

## Preface

From the outside, it is easy to perceive jihadist organizations like DĀ'ISH in terms of repression and loathing. When we think of DĀ'ISH, we think of the orchestrated beheadings, destruction of world heritage, and terrorist attacks which rendered most of the world perilous at the very least. Certainly, I would not wish to diminish in any way the violence and brutality of militant jihadist groups. Yet if we want to understand how such an insurgent group worked and how it managed to hijack the hearts and minds of its recruits and manipulate the Arabic-Islamic tradition, such a focus may be misleading. From the inside, the most striking aspect of DĀ'ISH is its absolute control over its symbolic world, culminating in its extensive use of poetry in the jihadist milieu. This book proposes that if we want to understand the power of DĀ'ISH, then we must make sense of the messages with which individuals living under DĀ'ISH control are bombarded continuously, and decode these ways of communication to address how people come to embrace such deadly cults. How can people leave their families and homes to pledge loyalty to DĀ'ISH, which in turn takes away their freedom, their life, and threatens extreme violence to anyone who would question, let alone oppose it? This study challenges the common belief that radical fundamentalist organizations such as DĀ'ISH can only be defeated by means of violent physical warfare. Underlying this work is the assertion that understanding the jihadist discourse can help us understand better the jihadist milieu and, as a result, be able to provide a more effective counter-narrative to the jihadist paradigm. *Decoding DĀ'ISH* offers a contextualized insight into the controversial manifestation of religiously inspired political violence by analyzing strategies sharpened by decades of technique through which organizations like DĀ'ISH permeate flesh and blood of the people. Flowery language captivates children and adults emotionally and passionately and helps to reshape their understanding of reality, deactivate self-inhibiting norms associated with atrocities, and induce specific actions. *Decoding DĀ'ISH* is a long shot in the dark to understand the complex worldview of the organization, which operates as a form of power in its own right because those who control the power over meaning, also control the perception of reality. By exploiting the power of poetry to wield absolute control over the worldview of its adherents, DĀ'ISH attempts to legitimate brutality as virtue, concentrate bigotry, eulogize violence, and give a veneer of truth to the jihadist propaganda. By claiming control over the symbolic world and public discourse, jihadist currents cling to the Arabic-Islamic tradition to chase political power, riding roughshod over Qur'anic principles and traditions. Its laudatory slogans, single words, sempiternal images, ancient wisdom, and poetic verses are reinvented and subtly imposed on those living in the jihadist milieu in a million repetitions and taken on board mechanically and unconsciously. *Decoding DĀ'ISH* sheds light on how jihadist organizations exploit the symbolic world to strike further flames of discontent in war-torn countries like Iraq and Syria and wreak havoc over large areas and populations.