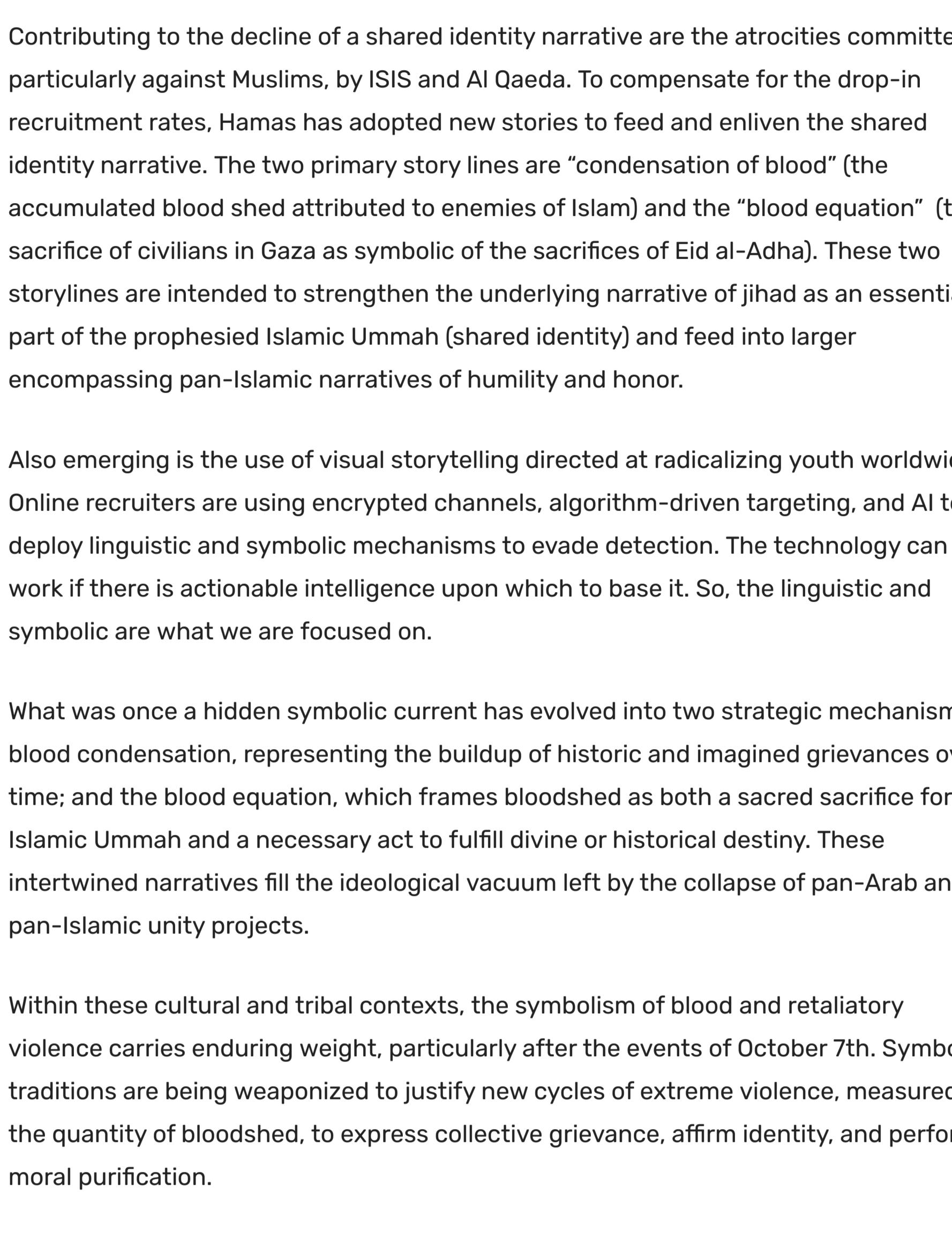


COUNTERTERRORISM TERRORISM STUDY

Hamas's Narrative Threat to the Syrian Druze: The Symbolism of Killing and Mutilation

By Suhai Hassen and Ajit Maan August 11, 2025

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Hamas flags at the 25th anniversary rally in 2012 (Photo: Fars Media Corporation via Wikipedia CC BY 4.0)

Syria appears poised to enter another bloody chapter, this time involving revenge campaigns targeting the Druze minority. The violence will be encouraged by framing it within an honor/humiliation narrative. Jihadi groups are not wasting any time capitalizing on real-time events to increase waning recruitment and radicalization rates.

Until recently, two narratives dominated the pan-Arabic region: one advocated a unified Arab nation, and the other an Islamic nation dominated primarily by the Muslim Brotherhood. The fall of Gaddafi, Hussein, and now Assad has weakened the idea of some version of an Arab/Islamic unification via shared identity.

Contributing to the decline of a shared identity narrative are the atrocities committed, particularly against Muslims, by ISIS and Al Qaeda. To compensate for the drop-in recruitment rates, Hamas has adopted new stories to feed and enliven the shared identity narrative. The two primary story lines are "condensation of blood" (the accumulated blood shed attributed to enemies of Islam) and the "blood equation" (the sacrifice of civilians in Gaza as symbolic of the sacrifices of Eid al-Adha). These two storylines are intended to strengthen the underlying narrative of jihad as an essential part of the prophesied Islamic Ummah (shared identity) and feed into larger encompassing pan-Islamic narratives of humility and honor.

Also emerging is the use of visual storytelling directed at radicalizing youth worldwide. Online recruiters are using encrypted channels, algorithm-driven targeting, and AI to deploy linguistic and symbolic mechanisms to evade detection. The technology can only work if there is actionable intelligence upon which to base it. So, the linguistic and symbolic are what we are focused on.

What was once a hidden symbolic current has evolved into two strategic mechanisms: blood condensation, representing the buildup of historic and imagined grievances over time; and the blood equation, which frames bloodshed as both a sacred sacrifice for the Islamic Ummah and a necessary act to fulfill divine or historical destiny. These intertwined narratives fill the ideological vacuum left by the collapse of pan-Arab and pan-Islamic unity projects.

Within these cultural and tribal contexts, the symbolism of blood and retaliatory violence carries enduring weight, particularly after the events of October 7th. Symbolic traditions are being weaponized to justify new cycles of extreme violence, measured by the quantity of bloodshed, to express collective grievance, affirm identity, and perform moral purification.

A particularly troubling development is the expanding use of this symbolic framework to target the Druze minority. Historically rooted in strains of antisemitism, jihadist rhetoric now employs reinterpretations of blood narratives to incite Arab tribes by portraying the Druze as "Zionists" or "Arab Zionists." This association with Jewish populations renders the Druze legitimate targets under jihadist logic. Extremist stories increasingly depict the Druze not only as military collaborators but also as ideological traitors to Islam.

Violence in the jihadist context often transforms physical combat into a ritual of purification, where blood becomes both the lens through which dignity is perceived and the measure by which it is restored. Hamas's radicalization tactics reflect a deliberate effort to erode remaining moral and ethical boundaries—visible, for example, in the use of women and children as human shields. Hamas has increasingly drawn on symbolic narratives linking sacrifice, blood, and religious memory to reframe violence as a sacred duty. Specifically, Hamas has adopted two interwoven storylines to reinforce a shared identity narrative:

- The Condensation of Blood (نكيف الدم):** The accumulated bloodshed attributed to enemies of Islam, situating current violence within a longer arc of victimization.
- The Blood Equation (معادنة الدم):** Framing the sacrifice of civilians in Gaza as symbolic of the sacrifices of Eid al-Adha, transforming their deaths into ritualistic acts of communal and religious significance. This symbolic violence fuels cycles of militant gratification and drives demand for further bloodshed. It serves as a map to restore a lost Islamic and Arabic identity and honor.

The Blood Equation Mechanism interweaves three core elements:

- Reinterpretations of blood within a Quranic context:** Violence and sacrifice are elevated to sacred duties, sanctifying acts otherwise seen as brutal or immoral. Fighters often describe shedding blood as spiritual purification and a way to draw closer to God.

- Reconstruction of tribal alliances across Arab states:** Built on shared histories of grievance and collective identity, this enables jihadists to revive fractured social bonds and forge loyalty through a common narrative of victimhood and revenge.

- Framing humiliation and revenge as balancing forces:** Bloodshed is not merely a response to insult or injury but a necessary mechanism to restore lost honor, achieve psychological satisfaction, and re-establish social equilibrium. This dynamic creates a powerful emotional drive fueling ongoing cycles of violence.

Together, these elements create a moral and psychological imperative compelling fighters to view violence not merely as a tactical choice but as a sacred, communal obligation. This obligation demands the shedding of blood—including that of women, children, and minorities—as an act of divine obedience and communal loyalty.

Bloodshed becomes a potent symbol of religious strength and ideological purity, directed against both external enemies and internal "traitors," such as moderate Muslims who embrace Western values.

These symbolic narratives strengthen the jihadist vision of an Islamic *Ummah*, framing jihad as a sacred obligation rooted in humility, honor, and prophecy. This framing contributes to the collapse of moral boundaries, where violence becomes not only permitted but emotionally and ideologically necessary.

It also helps explain the intensified brutality increasingly directed at minority communities such as the Druze. The killing and mutilation of Druze individuals function symbolically as substitutes for lost dignity and honor. Several videos circulating in Arabic media depict recurring themes among Arab tribes in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, employing narratives of honor and sacrifice within an Islamic framework to justify the extermination of the Druze. These visual and rhetorical tropes reinforce that such violence serves not only military or political aims but also the restoration of communal and religious honor.

Violence is also staged as public theater: videos depicting the burning of Druze civilians labeled as enemies of Islam and Arab honor, the killing of children, throwing youths from high buildings, looting, and the abduction of around 80 women—based on testimonies from Syrian survivors—serve critical communicative functions. These spectacles signal ideological commitment, divine obedience, and tribal revenge. They are designed not only to terrorize but also to unite followers around a shared emotional framework focused on humiliating the enemy, glorifying martyrs, and purging traitors.

Symbolic violence—acts substituting physical killing or layered with ritualized humiliation—has deep roots in Arab tribal traditions. These include mutilation or cutting of mustaches, carrying cultural weight as tools for dehumanization, fear induction, and identity erasure. Coupled with ethnic cleansing practices, these acts fulfill a broader violent impulse toward domination and purification.

Together, these elements compel fighters, Arab tribes, and communities to view violence not merely as a tactical necessity but as a sacred, communal obligation. This demands shedding blood—including women's, children's, and minorities—as divine obedience and loyalty to the collective. Bloodshed thus becomes a symbol of religious strength and ideological purity, targeting external enemies and internal "others," including minority groups and moderate Muslims. These acts function as ritualized assertions of dominance, piety, and group solidarity.

What the Intelligence Community Needs to Know:

- Encrypted platforms (Telegram, Arab social media channels):** These are designed to incite hatred and justify violence against them.

- AI-generated and manipulated videos:** Tracks synthetic content that falsely links Druze communities to Israeli military actions, fueling sectarian animosity and legitimizing reprisals.

- Visual metaphors and symbolic imagery:** Watch for the use of blood, knives, predators, animals, and other potent symbols, especially when intertwined with Eid and martyrdom narratives, that encourage ethnic and sectarian cleansing.

- Arabic-language extremist narratives in Western diaspora communities:** Identity-embracing hate-filled antisemitic and revenge-driven messages targeting Druze and other minorities, which may serve as recruiting tools or incitement vectors.

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