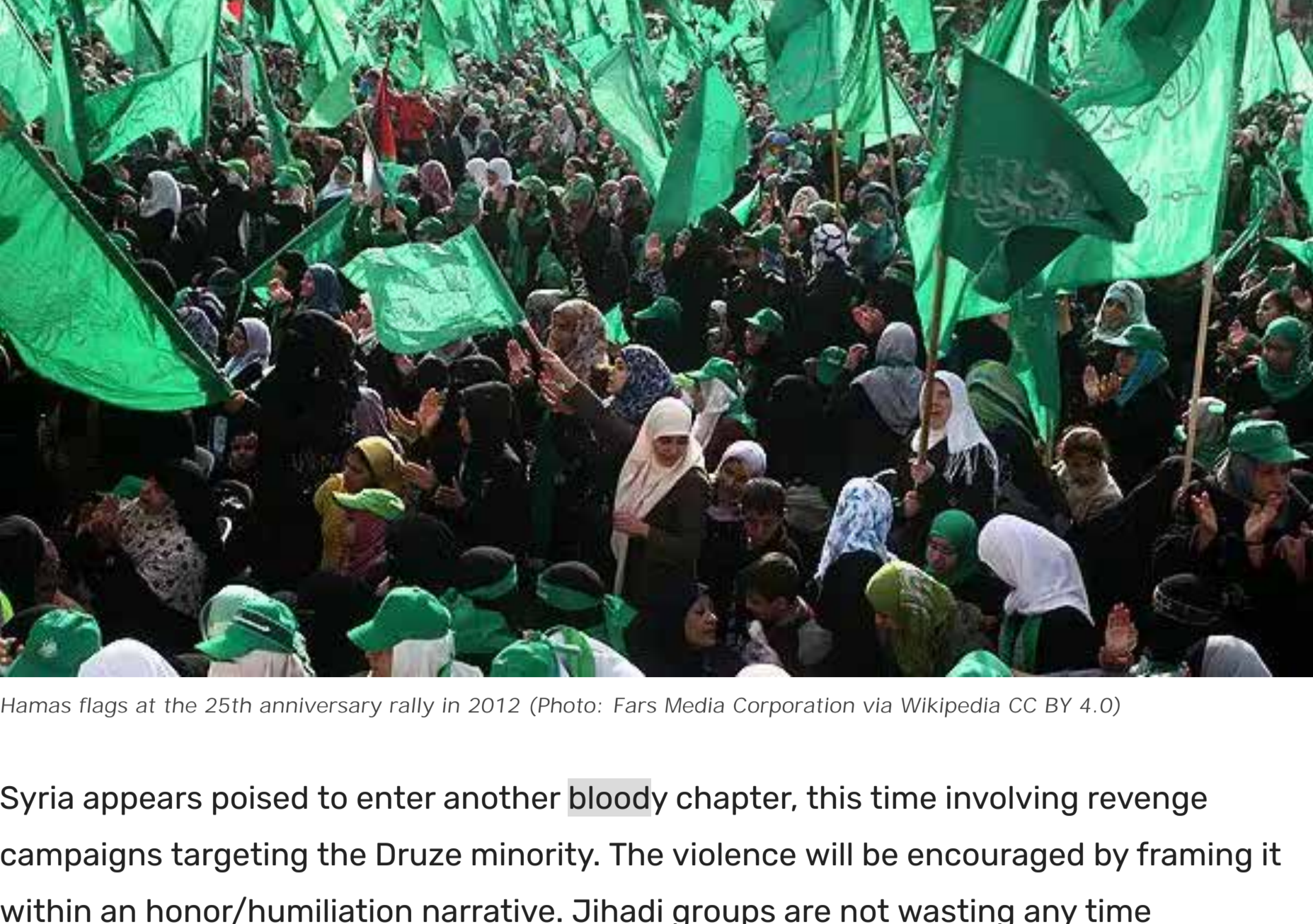


COUNTERTERRORISM TERRORISM STUDY

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

By Suha Hassen and Ajit Maan August 11, 2025

ShareFacebookTwitterLinkedInEmail



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 (تكثيف الدم):** The accumulated bloodshed attributed to enemies of Islam, situating current violence within a longer arc of victimization.
- **The Blood Equation (معادلة 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:

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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) need to be monitored for propaganda labeling the Druze as “traitors,” “Zionists,” or “Arab Zionists.” These labels are designed to incite hatred and justify violence against them.
- **AI-generated and manipulated videos:** Track 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, predatory 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:** Identify emerging hate-filled, antisemitic, and revenge-driven messages targeting Druze and other minorities, which may serve as recruiting tools or incitement vectors abroad.

Narrative Interventions: Israel says that its recent strikes have been aimed to protect the Druze, while al-Shara has also vowed to protect them. International human rights groups have also urged the protection of the Druze of Suwayda, Syria, where the largest population of Druze in the Middle East – over 700,000 – resides. But these policy recommendations are all focused either on kinetic protections or diplomatic pressure. We are proposing a non-kinetic, psychologically based strategy that operates on the less-than-fully-conscious triggers that animate the bad actors conducting human rights abuses. Specifically, we are proposing targeting, undermining, and simultaneously overwhelming the frames of reference of Hamas and other Jihadi groups, in addition to kinetic protections and diplomatic pressure from the outside. Our interventions will take place on the **inside**:

- **Disrupt the symbolic logic:** Use expert analysis to decode jihadist narratives around bloodshed, publicly challenging and refuting the “blood equation” framework that sanctifies violence.
- **Insert competing visuals:** Circulate emotionally resonant imagery and stories featuring Muslim victims of jihadist violence—especially women, children, and minority groups—to challenge the existing moral binary and undermine extremist recruitment narratives.
- Capitalize on what is triggered by **non-literal meaning, audience identity context, and the unconscious identity triggers of kinetic actors.**
- **Use trusted internal narrators to provide a larger narrative context,** one that overrides and swallows up Hamas’s context, interpreting from within. It is not a matter of reframing. It is a matter of out-framing, over-framing, providing a larger frame within which the previous frame still exists but is imbued with alternative meaning in a larger context provided by an internal trusted leader and reinforced by the international community.
- **Expose contradictions and redefine concepts of honor and humiliation:** Promote culturally meaningful symbols and narratives that shame these acts rather than glorify them, particularly reframing honor and humiliation from new perspectives shaped by events after October 7.

Note: The ‘Blood Equation’ model presented in this article was developed by Suha Hassen as part of her field research in Iraq into jihadist narratives and radicalization.”

Methodological Note

This article draws on continuous Arabic-language narrative monitoring across Arabic media, encrypted forums, and jihadi-linked visual content from Syria, Iraq, Gaza, and Lebanon. The “blood equation” is not simply a metaphor; it represents a multi-layered symbolic and psychological strategy grounded in political theology and emotional warfare.

TAGS ajit maan al qaeda Arab Druze hamas ISIS Jihadi Killing muslim brotherhood muslims

Mutilation radicalization Suha Hassen threat violence

ShareFacebookTwitterLinkedInEmail

PREVIOUS ARTICLE NEXT ARTICLE

ISIS 2025: The Silent Resurgence Peraton Appoints Ravi Dankanikote as Chief Growth Officer

Suha Hassen and Ajit Maan

Dr. Suha Hassen is a terrorism scholar with over a decade of first-hand field research experience in conflict zones. She holds a PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University, where she interviewed ex-ISIS fighters in Iraqi prisons. Her work focuses on violent jihadist movements and the religious and historical narratives that drive radicalization. Ajit Maan, Ph.D, is Professor of Practice at Arizona State University, CEO of the think tank Narrative Strategies, Columnist for Homeland Security Today, and the author of seven books.

RELATED ARTICLES

AI AND ADVANCED TECH

U.S.–China Technology Competition Intensifies as Beijing Invests \$900 Billion

AI AND ADVANCED TECH

Eight Types of Privacy, One Warrant: How Smart Devices Are Reshaping Search Warrants

COUNTERTERRORISM

Terrorists React to Maduro Arrest: Hizbullah, Houthis, and Jihadis Condemn U.S. Arrest as “Terrorist Aggression”

LEAVE A REPLY

Log in to leave a comment

LATEST ARTICLES

AI AND ADVANCED TECH

U.S.–China Technology Competition Intensifies as Beijing Invests \$900 Billion

AI AND ADVANCED TECH

Eight Types of Privacy, One Warrant: How Smart Devices Are Reshaping Search Warrants

COUNTERTERRORISM

Terrorists React to Maduro Arrest: Hizbullah, Houthis, and Jihadis Condemn U.S. Arrest as “Terrorist Aggression”

COUNTERTERRORISM

COLUMN: A Quarter Century After 9/11: Terrorism Trends in the United States and West in 2026

INTELLIGENCE

Why Fraud Is a Growing National Security Threat

Load more >