of dramatic military losses, appears to be on a rebound.



Top: English-language ‘Amaq statement issued on January 15.

Bottom: English-language communique issued on January 16.

“The Islamic State is now showing the first signs of a regrouping media operation,” says SITE Director Rita Katz. “The group suffered major setbacks by Coalition and Regime attacks, but is now clearly taking major steps to reassemble its propaganda operation, which is among its most dangerous weapons.”

The following SITE report details the effects that major territorial and key–personnel losses brought to ISIS’ media output, and the recent developments in its efforts to revive those media operations. SITE, which analyzes ISIS’ media, tracked the output of various ISIS media products and compared that output to parallel time periods (i.e. corresponding weeks and months across different years).¹

¹ The content–types analyzed as part of this report (videos, photo reports, communiques, news briefs, among others) were selected based off of the regularity by which ISIS has traditionally issued them. Content by ISIS’ ‘Amaq News Agency was not included in SITE’s analyses.

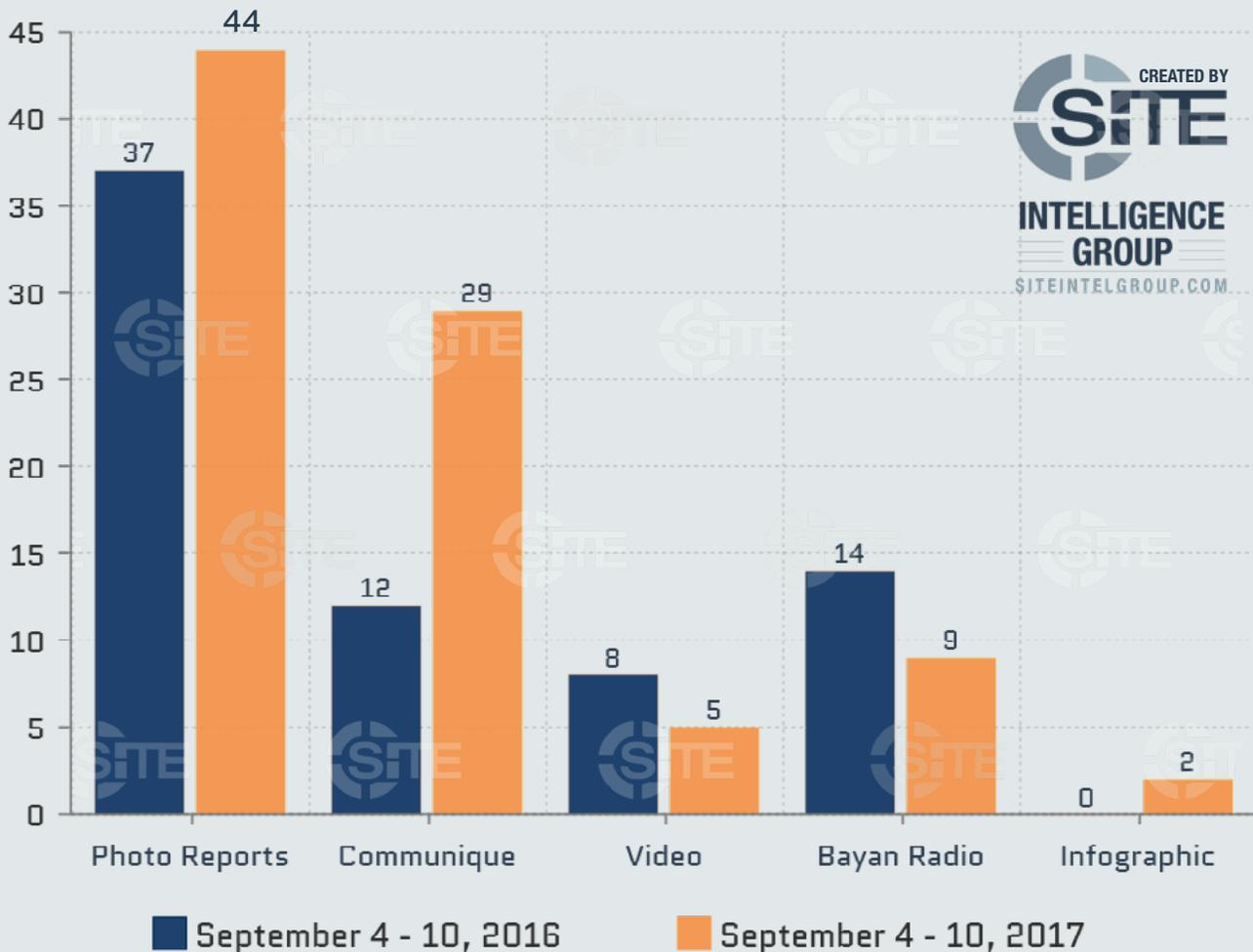
II DECLINE

This past spring and summer saw the deaths of major ISIS media officials—including Abu Ali al-Janubi, ISIS’ senior media director, and Rayaan Meshaal, the founder of ISIS’ ‘Amaq News Agency—via Coalition airstrikes in Mayadin, located southeast of Raqqa. Other ISIS media officials were also killed throughout Iraq and Syria.

Despite these attacks, the group’s media machine endured. Two week-long timespans exactly a year apart—September 10–16 of 2016, and September 10–16 of 2017—show both increases and decreases for different types of releases, with photo reports, communiques, and infographics rising, and videos and “Bayan Radio” releases declining.

One-Week Snapshots of ISIS Propaganda Releases

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ISIS’ media operations would not make a significant decline until mid-September.

Mayadin, which U.S. intelligence officials believed to house the majority of ISIS' relocated media command, was eventually retaken by the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and allied forces that October. By this point, ISIS media output had already declined drastically, with everything from major multimedia to day-to-day communications, photo reports, and news updates being affected. English-language statements halted completely at the official level, and even Rumiya magazine, once released on a consistent monthly basis, has still not seen a new issue since September 2017.

SITE's analysis of ISIS media shows that between November and December of 2016, ISIS released 261 communiques, 611 photo reports, and 23 videos. However, in that same two month span exactly one year later in 2017, ISIS released only 68 communiques, 121 photo reports, and 19 videos.

ISIS Media Releases 2016 vs. 2017

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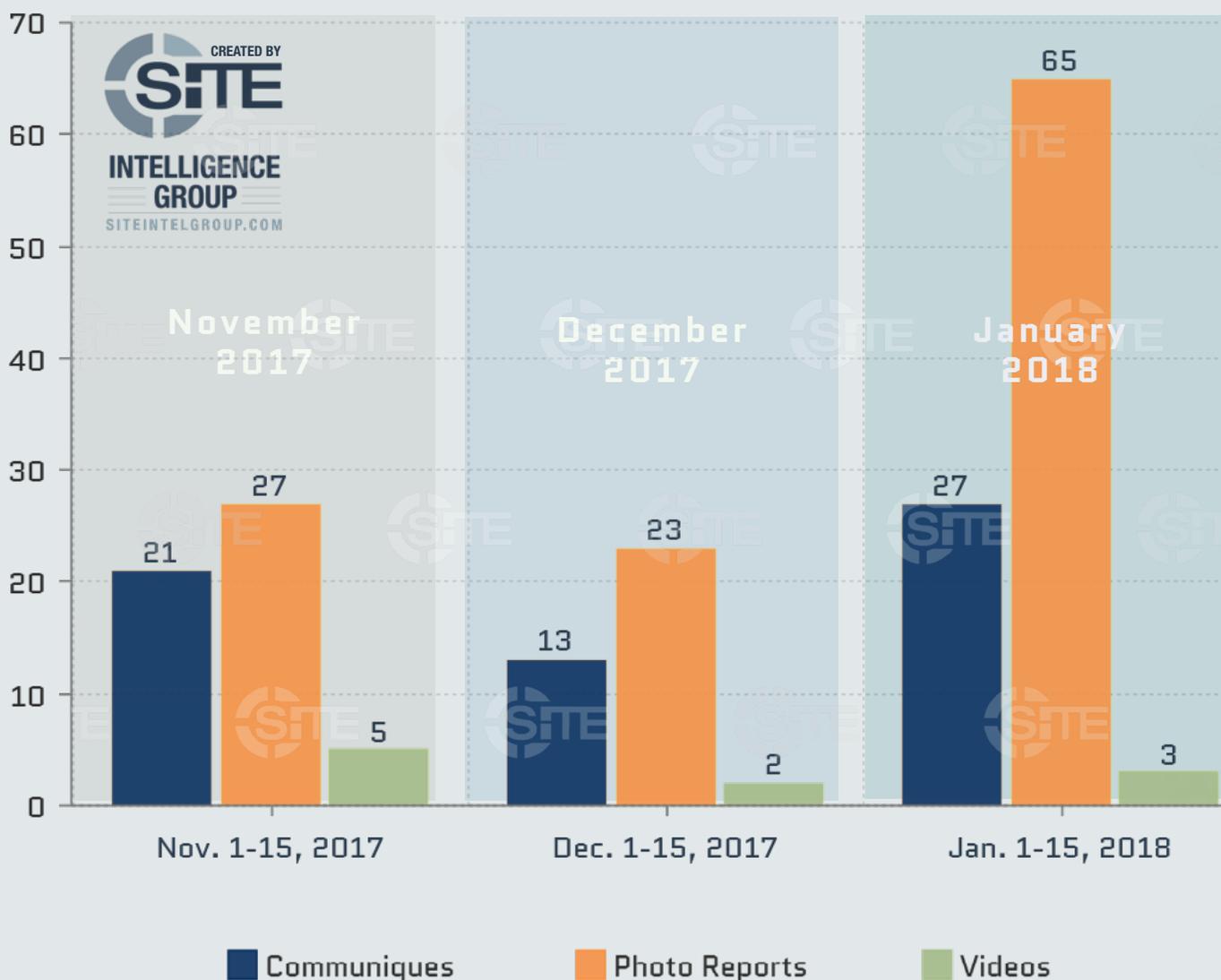


III SIGNS OF A REBOOT

Despite the aforementioned media decline, SITE's data analysis shows a significant uptick in several aspects of ISIS content production as of the first 15 days of January. SITE examined this uptick by comparing these first 15 days of January to the first 15 days of the preceding November and December months. All three 15-day intervals saw similar video output, but compared to December alone, the first half of January saw a 183 percent increase in photo reports (several of which sampled on page eight) and a 108 percent increase in communiques.

ISIS Media in the First 15 Days of the Last Three Months: Nov. '17 and Jan. '18

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Based on these first 15 days of January, ISIS is positioned to exceed its communicate output for all of December, and has already done so in terms of photo reports (65 so far in January versus 48 in December).

ISIS Media Releases to Date Since Dec. 2017

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Other corners of ISIS' media machine have meanwhile shown significant, albeit inconsistent jumps upward. ISIS has published three multimedia releases from al-Hayat Media Center, its Western-aimed media arm, between December 27 and 31. These releases included a French-language nasheed (chant) threatening that "heads will roll beneath our feet," and a video of an American IS fighter calling for American jihadists to take "advantage of" their country's gun laws and perform attacks.



FRENCH-LANGUAGE ISIS NASHEED, ENTITLED, “O’ DISBELIEVERS OF THE WORLD” (MÉCRANTS DE L’HUMANITÉ)



SIXTH EPISODE OF ISIS’ “INSIDE THE KHILAFAH” VIDEO SERIES

In light of these media increases, ISIS’ new reissuance of English–language communiques and ‘Amaq statements is just one of a larger array of indicators that the group is rebuilding its media operations.

“The Islamic State’s media operations will naturally see ebbs and flows,” says Katz. “However, as the Islamic State aims to recover from its military losses and reconfigure its media machine, this rise in content may turn out to be the beginning of a persisting, upward trend.”

“As I’ve always said, the condition of a terrorist group’s media operation runs parallel to its military stance,” Katz continues. “And, as ISIS claims increased military activity in Syria’s Idlib governorate, resumes terror attacks in Baghdad, and persists in pockets elsewhere throughout the region amid its media increase, we can see this tendency play out.”

IMAGES FROM PHOTO REPORTS DISSEMINATED BY ISIS IN EARLY JANUARY



SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

SITE's database-driven web portal is an unmatched source of thousands of messages and online artifacts spanning a decade's worth of terrorist and extremist activity. Our comprehensive database provides down-to-the-minute reports, analyses, and translations of extremist communications, multimedia, and propaganda. Threats monitored by SITE span those of jihadists, hackers, and far-right/far-left movements among others.

SITE's interactive and easily navigable database allows intelligence analysts to research the specifics of an event (weapons used, group leaders, statements, claims of attack, etc.), or zoom out to the larger picture at hand (trends, campaigns, recurring targets, growing opposition movements, etc.).

SITE Enterprise

SITE's Enterprise service is the best way for government, commercial, and academic clients to keep abreast of the latest trends within the global jihadist movement by receiving immediate and timely translations of the most important jihadist material published. Seven days a week, SITE constantly monitors the Internet and traditional media for material and propaganda contextual analysis explaining its source and importance to our subscribers. Any multimedia, such as video or audio messages, are also streamed through our website.



SITE News

SITE News is a low-cost component of our acclaimed terrorist monitoring services, designed for the personal use of informed consumers who follow and study terrorism. With access to the latest terrorist news, including excerpts from our exclusive translations, clips of terrorist videos, and expert analysis and opinion, this service offers subscribers the ability to keep abreast of the latest trends in terrorism by following the terrorists themselves.



Western Jihadists

The Western Jihadists Monitoring Service provides summaries and analyses of notable discussions and information found on selected Western-oriented jihadi forums and social media platforms. The service regularly covers threats and incitements made by jihadist fighters and supporters, as well as conversations and artifacts revealing recruitment appeals, migration methods, and other important information not typically included in official jihadist communications.



Far-Right/Far-Left Threat

SITE's Far-Right/Far-Left Threat service monitors threats from politically motivated extremist communities, including (but not limited to) white supremacists, militia groups, anarchist groups, eco-terrorists, and animal rights extremists. Reports and analyses by SITE's Far-Right/Far-Left service include claims of attack, chatter on forums and message boards, announcements, communiques, and analyses of emerging trends within these movements.



Dark Web and Cyber Security Threat

The Dark Web and Cyber Security Threat service monitors and analyzes hacking campaigns and groups across all ideologies (or lack thereof)—from those soliciting stolen data on the dark web, jihadist-motivated hacking groups, and everywhere in between. Reports and analyses cover hack claims, announcements and developments of hacking campaigns, details of released data, and other important information.



Terrorism and Finance

Terrorism and Finance reports provide daily alerts and critical analysis of terrorist activity, including threats to banks, financial services, and corporate entities. The reports identify key methods by which terrorist groups carry out money-laundering activity, and transfer and receive funds. The reports also track and assess economically motivated campaigns promoting attacks or sabotage against financial institutions or businesses.



Terrorism and Energy

SITE's Terrorism and Energy reports analyze threats to the energy sector by jihadi and environmental extremist groups in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe. The reports track and assess these activities by regions, timespans, groups, target categories, and other critical variables.



Guide Tracker

An exclusive service that monitors and tracks attack manuals by groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda online. Provides a steady flow of the primary source information to registered subscribers. Monitoring spans Deep Web jihadi forums, invite-only manual-focused chat groups on Telegram, and other online platforms.

GUIDE TRACKER
A SITE INTELLIGENCE GROUP SERVICE

SOURCEfeed

SourceFeed, a new service by the SITE Intelligence Group, is designed for social media and other internet-based services aiming to more efficiently diminish the dissemination of terrorist propaganda on their platforms.

SITE INTELLIGENCE GROUP PRESENTS
SOURCEfeed

Customized Services, Research, and Analysis

For those seeking a customized solution to researching, studying, and analyzing the global jihadist movement, SITE offers a variety of tailored solutions customized entirely for the client. Whether an industry-specific threat analysis, constantly monitoring jihadist forums for mention of a corporation or brand name, or a study on trends related to a particular issue or region, SITE can create a customized solution to suit your specific needs.

Investigation Assistance, Forensic Analysis, and Expert Testimony

For government clients and law enforcement, SITE offers a variety of services. SITE analysts can assist with investigations into jihadist activity, conduct forensic analysis of seized material and data, and provide expert testimony in court cases.

Seminar and Lecture Services

SITE can provide private seminars and customized training to educate both public and private sector intelligence analysts with the latest trends and developments within the online jihadist community, as well as how to monitor jihadists effectively. SITE analysts are also available for lectures and speaking engagements to offer insight into the global jihadist movement.

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