



COUNTERING ISLAMIC STATE IDEOLOGY:
VOICES OF SINGAPORE RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS

“Countering Islamic State Ideology: Voices of Singapore Religious Scholars edited by Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Rohan Gunaratna is an important work proving that the Islamic State (IS) is a master at propagating “fake news”. Reading Hassan and Gunaratna’s timely book will explain how the IS manipulates passages from the Qur’an and other theological texts out of context to fit its own quest for followers and power. The authors also advance the notion that countering IS is best done by Muslims whose interpretations of Islam’s theological works are predicated on forgiveness, hope, prosperity and peace. A must read for seekers of truth.”

Brigadier General (Ret) Russel Howard
Distinguished Senior Fellow, Joint Special Operations University,
and, Founder Director, Combating Terrorism Center
United States Military Academy, West Point

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WITH A FOREWORD BY
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Preface

Mohamad Hasbi Bin Hassan

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 اللهم صل على سيدنا محمد الفاتح لما أغلق والخاتم لما سبق ناصر الحق
 بالحق الهادي إلى صراطك المستقيم وعلى آله حق قدره ومقداره العظيم

Over the past few years, we have been grappled with alarming reports on the capture of Singapore Muslims who have been exposed to radical ideologies and propaganda while searching to deepen their understanding of Islam through misguided online sources instead of seeking knowledge through conventional proper methods and accredited sources and teachers.

These individuals represent neither the Muslim faith nor any part of it. They are misguided and have brought with them a distorted understanding and portrayal of this faith, causing an imbalance to the way of peace and harmony that Allah ﷻ has revealed to humankind demonstrated in the Prophetic ﷺ teachings and methodology.

Allah SWT has mentioned in the Holy Qur'an mentioned in surah Surah Al-Anbiya' Verse 7:

فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“... then ask those who have knowledge of the Scriptures”.

This verse clearly indicates for us to increase our understanding and knowledge by seeking out teachers, so that we may attain clarity on the doubts and confusions that we have. Individuals, who became radicalized, tend to steer away from seeking the proper explanation on certain content of a Prophetic ﷺ teaching and focus only on the text or content without embracing the essence demonstrated in the Prophetic ﷺ methodology. Paired with confusion, lack of meaning and purpose in life, they tend to develop a sense of low-esteem in themselves and making them vulnerable to the extremist ideas and thoughts that they discover online.

The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. It does not represent Islam. Instead, it represents evil, arrogance, ignorance, and skepticism clouded with narcissism and absolutist beliefs. Islam teaches us to read, ask, ponder, and be mindful of one's thoughts and actions. Teachings us to prioritize growing our humanity within us and remain humble and be a fountain of hope and compassion for all.

The Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers (Pergas) applauds this valuable contribution, a documentation of research and articles by a group of accredited asatizahs, each who are actively involved in the constructive effort against terrorism and their destructive propaganda. This compilation of articles will serve as an easy to access manual for Muslims and people of other faiths to better understand the misrepresented and distorted information and serve the truth by revisiting the concepts and ideologies that the radicalized individuals strongly believe in. An attempt to provide information to deter and demobilize more individuals from being influenced with such atrocity carried out under the name of Islam.

Our tradition is rooted in reading and to seek out teachers that shall expound the meaning while developing a deeper familiarization and coherence from within the Islamic viewpoints, responsive and practical to the needs of the changing times and demonstrated with the true meaning of *Adab*, *Ihsan* and *Hikmah*. The people of the sacred knowledge, comprising of both ‘Ulama and Asatizah serve to impart the truth, we at Pergas strongly hope this book will further contribute towards the preservation of the noble Islamic faith and traditions from these corrupted alterations and false interpretations that may lead others away from seeing the true Islam and facilitate in providing the guidance and reference.

اللَّهُمَّ اهْدِنَا بِهَذَاكَ وَاجْعَلْنَا مِمَّنْ يُسَارِعُ فِي رِضَاكَ
وَلَا تُؤَلِّمْنَا وَلِيًّا سِوَاكَ وَلَا تَجْعَلْنَا مِمَّنْ خَالَفَ أَمْرَكَ وَعَصَاكَ

O Allah! Guide us with Your Guidance and make us of those who hasten to Your Pleasure, do not appoint over us a protector other than You, and do not make us of those who oppose Your Command and disobey You.¹

وصلی اللہ علی سیدنا محمد وآلہ وصحبہ وسلم

Ustaz Mohamad Hasbi Bin Hassan

President

Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers Association (Pergas)

¹Excerpt of du'a at the end of gatherings, zikir and lessons by Habib Abdullah Bin Husayn Bin Tahir – author of Sulam al-Tawfiq and Majmu'.

Foreword

Karen Armstrong

In this important collection of essays, leading scholars draw on the rich traditions of Islam to counter the malignant and dangerous ideology of the Islamic State (IS), which seeks to restore the past glories and political triumphs of Islam by means of violence, cruelty and force. Until the rise of the West in the eighteenth century, Islam had been a major world power – perhaps the major world power – for over a millennium. The Qur'an had given the Muslim *ummah* a mission: their task was to create a just community in which all members, even the poorest, the most unimportant and vulnerable, were treated with absolute respect. A Muslim, therefore, had a political as well as a spiritual mission so the political status of Islam was a matter of supreme importance. This practically expressed compassion would enable Muslims to experience the divine and function effectively in the world. Within sixty years of the death of the Prophet (PBUH), the Muslims – who had hitherto lived outside the great world civilizations in the wilds of Arabia – ruled the largest empire that the world had ever seen - an extraordinary success that seemed to endorse the Islamic vision. This was the way things ought to be.

But after the rise of the European powers, Islam was reduced – almost overnight – to a dependent bloc, and for many Muslims this has been a religious as well as a political crisis. There is a yearning to put Islam back on track. The United States will, I believe, shortly have a similar experience. It too had a rapid and unlooked for political success: no one would have imagined that a few scattered trading colonies on the Atlantic seaboard would so swiftly acquire immense wealth, prestige and political supremacy. But there are clear signs of its imminent decline, which many Americans, who regard the supremacy of the United States as its “manifest destiny”, will experience as a religious as well as a political failure.

It is not difficult to understand the lure of the Islamic State – both for Muslims living within the *ummah* and those who live, often as a despised minority, in Western countries. Watching IS rampaging through Iraq and Syria and capturing large swathes of territory in its early campaigns seemed to recall the first victories of the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet (PBUH). Playing on this, IS fighters have larded their discourse with Islamic quotations; their leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, took the name of the deeply-revered first caliph, and IS imposed a medieval form of shari'ah law in its territories. The obscene savagery of its fighters – with their covered faces, swords, and cut-throat executions – may appear to belong to a bygone primitive age but, alas, from the French Revolution to the Bosnian massacres, mass killing has been a tragic part of the modern experience. IS is no more authentically Islamic than the Ku Klux Klan is genuinely Christian, but many Western people have come to believe that its policies are decisive proof that Islam

is addicted to violence, even though leading Muslim authorities have deplored both its conduct and ideology in the strongest terms. This new book will further explore traditions and writings that will counter this misperception.

I think we see the true Islamic attitude towards war and peace in the life and teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) – especially, perhaps, in the treaty of Hudaibiyyah of 628. For four years, the Muslim *ummah* in Medina had been engaged in a desperate struggle with the Quraysh of Mecca; there had been battles, terrible loss of life and, during the Siege of Medina (627), the community had faced the prospect of extermination:

“When they came against you from above you and from below you, and when your eyes swerved and your hearts reached your throats, while you thought thoughts about God; there it was that the believers were tried, and shaken most mightily.”¹

But a year later, the Prophet made a startling announcement that proved to be a demonstration of his prophetic genius. He announced that, as the result of an inspired dream, he intended to travel to Mecca – right into the heart of enemy territory – to make the *hajj* pilgrimage and he invited his companions to accompany him. This would not be a military expedition; fighting was strictly forbidden in Mecca and its environs at all times, and this prohibition was intensified during the *hajj* (pilgrimage). Pilgrims could bear no weapons, wear no armour, and during their journey to the holy places, a hajji could carry only a small hunting knife to kill game. When they arrived in Mecca, therefore, the Muslim pilgrims were making themselves dangerously vulnerable, marching provocatively unarmed into the heart of enemy territory. It was an extraordinarily perilous enterprise, but about a thousand Muslims volunteered to join the pilgrimage, and the Prophet was accompanied by his wife, Umm Salamah.

This was certainly risky but it was not a suicidal move. The Prophet was aware that he was placing the Quraysh in an extremely difficult position. Every Arab had the right to make the *hajj* and if the Quraysh, the guardians of the Kaabah, forbade a thousand pilgrims who were punctiliously observing the rites to enter the Sanctuary and, worse still, attacked them, they lose all credibility in the region. Nevertheless, the Quraysh did dispatch two hundred cavalymen to attack the unarmed Muslim pilgrims, but a friendly Bedouin tribe led them by a different route safely into the Haram, where they sat down with their camels at the well of Hudaibiyyah. It was a frightening time. The Muslims sent the well-connected `Uthman ibn `Affan to negotiate with the Qurayshi grandees, who took him hostage but sent word to the Muslims that he had been killed. It was a terrible moment, but a stalemate ensued, and, after an extremely anxious wait, the Quraysh eventually sent Suhayl ibn `Amr, a devout pagan whom Muhammad had always respected, to negotiate. The two sat together for a long time, but the terms agreed filled the

Muslims with dismay, since it seemed that they were about to surrender all the gains they had made during this long and terrible struggle.

First, the Prophet promised to return to Medina without visiting the *Haram* (holy sanctuary), but Suhayl agreed that the following year Muslim pilgrims could return and perform the traditional rites in the city. There would be a ten-year truce between Mecca and Medina, and Muhammad promised to return any Qurayshi who converted to Islam and made the *hijrah* (migration) to Medina without the consent of his family, but he also agreed that the Quraysh would not have to return a Muslim who defected to Mecca. The Qur'an had long stipulated that, in the interests of peace, Muslims must accept any conditions proposed by the enemy, however disadvantageous.² To the Muslim pilgrims, these terms seemed far too lenient, but when it came to the actual wording of the treaty they were even more appalled. `Ali was summoned to write to the Prophet's dictation, which began: This is the treaty that Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, has agreed with Suhayl ibn `Amr. Suhayl immediately objected, pointing out, reasonably enough, that if he believed that Muhammad was really the Prophet of Allah, he would not have been fighting him all these years. He insisted that Muhammad must simply use his own name and that of his father in the traditional way. `Ali had already written down the words "the Messenger of Allah" and indignantly refused to excise them. So, the Prophet calmly reached for the pen, asked `Ali to point to the words on the parchment, and deleted them himself. It was the crossing out of ego.

Horried by the treaty and the Prophet's seemingly meek submission, the pilgrims almost rebelled, but, with the skilful help of his wife, the Prophet managed to calm them down and they began the long journey home. But the mood was subdued and disgruntled. `Umar, who had vociferously objected to the treaty, feared that he had irreparably damaged his friendship with the Prophet and when he was summoned to join Muhammad at the head of the party, his heart sank. But to his surprise, he found the Prophet looking radiant as though a great weight had fallen from his shoulders: he had received a revelation, he told `Umar, that was dearer to him than anything under the sun. This revelation was, of course, *Al-Fath*, the *surah* (chapter) of Victory.

"Surely, We have given thee a manifest victory, that God may forgive thee thy former and thy latter sins, and complete His blessing upon thee, and guide thee on the straight path and that God may help thee with mighty help."³

The *surah* revealed the deeper meaning of the events at Hudaibiyyah. God had sent down his *sakinah* (the spirit of peace and tranquillity), which had entered the hearts of the Muslims who had so courageously agreed to accompany the Prophet on this perilous expedition. The treaty of Hudaibiyyah was not a humiliating compromise - far from it; it was a "sign" (an *ayah*), that revealed God's presence.

God had sent down the spirit of peace upon his Messenger and the Muslim *hajjis* (pilgrims), and imposed on them the self-restraint (*hilm*) that was fitting in these circumstances. Muslims were not supposed to be men of war; instead, they must embody the peace and forbearance that allied them with the People of the Book – the Jews and Christians. The *ummah* would not grow and develop by violence and aggressive self-assertion; it would flourish only if it embodied the spirit of mercy, courtesy and tranquillity,

“..as a seed that puts forth its shoot and strengthens it and it grows stout and raises straight upon its stalk, pleasing the owners.”⁴

This was the true ethos of Islam; and, indeed, the historian Ibn Ishaq tells us, Hudaibiyyah was indeed a victory; it proved to be a watershed not a humiliating defeat. Hitherto, the fighting and escalating hatred between Mecca and Medina had made it impossible for people to sit down and discuss the new religion calmly, but the armistice enabled them to meet safely and discuss Islam intelligently and calmly. As a result, “double as many or more than double entered Islam than ever before.”⁵ And two years after Hudaibiyyah, Mecca voluntarily opened its gates to the Muslim army.

In Muhammad’s final sermon to the Muslim community, delivered on Mount Arafat during his Farewell Pilgrimage, he emphasized the unity of humanity in words that speak urgently to our dangerously polarized world. An Arab, he insisted, had no superiority over a non-Arab and a non-Arab was not superior to an Arab; a white person was no better than a black person, nor a black person than a white. Because we were all descended from Adam and Eve, we belonged to a single family. The same applied to religious commitment. The Qur’an insisted that the original message of all the prophets had simply required a total submission to God. Every community had its own, specially revealed *din*, so Muslims must not participate in sectarian squabbles, because God could no more be confined to a single tradition than daylight to a single lamp:

“God is the Light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp (the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star) kindled from a Blessed Tree, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil wellnigh would shine, even if no fire touched it; Light upon Light.”⁶

This, not the brutal chauvinism of the Islamic State, is the vital message that the Qur’an gives to the world. In one verse, God addresses not just the Muslim *ummah*, but the entire human race:

“O humankind, we created you all from a single man and a single woman and formed you into tribes and nations so that you may get to know one another.”⁷

Each one of us, born of a man and a woman, is a conjunction of opposites and, from that conflict within ourselves, we can learn to respect the difference of others. Our task in this world is not to terrorise, convert or slander one another; nor is it to establish dangerously competing national or Islamic states or to slaughter our so-called enemies. Rather, in this time of crisis, we – like the contributors to this book – must all embark on the vital but difficult enterprise of learning to know one another – a task that requires the surrender of egotism; that is *islam*.

Karen Armstrong OBE FRSL is one of the world's leading commentators on religious affairs. She spent seven years as a Roman Catholic nun, but left her teaching order in 1969 to read English at St Anne's College, Oxford. In 1982 she became a full-time writer and broadcaster. She is the bestselling author of over a dozen books, including "A History of God," "The Case for God," "Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life" and, most recently, "The Lost Art of Scripture." She has also amongst other prizes and awards received the TED prize, the Roosevelt Institute Freedom of Worship Award, the Leopold Lucas Memorial Prize, the Nationalencyklopedia's International Knowledge Award, an Order of the British Empire for Services to Literature and Interfaith Dialogue and a Princess of Asturias Award for Social Sciences. She received several honorary doctorates.

⁷The Qur'an, 49:13, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (Oxford, 2004), adapted.

¹The Qur'an, 33:10-3; trans., Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran* (Oxford, 1955).

²The Qur'an, 2:193

³The Qur'an, 48:1-2, Arberry translation.

⁴The Qur'an, 48:32, Arberry translation.

⁵Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 751 in A. Guillaume (trans. and ed.) (1995), *The Life of Muhammad, A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, London.

⁶The Qur'an, 24:35, Arberry translation.

Introduction

Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Rohan Gunaratna

The ideology of the Islamic State (IS) manipulated and mobilised Muslims, especially young impressionable Muslims, to fight for a caliphate and Allah's rule on earth. To join the deadliest threat group, an estimated 60,000 recruits and families travelled from 120 countries to Syria and Iraq, the IS heartland. When governments formed coalitions and responded to the rising threat in Syria and Iraq, the IS expanded. In parallel, the world also witnessed the resurgence of Al-Qaeda, the mothership of the IS. Although they are similar in ideology, they clashed both in the mother theatre of Syria and Iraq, and globally.

Indoctrinated by virulent ideology and incitement by the IS and Al-Qaeda, tens of thousands of other operatives and supporters in Asia, Africa, Middle East and the West joined or formed threat groups, networks, and cells and staged attacks worldwide. The international community mobilised its resources to fight the threat in the core and the periphery. The overwhelming kinetic and lethal response focused on catching, killing and disrupting the operational guerrilla and terrorist threat. However, the threat today survives both in the physical and the virtual space. The operational threat persists in five theatres - Levant with Iraq-Syria as its epicentre, Africa with the Sahel and Somalia as its epicentres, Arabian Peninsula with Yemen as its epicentre, South and Central Asia with Afghanistan as its epicentre, and East Asia with the Philippines and Indonesia as its epicentres. The IS and Al-Qaeda's mastery of the virtual space has enabled it to survive and sustain the fight. The centre of gravity of the threat is ideological, the Achilles heel of the western-centric counter terrorism model.

Singapore developed an updated legal framework, a robust infrastructure and specialist expertise to keep the city-state safe. To continue to build the Singapore nation, Singaporean leaders led by its first Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew understood the need for the government to work with the communities. To counter exclusivism, extremism and terrorism, Singapore developed its own doctrine of promoting moderation, toleration and coexistence. The three community approaches Singapore developed were to counter the threat in the community through community engagement, to deradicalise and rehabilitate those in custody and in the community, and to counter the online threat, a work in progress. As the security of Singapore could no longer be guaranteed by raising its walls, Singapore also shared its expertise and experience with other governments and their partners.

As the terrorists and extremists misrepresented Islam, their precious faith, Singapore's religious clerics rose to the apex challenge to fight the terrorist and extremist ideology and its propagation. This book documents their efforts and

voices in combating extremism among Muslims in Singapore who are not immuned from the menace of violence. The contributors to this book are the local *asatizah*, the graduates of Islamic studies who are certified to teach Islam in Singapore. What is recorded in this book represents only a small part of the Singapore *asatizah*'s commitment and dedication to this work to protect their home and faith.

What is this book about?

This book is about countering IS warped ideology and propaganda based on misinterpretation and misapplication of Islamic intellectual tradition for the purpose of mobilising young impressionable Muslims from all over the world to support its cause by joining the group or executing terrorist attacks on its behalf.

The book seeks to demonstrate how IS ideology and propaganda is theologically misguided by offering the correct and authoritative understanding of Islam.

The book compiles various articles that focus on refuting specific aspects of IS ideology by local Singapore Muslim clerics who have dedicated time in researching IS extremist ideology, rehabilitating local radicalised individuals and engaging in public counter-radicalisation works. Most of these articles were published before in various publication platforms and republished here with permission. Several of the articles are written for the purpose of this edited book project.

Each article was selected for its focus on specific IS ideas accompanied with a theological refutation. As a whole, the articles encompass critical ideas of IS that are used to win support and allegiance, shape attitudes and mindsets towards their misguided vision of a caliphate.

The articles were written and edited with the primary objective of facilitating easy reading for the general public, policymakers and front-liners who are the primary targets of this book, known for their preference for simple and concise presentation over the standard academic approach filled with lengthy conceptual, theoretical and philosophical deliberation of a subject matter with unfamiliar jargons too.

However, the book strives to fulfil the needs and interest of the academic and researchers by providing, where possible, sources and references in footnotes for further reading and deliberation on a subject matter.

Both the focus and straight-to-the-point approach makes this book a valuable reading in the market.

All contributors in this book are local *asatizah* (graduates of Islamic Studies and certified to teach Islam in Singapore). The book, thus, serves to document their efforts and voices in combating extremism among Muslims in Singapore who are not immuned from the menace of violent extremism and radicalisation. Of course, what is recorded in this book represents a small part of Singapore *asatizahs'* commitment and dedication to this work, be it in the form of writing or others.

Why this book?

The premise behind this book is the important role IS extremist ideology played in radicalising individuals and winning over their support. Many have travelled to Syria and Iraq abandoning their families i.e. wife, children and parents, leaving behind a good life and profession to join IS. Some chose to commit atrocities in the countries where they live in the name of IS and many others would render other forms of support such as spreading IS propaganda online, raising funds for IS and recruiting new members.

This book will not dwell into the argument on the important role played by ideas in radicalising Muslim to join and support IS. There are already many studies written on it which readers can refer to.

What needs to be stressed here, so as to avoid misunderstanding, is that recognising the importance and centrality of IS ideology in mobilising support is not the same as arguing it is a single causal factor of radicalisation among Muslims.

The editor of this book recognises, as affirmed also by many studies, that the problem of radicalisation of Muslims towards IS-type violent extremism remains complex, and a result of an amalgamation of various factors. The configuration of these factors and the significance of one above the others might differ from one context to another. However, IS ideology does take important place among the factors, whether at the pre or post radicalisation stage.

In that regard, countering IS ideology becomes one of many important components in mitigating the problem of violent extremism among Muslims today. This book seeks to contribute to this by offering strong and credible arguments that expose how IS ideology is fallacious and warped.

Because IS seeks to legitimise its ideology with Islamic theological arguments and taps on Islamic intellectual traditions, both become important sources for, and make up the main feature of refutation against IS ideology, which explains the nature and character of all articles published in this book.

Using the same theological source and intellectual tradition, the articles compiled in this book would demonstrate how IS has been theologically mistaken and misguided. Thus, Muslims should not be hesitant to reject IS or resist from rendering support to its agents. At the least, and, ideally, they should be confident to debate with those who profess the misguided ideology online or in real life in order to bring the person back to the right path or to prevent others from going onto the wrong path.

It is not the objective of this book, however, to offer comprehensive rebuttal of IS ideology. Nevertheless, the selected articles represent key components of IS ideology. They appear regularly in IS online materials and are used often to influence targeted audiences.

This book would benefit non-Muslims too because IS ideological propaganda has affected them, as much as it affects Muslims.

Some non-Muslims think that what IS propagates is representative of Islam. Others are not sure, but they are anxious about the safety and security of their family and themselves in the multi-cultural and religious society/country that they live in. Right wing extremists, Islamophobes and ultra-nationalists take advantage of IS ideological propaganda to promote hate just like IS is doing. Both are feeding each other's hate ideology to drive a wedge in society and affect the peaceful co-existence necessary for national security and stability.

It is hoped that the book would contribute in preventing misunderstanding and misperception of Islam and Muslims among non-Muslims, and correcting them among those who have been influenced by IS and its extremist counterparts among right-wing, ultra-nationalist and Islamophobe groups. Consequently, we hope to contribute also to harmonious relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in society.

What is the significance of the book?

The book would be handy reading material for the general public, Muslims or non-Muslims, to know the right understanding of Islam vis-à-vis IS ideological propaganda, be it for personal understanding, for parents' guidance of children, for teachers in educating their pupils at school, or for professors when teaching relevant topics to undergraduate and graduate students.

The book would also benefit governmental agencies who deal with counter-extremism works in society and with rehabilitation of incarcerated Muslim extremists or terrorists. It would provide them with necessary "ammunition" against the IS ideological threat in society and in detention facilities.

For those who are into countering IS material online, the book could be a reference to produce various online materials for various audiences. It could also be shared among online users who are looking for counter-IS material.

The book could also inform counter-extremism policies by raising awareness on the importance of countering IS ideological propaganda, how to go about doing it and with whom they could work with to produce similar material.

For whom the book is written?

This book is written for general readers, but it is also suitable for academicians, researchers and policy makers who are interested in the contemporary study of jihadism, jihadist terrorism threat, countering violent extremism and the promotion of harmonious Muslim and non-Muslim co-existence in society.

How is the book organised?

The book is divided into two parts.

The first part provides a historical development of IS and the centrality of ideas in IS' mobilising efforts. This is to provide a brief background to the main aspect of the book – countering IS' misguided understanding of Islam that have influenced many Muslims to commit terrorism and promote strife and disharmony among Muslims, and between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The second part contains a collection of articles countering IS ideology. The articles are selected to address key IS ideas used to influence Muslims to join IS in Syria or Iraq, launch attacks in their own countries against targets deemed to be hostile towards IS or render any form of support to the IS cause.

The key selected ideas are:

- ❖ IS' fight in Syria is the catalyst of the prophesied coming of Al-Mahdi and Armageddon.
- ❖ IS black banner represents the prophesied army of the righteous that would fight with Al-Mahdi
- ❖ Fighting with IS is a legitimate and obligatory jihad for Muslims
- ❖ Establishing the caliphate or an Islamic state is obligatory upon Muslims
- ❖ IS is the legitimate Islamic caliphate today towards which *bay'at* (allegiance) is obligatory upon all Muslims

- ❖ Living in non-Muslim countries under an un-Islamic system and non-Muslim ruler is haram and nullifies a Muslim's testimony of faith
 - ❖ *Hijrah* (migration) to IS territory is obligatory upon any Muslim who has the means to perform it
 - ❖ Permission of parents is not necessary to join jihad with IS and to perform *hijrah* to IS territory
 - ❖ Those who reject and condemn IS are *kuffar* (infidels) and performing *takfiri* against them is obligatory
 - ❖ Hating non-Muslims is a fundamental aspect of Islamic faith
 - ❖ War is the basis of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims
 - ❖ Slavery is permissible and must be revived
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The Islamic State (IS) Group – A Brief Introduction

— Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff

Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide a brief introduction about the IS group and will focus on the importance of ideas and doctrines to the group. The chapter will be a prelude to the remaining chapters in this book, emphasising the importance of IS' exploitation of religious ideas and the need to refute them, as well as efforts that have been put forth to counter the group's treacherous ideas and doctrines.

The IS group is one of the contemporary notorious terror group in the 21st century that has reshaped the jihadist landscape. It is also one of the bloodiest, particularly after its split from Al-Qaeda in 2013. It terrorised the world by declaring a proto-state or caliphate across swathes of lands in Iraq and Syria in 2014, mobilising thousands of foreign fighters, and conducting attacks across the world; the Muslim world, the West, and the East.

The group weaves its jihadist thought to include sectarian, revolutionary and anti-imperialist thought. Thus, it fights on multiple fronts against the Arabs, the Sunnis, the Shiites, other religious groups and sects, and the West.¹

There are various factors that contribute to the rise of the group and to become what they are today. This chapter will elaborate on some of the key incidents that became part of the group's ideological motivations and justifications.

IS' origin and rise factors

The IS group started from “an accident of history, emerging from multiple social, political and economic tensions in the Middle East and beyond”.² The group is neither new nor inexperienced, and it has evolved into a terrifying and ruthless group far from its origin, yet the group was able to establish and declare a “Caliphate”.

The group has its origins in the late 1990s, when Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi began recruiting and preparing extremist militants to fight against the US forces during their occupation in Iraq.

The organisation was called *Jama'at Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad* and later renamed to Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) after pledging allegiance to Al-Qaeda.

The idea of a state was initiated in 2006 when the group joined forces with other insurgent groups and renamed Mujahideen Shura Council. During this time, the group claimed to have controlled at least six Iraqi provinces. The group then renamed itself in the same year to Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).

The group then faced a decline from 2006 to 2011 from a backlash from the local community and increased security from the US and Iraqi forces particularly due to Zarqawi's brutal tactics.

In 2013, it changed its name to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) due to its involvement in the Syrian Civil War. Since then, the group has taken over large swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq.

On 29 June 2014, the group changed its name again, to the "Islamic State" (IS), declaring a Caliphate and naming its leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi the Caliph.³

The group's rapid physical expansion and control in addition to its universally-condemned brutal tactics led to its own ruin. Many states began to intervene against the group.

On 22 March 2019, a spokeswoman from the White House claimed that the IS group no longer holds any territory in Syria, following the group's last territorial defeat in the Baghuz town in Deir ez-Zor, Syria.⁴ Though IS has been defeated, it was reported that IS continues to exist and has now turned into conducting insurgency campaigns back to how it was during its period with Al-Qaeda and pre-Al-Qaeda.

Sectarianism in a country is another factor contributing to the rise of IS physically and ideologically. The group was able to recruit supporters by perpetuating arguments on religious intolerance. The country became deeply sectarian especially following the invasion of foreign forces in March 2003 that resulted in a power vacuum. Iraqi social division became distinct after Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, a Shiite sectarian ruler, took over in December 2005. Iraq's Shiite-dominated government then shaped the country to be a deeply sectarian system. The sectarian conflict worsened even further after Sunnis were suppressed.⁵ Many Sunnis were also purged from the military and the government. The aftermath of the 2003 invasion resulted in the escalation and perpetual sectarian violence between Shiites and Sunnis. The country became a fertile breeding ground for violence.

Apart from the festering Sunni resentment, the rise of the IS group was also propelled by Abu Musab Zarqawi's strong hatred for Shiites. He instigated the group to target Shiites in Iraq resulting in an emerging battle line in the country and the creation of strong anti-Shiite narratives within the group.⁶

Zarqawi's hatred of other Muslims also influences his role in the religious indoctrination of the group, widening the range of actions and behaviours that warranted an excommunication, making Muslims infidels.⁷ Such narratives had led to the demonisation and persecution of not only the Shiites but other religious groups and communities.

Besides the anti-Shiite and anti-Iraqi government rhetoric, the constant dysfunctional nature of the Iraqi state and the outbreak of the Syrian civil war were also among the other factors that contributed to the evolution of the IS group.

While Iraq and Syria were chaotic, IS – post-2010 – was re-built when Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi took over by exploiting the political and social instability in Iraq and Syria. The dysfunctional situation, coupled with the absence of governance, allowed the group to move and operate freely. He created a “cohesive, disciplined and flexible” organisation.⁸ He built a hierarchical and centralised organisation that was flexible enough to allow its subordinate leaders wide latitude to do as they saw fit in the field as long as it was within the mission guidelines established by the leader.

Al-Baghdadi's strategy was different from his predecessors; Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi. Al-Zarqawi focused more on spectacular and provocative attacks rather than on creating a solidly anchored organisation while Abu Umar Al-Baghdadi, on the other hand, focused on the mind-numbing minutiae of the organisation and micro-managing his subordinates.⁹ He also recruited many local Iraqis who were mostly from the intelligence, military and security establishments.

The instability had also allowed IS to take control of towns and cities to build the group's financial capacity; through the extortions and taxations on local populace, and also by exporting oil from oilfields it controls.

The 2011 Arab revolutions also opened an enormous opportunity for extremism and radicalisation in the region. As violence escalated in the region, many movements gathered and evolved especially after money, weapons and fighters flew in, resulting in the expansion of many Jihadists groups and movements, including the IS group.¹⁰

Similar to the earlier days of IS in Iraq, their initial objectives were to achieve political and social justice in Iraq. However, the group evolved and radicalised further to become notorious and brutal, achieving beyond just politically-and religiously-motivated goals. The dysfunctional political system and perceived continuous injustices and oppressions that led to grievances and wanting to take revenge, provided a fertile ground for the group's radicalisation.

Importance of ideology and propaganda to IS

The IS group built its legitimacy around a number of concepts and ideas, one of which is that if a group has power, it will have the legitimacy to rule. Therefore, IS was built on a foundation of a strong and cohesive ideology and symbolism. Its clear ideological visions were elaborated in detail in several of its publications and propaganda. A clear idea is one, religious ideas are another. As most of the group's ideas are religiously motivated, the value of religion is crucial in justifying any acts that IS propounds.

In March 2005, the group (while still associated with Al-Qaeda and known as AQI) published its “creed and methodology” in which it expressed its determination to promote and defend *tawhid* – monotheism – and eliminate polytheism. The “creed and methodology” also implied that anyone who disagrees constitutes an infidel and is thus subject to *takfir* (excommunication) and death. This is also extended to secularism – *‘ilmaniyah* – and all other man-made ideologies such as nationalism, Communism and Baathism. They are considered “blatant violation of [their version of] Islam”. As such, jihad is required, and it is the duty of all Muslims especially if the “infidels” attacked Muslims and their territories. Waging jihad against the enemies of Islam is therefore next in importance after the profession of the *shahadah* – faith.¹¹

In addition to having a clear methodology and creed, the group's goals are also clear and explicit. These goals are built upon the methodology and the creed. The goals are: 1) Remove the aggressor from Iraq. 2) Affirm *tawhid*, oneness of God among Muslims. 3) Propagate the message that “there is no god but God”, to all the countries in which Islam is absent. 4) Wage jihad to liberate Muslim territories from infidels and apostates. 5) Fight the *taghut* (transgressors) ruling Muslim lands. 6) “Establish a wise Caliphate” in which the Sharia rules supreme as it did during the time of Prophet Mohammad. 6) “Spread monotheism on earth, cleanse it of polytheism, to govern according to the laws of God”.¹²

IS also utilises the experience and works of its predecessors. Two key works are *Idarat Al Tawwahush: Akhtar Marhalah Satamur Biha Al-Ummah* (The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass) by Abu Bakr Naji written in 2004 and *Khuttah Istratijiyyah Li Ta'ziz Al-Mawqif Al-Siyasi Li Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Fi Al-Iraq* (Strategic Plan to Improve the Political Position of the Islamic State in Iraq) written by members of the Iraqi group Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2010.¹³

In terms of ideology, these two publications were developed based on jihadist rhetoric; among others, they spread hatred and the polarisation between Islam and the non-Islamic West. There are misguided religious justifications for the use of violence too.¹⁴

The significance of these publications is that they gave the group powerful narratives, religious legitimacy and authority to rule. They have in fact been widely embraced by the group's senior leaders as a blueprint for their barbarous acts and intended plans for the establishment of a caliphate.

Importance of religious indoctrination to IS

While there are various reasons for IS' continuous existence either as a state or as an insurgent group, its resilience in still existing can also be deduced from its strong religiously-motivated propaganda, spreading religious doctrines and ideologies. Due to its importance, the group begins their indoctrination of new recruits through classes on their version of Islamic theology prior to any other training.

Promoting and defending tawhid is vital to the group. IS exploits the Islamic theology using theological frames that classify 'truths' in black-and-white terms – right vs wrong, *Dar Al-Aman* vs *Dar Al-Harb*, Muslim vs non-Muslim. They use these categories – Muslim/non-Muslim – to demarcate their enemies along theological lines. By labelling fellow Muslims and the religious 'other' as a *kafir* (disbeliever), *murtad* (apostate), *taghut* (transgressor), or *ahl al-bid'ah* (blasphemer), IS morally disengages and dehumanises their victims. Through these theological frames, IS believes it has a divine mandate to commit acts that are morally forbidden in their own religion such as suicide attacks, burning people alive, and disfiguring dead bodies.¹⁵

The building block of the binary worldview is on the basis of the concept of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* – a concept in which good and evil are two different domains with a line drawn between the two. The concept does not only separate the two, but also disavowing the evil and being loyal to the good.¹⁶ IS group mentions this concept several times in many issues of *Dabiq* magazines¹⁷ in its early days of the Caliphate as well as other publications, such as *Rumiyah* and *An-Naba*. Such exploitation clouds the minds of naïve Muslims into believing the binary worldview that IS propagates and how non-Islamic elements are incompatible with Islam.

The non-Islamic elements, be them institutions or governance etc., are believed to be at odds with Islamic teachings, and a source of inequality, socio-political backwardness and various social ills. Thus, IS through theology espouses the rejection of contemporary moderate Islamic life and that Islam has to be practised as it was in 7th century Arabia, in literal terms.

In addition, by exploiting theology, IS capitalises on the provision of a strong divine command, and narratives to normalise violence within its members, supporters and sympathisers, particularly the vulnerable and naïve young Muslims who lack religious understanding.¹⁸

Following the establishment of the self-styled caliphate, IS has been promoting such binary worldview. For instance, in *Dabiq*, the group's official magazine, it is emphasised that the world is divided into two camps only; the camp of Muslims and the camp of non-Muslims.

As an example, in the first issue of *Dabiq*, the leader said,

“O Ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy – the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the Jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews”.¹⁹

The binary worldview of the two camps does not stop at the first issue of their *Dabiq* magazine but continue to be propagated throughout all their propaganda materials, echoing similar views.

The binary worldview, coupled with imaginary boundaries of the two worlds, are further strengthened with the idea of the caliphate. The new caliphate represents the onset of a new era of might and dignity for the Muslims. Even after the fall, the idea that the caliphate was able to be created perpetuates within the mind of the members, supporters and sympathisers. Caliphate as a religious mandate is not the only idea that IS propagates. Others, such as the obligation to migrate or *hijrah* to a “Muslim country”, - in this regard, IS territory - is another religious argument propounded by the group.²⁰ The binary idea of the only two worlds that exist provides a legitimate inspiration for Muslims to migrate to IS territory. Even though IS has lost its territories, the idea of migration continues to permeate within the mind of some Muslims.

IS also exploits the religious apocalyptic beliefs. The group propagates End of Times narratives in which the group utilises religious texts to mobilise fighters in Syria. A prophetic text that says *Dabiq* (near Aleppo in Syria) will be where Islam defeats Christendom, highlights the alleged prophesy of the conflict in Syria as a prelude to the anticipated end of the world. Although many Muslims may have rejected such an interpretation of the prophetic text, apocalyptic beliefs in Islam can be seen as one of the importance aspects of beliefs after *tawhid* (monotheism).²¹

Another religious idea that IS espouses is the importance of reviving slavery. The group believes in reconstructing a medieval tradition based on the supposed prophetic guidance and teachings. The group claimed that slavery is permissible, and this practice will flourish once more as an indication of the arrival of the Hour. The group published a brochure focusing on the topic, to educate the populace under their control as well as the general Muslims.

The brochure comprises of 29 questions and answers pertaining to the issue of slavery. The brochure also provides religious justifications for the practice of slavery in the modern era.²²

There are various other misguided religious arguments and justifications of supposed Islamic practices that IS propagates. The remaining chapter of this book will provide further details on other religious ideas including the contestations, arguing against IS skewed interpretations and justifications.

Importance of education to IS

Education is as important and crucial for the Islamic State group as their propagation of ideas. Thus, the IS has not only been promoting ideas of religious hatred and violence globally by the use of online platforms for their propaganda, but the group has also exploited the education systems that it has taken control of in Iraq and Syria previously to institutionalise its brainwashing efforts.

First, they revamped the syllabus and content of the subjects in schools with the help of about 400 individuals. In February 2015, the group was reported to have a list of subjects that they retained and removed. The subjects kept were Monotheism, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Natural Sciences, Arabic and English languages, with Geography recently re-added to this list. The subjects removed were Music and the Arts, National Education, Social Studies, History, Fine Arts, Sports (Physical Education), Philosophy and Psychological Studies.²³

The group, despite its throwback to the past, acknowledges the instrumental importance of the hard sciences, such as Physics and Chemistry, as well as the natural sciences. Indeed, IS is in need of engineers, doctors, accountants, and many such professionals. These sciences and their practitioners – grown organically – are deemed useful for the production and deployment of technologies to advance the group's agenda of conflict and violence.

IS also recognises the role of languages to communicate its propaganda to other parts of the world, and hence its acceptance of foreign languages such as English in its education system.²⁴

A study of the changes in the syllabus and curriculum will show the most pronounced as being the Social Sciences, which have been effectively obliterated. The subjects that are more specifically affected are the ones that require the use of critical analyses and logical arguments. Indeed, IS abhors the use of logic, especially in the interpretation of Islamic teachings. In its fundamentalist view of the religion, it approaches religious sources in a dogmatic and literal sense without regard for hierarchy of values, and the need to take into account time and space.²⁵

The rejection of critical analyses and the use of logic have their precedents in the practice of those who believe that a blueprint for a social order may be lifted from the literal stipulations of the Qur'an and *hadith*. It regards as unacceptable the use of logic and reason in the approach to religious sources, and neither attempts to contextualise nor extract the moral purposes behind the scriptural stipulations. The strict rejection of the use of logic and disregard for context issued from the teachings on monotheism of the Saudi-based scholar-warrior Muhammad bin Abd Al-Wahab.²⁶

In his book, those whose beliefs lie outside the theological boundaries of monotheism are infidels or apostates, whose killing or subjugation into slavery constitutes a religious obligation. Juxtaposed against IS 'Cubs of Caliphate' project where youngsters are regularly exposed to violent images of beheadings and even taught to carry them out, one can expect only the most extremely violent and brutal militants to emerge from such a system.²⁷

In IS' pursuit to fashion a radical utopia of an Islamic caliphate, it has attempted to remove all manner of social identities that it regards as being the antithesis of a true Muslim and an Islamic social order.

To this end, it has replaced all references to the 'Syrian Arab Republic', 'national', 'home', 'Syria', 'my nation' with 'Islamic State' and condemned any references to ethnicity.

In short, IS believes that the sole identity of a person should be a religious one, in particular its understanding of who constitutes a true Muslim and the sole identity of a state as being one that implements the criminal laws of seventh century Arabia.²⁸

Countering IS ideology

The group's use of religion – be it right or wrong – is because of the influence and legitimacy of the religion itself. The religion is a powerful force in mobilising its followers towards a certain goal. It also carries more weight in proving their point, in this case the justification for violence.

As much as the group can justify the use of violence by using the religion, it is difficult for the Muslim community to counter it. The religious scholars can argue that all the violence is not legitimate in today's context, which many have been saying, but the issue is on proclaiming these acts outright as totally prohibited. This is because it will contradict with what is in the Qur'an and the prophetic text as both can be understood in its literal sense that such violent acts are permissible. Thus, the counter argument to this understanding is that

the Qur'an and the prophetic texts can never be understood literally, but to look at the interpretation and context of the verses and the texts. As such, rulings in the religion are dynamic due to the various interpretations and contexts of Qur'anic verses and prophetic texts. In fact, different sets of opinions have emerged, accepted and practiced by various religious scholars from during the Prophet's time until today.

Though the religion allows for many interpretations and opinions, IS would only peg its religious arguments to only one set of interpretation and opinion. Thus, denouncing them as totally un-Islamic is rather counter-intuitive.²⁹

Being un-Islamic is one thing, but misinterpreting the religion is another. A counter to the group is not necessarily because of them being un-Islamic but rather their misinterpretation of the religion is a manipulation to accede to their lust in achieving their political and social objectives.

Countering them theologically is being done on the individual level as well as collectively. This effort should not stop. One tremendously brilliant action taken by the Muslim community is through *The Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi*.³⁰ It is a letter to refute the IS group theologically and was signed by numerous Muslim scholars, thinkers and community leaders.

Another effort in countering the group is to promote shared human values. The group, similar to many other jihadi groups, often urge its followers to hold on to the concept of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'*. This concept radicalises a person to have a reversed sense of morality. Hence, committing an act of violence becomes a moral obligation instead of a forbidden act.³¹

Thus the need to safeguard communities and impart moral values to them before the group's immoral values reach them.

A point worthy to note with regards to the religious aspect of the group is that IS authors are not theologians but mere propagandists. Despite their plentiful references to Islam's canonical sources, directly or indirectly, the inclusion of those resources is a rhetorical mechanism with which to lend their propaganda theological authority.³²

Conclusion

Religious elements have substantial weight in influencing ideas as religion plays an important role in one's life.

IS' capability in skewing religious ideas pose a real threat to Muslims at large, particularly their ideologies that "provides the logic of extremism, violence, and

acts of inhumanity”.³³ IS exploits the religion to create influential and convincing narratives so as to have legitimacy and authority.

Despite IS’ territorial losses, its existence pervades in the realm of propaganda especially via online media platforms; providing a coherent narrative, rejection-based speeches, and carefully calibrated media “projectiles”.³⁴ IS employing such strategy has been successful in garnering support, and mobilising and recruiting fighters.

However, terror groups that exploit religion have been in existence for centuries and the Islamic State group is not the first and it will not be the last. Therefore, in order to safeguard the Muslim minds, it is important to have constant and rigorous efforts to uncover the propagated skewed religious ideas and countering them whilst imparting Muslims the correct understanding of the religion coupled with the promotion of moral and humane values.

It is also important to educate on the significance of maintaining good relations between human beings regardless of race, ethnicity or religion as a riposte to IS’ binary worldview.

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An Analysis Of Muslim Voices Against Islamic State (IS)¹

Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mustazah Bahari

Out of a sudden in June, IS succeeded in expelling Iraq's armed forces from its northern territories to Baghdad and took control over the large area. Immediately after, news and reports of IS' violence on its opponents: the Shiite communities, Christians and other minority sects started to emerge. These news and reports are not obtained from mainstream media sources only, but also from local activists and NGOs on the ground.

On 30th June 2014, Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi, the leader of IS made a public announcement of the establishment of a new "caliphate" stretching from Diyala (Iraq) to Aleppo (Syria) and subsequently appointed himself as the caliph. He called upon Muslims all over the world to pledge allegiance to him and to actively assist him in running this new "caliphate".

These developments have caught the world by surprise and have posed a challenge to the Muslim world namely the world leaders, scholars and intellectuals. There was now a pertinent need to take a stance against the IS' atrocities and the establishment of the new "caliphate".

Muslims' reaction

Consequently, Muslim political leaders, scholars, intellectuals, social activists and organisations have responded to these challenges and developments. A large majority of them have denounced the IS.

This conclusion is based on various denunciations and statements made by Muslims that the authors have managed to compile in a list titled Muslim Voices Against IS / ISIS / ISIL.²

As of 22 September 2014, the list compiles the voices of 86 individuals and groups. These voices are divided into,

1. Religious scholars (ulama) (46)
2. Intellectuals, community leaders and Muslim organisations. (34)
3. Political leaders (3) and policy of Muslim countries. (3)

The authors have intentionally created a specific category under the category of religious scholars as the issues posed by the IS has close relations with religion i.e.

the validity and legitimacy of the newly founded “caliphate” that requires Muslims to pledge allegiance to its new “caliph” and IS’ violent conduct towards their opponents and minority groups in territories under its control in the name of Islam.

As such, the scholars’ stand in the issue would play an important factor in assisting Muslims all over the world to evaluate the legitimacy of IS, their extreme conduct and the new “caliphate” in Islam.

It must be emphasised, however, that the list is not a comprehensive one and the attempt to make it one is almost futile because the scope covering Muslims all over the world is so vast and dynamic. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to give a broad view of Muslims’ stance towards IS.

Another initiative that shares the same spirit of this list is an open letter to Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi, signed by more than 100 Muslim scholars that can be read at <http://lettertobaghdadi.com/> .

Analysis

In addition to Muslims’ clear rejection of IS, the list also offers a few interesting points with regards to the negative attitudes of Muslims towards IS.

Firstly, religious scholars are the most vocal group against IS and their stand is made credible from the following facts;

- ❖ The Federation of Muslim Scholars, the one and only organisation, that unites Muslim religious scholars all over the world, led by Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradhwai, a renowned scholar based in Qatar has issued a statement rejecting the validity of the new “caliphate” founded by IS and condemning their violence. Till now, there is no member of the organisation who contests or objects this statement.
- ❖ Religious scholars in Syria and Iraq, individually and collectively through their respective organisations denounce IS, their violence and the “caliphate”. This denunciation is more important than the rest of the international scholars because they represent the primary eye-witnesses of the realities of the IS regime as they were the ones who come into direct contact with the IS on the ground; their statement is not based on news and reports only.
- ❖ IS is rejected by religious scholars of the three main schools of thought in Islam today,
 - ◊ the Sunnis who are represented by Al-Azhar University and *Dar Al-Ifta’ Al-Misriyah* (Egypt’s Office of Fatwa).

- ◇ the Shiites who are represented by top Shiite religious scholars in Iran and Iraq.
 - ◇ Salafis who are represented by the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia and other Salafi scholars.
- ❖ IS is also denounced by prominent religious scholars among jihadist such as Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatadah.

Secondly, IS is rejected not only by traditionalists and modernists, but by radicals also. Hizbut Tahrir, a global Islamist movement with a mission of reviving the caliphate, denounced ISIS' proclamation of a "caliphate" and their violence.

In Syria, IS was denounced by insurgent groups under the Islamic Front (an alliance of Islam-based insurgent groups in Syria) and the Free Syrian Army alike.

Ironically, IS is also denounced by Al-Qaeda for their extremism and violence and for being a threat to jihad against the Syria government by local jihad groups. This is voiced by Ayman Al-Zawahiri and the leaders of Jabhah Al-Nusrah (Al-Qaeda branch in Syria).

Ayman Al-Zawahiri denounced IS as early as January 2014 and withdrew his recognition of IS as being part of Al-Qaeda.

Radicals and sympathisers of Al-Qaeda in Indonesia such as elements of Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah and Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (Indonesian Mujahidin Council founded by members of Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah) have rejected the validity of IS' "caliphate" and their violence.

Thirdly, IS is rejected not only by those who base their stand on available news and reports brought by mainstream media whose credibility is suspect to some. They are also rejected by those who live in Iraq and Syria who directly witness and experience IS' atrocities. This includes the scholars, tribal leaders and local organisations there.

The core critiques

From the assessment of voices and opinions in the list, it could be summarised that the core critiques towards the IS are mainly addressed in the following issues: a) the invalidity of "caliphate", and b) IS' violent conduct which contradicts the teachings of Islam.

Religious scholars view that the newly founded "caliphate" and its new "caliph" Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi are void and illegitimate because they do not comply with processes required by Islam.

The scholars stress that the appointment of a caliph must be based on the consultation of Muslim leaders, scholars, intellectuals and other representatives which is traditionally known as *Ahlul Hal Wal 'Aqd* and it has to be done voluntarily, not through coercion.

In this particular case, no meetings or consultation has been done and the caliph is self-appointed, rather than chosen by Muslim representatives. There is also an element of force and coercion through IS' armed militants as demonstrated in their violent behaviour towards their opponents.

IS is also criticised because of;

- ❖ their *takfiri* ideology, an ideology that rules any Muslim who opposes them as apostate and thus permits the shedding of his or her blood.
- ❖ extreme and violent conducts which have resulted in thousands of Iraqis of minority groups being displaced from their homes.
- ❖ sectarianism, especially towards the Shiites.
- ❖ the implementation of *hudud* (Islamic penal law) during a time of war and in a situation that is unconducive; the implementation under such conditions has been made forbidden by Muslim legal scholars.
- ❖ the destruction of holy and historical sites.
- ❖ practicing permissive jihad.

Finally, religious scholars are in agreement that the ISIS today mirrors the tendencies and practices of the Kharijites in the past.

Truth with the majority?

It's true that there are religious scholars, teachers and Muslim individuals who openly support IS, with some preferring to remain neutral. This raises a question amongst some Muslims towards the stand made by the majority of religious scholars. They argue that truth in Islam is not based on a majority voice and, thus, the view of a majority of the scholars on the IS is not a proof of the illegitimacy of the IS.

While the view that 'truth in Islam is not determined by the majority voice' carries some truth, however, this is valid only in the issues of religious rulings that are definitive in nature (*qat'i*) like in the prohibition of fornication, murder killing and gambling. They will remain *haram* (forbidden), even if the majority says otherwise or practice them.

In the issue which involves rulings based on *ijtihad* (independent reason) like the case of the IS, other than the strong arguments based on the Qur'an, hadith and valid data from the ground, Islam does recognize the majority voice as an important weight in determining a view that is closer to the truth.

This is relevant especially to general Muslims who do not have the ability to make their own *ijtihad* on religious matters and, thus, are in need of guidance from the scholars in making a stand.

Traditionally also, religious scholars would give greater weight to religious rulings held by majority.

The concept of *al-ijma'* (consensus of all scholars) supports the importance of numbers in determining the truth. The Prophet too, made decisions in matters that fall in the area of *ijtihad* by giving preference to the views of the majority as exemplified in his decision making before the Battle of Uhud.

Finally, the Prophet has said, "My people/followers will not be in agreement over misguidance. When you differ in opinions, be with the *Al-Sawad Al-A'zham* (the majority)." (Narrated by Ibn Majah)

Conclusion

IS has been rejected by most of the scholars. This conclusion is not made by the scholars who look into the situation from afar and basing their stand only on news and secondary reports, it's also the opinion of the scholars who live in Iraq and Syria and witness and experience the IS directly.

¹First published in Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mustazah Bahari (2014), "An Analysis of Muslim Voices Against IS", *Eurasia Review*, 1 October. Edited and re-published here with permission.

²Available at <http://haniff.sg/en/links/muslim-voices-against-is-isis-isis/> (20 March 2019).

Countering Islamic State (IS) Mobilisation Appeal With Story Of The Famous Uwais Al-Qarni¹

— Muhammad Haniff Hassan

Introduction

One of the arguments that was put forth by the so-called Islamic State (IS) to attract Muslim youths to wage jihad and travel to Iraq and Syria centres on the irrelevance of parental consent. IS has interpreted its jihad as *farḍ ayn* (personal obligation) whereby Muslim youths do not need to feel guilty about ignoring their parents' disapproval. This article seeks to refute the above argument using the story of Uwais Al-Qarni who was not able to migrate to Medina and participate in jihad as he was taking care of his aged mother in Yemen. In spite of this, he was still praised and honoured by the Prophet more highly than other senior Companions. Although this refutation counters IS ideology, it could also be applied to similar religious justifications by other terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda (AQ) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI).

IS' ideological threat

Despite IS' defeat in Iraq and Syria, the group still poses a dangerous threat in three ways. Firstly, IS has highly committed cadres who continue to solicit support and instigate Muslims worldwide to commit acts of terrorism in the name of IS' vision of jihad. Second, the ideology adopted by IS is masked with theological arguments and opinions of past classical scholars which can influence young Muslims with limited religious knowledge. Third, IS propaganda is still circulated through the Internet, where regulation by state authorities remains difficult.

IS' ideological threat from the three aforementioned factors is heightened by attempts to establish a base in the Mindanao islands in southern Philippines.² The conflict-stricken area has experienced decades of clashes between Moro Muslims and the Philippines government. Even though IS was eventually defeated in Marawi, its affiliated groups and members continue to operate and spread propaganda. The active networks and desire to hold territory in the Philippines allow easier recruitment for IS, in comparison to traveling to Iraq and Syria. Both Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, and Malaysia, a Muslim majority country, have had traction with extremist groups similar to IS. Both of these factors are worrying for mainstream and moderate Muslims who seek to protect the religion from extremist ideologies.³

IS' misguided argument

IS propaganda aims to gain Muslims' support to mount attacks in its name by claiming that armed jihad against infidels today is *fard 'ayn* (personal obligation). The overall objective is to liberate Muslim lands from the occupation of non-Muslim armies and to re-establish the historical Islamic caliphate.

Under this condition, young Muslims who wish to join IS and migrate to its territories are not required to seek their parents' consent to fulfil the obligation, similar to the performance of the obligatory five daily prayers. Thus, according to IS, even if their parents disapprove, there should not be any feelings of guilt in disobeying them as one's duty to God must be above one's duty to their parents.⁴

*Dabiq*⁵, IS' official online magazine, states that:

"Amongst the major sins that many parents order their children with is the abandonment of the *fard 'ayn* jihad (jihad which is obligatory upon each and every individual). They intentionally or unintentionally distort the meaning of various ahadith on the obligation to obtain the permission of one's Muslim parents before performing *fard kifayah* jihad (jihad which is an obligation on the Ummah as a whole but not obligatory upon each and every individual)... The scholars mentioned numerous cases that make jihad against the kuffar *fard 'ayn*, including the invasion of the Muslims' lands, the imprisonment of Muslims, the imminent threat of attack against the Muslims, and the faceoff of the opposing armies. The Khalifah (hafidhahullah) has made a call for a general mobilisation, further emphasizing this obligation – as one of the cases making jihad *fard 'ayn* is the Imam commanding all the Muslims with jihad – so how can one ignore this clear-cut obligation now and be satisfied with submission to his lower self? How can one claim to be a muwahhid."⁶

This ideological justification is a key reason for the sudden disappearances of young Muslims without informing their families. According to reports, many parents were unaware that their children had been radicalised and were in Iraq or Syria as members of IS.⁷ Thus, countering and refuting this propaganda is important to mitigate IS' influence and ability to radicalise young Muslims. In this regard, the story of Uwais Al-Qarni contains several arguments against IS' fallacious argument.

Story of Uwais Al-Qarni⁸

Al-Qarni's full name is recorded in his biography by Muslim scholars as Abu 'Amr Uwais bin Amir bin Juz' bin Malik Al-Qarni. Although he lived during Prophet Muhammad's lifetime, he was not one of the Prophet's Companions, as

he never had the opportunity to meet him. Al-Qarni was thus regarded only as a *Tabi`* (sing. of *Tabi`in* – a Muslim who met a Companion of the Prophet and died as Muslim).

Al-Qarni embraced Islam when it was spread to Yemen by the Prophet's Companions. He was held back in Yemen from joining the Prophet in Medina as he was taking care of his aged mother. However, it was reported that Al-Qarni once sought permission from his mother to travel to Medina to meet the Prophet in person. His mother had asked him to return back to her after meeting the Prophet, and not to stay in Medina.

When Al-Qarni visited Medina, the Prophet was travelling on a military expedition. Al-Qarni waited for three days and returned back to Yemen without meeting the Prophet. Even though Al-Qarni never met the Prophet and never participated in jihad, he was not condemned. The Prophet did not declare that Al-Qarni was sinful, disobedient or negligent in performing jihad by prioritising his mother above jihad or his faith.

On the contrary, the Prophet praised Al-Qarni for his personal righteousness and dedication to his mother when he heard about his story after returning to Medina. The Prophet then announced to his Companions that God had bestowed a privilege on Al-Qarni whereby God would always forgive the sins of any person who Al-Qarni prayed for. The Prophet also announced that anyone who had the opportunity to meet Al-Qarni during his lifetime should ask him to pray to God for the forgiveness of their sins. This was an honour that was not bestowed upon even the Prophet's senior Companions who had endured hardships during the Meccan period and had performed jihad after their migration to Medina.⁹

Argument against IS

Based on Al-Qarni's story, IS' claims -- that Muslims who do not join the group to wage jihad have sinned -- are misguided and inaccurate. They are merely an attempt to arouse fear in Muslims who lack religious knowledge and are doubtful about IS' vision of jihad. In addition, IS' justifications nullifying parental consent for jihad are a ruse to induce young Muslims to disobey their parents without the fear of committing a sin. This is evident from the following questions:

If non-migration and non-participation in jihad (when it is deemed *fard `ayn*) are deemed to be sinful, why was Al-Qarni still praised and given a high status by the Prophet?

If *hijrah* (migration) to a caliphate is obligatory and living under a non-Muslim rule is sinful for Muslims, why was Al-Qarni not reprimanded by the Prophet for remaining in Yemen to take care of his mother?

If living outside the caliphate is contemptible in Islam, lowers a Muslim's level of faith and would incur God's wrath, why was Al-Qarni bestowed high honours by God? Al-Qarni attained closeness to God to the extent that He would forgive the sins of any person whom Al-Qarni prayed for – an honour that was not given even to senior Companions of the Prophet such as Abu Bakr and Umar, the first and second caliph after the Prophet respectively. It was even reported that Umar envied Al-Qarni for the privilege and requested Al-Qarni to pray for forgiveness of his sins when he chanced upon him during his rule.¹⁰

It was the Prophet's duty to explain an act that was sinful or against the spirit of Islam. The fact that he did not condemn Al-Qarni implies that what Al-Qarni did was permissible. In addition, all classical scholars who wrote biographies of the Companions and *Tabi'in* recorded Al-Qarni's biography impeccably.¹¹

Here, a comparison can also be made between the Prophet and IS. The Prophet did not attempt to influence Al-Qarni to abandon his mother in favour of supporting his jihad. In contrast, IS intentionally instigates Muslims to ignore their parents and the adverse consequences their children's departure would inflict on them.

Moreover, Al-Qarni's story is also consistent with the stories of other individuals intending to participate in jihad. These are related in the following hadiths:

“Abdullah bin Umar narrated: A man came to the Messenger of Allah asking permission to go out for jihad. The Messenger of Allah asked him: Are your parents alive? He replied: Yes. The Messenger of Allah then said to him: Then your jihad would be with them (in looking after them and being at their service).”¹²

“When a man came to the Prophet from Yemen to participate in jihad, the Prophet asked him: Did they [your parents] give you permission?’ The man said: No. He said: Go back to them and seek their permission, and if they give you permission, then go for jihad, otherwise honour and respect them.”¹³

“Abdullah bin Amr bin Al-As narrated: A man came to the Prophet and said: I came to you to take the oath of allegiance to you on emigration, and I left my parents weeping. He (the Prophet) said: Return to them and make them laugh as you made them weep.”¹⁴

However, IS propagandists may argue that the above hadiths refer to jihad when it was considered as *fard kifayah* (collective obligation). Thus, they are not relevant to jihad which becomes *fard 'ayn* today because many Muslim territories are allegedly occupied by non-believers and non-Muslim armies, and the caliphate is not established.

This claim can be refuted by referring to the occupation of Mecca and Jerusalem by pagan Arabs and Roman Christians respectively during the Prophet's lifetime. Although two of the holiest sites in Islam – the Kaabah in Mecca and Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem -- were located in the two cities, the Prophet did not declare that jihad was *fard `ayn* in order to liberate both cities; nor did he encourage Muslims to abandon their parents and join him in Medina. There is no evidence that the Prophet applied the same ruling adopted by IS today.

Since IS' dismissal of parental consent for joining its jihad is anchored on the argument that jihad is *fard `ayn* today, it must be highlighted that Al-Qarni's story also informs us that the *fard `ayn* or *kifayah* status of jihad falls under the sole jurisdiction of a legitimate Muslim authority that bears semblance to the position of the Prophet during his lifetime. It cannot be dictated by extremist Islamist groups such as IS, AQ and JI. This is the definitive position of many Muslim scholars:

“...it is important to note that Muslim scholars have ruled that laws of war can only be administered and executed by the Ulil Amri, or persons of appropriate authority. No individuals or groups are allowed to declare and wage war or jihad in the name of Islam or the community. As war will always affect the public at large, the declaration of war requires a proper mandate. The best people to hold such a mandate are those who are mandated to be the government. Furthermore, the teaching of *syura* (consultation) in Islam requires proper consultation of the people before war can be waged in their name. A serious matter such as the waging of war, if left to individuals or Muslim groups to decide and without going through a proper consultation process, will only create chaos and injustice - which is against the principle of any religion.”¹⁵

Even though the two holy lands were in the hands of pagan Arabs and Roman Christians, the fact that the Prophet did not apply the same ruling issued by the IS implies that it was his discretionary power to declare whether jihad is *fard `ayn* or *kifayah*.

In today's context, jihad becomes *fard `ayn*: (i) only when a legitimate Muslim authority declares so in response to an enemy's transgression of a Muslim land, and (ii) and if one is a professional soldier serving in a country's military.<sup>16</sup> In other words, Muslims do not carry the burden of jihad as *fard `ayn* based on any declaration or exhortation by Muslim groups with dubious religious credibility. Further, the individual Muslim does not automatically bear the burden of jihad when a Muslim land is being invaded, before a legitimate Muslim authority issues such a ruling. Since extremist Islamist groups like IS do not have the theological mandate to issue such a ruling, Muslims should not hesitate to ignore their propaganda or calls to jihad.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to expose the fallacies in a key aspect of IS' misinterpretation of jihad that has influenced a segment of Muslim youth today. Even though the issue addressed here relates specifically to IS, the story of Al-Qarni could also be applied in countering the propaganda of groups such as AQ and JI on the irrelevance of parental consent in jihad that is *fard `ayn*.¹⁷ The counter-argument to IS' recruitment rhetoric could be useful in deradicalisation efforts and be incorporated in theological refutations against IS in the online and off-line domains.

¹First published in Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2018), "Refuting Islamic State (IS) Jihad Propaganda with the Story of Uwais Al-Qarni", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis*, vol. 10, no. 10, October. Edited and re-published here with permission.

²The so-called Islamic State (IS) attempted to takeover Marawi city in May 2017 with the Philippine security forces liberating it in October the same year.

³The Straits Times (2018), *Philippine Congress passes autonomy bill for volatile Muslim region*, 30 May, available at <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippine-congress-passes-autonomy-bill-for-volatile-muslim-region> (28 June 2018); Joseph Liow Chin Yong (2018), "Shifting Sands of Terrorism in Southeast Asia", *RSIS Commentary*, 15 February, available at <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co18025-shifting-sands-of-terrorism-in-southeast-asia/#.WzCphNlZbs0> (28 June 2018); Emile Amin (2017), "Southeast Asia: The New Terrorist Destination", *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*. 20 November, available at <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1089481/southeast-asia-new-terrorist-destination> (28 June 2018); Greg Fealy (2017), "The battle for Marawi and ISIS in Southeast Asia", *The Strategist*, 23 August, available at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/battle-marawi-isis-southeast-asia/> (28 June 2018). See Rohan Gunaratna (2016), "The Islamic State's eastward expansion", *Countering Daesh Extremism: European and Asian Responses*, Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and RSIS, pp. 9-26; Vanessa Panes (2016), "The Influence of Daesh in Philippines", *Countering Daesh Extremism: European and Asian Responses*, Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and RSIS, pp. 124-38; Kumar Ramakrishna (2017), "The Growth of ISIS Extremism in Southeast Asia: Its Ideological and Cognitive Features—and Possible Policy Responses", *New England Journal of Public Policy*, 29:1, pp. 1-16.

⁴*Dabiq* (1436H), no. 10, pp. 14-7; *Dabiq* (1437), no. 13, pp. 3-4.

⁵*Dabiq* is now discontinued. It was issued from July 2014 to 2016 and has 15 issues.

⁶*Ibid*, pp. 15-6.

⁷Kevin Sullivan (2014), "Bolingbrook teens' parents 'stunned' by Islamic State recruitment claims", *Chicago Tribune*, 9 December, available at <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/bolingbrook-plainfield/ct-chicago-islamic-state-met-20141208-story.html> (28 June 2018); Mario van San (2018), "Belgian and Dutch Young Men and Women Who Joined ISIS: Ethnographic Research among the Families They Left Behind", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 41:1, pp. 39-58; Lizzie Dearden (2016), "Mother of British teenager killed fighting for Isis starts group to help parents counter radicalisation", *Independent*, 3 December, available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/isis-foreign-fighters-british-islamic-state-syria-rasheed-nicola-benyahia-birmingham-radicalisation-a7453936.html> (28 June 2018); Janet Reitman (2015), "Children of ISIS: Why did three American kids from the suburbs of Chicago try to run away to the Islamic state, and should the Feds treat them as terrorists?", *Rolling Stone*, 25 March, available at <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/teenage-jihad-inside-the-world-of-american-kids-seduced-by-isis-20150325> (28 June 2018); CBS (2015), *Desperate Alabama family: Woman, 20, left to join ISIS*, 21 April, available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/desperate-alabama-family-woman-20-left-to-join-isis/> (28 June 2018).

⁸See *Sahih Muslim*, The book of the merits of the Companions, Chapter: The virtues of Uwais Al-Qarni, hadith no. 319, available at <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/319> (28 June 2018); Al-Zahabi (2001), *Siyar A'alam Al-Nubala'*, No place: Muassasah Al-Risalah, vol. 4, pp. 19-33.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹See Biography of Uwais Al-Qarni (may Allah have mercy on him), *islamqa.info*, available at <https://islamqa.info/en/125276> (28 June 2018).

¹²Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Chapter: One should not go for Jihad without the permission of the parents , available at <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/78/3> (6 August 2018); Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Chapter: Being dutiful to one's parents, and which of them is more entitled to it, available at <https://sunnah.com/muslim/45/5> (6 August 2018).

¹³Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Chapter: Regarding a man who goes to battle while his parents object, available at <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/15/54> (6 August 2018).

¹⁴Ibid, available at <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/15/52> (6 August 2018).

¹⁵Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2006), *Unlicensed to Kill: Countering Imam Samudra's Justification for the Bali Bombing*, Singapore: Peace Matters, p. 75. See also Wahbah Al-Zuhaili (1996), *Al-Fiqh Al-Islami Wa Adillatuh*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr, vol. 6, p. 419; Ibn Qudamah (1984), *Al-Mughni*, Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, vol. 10, pp. 368-7; Al-Mawardi (1982), *Al-Ahkam Al-Sultaniyah*, Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, p. 35.

¹⁶See Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mohamed Ali (2007), *Questions and Answers on Jihad*, No place: No publisher, p. 15, available at <https://counterideology2.wordpress.com/2012/11/20/my-booklet-questions-and-answers-on-jihad/> (28 June 2018); Yusuf Al-Qaradawi (2009), *Fiqh Al-Jihad*, Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, vol. 1, pp. 95-105.

¹⁷See *Inspire* (2009), no. p. 43; *Inspire* (2014), no. 13, p. 49; *Inspire* (2016), no. p. 38; Ayman Al-Zawahiri (no date), *Al-Tabriah*, No place: As Sahab Media, pp. 83-88; Ayman Al-Zawahiri, *Exoneration* (translation of Al-Tabriah), Federation of American Scientist, chapter 5, available at <https://fas.org/irp/dni/osc/exoneration.pdf> (28 June 2018); Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2006), p. 74-84; Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2014), *The Father of Jihad: 'Abd Allah 'Azam's Jihad Ideas and Implications to National Security*, London: Imperial College Press, pp. 114-119.

The Black Flag Myth: An Analysis From Hadith Studies¹

— Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mustazah Bahari

Lately, images of black flags have become a prominent feature in the media. It was proudly displayed by militants of IS (formerly known as ISIS / ISIL) during their victory parades and were flown across vast Sunni territories in Iraq that have fallen into their hands.

In fact, the black flag is not exclusively used by the IS. It is used as a symbol by a number of radical and militant groups such as the Taliban, Jabhah Al-Nusrah (a branch of Al-Qaeda in Syria), Al-Qaeda, the Chechen fighters and the Hizb Al-Tahrir (Unarmed Muslim political movement).

Generally, the masses are not aware of the symbol and meaning behind the said flag. The more perceptive ones would speculate that this may not be a coincidence and the flag may have some significance but could only wonder what the significance actually is.

Thus, this article is written in order to provide a brief explanation of, a) the symbolic meaning behind the black flag, and b) the validity of this meaning from the Islamic theological viewpoint.

Historical basis

The use of the black flag by Muslim revolutionary movements is not new.

Prophet Muhammad used a black flag as his military standard. However, the Prophet's black flag was never a symbol of his movement. It was used merely for identification purposes. It has also been reported that the Prophet used other colours as his military flag.

Black flags were prominently used by the Abbasid revolutionary movement which was based in Khurasan. It rebelled against the Umayyad caliphate and sought to bring it down. The movement succeeded by founding the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. The black flag then became the official flag for the Abbasids.

Many historians argued that the Abbasid revolution was the major contributor to the popularity of narratives and mystical meanings behind the black flag. Fabricated stories and narratives were disseminated for the purpose of winning over people's support of the revolution until they became part of accepted popular tradition and legend in the name of Islam.

Theological basis

The black flag is nowhere mentioned in the Qur'an. There is not even a single hint in the Qur'an that promotes the use of the flag and to regard it as holy or sacred.

What then makes the black flag a positive symbol capitalised by contemporary revolutionary movements?

The answer is in a few hadiths (Islam's second most authoritative source) recorded in books of hadith. The hadiths prophesied the emergence of an army from an area known as Khurasan (today covering Afghanistan, Central Asia, Iran and parts of Pakistan) flying the black flag before the end of this world. From this army, the Muslim Mahdi (Messiah) will appear, lead them to achieve decisive victory against enemies of Islam and finally restore the glory of Islam. The hadiths also call on Muslims to support and join the army of the black flag when they appear.

The hadiths provided the black flag with symbolic meanings for:

- ❖ truth-bearing group
- ❖ legitimacy of a struggle
- ❖ victorious group
- ❖ Muslims' obligation to support and join the group carrying it.

The hadiths do not provide details of the actual design of the black banner. That is why there are different versions of it. Arabic words such as *La ilaha illa Allah Muhammad Rasul Allah* (there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's Messenger), *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest), *Al-Jihad Sabiluna* (Jihad is our way) and others are additions only to further enhance the flag's symbolic meanings.

Hadiths analysis

Since the theological basis of the black flag is derived from the hadith, it would be appropriate to analyse the authenticity of the hadiths in order to ascertain their validity in Islam.

This article will not be able to provide the analysis of all hadiths on the black flag due to its number. Only selected key ones will be analysed here from the approach used in the sciences of hadith. The analysis will conclude with the general theological position of Muslim scholars with regards to hadiths on the black flag for the benefit of the public.

hadith #1

Abdullah bin Mas'ud narrated that the Prophet said, "A Nation will come from the east with a black flag and they will ask for some "khair (charity)" (because of them being needy) but the people will not give them (charity). Then, they will fight and win over those people (who did not give them what they asked). Now the people will give them what they asked for but they will not accept it until they will hand it over to a person from my progeny who will fill this earth with justice just as it was previously filled with oppression and tyranny. So if anyone of you finds this nation (i.e. from the east with black flags) then you must join them even if you have to crawl over ice."

This hadith is narrated by Ibn Majah and Al-Bazzar from Yazid ibn Abi Ziyad, from Ibrahim Al-Nakha'i, Abdullah bin Mas'ud to the Prophet.

Al-Bazzar said that Yazid ibn Abi Ziyad was not known to receive the hadith from Ibrahim Al-Nakha'i.

Waki' bin al-Jarrah said, "this hadith is not known." Ahmad bin Hanbal held the same view.

Hammad bin Usamah, as reported in Al-Dhu'afa by Al-'Uqaily, declared that he will never accept hadith from Yazid ibn Abi Ziyad, even if he swore (upon its truth) 50 times in front of him. Al-Zahabi said, in his book *Siyar Al-A'alam*, Yazid is a hadith narrator with a flaw and Ibn Hajar, in his book *Al-Tahzib Taqrib*, regarded him as a weak hadith narrator with Shiite inclination.

hadith #2

Abdur Rahman Al-Jarshi narrated by a companion of the Prophet, Amr Bin Murra Al-Jamli said that the Prophet said: "Surely Black Flags will appear from the Khurasan until the people (under the leadership of this flag) will tie their horses with the Olive Trees between Bait-e-Lahya and Harasta. We asked: "Are there any Olive trees between these places?" He said, "If there isn't then soon it will grow so that those people (of Khurasan) will come and tie their horses there."

This hadith was narrated from Abdul Rahman Al-Jarshi whose real identity is unknown. The text could not be traced from any sources which thus makes it unverifiable.

hadith #3

Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet said, "(Armies carrying) black flags will come from Khurasan. No power will be able to stop them and they will finally reach Eela (Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem) where they will erect their flags."

This hadith is narrated by Ahmad bin Hanbal, Al-Tirmizi, Al-Tabarani and Al-Baihaqi from Rusydain bin Sa`ad, Yunus bin Yazid, Ibn Syihab, Qubaishoh bin Zuaib, to Abu Hurairah.

Al-Tirmizi ruled this narration as weak because the actual chain of narrators is doubtful.

Some narrated from Yunus from Ibn Shihab while others narrated from Rusydain, from Ibn Shihab.

hadith #4

The Prophet reportedly said, “When you see the black flag coming from Khurasan, join them even if you have to crawl over the snow... that is the army that will liberate the Holy Land, and there is no power that can stop them.”

Hadith scholars such as Al-Zahabi, Ahmad bin Hanbal and Al-Tabarani concluded that this hadith cannot be accepted because the content has been mixed up with other narrations on the black flag of Khurasan.

hadith #5

Ibn Majah and Al-Hakim recorded that the Prophet said, “If you see the black flag coming from Khurasan, go to them immediately, even if you have to crawl over the snow, because indeed amongst them is the Caliph al-Mahdi .. and no one can stop the army until they get to Jerusalem.”

This hadith was also narrated by Imam Ahmad from the path of Sharik bin Abdillah, from Ali bin Zaid bin Jad`an, from Abu Qilabah, from Thauban. According to Al-`Ijli, in his book *Ma`rifat Al-Rijal*, the chain of this hadith is disconnected because Abu Qilabah never heard a narration from Thauban.

Ibn Al-Jauzy, in his book *Al-`Ilal Al-Mutanahiah*, mentioned this hadith through the same path and concluded that Ali bin Zaid bin Jad`an is a narrator with flaw.

The hadith was also narrated by Ibn Majah and Al-Bazzar from Abd Al-Razzaq Al-San`ani from Al-Thauri, from Khalid Al-Hazza`, from Abu Qilabah, from Abu Asma` Al-Rahbi, from Thauban.

Scholars, however, differ on the validity of the hadith from this path. Al-Bazzar and Al-Hakim considered it as authentic. Ibn `Ulayyah, Al-`Uqaili and Ibn Qudamah ruled it as weak, similar to the chain of Khalid Al-Hazza` as reported in the book of *Al-`Ilal*, by Imam Ahmad, *Al-Dhu`afa and Al-Muntakhab Min `Ilal Al-Khallal*.

hadith #6

Muhammad, son of Al-Hanafiah said: “Black flags will come out for the children of Al-Abbas. The other black flag will come from Khurasan. Their turbans will be black and their clothes white. On their front will be a man named Shuayb, the son of Salih, from Tamim. They will defeat the companions of the Sufyani until he comes to the House of Jerusalem where he will establish his power for the Mahdi, and he will be supplied with three hundred (men) from Syria after his arrival and the matter will be settled for the Mahdi in seventy-two months (six years).”

Contemporary scholars such as Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Turaifi and Sheikh Adnan Al-ʿArʿur, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mutlaq and many others ruled that this narration could not be traced to any source. There is also the possibility that the content has been mixed up with other narrations associated with the black flag and Al-Mahdi.

Summary

Several conclusions can be made based on what has been presented above.

First, the black flag has no symbolic meaning in Islam due to the absence of authentic evidence to support it.

The authenticity of the narrations are considered weak or rejected by scholars of hadith. The main cause of the rejection is either due to the flaw of the narrators or fabrications.

Sheikh Al-Sharif Hatim bin Arif Al-ʿAuni, an expert in the field of hadith from Umm Al-Qura University says, “Symbols such as the black flag are fabricated by liars for their own personal agenda from the past till today.” This is consistent with Al-Zahabi, in his book *Al-Siyar* and *Al-Tarikh Al-Kabir*, who said that history has recorded how Abu Muslim Al-Khawlani was the one who raised the black flag during the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate and similarly, Yazid bin Mahlab, a rebel at the time of Umar bin Abdul Aziz, raised black flags calling upon people to give him a pledge of obedience.

Ahmad bin Hanbal prohibited all narrations on black flags because they are not reliable and authentic.

Second, in addition to the above basis that the narrations are not acceptable, no one should also believe, support or join any group that makes use of the black flag to legitimise their struggle simply on the basis of the symbol. Muslims should not regard them as the trustworthy group to represent the truth.

Third, history itself has provided proof for the black flag claim. Al-Mahdi has not appeared and the Day of Resurrection did not happen after the black flag was raised by the Abbasid rebellion and various groups that came later. Even if, for argument's sake, the narrations are considered acceptable based on a few "authentic" hadith or the narrations mutually strengthen each other, no one can give assurance that the group who raises the black flag represents the group prophesied by the Prophet. It is possible that the Prophet referred to other groups which have not emerged yet.

Fourth, some of the militant groups understood very well the weaknesses of the black flag hadiths and that its symbolic meaning is just a myth. Thus, they have never used these hadiths as basis. Their use of the black banner is simply an act of manipulation of popular myths and folklore among Muslims to support their political agenda. A search at *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad* website, considered as the largest repository of jihadist ideological materials, does not produce any finding on the black flag hadiths or relevant materials.

Finally, it is important for Muslims to understand that truth is not judged from the use of symbols such as flags, turbans, colours and clothing styles. Truth in Islam is based primarily on evidence found in the Qur'an and hadiths and supported by reasoned and scientific arguments. It must also be manifested through right behaviour according to the religion.

Thus, no symbol or slogan, not even the writing of the two testimonies of the Islamic faith, can justify acts of terror and extremism.

¹First published in Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mustazah Bahari (2014), "The Black Flag Myth: An Analysis From Hadith Studies", *Counter-terrorist Trends and Analysis*, ICPVTR, Singapore, September. Edited and re-published here with permission.

The Selective Nature Of Islamic State (IS)' Armageddon Narrative¹

— Muhammad Haniff Hassan

One of many narratives used by ISIS in its propaganda materials to win support from Muslims all over the world is the Armageddon or *Al-Malhamah Al-Kubra* (the Great Battle) narrative. This narrative taps on Islamic traditions concerning the End of Time that have been circulated among Muslims since the first generation of Islam.

The broad original Armageddon traditions in Islam speak about the final battle between the evil forces led by *Dajjal* (Anti-Christ) and the Muslim army under the leadership of Prophet Isa (Jesus) and his assistant Al-Mahdi (the Mahdi) which culminates with the death of the former and the defeat of his forces and the glorious victory for the latter. Prior to the emergence of Al-Mahdi, the second coming of Prophet Isa and the final battle, however, there will be a series of battles between the Muslim and Roman army in the vicinity of Syria.

These battles will attract true Muslims to congregate in Iraq and Syria and they would form the bulk of *Al-Taifah Al-Mansurah* (the victorious/saved sect) of the End of Time as illustrated by Ibn Taimiyah, a much revered scholar by IS, in his famous book *Majmu' Al-Fatawa* (Compilation of Fatwas), “Islam in the end of times will be more manifested in Sham... So the best of the people on the earth in the end of times will be those who keep to the land of [Prophet] Ibrahim’s hijrah, which is Sham.”²

According to IS, what is currently happening in Syria and Iraq that pits them with the US-led coalition forces represents that series of battles that would lead to the Armageddon.

Dabiq no. 4, IS official online magazine, asserts after citing hadiths that relates events in the End of Time, “These ahadith [plural for hadith] indicate that the Muslims will be at war with the Roman Christians. Rome in the Arabic tongue of the Prophet refers to the Christians of Europe and their colonies in Sham prior to the conquering of Sham at the hands of the Sahabah [the Prophet’s companions]. There will be a pause of war due to a peace treaty. Then, there will be a treachery by the Romans which would lead to a continuation of war and events which leads to “the final, greatest, and bloodiest battle – al-Malhamah al-Kubra – between the Muslims and the Romans prior to the appearance of the Dajjal and the descent of al-Masih [Prophet Isa]. This battle ends the era of the Roman Christians, as the Muslims will then advance upon Constantinople and thereafter Rome, to conquer the two cities and raise the flag of the Khilafah over them.”³

The hadiths cited by *Dabiq* to support the above assertion are:

“Allah’s Messenger said: Indeed the camp of the Muslims on the day of al-Malhamah al-Kubra will be in al-Ghutah, next to a city called Damascus, one of the best cities of Sham.” (Narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, and Al-Hakim)

“Allah’s Messenger said: I saw as if a pillar of the Book was taken from underneath my pillow, so I looked and it was a shining light extending towards Sham. Verily faith, at the time of tribulations, is in Sham.” (Narrated by Al-Hakim)

“Allah’s Messenger said: Sham is the land of congregation and dispersal [meaning resurrection].” (Narrated by Al-Bazzar and others)⁴

“Allah’s Messenger said: The Hour will not be established until the Romans land at al-A`maq or Dabiq (two places near each other in the northern countryside of Halab). Then an army from Madinah [made up] of the best people on earth at that time will leave for them. When they line up in ranks the Romans will say: Leave us and those who were enslaved from amongst us so we can fight them. The Muslims will say: Nay, by Allah, we will not abandon our brothers to you. So they will fight them. Then one third of them will flee; Allah will never forgive them. One third of them will be killed; they will be the best martyrs with Allah. And one third will conquer them; they will never be afflicted with fitnah. Then they will conquer Constantinople. While they are dividing the war booty, having hung their swords on olive trees, Shaytan [satan] will shout: The [false] Messiah has followed after your families [who were left behind.] So they will leave [for their families], but Shaytan’s claim is false. When they arrive in Sham, he comes out. Then when they are preparing for battle and filing their ranks, the prayer is called. So `Isa Ibn Maryam will descend and lead them. When the enemy of Allah sees him, he will melt as salt melts in water. If he were to leave him he would melt until he perishes, but he kills him with his own hand, and then shows them his blood upon his spear.” (Narrated by Muslim)⁵

“Allah’s Messenger said: You will have a treaty of security with the Romans until you both fight an enemy beyond them. And you will be victorious, you will gain war booty, and you will achieve such without losses. Thereafter you will return until you lodge at a pasture land full of rocky mounds. A man from the Roman Christians will then raise the cross. He will say: The cross has prevailed! A man from the Muslims will then say: Rather Allah has prevailed, and then he will angrily rise and crush the cross, which is not at a distance from him. Then the Romans will betray the treaty by rising against the breaker of the cross and striking his neck. The Muslims will then rise and rush to their arms. They will then battle. Allah will bless this party of Muslims with shahadah [martyrdom].

The Romans will say to the Roman leader: We are sufficient for you against the Arabs. They will then gather for the Malhamah (the grand battle before the Hour). They will come for you under eighty banners, with each banner there will be twelve thousand people.” (Narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah, Ibn Hibban and Al-Hakim)

“Abdullah Ibn Mas`ud said: The Last Hour will not come until the people stop dividing inheritance and rejoicing over booty. Then he said, while pointing towards Sham: An enemy shall muster strength against the Muslims and the Muslims will muster strength against them. Yusayr Ibn Jabir asked him: You mean the Romans? He said: Yes, and there will be a great raddah (fleeing) and the Muslims will prepare a detachment for fighting unto death so that they may not return but victorious. They will fight until night will intervene between them; both sides will return without being victorious and the detachment will be wiped out. The Muslims will again prepare a detachment for fighting unto death so that they may not return but victorious. They will fight until night comes upon them; both sides will return without being victorious and the detachment will be wiped out. When it is the fourth day, a new detachment from the remnant of the Muslims will be prepared and Allah will decree that the enemy would be routed. And they will fight such a fight the like of which will not be seen (or which has not been seen), so much so that even if a bird were to pass their flanks, it would fall down dead before reaching the end of them. (After the battle), when relatives count each other, they will find that after one hundred, only one man is left from them. So what can be the joy at the spoils of such war and what inheritance can be divided! While they are in this very state, they will hear of a calamity more horrible than this. And a cry will reach them: The Dajjal has taken your place among your families. They will, therefore, throw away what is in their hands and go forward sending ten horsemen as a scouting party. Allah’s Messenger said: I know their names and the names of their fathers and the color of their horses. They will be the best horsemen on the surface of the earth on that day or amongst the best horsemen on the surface of the earth on that day.” (Narrated by Muslim)⁶

The abovementioned narrative is consistent with the view held by IS prominent figures:

Abu Mus`ab Al-Zarqawi, the founder of Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad group which later on evolved to ISIS, had reportedly said, “The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah’s permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq.”⁷

Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani, ISIS former spokesperson, said, “O soldiers of the Islamic State, be ready for the final campaign of the crusaders. Yes, by Allah’s will, it will be the final one. Thereafter, we will raid them by Allah’s permission and they will not raid us... And so we promise you [O crusaders] by Allah’s

permission that this campaign will be your final campaign. It will be broken and defeated, just as all your previous campaigns were broken and defeated, except that this time we will raid you thereafter, and you will never raid us. We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted. This is His promise to us; He is glorified and He does not fail in His promise. If we do not reach that time, then our children and grandchildren will reach it, and they will sell your sons as slaves at the slave market.”⁸

Abu `Umar Al-Baghdadi, the late Emir of Islamic State of Iraq, the predecessor of ISIS, said, “The Iraqi Jihad brought back life to jihadi regions which had weakened a bit after their strength. It also prepared the path for attacking the Jewish State and retaking Baytul-Maqdis. It is as if I stand before the `asa’ib (bands) of Iraq that leave from here to give support to the Mahdi whilst he holds on to the curtains of the Ka’bah.”⁹

In this context, ISIS claims for itself to be the force of truth and the US-led coalition is the Roman army as the Final Crusader before the Armageddon as prophesied by the Prophet.¹⁰ Similarly, the congregation of “mujahidin” in Iraq and Syria fit the Armageddon narrative in the Islamic tradition to fight the coalition forces and Assad’s army. *Dabiq* no. 3 is candid on this when it writes:

“Then, these nuzza’ [strangers who break off from their family and tribe] gathered in Sham [Syria], the land of malahim [battles] and the land of al-Malhamah al-Kubra [the Great Battle]. Allah’s Messenger has informed of battles that will occur in places within Sham and its vicinity, such as al-Ghutah, Damascus, Dabiq (or al-Amaq), the Euphrates River, and Constantinople (which is near Sham), as well as Baytul-Maqdis (Jerusalem), the gate of Lod, Lake Tiberius, the Jordan River, Mount Sinai, and so on. And he [the Prophet] linked this blessed land with many of the events related to al-Masih, al-Mahdi, and the Dajjal. ...They gathered together in the land of malahim [battles] shortly before the occurrence of al-Malhamah al-Kubra, announced their enmity and hatred for the cross worshippers, the apostates, their crosses, their borders, and their ballot boxes, and pledged allegiance to the Khilafah promising to die defending it. Then, they were opposed and forsaken by “the wise ones,” the “theorizers,” and “the elders,” who labeled them as being khawarij, haruriyyah (a branch of the khawarij), hashashin (a heretical isma’ili sect), the grandsons of Ibn Muljim (the khariji who killed `Ali Ibn Abi Talib), and the dogs of Hellfire! So if the muhajirin of the Islamic State in their thousands are the dogs of Hellfire, then who are the ones referred to in the hadith as being “those who break off from their tribes” and “the best of Allah’s slaves”? Apart from them, there are no other muhajirin left in Sham, except for a small number whose hearts yearn for the Islamic State and for giving bay’ah to the Imam. Then there will remain outside of the Islamic State only he who is obstructed from it by mountainous waves of envy and arrogance, so that

he drowns in the methodologies of the hypocrites, the rumor mongers, and the weak-hearted, and he aids the *sahwat*¹¹ of apostasy, following *rukhas* (concessions) on his path to heresy. We ask Allah for forgiveness and well-being in this life and in the hereafter.”¹²

On this claim, Muslims all over the world are called upon to migrate to Iraq and Syria and join the “blessed newly founded Islamic caliphate” under the leadership of the caliph Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and join the fight so as to be amongst “the best of Allah’s servants” and helpers of the long awaited Al-Mahdi and Prophet Isa and hopefully witnessing the victory of truth above all falsehoods or die as martyrs in the cause of it.¹³

Contesting IS narrative & mobilisation

Deep analysis of Islamic traditions concerning the End of Time which include the Armageddon would disclose the opposite position of what ISIS is calling upon Muslims. This opposite position is based upon various hadiths that warned Muslims about the widespread of strife and wars when the End of Time is near. Muslims who live in such situations are commanded to stay away from the conflict, not taking any sides and if necessary to live in seclusion (*‘uzlah*) so as not to be implicated by the situation and affected by the harms. The hadiths permit Muslims to disavow participation in violence and war and to practice non-resistance in such a situation even if it would cost their lives.

Some of the hadiths are:

It was narrated from Abu Musa Al-Ash`ari that the Messenger of Allah said: “Before the Hour comes, there will be tribulation like pieces of black night, when a man will wake up as a believer but be a disbeliever by evening, or he will be a believer in the evening but will be a disbeliever by morning. And the one who is sitting will be better than the one who is standing, and the one who is standing will be better than the one who is walking, and the one who is walking will be better than the one who is running. So break your bows, cut their strings and strike your swords against rocks, and if anyone enters upon anyone of you, let him be like the better of the two sons of Adam. (i.e. the one killed, not the killer).”¹⁴

A person said: Allah’s Messenger, what is your opinion if I am drawn to a rank in spite of myself, or in one of the groups and made to march and a man strikes with his sword or there comes an arrow and kills me? Thereupon he said: He will bear the punishment of his sin and that of yours and he would be one amongst the denizens of Hell.¹⁵

He said: "What will you do when killing befalls the people so that Hijaratuz-Zait [a place in Madinah] is covered with blood?" I said: "Whatever Allah and His Messenger choose for me." He said: "Stay with those whom you belong to." He said: "I said: 'O Messenger of Allah, should I not take my sword and strike those who do that?'" He said: "Then you will be just like the people. Rather enter your house." I said: "O Messenger of Allah, what if they enter my house?" He said: "If you are afraid that the flashing of the sword will dazzle you, then put the edge of your garment over your face, and let him carry his own sin and your sin, and he will be one of the people of the Hellfire."¹⁶

The Prophet said, "Woe to Arabs because of evil which has drawn near! He will escape who restrains his hand."¹⁷

Muslim scholars commenting on the above hadiths hold that the command not to participate in violent conflict is applicable whenever Muslims face situations, a) conflict between parties where there is no clear evidence to distinguish who is on the side of truth, b) periods where violent conflicts are widespread and cause widespread harms and destruction, c) when a Muslim believes his participation or even existence in such situations would cause greater harm than benefit to his faith and life, and d) when a Muslim believes that he would not be able to deal with the situation in accordance to the demand of the shari`ah due to factors within himself or external to him (beyond his control). The scholars also recognise that determining the situation and the resulting pacifist stand can be subjective from a person to another. Thus, a situation may represent what is mentioned in the hadiths to a person, but not to the other or the command in the hadiths may be applicable to a person/situation but not to the other.¹⁸

On a similar note, I have listed a few hadiths related to the End of Time which described Iraq as the region where a deviant group (the horn of satan) will emerge and these hadiths could possibly refer to IS in an article titled *ISIS Seeks Legitimacy in Dabiq & Its Narrative* published by *Eurasia Review* (republished in this book). This therefore challenges IS' self-righteous claim based on their selective use of the Armageddon traditions in Islam as the truth-bearing or saved sect that require Muslims to render their allegiance and support.

Concluding remarks

There are no definitive theological evidence to validate IS' Armageddon narrative. The claim can be easily challenged by the same collection of Islamic traditions on the End of Time and the Armageddon.

IS' Armageddon narrative is clearly selective and is meant to serve its objective of political mobilisation. It is not an academic theological study that

seeks to offer a full and comprehensive understanding of the current events and the End of Time.

If the IS narrative is not theologically definitive, how then should Muslims decide which position they should take, whether to support ISIS based on its narrative or not?

The indefinite character of the narrative means that the narrative itself cannot be the main factor in making decisions. The key factor is located in the behaviour and conduct of IS in conformance to the shari'ah. In this regard, the stand made by hundreds of Muslim scholars all over the world as seen in www.lettertobaghdadi.com bears clear testimony that IS is far from the standards set by the shari'ah and thus Muslims should have no doubt about condemning and staying away from it.

¹First published in Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2015), "Selective nature of ISIS' Armageddon narrative", *Eurasia Review*, 9 February. Edited and re-published here with permission.

²*Dabiq*, no.3, pp. 9-11.

³*Dabiq*, no. 4, pp. 34-5.

⁴*Dabiq*, no. 3, p. 9.

⁵*Dabiq*, no. 4, p. 33.

⁶*Ibid*, p. 34.

⁷*Ibid*, p. 35.

⁸*Ibid*, p. 8.

⁹*Ibid*, pp. 35-6.

¹⁰*Ibid*, p. 32.

¹¹Iraqi sunni anti-Al-Qaeda movement.

¹²*Dabiq*, no. 3, pp. 9-11.

¹³*Ibid*, pp. 5-6 & 10.

¹⁴Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, hadith no. 3961; Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, hadith no. 4259. All citation of hadiths in this article is based on hadith database available at www.sunnah.com (5 February 2015).

¹⁵Muslim bin Al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, hadith no. 2887.

¹⁶Ibn Majah, hadith no. 3958.

¹⁷Abu Dawud, hadith no. 4249.

¹⁸Salman bin Abdullah Al-Awdah (1993), *Al-Uzlah Wa Al-Khultah: Ahkam Wa Ahwal*, Dammam: Dar Ibn Al-Jawzi, pp. 40-9, 71-99.

Islamic State (IS) Seeks Legitimacy From *Dabiq* & Its Narrative¹

Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mustazah Bahari

One of the ways IS use in order to provide religious legitimacy to its cause and appeal to young and impressionable Muslims is by using symbols associated with Islam.

Some of the symbols used are based on fabricated sources i.e. hadith that can be classified as myth. One example of this is the use of the black flag as the group's symbol.

We have written on this in an article titled *The Black Flag Myth: An Analysis from Hadith Studies* (republished in this book).

There are also symbols used by IS that are based on authentic hadith. However, its application can still be challenged and contested.

The two symbols that fall under this category are *Dabiq* and *A`maq*.

This article seeks to provide the fallacy behind the use of these two symbols and the narratives that IS wants to tell from them.

Dabiq* & *A`maq

Dabiq is the title of IS' online magazine in English. It contains materials on its ideology, analysis of contemporary issues and news of its activities.

A`maq is its media wing. It distributes news and propaganda of IS in text and video format via Internet and social media.

IS adopted both terms from an authentic hadith that contains the Prophet's prophecy of big battles between the Muslim and Roman army before the End of Time. The use of these names is a clear sign of a legitimacy-creating attempt on the part of IS.

The text of the hadith is:

“Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: The Last Hour would not come until the Romans would land at *Al-A`maq* or *Dabiq* [emphasis added]. An army consisting of the best (soldiers) of the people of the earth at that time will come from Medina (to counteract them). When they have arranged themselves in ranks, the Romans would say: Do not stand between us and those (Muslims) who took prisoners from amongst us. Let us fight with them.

The Muslims would say: Nay, by Allah, we would never get aside from you and from our brethren that you may fight them. They will then fight and a third (part) of the army would run away, whom Allah will never forgive. A third (part of the army) which would constitute of excellent martyrs in Allah's eye would be killed and the third who would never be put to trial would win and they would be conquerors of Constantinople. As they would be busy in distributing the spoils of war (amongst themselves) after hanging their swords by the olive trees, the Satan would cry: The *Dajjal* [Anti-Christ] has taken your place amongst your family.

They (Muslims) would then leave, but found it untrue. When they arrive in Syria, he (Dajjal) would then come out while they are still preparing themselves for battle and straightening their ranks. Certainly, the time of prayer shall come and then Jesus (peace be upon him) son of Mary would descend and would lead them in prayer. When the enemy of Allah (Dajjal) see him, he would disappear just as the salt dissolves itself in water and if he (Jesus) were not to confront him at all, even then he would dissolve completely, but Allah would kill him by his hand and he would show him his blood on his lance (the lance of Jesus Christ)."²

Etymologically, *Dabiq* in Arabic means glutinous and *A'maq* means deep holes or low areas.

However, many Muslim scholars, when commenting on the hadith, understand them as a special noun referring to a place located in north Syria in Aleppo district, 10 kilometer from Syria-Turkey border.³

The Roman army mentioned in the hadith is not understood as the real army from Rome today. Instead, it refers to an army made up of Christians of European origin because Romans during the Prophet's time represented Christians who were from Europe.

This is also the narrative that ISIS seeks to propagate in some videos that it released. The videos challenge Western countries (perceived as Christian countries) led by the United States to fight them face to face in *Dabiq* (Syria).⁴

By implication, IS seeks to offer a narrative that:

- ❖ the current presence of coalition forces under the US leadership represents the Roman army mentioned in the hadith
- ❖ the expansion of the coalition forces' operation to Syria would culminate in the great battle in *Dabiq* as prophesied by the Prophet in the hadith
- ❖ IS is the catalyst of the Muslim army that would defeat the Roman army as predicted in the hadith.

In other words, IS is the party of truth and Muslims are obligated to render support and join their jihad.

Countering the narrative

Unlike the black flag, the content of the above hadith cannot be simply rejected as myth because of its authentic status.

However, this does not mean the use of *Dabiq* and *A'maq* and the narrative that IS seeks to offer through them is not problematic and cannot be challenged.

The narrative can be contested on two grounds.

Firstly, the IS narrative that the current conflict in Iraq and Syria refers to the End of Time event as prophesied in the above and many other hadiths and that they represent the party of truth is, at best, an interpretation on their part and not a divine decree.

There is no definitive (*qat`ii*) scriptural evidence to be relied upon that the current conflict has any relation with the End of Time prophecy and the party of truth that is indeed IS.

Thus, young impressionable Muslims should not be quick to accept the IS narrative and should not be afraid to critically challenge or question it. Rejecting the narrative also does not tantamount to rejecting an authentic hadith because what is rejected is not the content of the hadith but its application to the current situation.

Secondly, there are many authentic hadiths which also prophesise the emergence of deviant and heretical groups from the east of Arabia and Iraq as some of the signs of the End of Time.

Among the hadiths are:

“Nafi` narrated: The Prophet stood up at the doorstep of Hafsa and pointed to the east and he (the Prophet) said thrice: Affliction (will appear from) here, and from where the side of the Satan’s head comes out.”⁵

“Salim ibn `Abdullah ibn `Umar said: O people of Iraq, how strange is it that you ask about the minor sins but commit the major sins? [The killing of al-Husayn!] I heard my father, `Abdullah ibn `Umar narrating that he heard the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) saying while pointing his hand to the east: Indeed the turmoil would come from this side, from where appear the horns of Satan and you would strike the necks of one another...”⁶

“Yusair ibn `Amr narrated: I asked Sahl bin Hunaif: Did you hear the Prophet (peace be upon him) saying anything about Al-Khawarij? He said: I heard him saying while pointing his hand towards Iraq. There will appear in it (i.e, Iraq) some people who will recite the Quran but it will not go beyond their throats and they will go out from (leave) Islam as arrow darts from the bow.”⁷

“Ibn `Umar narrated that the Prophet has said: O Allah! Bestow Your blessings on our Sham [Levant]! O Allah! Bestow Your blessings on our Yemen. The People said: And also on our Najd. The Prophet said: O Allah! Bestow Your blessings on our Sham [Levant]! O Allah! Bestow Your blessings on our Yemen. The people said: O Messenger of Allah! And also on our (hometown) Najd. I think the third time the Prophet said: There (in Najd) is the place of earthquakes and afflictions and from there comes out the horn of Satan.”⁸

Ibn `Abbas narrated that the Prophet has said: O Allah! Bestow Your blessings on our Sham [Levant]! O Allah! Bestow Your blessings on our Yemen. He repeated three to four times. The people said: And also on our Iraq. The Prophet said:

There (in Iraq) is the place of earthquakes and afflictions and from there comes out the horn of Satan.”⁹

Hadith on the emergence of afflictions from Iraq are also reported by Al-Tabarani in his book *Al-Awsat*¹⁰ and by Abu Nu`aim and Ibn `Asakir who narrated it with chain of narrator that qualifies Al-Bukhari and Muslim requirement of accepted hadith.¹¹

There are also hadiths that mention Najd, an area now located in Saudi Arabia, as the location from where the afflictions and the horn of Satan would emerge.

However, hadith scholars do not see any contradiction between hadiths that refer the east to Iraq and Najd because both are located in the eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula and Najd, during that time, was not exclusively referring to the current Najd in Saudi Arabia. It was also understood to refer to hinterland on Iraq.¹²

Classical scholars in the past had referred to the groups mentioned in these hadiths to be the Kharijites (*Khawarij*),¹³ Qarmatians (*Qaramitah*),¹⁴ Mongols¹⁵ and other groups which were the reasons for the many afflictions which occurred in Iraq that caused great tragedy to Islam.

But, this does not mean that the temporal meaning of the hadiths stopped there and they are of no relevance anymore today. Thus, it is not impossible that the hadiths could be referring to IS which as a matter of fact, emerged from Iraq and has been denounced by hundreds of Muslim scholars around the world with sound and detailed arguments as a heretical and deviant group.¹⁶

Here, IS has to explain and answer why the hadiths on the emergence of afflictions and a movement that represents the horn of Satan mentioned above do not refer to them and that their *Dabiq* narrative is not a selective and manipulative use of Islamic theological authorities to gain legitimacy and support from ignorant Muslims.

Conclusion

Muslims must understand that symbols and narratives that are obscure and subjective cannot legitimise ideas and behaviors that contradict clear injunctions of the shari'ah such as terrorism, religious persecution and violent sectarianism. What more if large numbers of Muslims have agreed upon the issue such as IS' deviation.

¹First published in Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mustazah Bahari (2014), "ISIS seeks legitimacy from Dabiq & its narrative", *Eurasia Review*, 11 December. Edited and republished here with permission.

²Narrated by Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, hadith no. 2897.

³Al-Nawawi (2000), *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, Riyadh: Bayt Al-Afkar al-Dawliyah, p.1679.

⁴See *Message from Dabiq*, available at www.youtube.com

⁵Narrated by Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, hadith no. 2905.

⁶Narrated by Muslim, *ibid*.

⁷Narrated by Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, hadith no. 6934.

⁸Narrated by Al-Bukhari, *ibid*, hadith no. 7094.

⁹Narrated by Al-Tabarani (n.d.), *Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir*, Baghdad: Matba'at Al-Ummah, vol. 12, p. 348, hadith no. 13422. The chain of the narrators (sanad) is good.

¹⁰Al-Tabarani (1985), *Al-Mu'jam Al-Awsat*, Riyadh: Maktabat Al-Ma'arif, vol. 4, p.245-246.

¹¹Abu Nu'aim (n.d.), *Hilyat Al-Awliya' Wa Tabaqat Al-Asfiya'*, Lebanon: Dar Al-Fikr, vol. 6, p. 133. Ibn 'Asakir (1995), *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq*, Lebanon: Dar Al-Fikr, vol. 1, p. 130-131.

¹²Al-Khattabi (n.d.), *I'lam Al-Sunan*, n.p.: Al-Tab'ah Al-Maghrabiah, vol. 2, p. 1274; Al-'Aini (2001), *Umdat Al-Qari'*, Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, vol. 24, p. 200; Ibn Hajr (1986), *Fath Al-Bari'*, Cairo: Dar Al-Rayyan, vol. 13, p. 51; Al-Karmani (1981), *Sharh Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Beirut: Dar Ihya' Al-Turath Al-'Arabi, vol. 24, p. 168; Ibn Taimiyah (n.d.), *Majmu' Fatawa*, Medina: Al-Riasah Al-'Ammah Li Shu'un Al-Haramain Al-Sharifain, vol. 13, p. 47; Al-Qastalani (1905), *Irshad Al-Sari*, Cairo: Matba'at Al-Kubra Al-Amiriyah, vol. 10, p. 188.

¹³The first Kharijites were those who opposed the caliphate of 'Ali (third caliph after the Prophet) and Muawiyah (founder of Umayyad caliphate after the death of 'Ali). Originally, they were supporters of 'Ali against Muawiyah. They defected from 'Ali because they ruled 'Ali's acceptance of mediation as a means to resolve the ongoing conflict between himself and Muawiyah as contravening the shari'ah. They regarded it (Ali's decision to mediate) as ruling by other than the Quran and, thus, ruled both 'Ali and Muawiyah as apostates. Today, the term is often used for takfiri groups and violent Muslim militant group which sought to bring down Muslim rulers via violent jihad such as Al-Qaeda. See Annie C. Higgins (2004), "Kharijite", *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, Richard C. Martin (ed.), New York: Thomson-Gale, vol. 1, p. 390.

¹⁴Qarmatian was a sect that emerged from the Shiite Ismaili tradition. They were famous for their rebellion against the Abbasid caliphate in 899CE. Their famous exploits included the raid and murder of pilgrims on the way to or from the *Haj*, the sacking of Mecca and the desecration of Kaabah where even the sacred Black Stone (*Al-Hajr Al-Aswad*) was taken from its place to their capital. Notorious for their brutality, the period which saw the proliferation of their rebellious acts was regarded as century of terrorism. See John Esposito (2003), *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 253 and Mohammed Rahman (2014), "The Qarmatians: The world first communistic society", *World Bulletin*, 2 February, available at <http://www.worldbulletin.net/haber/127416/the-qarmatians-the-worlds-first-enduring-communistic-society> (11 December 2014).

¹⁵This refers to the Mongol invasion that caused the downfall of Abbasid caliphate and its brutal aftermath. It is still regarded by Muslim scholars as one the greatest tragedies and darkest period in Islamic history.

¹⁶See one example *Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi*, at www.lettertobaghdadi.com (11 December 2014).

'Jihad' In Syria: Fallacies Of Islamic State (IS)' End-Time Prophecies¹

—Mohamed Bin Ali

The ongoing conflict in Syria which started as part of the Arab Spring against the Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad has since turned into a war that has drawn many regional powers and international players. At the same time, Muslims from many parts of the world have travelled to the country to join the rebel forces.

For over three years since the conflict started in 2011, both the Assad regime and its opponents have committed war crimes that include mass-killings, kidnappings, indiscriminate bombings, executions and murders.

Three-level conflict

Broadly, the ongoing conflict in Syria runs on three levels. The first is a sectarian one between Sunnis and the Shi'ite regime which is also a struggle between Sunni Islam and Shi'ite Islam led by Iran. The second level is the ideologically-motivated attack against the Assad regime.

The rebels are those who join Al-Qaeda affiliated groups on the premise that the Syrian war is part of the global jihad; and others who are driven by end-times prophetic narrative. These individuals believe that they have to be in Syria to be part of the final battle.

The third is the humanitarian level i.e. the conflict is portrayed as a humanitarian crisis as some travel to Syria to render humanitarian and financial aid. Many are radicalised by what they see and who they come into contact with in Syria.

Syria is undergoing a political conflict that serves as the newest hotspot attracting scores of foreign fighters. Its ability to mobilise and draw foreign fighters is unprecedented; surpassing that of even the Soviet-Afghan war. These fighters who claimed to perform the act of jihad against the perceived infidel Assad regime are factionalised opposition groups comprising the secular nationalist Free Syrian Army (FSA), rebel groups like Al-Qaeda affiliated Jabhah Al-Nusra (JAN or Al-Nusra Front) and Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS or ISIL).

Political not religious conflict

However, many believe that the ongoing conflict in Syria is not about religion, and the war which is taking place is not an act of jihad. Muslim scholars have come forward to clarify that the political conflict in Syria does not qualify as "jihad".

For example, Tunisia's Mufti, Sheikh Othman Battikh, has described calls for jihad against the government in Syria as a "huge mistake" that is not permitted under Islam. Sheikh Battikh stressed that those who went to fight in Syria under the banner of jihad were "fooled and have been brainwashed."

Apart from Muslim scholars, some Islamist groups have also agreed that the Syrian conflict cannot be categorised as a religious war and called for peace and reconciliation. Mohammed Sawan, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya, said the battle in the Arab region (including Syria) is not about Islam or identity at all. It is about fundamental values of democracy, freedom and rights. It has nothing to do with a clash between Islamists and non-Islamists.

The End-Time narratives

Many fighters who travelled to Syria are swayed by the narrative of performing armed Jihad in Syria. These individuals and many others were influenced by the "doomsday narrative"; that the conflict in Syria is a prelude to the anticipated *Yawm Al-Qiyamah* (end of time).

They argue that the Syrian conflict is the start of the end-times. According to them, it is the apocalyptic struggle between the forces of good represented by the Mahdi (the prophesied redeemer of Islam who will rule before the Day of Judgment and rid the world of evil) and evil as represented, for example, by the Syrian Assad regime. Hence, they argue that it is the religious duty of Muslims, and if they can do so, to go and join the fight to defeat the Assad regime and help usher in the final victory for Islam.

Such narratives are based on sayings of the Prophet (hadith) which are often misunderstood and taken out of context. Among the narratives used is, for example, a hadith on carriers of the Black Banners (the black banners are used by the current violent Islamist groups as their official flag) narrated on authority of Ibn Majah, a medieval scholar of hadith: "If you see the Black Banners coming from Khurasan go to them immediately, even if you must crawl over ice, because indeed amongst them is the Caliph, Al Mahdi... and no one can stop that army until it reaches Jerusalem."

Some scholars are also sceptical of the accuracy of the interpretation of the prophecy in the hadith. Few would express such reservations in public for fear of being misinterpreted as doubters of the prophecies.

The role of ideology and Internet

Ideology plays an important role in many conflicts such as in Syria as it appears in a religious guise. These ideas are actively propagated through the Internet and social media by radical preachers who used some of the hadiths of the end-time prophecies. One example of such preachers is the Philippines-based Musa Cerantonio who was arrested in the Philippines. Musa, 29, who was born in Melbourne to an Italian family, converted to Islam at the age of 17 and is now one of the most popular online preachers supporting IS. He allegedly used the Internet to publicly urge Muslims to join “jihad” in Iraq and Syria. In a YouTube video, Musa described the various Islamist groups such as ISIS, JAN and others including Al-Qaeda and Taliban as warriors of Islam who carry the black banners as described in the prophetic tradition.

Such claims from radical preachers of the end time prophecies should be treated with great care and wisdom. The Prophetic Traditions, just like the Holy Qur’an, should be studied in a more rigorous, systematic and scholarly manner. Unlike most any ordinary books, it cannot simply be taken literally and without a full understanding of its context. For the Prophetic Traditions, there is also a question of verifying its authenticity as this usually involves a chain of transmitters as compared to the Qur’an, which was sent directly from God through the Archangel Gibril to Prophet Muhammad.

The audience of such messages should also have the ability to discern certain truths from untruths. For example, the endorsement of Islamist groups like ISIS as warriors of Khurasan as claimed by preachers such as Musa Cerantonio is highly questionable and refutable. This is due to the indiscriminately violent nature of IS, which contradicts the expected coming of Imam Al-Mahdi, which is to bring peace and stability as narrated in another hadith.

Muslims must be able to distinguish political issues from religious ones and be fully aware of politics cleverly couched in religious language. This ability to make a clear distinction will enable them to think with a clear and logical mind, instead of allowing themselves to be emotionally manipulated by religious rhetoric.

On the part of the scholars, there is a pressing need to counter such narratives with a rigorous in-depth study of hadiths which have been quoted widely on the Internet. This is to prevent the genuine messages of Islam from being manipulated or misunderstood.

¹First published in Mohamed Bin Ali (2014), “‘Jihad’ in Syria: Fallacies of ISIS’ End-Time Prophecies”, *RSIS Commentaries*, 30 July. Edited and re-published here with permission.

Countering Islamic State (IS) On Jihad In Syria, Its Apocalyptic Character And The Burning Of Captured Enemy¹

Firdaus Yahya

Introduction

The conflict in Syria has facilitated the expansion of IS and Al-Qaeda and served like a beacon to various local militant groups.

The oppressions and cruelty inflicted upon Muslims in the conflict have attracted some Muslim to go there and take up arms, believing that this is part of their obligatory jihad. Adding fuel to the fire, there is this view that the wars there are signs of the impending end of time, the Armageddon that they are waiting for. Unfortunately, this misconception is gaining ground among some Muslims.

The virtues of jihad cannot be overstated. There are countless Quranic verses that extoll the obligatory nature of jihad, its greatness and virtues. Those who die as martyrs in a jihad will receive the highest station in Paradise.

However, the loud and ostensible call for jihad in Syria that has been especially prominent in social media and internet webpages, is misleading, dangerous and false.

The ruling on jihad

The main question that should be asked before taking arms for jihad is this: Does jihad fall into the category of *Fard Kifayah* or *Fard 'Ayn*?

Fard Kifayah can be defined as the collective responsibility of a local Muslim community to produce at least an expert in every field that are deemed necessary for the well-being of that community. Hence, it is a collective responsibility to have at least one Muslim judge, one Muslim doctor, one Muslim engineer and so forth. Should the community fail in this communal obligation, the whole community will be considered as committing a sin. However, the act of just one person fulfilling the role needed for the community relieves the community from such sin.

Fard 'Ayn, on the other hand, is a personal obligation that all individual Muslims must fulfil. Examples are the five daily prayers and fasting in the month of Ramadan. Every single Muslim must know *Fard 'Ayn*.

Scholars have unanimously agreed that jihad is by default a *Fard Kifayah*. Which means, that if there is just but one Muslim going for jihad, the communal obligation has been fulfilled.

But jihad can become *Fard `Ayn* when any of the following three events occur:

- ❖ when a Muslim soldier is facing the enemy on the battlefield. He cannot turn back and run.
- ❖ when an Islamic country is attacked unjustly. It is *Fard `Ayn* on every single citizen of that country to take up arms and defend their homeland.
- ❖ when the leader of a Muslim country announces general mobilisation for jihad. It is *Fard `Ayn* for able male members of that country to obey that call.

If none of the above occurs, it is not obligatory for a Muslim to take up arms and leave his family and friends to go overseas for any jihad.

The Syrian armed conflict certainly does not fulfil any of the above three criteria. Therefore, it is not obligatory for Muslims today to travel there on the pretext of performing jihad.

Parents' consent

In a hadith, a man came to Prophet Muhammad asking him permission to go out and perform jihad. The Prophet asked him, "Are your parents still alive?" The man answered, "Yes". The Prophet then said to him, "Go back to them and ask for their permission. If they allow you to go for jihad then go. Else, serve your parents and do good to them." (Narrated by Abu Dawud)

In another narration, the Prophet said, "Serving parents and doing good to them, that is the real jihad." (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

These two hadith clearly elevate the position of parents above armed jihad. Taking care of them especially when they are old takes priority over armed jihad. In fact, caring for parents is indeed a form of jihad.

The same ruling goes to those who already have families. It is not appropriate for one to answer the call of jihad which is a *Fard Kifayah* for him, when caring for the family, which is *Fard `Ayn* for him, is neglected.

Hijrah (migration)

One of the arguments calling for Muslims to travel to Syria for jihad is that migrating from a country ruled by a non-Muslim to an area that is ruled by Muslim is an obligation. And those who do not migrate will receive no protection from God.

There are of course Qur'anic verses that commanded Muslims to migrate. Example is,

“They long that you should disbelieve even as they disbelieve, so that you might be (all) alike. So choose not friends from them till they forsake their homes in the way of Allah; if they turn back (to enmity) then take them and kill them wherever ye find them, and choose no friend nor helper from among them.” (the Qur'an, 4:89)

Plucking verses from the Qur'an without looking at their historical context is wrong. It can lead to misunderstanding and ultimately bring a Muslim to committing things that are forbidden by God.

Those verses that talk about battles and migration such as the verse above, were revealed in Medina when Muslims were facing the prospect of wars with the non-Muslims in Mecca.

After the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet clearly said in a hadith narrated by Muslim, that there is no more *hijrah*. Its time is over.

In other words, Muslims are not obliged to leave the country of their birth just for the sake of migrating to a Muslim-majority country or area thinking that that country is more Islamic than his country since Muslims rule it.

If Muslims migrate *en masse* to Muslim-controlled area or country, who is going to share the beauty of Islam to the non-Muslims across the world?

IS, when propagating *hijrah* as compulsory upon Muslims living outside its territory, frequently uses the story of the Dwellers of Cave (*Ashab Al-Kahf*) as an example on the legality of *hijrah*. There were seven young men in that Qur'anic story who left their city and sought refuge in a cave because they wanted to escape their non-Muslim countrymen.

Therefore, according to IS, Muslims must follow this example and leave their non-Islamic countries to areas controlled by IS which purports the return of the Islamic caliphate. IS and those who believe in its narrative clearly either misunderstood or twisted that story.

The reality is that those seven cave dwellers were forced to worship other than Allah. Thus, to save their faith, they escaped from their city and sought refuge in a cave. Not once did they have the intention to take up arms and fight against their own people. And not once did they have any intention to leave their country forever.

Therefore, to leave one's country and migrate to areas controlled by IS in Syria and Iraq, on the false belief that that action emulates the noble migration of the Dwellers of the Cave, is wrong and misguided.

Fighting the enemies of Islam

Those who were eager to travel to Syria and perform jihad there thought that they would fight against the enemies of Islam.

The question is: Who are the enemies of Islam in that volatile and conflict-wrecked region?

And the usual answer given by these people who are eager to migrate to IS-controlled area is that the enemies of Islam are the Syrian army and/or the Shiites.

However, Islam views all who utter the two articles of faith (the *Shahadah*) as Muslims, regardless of whether they sincerely believe in the *Shahadah* or not, and irrespective of whether they commit major sinful acts. Killing one who already uttered the *Shahadah* is a major sin.

In one famous incident, the companion Usamah bin Zaid and another companion managed to corner a non-Muslim soldier during a battle. The trapped soldier quickly pronounced the *Shahadah* to save himself. He knew that Muslims cannot kill another Muslim. But Usamah did not trust his sincerity. He killed that non-Muslim soldier.

When the Prophet got to know it, he became very angry. He repeatedly rebuked Usamah, "You have killed someone who said the *Shahadah*!?"

Even though Usamah tried to explain that the non-Muslim soldier only said the *Shahadah* to escape with his life, the Prophet kept repeating his question, to the point that Usamah wished that he did not embrace Islam before this incident so that he would not raise such anger in the Prophet.

The Prophet's deep anger towards those who killed people who has pronounced the *Shahadah* is evidently clear, irrespective whether that person said the *Shahadah* willingly, under duress or to escape with their lives.

In the Syrian conflict, there is a very high possibility that the intention to help the oppressed will cause the intentional and unintentional killing of innocent people who have uttered the *Shahadah*. Such concept of collateral damage is not acceptable in Islam.

Participation in violence is not encouraged

Islam forbids violence and cruelty. The Prophet said in a hadith, “A Muslim is not one who spouts filthy words, cursing and bad mouthing people.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari)

If the abominable acts of the tongue are forbidden in Islam, what more the atrocities committed by the hand?

Instead of joining the conflict, Muslims should broker immediate cessation of hostility by all parties followed with dialogue and negotiation that would lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The Prophet also enjoined Muslims to abstain from being parties in violent conflicts. This is evidently clear in his saying, “Do not aspire in meeting your enemy. But should you meet them, be patient.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Permissive violence is forbidden

Islam has laid down the guidelines in warfare. These guidelines are important so that one would not be carried away to the extent of committing atrocities in the heat of the battle, which IS is guilty of.

Among the guidelines are that unarmed women and children cannot be killed, public properties cannot be destroyed, and places of worship must not be desecrated.

There was an instance reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim that the Prophet strongly denounced the killing of women in battles when he discovered the body of a dead woman in the battlefield.

In another hadith, the Prophet said, “Do not commit treason, mutilate the bodies of your enemy or kill children.” (Narrated by Muslim)

Conduct of the parties involved in conflicts in Syria and Iraq, as witnessed and confirmed in many reports, are far from the guidelines given by the Prophet. It is thus forbidden for Muslims living outside that zone of conflict to side any of the warring parties or to cheer the reprehensible acts of any of the parties involved.

Instead, the *ummah* must ask Allah for peace and harmony in that part of the world.

And for Muslims in that unfortunate zone, the following are instructions of the Prophet to them that could be found in many hadiths:

- ❖ they are not to side with any warring parties, or
- ❖ they should try to escape from this affliction, or
- ❖ try their best to protect their families, properties and dignity from any of the fighting parties.

This is their jihad and if they die in doing these, they could be considered as martyrs.

The coming of Al-Mahdi (the Messiah)

Another argument put forth to incite Muslims to travel to Syria and immerse themselves in the conflict is that the on-going battles are precursors to the emergence of *Al-Mahdi*.

It is true that the emergence of Al-Mahdi before the End of Time is recorded in many hadiths. He will announce himself between the door of the Station of Abraham (*Maqam Ibrahim*) and the Black Stone (*Al-Hajar Al-Aswad*) corner.

There are also many hadiths that prophesised the ultimate battle in Syria in which the Muslim army will be led by Prophet Isa and Al-Mahdi. However, that Armageddon will only occur after the emergence of Al-Mahdi. Therefore, what is happening in Syria right now cannot be considered as the Armageddon. However, could this violent conflict be the precursor to the emergence of Al-Mahdi as argued by IS?

Nobody can offer a definitive answer. Only God knows.

But what is clear is that the military violence in Syria has been predicted by Prophet Muhammad. He also gave guidelines to Muslims should they face such predicament.

In a hadith, the Prophet said,

“This ummah will be tested with five afflictions. Four of them have occurred. Only one left, and that is *Al-Sailam*. And this will happen to you O people of Sham. And when it happens, if you can turn into a stone, do it (i.e be as neutral and non-participative as you can). Do not support any conflicting parties. And if you can, seek refuge in holes on Earth (such as caves).” (Narrated by Ahmad)

Al-Sailam is the Arabic word for a horrendous war that displaces people from their homes.

What is happening now in Sham might or might not be *Al-Sailam*, the fifth affliction. The true knowledge about this is with God. Nevertheless, it is prudent for Muslims to be cautious and treat it as one. And thus Muslims should not take sides, even though there are groups who claim that their actions are to uphold Islamic rule and to establish the caliphate.

The burning of the human body

The report that the Jordanian fighter pilot, Muaz Al-Kasasbah, was burnt alive shocked the whole world. IS committed this act on the pretext of an Islamic form of capital punishment.

The group claimed that Al-Kasasbah had killed its fighters using fire from the bombs that he dropped from his jet, and so the punishment will be death through fire. Al-Kasasbah, according to the group's twisted logic must be burnt alive as a form of *qisas* punishment in Islam.

Qisas is based on the exact punishment for the crime committed. If A slaps B's right cheek, B can claim his right by giving a slap to A's right cheek with the same force.

The Qur'an says to this effect, "If you punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith you were afflicted." (The Qur'an, 16:126)

It is also based on the following Qur'anic verse:

"We ordained therein for them: Life for life, eye for eye, nose or nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal. But if any one remits the retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself. And if any fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah has revealed, they are wrong-doers." (The Qur'an, 5:45)

There are three lessons we can gather from the above verses.

First, the Islamic capital punishment must be just and exact. It cannot exceed the nature and degree of the crime committed.

For example, one who has his right eye blinded by someone intentionally, can claim his right to have the latter's right eye be blinded too. Not both eyes nor the left eye.

However, it is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to measure the exact quantum of the crime committed. Let us take the example of a punch.

The amount of force exacted by someone punching another person cannot be measured, unless under laboratory condition. Hence, it is difficult for the victim to claim his right to give the exact force to punch the perpetrator of the crime.

That is the reason behind the second lesson derived from verse 5:45 above – those who forgo his claim for rightful punishment will have his sins forgiven. God enjoins forgiveness and patience.

So for the family of a murdered victim, they have three options: a) demand their right for the murderer to be killed the same way as the victim was killed by him, or b) forgo the right and replace it with a form of blood money, or c) for go the claim altogether. And the third option is much encouraged by God for God will replace such chivalry with expiation of all sins.

God reminds us in the Qur'an the virtue of showing kindness in the face of evilness,

“Nor can goodness and Evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with what is better: Then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate! And no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint,- none but persons of the greatest good fortune.” (The Qur'an, 41:34-5)

The third lesson from verse 5:45 above is that those who are extreme in exacting the punishments are considered as among the unjust.

The burning of the human body, alive or dead, without a slightest doubt is in this category.

Muslim scholars, past and present, are unanimous in their opinion that burning a human is abominable and forbidden in Islam based on the following hadith:

“Nobody is allowed to punish using fire. Only God has the right to punish with fire.” (Narrated by Abu Daud and Ahmad)

It was reported that there was a prophet who was bitten by an ant. The prophet then ordered the whole nest to be burnt. God then chastised him, “Why did you destroy the whole colony of my creature who obeyed me just because one of them bit you?” (Narrated by Muslim)

The erudite scholar, Abu Hanifah, gave his opinion that taking a criminal's life can only be done through a sword and no other instruments, what more with fire.

He based his opinion on a hadith in which Prophet Muhammad said, “Capital punishment cannot be executed except through the sword.” (Narrated by Ibn Majah)

Thus, IS' abominable act of burning alive a human, on whatever pretext, is sinful in Islam and another of many transgressions that the group itself has publicly declared to the world as clear evidences that this group is actually desecrating Islam.

Concluding remarks

Events happening in Syria and Iraq shocked the world because of the level of atrocities committed by those involved in the fighting there. It is as if compassion and mercy have been rooted out of the hearts of those parties involved.

The world witnessed the mass killing of innocent people and the gruesome videos of children being praised by their fathers for holding the severed heads of people just beheaded by the fathers.

The world read in horror the pride shown by those warring parties on their atrocities that shred all forms of decencies and basic humanities.

What's more heart-wrenching is that these violence and cruelty are rampant in a region that once gave rise to great civilisations, including Islam. And since Islam is the last great civilization to arise from that region, like it or not, Islam is associated with violence and atrocities committed by those people there presently.

The cruelty and brutality committed by all warring parties lead only to more suffering among the Syrians and Iraqis, regardless of religion.

These brutal military adventures must end. Increasing the number of those killed and tortured in the Syrian wars by participating in what they considered as jihad there, goes against the spirit of Islam that upholds peace, not destruction and killing.

Not participating in the conflict that would aggravate and prolong its destructive effect does not mean Muslims should be passive. Instead, Muslims would do better to offer continuous prayers, asking God to return peace and harmony in that land. Muslims are also enjoined to help the fleeing Syrians who are now living in harsh and difficult conditions through donations and humanitarian works. And since the major parties in this horrendous war claim to be Muslims, the *ummah* must continue its efforts to peaceful resolution to the conflict.

¹This chapter is translated and edited from three articles originally written in Malay and published in Firdaus Yahya (2014), "Perbetul salah faham 'jihad' di Syria", *Berita Harian*, 15 April, Firdaus Yahya (2014), "Apakah perasaan manusia sudah tercabut dari hati", *Berita Harian*, 15 August and Firdaus Yahya (2015), "Perbuatan kejam ISIS di luar landasan Islam", *Berita Harian*, 5 February.

Islamic State (IS) Attacks In Ramadan: A Perverted Interpretation Of The Blessed Month¹

—Mohamed Bin Ali

The coming of Ramadan marks the beginning of fasting for Muslims for a month. It is a time for Muslims to devote themselves spiritually and perform more acts of kindness and charity. However, the sanctity of this blessed month has been tainted by IS fighters who took the opportunity of this month to launch more terror attacks. According to a media report, 149 people have been killed during Ramadan from three separate attacks in 2017 alone.

IS fighters claim that Ramadan is a month of jihad and martyrdom. Hence, they justify these attacks by twisting the true meaning and spirit of Ramadan. Rather than emphasising on the lofty moral spirit of Ramadan, these IS fighters chose to focus on war and offenses. Their focus on violence in the month of Ramadan stirs revulsion among many Muslims who consider it as a time of intensified spirituality and increased religious activity.

IS attacks in Ramadan

On 22 May 2017, IS claimed to have launched a suicide attack in Manchester Arena in Manchester, England, following a concert by American singer Ariana Grande. The suicide bomber identified as Salman Ramadan Abedi, a 22-year-old British Muslim, detonated a shrapnel-laden homemade bomb at the exit of the arena after the show. 23 adults and children were killed, including Abedi, and 119 others were injured.

In a video message entitled “Where are the lions of war?” which was broadcasted after the Manchester attack, IS calls for ‘all-out war’ to mark the start of Ramadan by attacking innocents and civilians in their homes, markets and roads. The message said, “Do not despise the work. Your targeting of the so-called innocents and civilians is beloved by us and the most effective, so go forth and may you get a great reward or martyrdom in Ramadan.”

Two days after the Manchester attack and three days before Ramadan, two suicide bombers attacked a bus station in East Jakarta. The attack near a bus terminal in Kampung Melayu had killed three policemen and injured 11 others. IS news agency known as *Amaq* confirmed that the executor of the Jakarta attack was an IS fighter.

On May 26, a day before Ramadan, IS fighters attacked a bus carrying Coptic Christians in central Egypt, killing 28 people and injuring 25 people. The bus was travelling to the Monastery of St Samuel from Minya province when it came under fire. All these attacks were linked to IS fighters and they came just days before Muslims worldwide observed Ramadan on 27 May.

On the ninth day of Ramadan, IS fighters killed 7 people and injured 48 people near London Bridge stabbing a police officer and revelers around Borough Market with knives. The attackers came out from a van at London Bridge shouting “This is for Allah”. Again IS claimed responsibility for this attack. They had sent out a call on instant messaging service Telegram earlier urging its followers to carry out attacks with trucks, knives and guns against “Crusaders” during Ramadan.

These attacks by IS in Ramadan are not new. Last year, IS launched attacks in many places including Orlando, Ankara, Baghdad, Medina and Dhaka. It was the worst Ramadan ever on record. The attacks in Medina, Dhaka and Baghdad occurred in the last ten days of Ramadan. According to Islamic traditions, the Night of Power (Lailah Al-Qadar) will occur in one of the last ten nights of Ramadan. In this night, Muslims are encouraged to perform more devotional acts such as night prayers and charity as blessings and forgiveness of God will be granted to those who seek the blessings of the night. IS believes that killing their enemies in the name of jihad as they understood in the last ten days of Ramadan is one of the most preferred forms of devotional acts and a way to gain martyrdom.

Justification for attacks

What is the significance of mounting these attacks in this blessed month of the Islamic calendar? IS claims that Ramadan is historically a month of armed struggle for Muslims. They believe that it is a month of conquest and jihad. While Muslims use the month of Ramadan to perform jihad against their temptations and desires, IS and many other violent Islamist groups claim that Muslims must also perform the physical jihad or armed struggle in this holy month. The attacks in Ramadan are based on their interpretation and emulation of the Battle of Badr, the first battle in Islam which occurred in the month of Ramadan. In this battle that took place in 624 CE, Muslims were granted victory against their opponents, the Quraish of Mecca.

These claims by IS are considered grave fallacies and indeed another misuse of the notion of Jihad in the Islamic legal tradition. While the Battle of Badr was justified as a legitimate battlefield, IS attacks are random and indiscriminate killings in nature. In this sense, IS do not adhere to the classical prescriptions for addressing jihad and war. Their ideology largely rests upon the centrality of armed jihad without considering the ethics of war. Hence, armed jihad becomes the means to expand the territories of Islam and Muslim control, thus the realization of Islamic ideals. To justify their resort to violence, they define jihad as fighting alone.

In Ramadan, Muslims believe that their spiritual rewards will be multiplied during this month. However, IS fighters have twisted this concept of spiritual rewards for their own corrupted beliefs. They perverted the heightened rewards promised during Ramadan for their own purpose believing that they will receive more rewards and praises from God should they unleash terror in the month of Ramadan.

The manipulation of the real objectives of Ramadan by IS is one of the ways IS interpreted the religion in a way most Muslims deplore. One example is IS' use of the doctrine of *takfir*, or the labeling of other Muslims as infidels who deserve death. IS has used this concept to justify the killing of other Muslims, be they Shiites or fellow Sunnis whom the group deems to be insufficiently devout.

IS uses propaganda extensively to brainwash their supporters to launch more attacks in Ramadan. In a propaganda poster shared by IS-linked news service, IS urges its supporters in the West to “gain benefit” from carrying out attacks during Ramadan. They had called on English-speaking Muslims to execute more attacks in Ramadan using ordinary weaponry like pistols, knives and trucks. Before the official claim was issued, Nashir News Service, another IS-linked media outlet, dispersed a black propaganda poster, picturing a handgun, hunting-style knife and large truck. Using English instead of Arabic, Nashir News Service called on IS supporters to “kill the civilians of the crusaders”.

A great perversion

The attacks by IS in Ramadan is a clear indication of IS perversion in their interpretation of Ramadan and its objectives. These attacks are against the true spirit of Ramadan. As Muslims enter this blessed month, they are motivated to perform good deeds and be compassionate towards all human beings and God's creations. Ramadan is known to be the month of mercy and blessings and not the month of killings and shedding blood. Rather than emphasizing on the lofty moral spirit of Ramadan, IS fighters chose to focus on war.

The Qur'an explicitly highlights that the ultimate objective of fasting in the month of Ramadan is to gain piety (*taqwa*) or the sense of God consciousness. How can Muslims gain *taqwa* by killing innocent lives and causing destruction? IS' focus on violence in the month of Ramadan stirs revulsion among most Muslims who see it as a time of intensified spirituality and increased religious activity.

¹First published in Mohamed Bin Ali (2017), “IS Ramadan Attacks: Perverted Interpretation of Fasting Month”, *RSIS Commentaries*, 9 June. Edited and re-published here with permission.

Contesting Islamic State (IS) Argument On The Obligation Of Establishing The Islamic State¹

— Muhammad Haniff Hassan

Postscript

This article was originally written to refute Jemaah Islamiyah and Al-Qaeda ideology that propagates the view that the establishment of an Islamic state is an obligation upon all Muslims after the fall of the Ottoman caliphate. It is republished here with minor editing in view of the identical nature of IS ideology regarding establishing an Islamic state to Jemaah Islamiyah and Al-Qaeda's and, thus, the refutation in this article applies to IS too.

Argument for establishment of an Islamic state

All jihadists such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Al-Qaeda believe that establishing an Islamic state is a religious obligation of all Muslims and a principle of the Islamic faith that cannot be compromised.

As such, they view Muslims who do not subscribe to, or challenge such a view, as committing what they term as *nawaqidh al-shadatain* – acts that nullify a Muslim's testimony of faith - a very serious allegation amounting to charging a Muslim of being an infidel.

However, the strongest argument that could be offered by jihadists to support the above view is based on the verse, "...and whoever did not judge by what Allah revealed, those are they that are the unbelievers." (The Qur'an, 5:44).

These jihadists argue that the verse obligates Muslims to rule by God's laws (shari'ah), failing which they could be regarded as unbelievers. According to them, the implementation of God's law, which is obligatory, cannot be fully realised except through a political institution or when Muslims are in power. The law of *hudud*, for example, cannot be implemented except by a legitimate Muslim ruler which clearly necessitates the establishment an Islamic state. According to them, this is a fundamental obligation entrenched in the faith because Muslim scholars have agreed on a maxim which says: "*ma la yatim al-wajib illa bih, fahuwa wajib* (when an obligation cannot be fulfilled without a means, then the means become obligatory)". Applying this maxim, they conclude that establishing an Islamic state is an obligation because it is a precondition for the full implementation of the shari'ah.

Contesting absolutism on establishment of an Islamic state

However, if one considers the jurisprudential methodology used in Islamic studies, the maxim only takes effect if and only if there is *al-ijma'* (consensus among Muslim scholars) for issues with no definitive ruling (*hukm qat'i*) from the Qur'an or the hadith (Prophet's tradition). Moreover, by studying the many rulings in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), one will find many cases that do not conform to the above maxim. For example, although the *zakat* (alms) and *haj* (pilgrimage) are two of the five pillars of Islam that are obligatory for Muslims, no Muslim scholar is of the view that saving money or acquiring wealth as a means and with specific intention to pay *zakat* or to perform *haj* as obligatory, failing which those Muslims would be considered as sinners.

Similarly, in the case of the Islamic state, a critical study on the issue shows that there is neither a direct statement in the Qur'an or the hadith relating to such obligation nor is there the requisite consensus amongst scholars. Hence, though the jihadists' argument is one way to interpret the verse, it certainly is not the only way. Following from this, the claim that the establishment of an Islamic state is an indisputable principle of faith is inaccurate. The use of the maxim to interpret the above verse does not produce an absolute ruling that the establishment of Islamic state is obligatory.

Thus, while the Islamists have the right to interpret the text the way that they have, framing it as an absolute obligation is incorrect and is also a violation of jurisprudential reasoning.

This violation of jurisprudential reasoning resonates negatively upon the wider Muslim community as it contributes to the willy-nilly declaration of *takfir* (ruling a Muslim as apostate) of fellow Muslims who do not agree with the jihadists. The misuse of *takfir* not only polarises the Muslim community but, in addition, it is also jurisprudentially erroneous as passing judgement on a person or a group as *kafir* (apostate/infidel) can only be carried out by an Islamic judicial authority. If there is no Islamic judicial body able to determine the apostasy of a person, that right is not transferable to any other party.

Besides the incorrect jurisprudential reasoning deployed to justify their argument for the establishment of an Islamic state, the narrowness of the jihadist interpretation is also unacceptable as it limits the options available for Muslims in contemporary society. Those who view Islam's positive role in politics as the development of the best possible framework for government balancing Islamic principles and the contemporary situation have no space. Unfortunately, jihadists have an overly simplistic view of a truly Islamic state where the state is ruled by a Muslim ruler and *shari'ah* is an enforced legal code that is the sole basis of law.

To them, a government is considered unIslamic if any one of the above criteria is not met – regardless whether it possesses other positive aspects that are in line with the Islamic teachings.

Such absolutism needs to be corrected because, as demonstrated above, it has no basis from the perspective of the jurisprudential methodology used in Islamic studies. The disagreement as to whether an Islamic state is obligatory or not falls under the area Muslim scholars regard as an area where disagreement is inevitable and permissible. In this respect, the jurisprudential maxim that should be applied here is: *la inkar fi masail al-ijtihad* (no denial to permit an opinion in issues that are open to independent judgement).

Conclusion

Islam allows Muslims to “agree to disagree” on the obligation of establishing an Islamic state and any disagreement that arises thereof should not be the cause of hostility between the differing parties.

While offering the argument that the establishment of an Islamic state is non-obligatory in Islam, the argument here does not suggest that the establishment of an Islamic state is *haram* (prohibited) or heresy. It only means that Muslims who view Islam as inseparable from politics have more options to ensure Islam’s positive role in politics than what the jihadists offer.

Political power is not directly related to a Muslim’s obligation to live by the shari`ah. Muslims are required to live by the shari`ah in all circumstances, whether they hold political power or not. However, the shari`ah must be understood in its truest meaning that encompasses rituals, faith, moral values and not simply a legal code to be enforced. Furthermore, Islam does not dictate that all in the shari`ah should be established through legal means. Most importantly, the obligation to live by the shari`ah is not unconditional as the Qur’an maintains, “So keep your duty to Allah as best you can” (The Qur’an, 64:16) - thus holding that every effort must be moderated by a realistic view and within existing constraints.

Political power via an Islamic state does not guarantee the ability of Muslims to live fully by the shari`ah because constraints will still exist in various forms owing to God’s design of His creations. Thus, living as a Muslim within constraints is a necessity that does not necessarily lower his status in the eyes of God.

¹First published in Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2006), “Contesting Islamists’ Absolutism on the Islamic State”, *IDSS Commentaries*, 14 June. Edited and re-published here with permission.

Responding To Abuse Of The *Hijrah* Concept For Mobilising Muslims To Syria And Iraq¹

— Muhammad Haniff Hassan

The idea of *hijrah* or migration has a special place in the history of Muslims. It denotes the flight of Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslims to Medina to take refuge from persecution in the then pagan Mecca. Today, the idea of *hijrah* has however been given its own interpretation by Muslim extremist groups. They use it to argue in favour of the isolation of minority Muslims from the larger non-Muslim community. It is also used to encourage Muslims living in a non-Islamic environment to migrate and live with the “jihadists” who supposedly live the life of the pious pioneers of Islam so as to establish a better Muslim *ummah* or community.²

A glimpse of this idea was provided in the White Paper report on the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members in Singapore which reported that one of the JI leaders had sent a letter to Mullah Omar, the former head of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, asking whether Muslims (members of JI) should migrate to Afghanistan.³

Some Muslim extremist groups criticise Muslims who settle down in non-Muslim countries and call them to migrate instead to a Muslim country. There are also extremists who label these Muslims as disbelievers just because they live in a non-Muslim country.⁴

With regard to the current problem posed by IS, it is very clear that *hijrah* is one of many Islamic concepts which has been abused and given importance by ISIS in order to mobilise Muslims all over the world into joining jihad in Syria and Iraq and supporting the newly established “caliphate”. Just a month after proclaiming the “caliphate”, IS published its third edition of its online magazine, *Dabiq*, with *hijrah* as its main theme.

IS in the magazine seeks to link the unwillingness of Muslims to make *hijrah* to them with hypocrisy. After citing a hadith, “Whoever dies without taking part in a battle and without intending to take part in a battle has died with a trait of hypocrisy” (Narrated Muslim), the magazine asserts:

“Therefore, abandoning jihad is a trait of hypocrisy. So be wary of it or else it may seize you by your heart..... So abandoning *hijrah* – the path to jihad – is a dangerous matter. In effect, one is thereby deserting jihad and willingly accepting

his tragic condition of being a hypocritical spectator. He lives in the West amongst the kuffar for years, spends hours on the Internet, reads news and posts on forums, only to be encompassed by the verse, {They think the parties have not [yet] withdrawn. And if the parties should come [again], they would wish they were in the desert among the Bedouins, inquiring [from afar] about your news. And if they should be among you, they would not fight except for a little} [Al-Ahzab: 20].⁵

Muslims who do not or are reluctant to make hijrah to them are framed to have lived a life of modern slavery – enslaved by their employment and other worldly matters held in the hands of non-Muslim masters:

“The modern day slavery of employment, work hours, wages, etc., is one that leaves the Muslim in a constant feeling of subjugation to a kafir master. He does not live the might and honor that every Muslim should live and experience.”⁶

According to IS, jihad which is regarded as a personal obligation (*fardu `ayn*) of all Muslims today due to the occupation of Muslim lands by non-Muslims can only be fulfilled via *hijrah*, “There is not life without jihad and there is no jihad without hijrah.... This life of jihad is not possible until you pack and move to the Khilafah [caliphate].”⁷ In other words, a neglect of *hijrah* is a neglect of jihad and unwillingness to make *hijrah* is a sign of weak commitment to jihad.

IS also views *hijrah* as obligatory to all Muslims because supporting the newly founded “caliphate” is a religious obligation. There is no other important interest of Islam to be fulfilled by Muslims now except to extend their effort for the “caliphate”. There is no distinction between a student and a professional:

“Therefore, every Muslim professional who delayed his jihad in the past under the pretense of studying Shari’ah, medicine, or engineering, etc., claiming he would contribute to Islam later with his expertise, should now make his number one priority to repent and answer the call to hijrah, especially after the establishment of the Khilafah. This Khilafah is more in need than ever before for experts, professionals, and specialists, who can help contribute in strengthening its structure and tending to the needs of their Muslim brothers. Otherwise, his claims will become a greater proof against him on Judgment Day.

As for the Muslim students who use this same pretense now to continue abandoning the obligation of the era, then they should know that their hijrah from darul-kufr to darul-Islam and jihad are more obligatory and urgent than spending an unknown number of years studying while exposed to doubts and desires that will destroy their religion and thus end for themselves any possible future of jihad.”⁸

Living under un-Islamic conditions

Muslim extremist groups build their view of *hijrah* on a premise that living in a non-Muslim country is wrong because Muslims will have to live under un-Islamic conditions. They also claim that Muslims who willingly accept the rule of non-Muslims, and live under any rule other than the *shariah* (Islamic law), in all circumstances, are committing acts that will nullify their faith. For the extremists, loyalty and sovereignty can only be given to and by God and Islam is the only way of life for Muslims.

They base their argument, among others, on the following verses:

“When angels take the souls of those who die in sin against their souls, they say:

“In what (plight) were ye?” They reply: “Weak and oppressed were we in the earth.” They say: “Was not the earth of Allah spacious enough for you to move yourselves away (from evil)?” Such men will find their abode in Hell, What an evil refuge! Except those who are (really) weak and oppressed - men, women, and children - who have no means in their power, nor (a guide-post) to their way.” (The Quran, 4:97-8)

Such interpretation of the verse could be supported by few hadiths such as:

“I am not responsible for any Muslim who resides among unbelievers.” (Narrated by Al-Turmuzi)

“Anyone who are with the unbelievers and live among them, then he is like them.” (Narrated by Abu Dawud and Al-Turmuzi)⁹

For IS, living among non-Muslims will inevitably have serious effect on Muslims’ religiosity:

“Living amongst the sinful kills the heart, never mind living amongst the kuffar [infidels]! Their kufr [infidelity] initially leaves dashes and traces upon the heart that over time become engravings and carvings that are nearly impossible to remove. They can destroy the person’s fitrah [natural state] to a point of no return, so that his heart’s doubts and desires entrap him fully.... Even if one were to spend all his hours at a masjid in prayer, dhikr, and study of the religion, while living amongst Muslims who reside amid kuffar and abandon jihad, then such a person would only be establishing the strongest proof against himself and his sin.... Thus, the sinful company affects you whether you desire so or not.”¹⁰

The flight of Muslims from non-Muslim countries to Syria and Iraq in thousands partly testifies to the potency of ISIS' mobilisation appeal tapping on Islamic concepts already familiar and available among Muslims, although it must be admitted that causes of radicalisation remains too complex to be attributed to religious ideas only.

However, the abovementioned idea of *hijrah*, if accepted, has other serious implications to Muslims who are not making *hijrah* to Syria and Iraq. The consequence of this thinking is the idea that one cannot be a proper Muslim unless one lives among Muslims only. Such thinking encourages ghettoism and an exclusivist attitude in social life. This may not be a security problem, but it is surely a theological problem and could become a social problem that must be addressed.

Theological response

It is argued that the verses (4:97-9) cannot be used as absolute proof that Muslims cannot live in a non-Muslim country. On the contrary, it could also be interpreted otherwise, that is to allow a Muslim to do so. The verse, "Except the weak ones among men, women and children who can not devise (a) plan, nor are they able to direct their way." (4:98), has been interpreted by Muslim scholars to mean a Muslim is only required to migrate from a non-Muslim country if he is unable to practise his religion freely and is being oppressed.¹¹

Consequently, it also means that Muslims are allowed to live in a non-Muslim country or under a non-Muslim government, as long as they have the freedom to practice their religion and can experience basic human rights. There is no reason or compulsion for Muslims who live in such a situation to migrate.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that the Prophet himself permitted his uncle, Abbas to remain in Mecca, which at that time was not under Muslim rule. That proved that the injunction to migrate was not binding over every Muslim.

Secondly, the migration of the Prophet's companions to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and their return six years after the Prophet's migration to Medina, also suggests that migration is only necessary for those who are weak and fear religious persecution. Therefore, living in a non-Muslim country is allowed if a Muslim's right of worship is protected.

Thirdly, not all Muslims during the time of the Prophet migrated to Medina. One such case was Abu Nu'aim. He became a Muslim and wanted to migrate to Medina. As he was the financial provider for a group of orphans and widows for his tribe, his people asked him to stay with the promise to protect him from

any abuse. He postponed his migration plan and when he eventually migrated to Medina, the Prophet said to him: “My people have ousted me and wanted to kill me. Whilst your people protected you.”

Fourthly, the Prophet said (in one narration by Imam Muslim), that those living in a non-Muslim country who later became Muslims could still remain living there and did not need to migrate.

From the evidences, it can be concluded that there cannot be a general ruling for or against Muslims living in a non-Muslim country. The ruling depends on the status of the individual and the context. Clearly then, any position prohibiting Muslims from living and settling in non-Muslim countries is not the consensus of Muslim scholars. The scholars are of the opinion that a ruling on migration depends on the situation and can be summarised as such: a) it is obligatory for a Muslim to migrate if he or she cannot practise his religion and fears that he cannot maintain his faith (4:97-9); b) Muslims who can practise Islam and can afford to migrate are only encouraged to do so. This is based on the actions of the Prophet’s uncle, Abbas and his companion, Abu Nu’aim; c) Muslims who cannot afford to or face difficulty in migrating are not required to do so and can remain living in that country (4:97); and d) it is obligatory for a Muslim to remain in a non-Muslim country if his presence and expertise is required by the Muslims there.¹²

Shaykh Jad Al-Haq, former Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University, Egypt (1978 – 1982, died in 1996), issued a decree (*fatwa*);

“If a Muslim feels that his religion is safe and he is able to practise it freely in a country with no religion or in a non-Muslim country, it is allowable for him to stay. If he fears for his religion, morals, property or self-worth, then it is obligatory for him to move to a country where he can be safe.”¹³

Rational response

In today’s context, migration to a Muslim country in a classical sense is no longer relevant or practical as no particular country today can be truly classified as a *Dar Al-Islam* (land of Islam) in the classical sense.

Furthermore, the world has been globalised. Any attempt to isolate Muslims from other communities in order to preserve their faith and commitment to the religion is a futile effort.

Also, there is no one country, be it a non-Muslim or Muslim country, that is perfectly suitable to meet the original objective of migration, which is to allow a Muslim to practise Islam as a religion comprehensively. Practically anywhere a Muslim chooses to live, he still has to make the appropriate adjustments and accommodations to his society.

The early Muslims travelled and settled widely, from their origins in the Arab world to continents such as China and the Malay Archipelago. In each case they settled and lived with the non-Muslims, which eventually caused the spread of Islam.

Muslim minorities living in non-Muslim democratic countries must realize that whatever the imperfections, remaining in these countries is critical. By doing so, they provide abundant opportunities to share their Muslim way of life and dispelling any misconceptions about Islam.

In that respect, instead of isolating themselves, Muslims must strive to actively engage with their host society by being a constructive member of the country. An active participation in the nation's progress and development is the strongest argument against the negative image of Islam. This can be achieved in part by living in accordance with the principles of democracy and the law of the state. This will assist Muslims in building a foundation for peaceful coexistence with others.¹⁴

¹First published in Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2015), "Responding to Abuse of *Hijrah* Concept for Mobilizing Muslims to Syria and Iraq", *Eurasia Review*, 30 June. Edited and re-published here with permission.

²Pergas (2004), *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore*, Singapore: Pergas, pp. 226-7; Muhammad Sulaiman Tubuliyak (1997), *Al-Ahkam Al-Siyasiyah Li Al-Aqalliyat Al-Muslimah Fi Al-Fiqh Al-Islami*, Amman: Dar Al-Nafais, pp. 61-6.

³Ministry of Home Affairs (2003), *The White Paper: The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrest and the Threat of Terrorism*, Singapore, pp. 34-5.

⁴Abd Al-Rahman bin Mu'alla Al-Luwaihiq (1992), *Al-Ghuluw Fi Al-Din Fi Hayat Al-Muslimin Al-Mu'asirah*, Bayrut: Muassasat Al-Risalah, pp. 308-9.

⁵Dabiq, no. 3, pp. 26-7.

⁶Ibid, p. 29.

⁷Ibid, p. 31.

⁸Ibid, p. 26.

⁹*Inspire* (Al-Qaeda online magazine), no. 13, pp. 32-3; `Abd Al-Rahman bin Mu'alla Al-Luwaihiq (1992), pp. 306-9.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 32.

¹¹Muhammad Sulaiman Tubuliyak (1997), pp. 66-72.

¹²Pergas (2004), pp. 224-33

¹³Cited in Muhammad Sulaiman Tubuliyak (1997), p. 54. See *Majallat Al-Azhar* (1991), vol 6, 63rd year, December-January 1991, p. 618.

¹⁴Pergas (2004), pp. 233-6.

Islamic State (IS) Distortion Of *Hijrah*: Emigrating For A Lost Cause¹

— Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah

Since 2015, there have been at least a dozen Singaporeans investigated by the Singapore authorities for harbouring intentions to travel or emigrate to the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS). In 2017, four individuals were detained for the same reason. In September, IS issued a propaganda video featuring a Singaporean who is known to have gone to Syria to join IS. In the brief three-and-a-half-minute video, Megat Shahdan Bin Abdul Samad calls on Muslims to relocate to IS-controlled territories or locations where the group's influence is present.

He quotes a hadith or Prophetic saying that implicitly affirms that the duty of *hijrah* will not cease until the Final Hour (Doomsday). While most people would ignore or reject such a call, especially coming from a terrorist group, there will be a few who will fall prey to extremists' exploitation of *hijrah* and other Islamic concepts. They include the literalists and those who understand the *hadith* without using appropriate tools of inquiry and interpretation used in the science of *hadith*. Like *Shahdan*, they would believe that relocation to IS fulfils a religious obligation.

The origin of *hijrah*

IS' promotion of *hijrah* calls for a deeper examination of the concept. To begin with, what was the cause of *hijrah* as reported in Islamic history? Why did Prophet Muhammad encourage Muslims to emigrate? How should Muslims react to calls for *hijrah*? And why should terrorist propaganda and interpretation draped in scripture be roundly dismissed?

Hijrah is Arabic for emigration. In the early days of Islam, Prophet Muhammad and his followers were ill-treated and harassed by polytheist Meccan Arabs over differences in religious beliefs. They were subjected to economic and social boycott and barred from marriage and trade. When these tactics failed to stop people from converting to Islam, the pagan Quraish clan resorted to physical abuse. This triggered the first *hijrah* to Ethiopia which was then ruled by a Christian king known as Negus.

The Quraish intensified their violence when they learned that several Muslims secretly sought refuge in Medina. The clan also plotted the assassination of the Prophet. This marked a serious escalation of efforts to stop the practice of Islam, from mistreatment to violence, including an assassination plot against the Prophet.

These developments led to Prophet Muhammad's emigration to Medina. This marked the final *hijrah* in Islamic history. Viewed in its historical context, *hijrah* was in effect a means to preserve the basic right to practise one's faith and to protect one's life.

Distortion of *hijrah* by IS

IS however exploited *hijrah* to build up their human capital and resources in their newly-established ‘caliphate’ which they declared in June 2014. The group’s online magazine *Dabiq* (later known as *Rumiyah*) and weekly online Arabic newsletter *Al-Naba’*, for instance, frame *hijrah* as a religious obligation, an act of worship that would bring a Muslim close to God, and a manifestation of true faith.

IS claims that Islam requires Muslims to live in an Islamic state that practises shari’ah law over a territory governed by non-Muslims or by Muslims administering man-made laws.

IS asserts that Muslims should leave their country (especially in the Middle East) which was created based on the colonial era Sykes-Picot “false border demarcation” and relocate to IS to support the caliphate and redraw the borders. Both hadith and *sunnah* (Prophetic tradition and practice) were distorted to back these arguments. Shahdan’s video is a clear example of such distortions.

The correct understanding of *hijrah*

IS’ narrative on *hijrah* needs to be debunked for its so-called religious justifications. Contrary to IS claims, *hijrah* to IS is not among the best forms of worship and does not make a Muslim closer to God. Many acts of worship bring a Muslim closer to God, from regular prayers and repentance to generous donations and charitable acts. A hadith was reported to have implied that whoever comes to the mosque of Quba (in Medina) and prays in it will have a reward similar to performing an *‘umrah* (small pilgrimage). This suggests that location is not fundamental to get closer to God but the performance and quality of a ritual. *Hijrah* to IS to achieve this goal is unnecessary.

IS falsely claims that Prophet Muhammad instructed Muslims to sever ties with family and tribe by performing *hijrah*. The hadith was, in fact, a directive for a newly-converted Muslim to detach himself from the religious practices of his people, not blood ties. This is to distinguish himself from the other faith groups through his observance of religious obligations.

Maintaining good relationships with non-Muslim family members is part of Islamic teachings. This is evident in the Prophet’s behaviour towards his two pagan paternal uncles. Hence, there is nothing Islamic when a Muslim leaves his family and heads to IS - like what Shahdan did - with the hope of receiving blessings from God and to die as a martyr.

Way forward: Migration from literalism

Lastly, Prophet Muhammad was reported as saying that *hijrah* will not cease until repentance is ceased. Repentance will not cease until the sun rises from the west (a major sign of the end of time). Although the hadith is authentic, its reading must be complemented with the understanding of its implicit objective. *Hijrah* in this hadith does not suggest a physical relocation but rather a change in mindset and behaviour.

Islam promotes progressive thinking and positive change in life. A believer must think of ways to become a better person each day to benefit not only himself but those around him including animals and nature. A Muslim who learns Islam by heart and perseveres to ponder upon its teaching marks a '*hijrah*' in his cognitive attitude towards his faith, from a literalist to a pragmatist. *Hijrah* is also a manifestation of a paradigm shift.

A Muslim who constantly seeks to upgrade his knowledge so that he could be of service to others is expressing a form of *hijrah* towards becoming a useful and productive Muslim. Similarly, a Muslim who strives to distance himself from evil is making *hijrah* towards becoming a better Muslim who understands his religion holistically. These counter-narratives can be understood from other prophetic sayings such as, "An emigrant is one who ditches mistakes and sins". In another hadith, the Prophet was reported as saying, "An emigrant is the one that ditches anything that Allah has forbidden."

The fall of IS' de facto capital Raqqa is not likely to lead to a decline in the propagation of literalist, narrow and extremist interpretations of Islamic scriptures. IS will decentralise and exploit social media platforms to the fullest to maintain its hold over its followers and to radicalise even more vulnerable segments of society.

Given this scenario, it is imperative that action be taken not only to debunk extremist teachings through various means but also to disseminate widely moderate and progressive values which will act as a 'firewall' against false, deviant and divisive ideas.

¹First published in Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah Sudiman (2017), "IS Distortion of *Hijrah*: Emigrating for a Lost Cause", *RSIS Commentaries*, 13 November. Edited and re-published here with permission.

Islamic State's (IS) Misconception Of *Bay`at*: Nuances In Oath Of Allegiance¹

— Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah Sudiman

In July 2017, Singapore authorities arrested two Singaporeans on terrorism-related charges. One of them is 34-year-old Imran Kassim, managing director of a logistics company. He was put under an Order of Detention (OD) for intending to undertake armed violence overseas. The Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs also stated that Imran had pledged allegiance or *bay`at* to the leader of the 'Islamic State' (IS) terrorist group, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi in 2014.

Imran's detention raises several important questions about the concept of *bay`at*. To begin with, what is *bay`at*? Why is the concept frequently exploited by violent self-proclaimed "Islamist" groups? How should Muslims react to it?

The origin of *bay`at*

Bay`at is an Arabic term that denotes a pledge of allegiance, alliance and loyalty. It predates Islam and was a common practice among Arabs. In pre-Islamic Arabia, a pact, which was observed through the pledge of alliance, was employed between Arabian tribal groups to establish security in the absence of state power.

In early Islamic history several accounts of *bay`at* were recorded between Prophet Muhammad and residents of Medina and between his companions. For example, a group of men from the city met the Prophet at a location called 'Aqaba to embrace Islam.

They pledged not to commit customary practices of that time such as polytheism, robbery and adultery. *Bay`at* continues to be practised to this day in a few countries, especially between leaders and their followers in tribal societies, and among some Muslim groups.

Distortion of *bay`at* by Southeast Asian militants

In the last several decades, the concept of *bay`at* has been exploited by Muslim militant and terrorist groups to compel obedience and loyalty to the group's leader and agenda. On 23 July 2014, a splinter of the militant Filipino Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) under the Basilan wing leader Isnilon Hapilon pledged allegiance to IS which had declared the establishment of a so-called worldwide Muslim caliphate several weeks earlier.

Another Filipino group, the Raja Sulaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM), uploaded a YouTube video showing ASG members in Bicutan prison in the Philippines taking an oath of loyalty to Al-Baghdadi. Similarly, in December 2015 and June 2016, IS released several videos showing acceptance of *bay'at* by various battalions under Hapilon.

The acceptance symbolises recognition of the groups by IS and its leaders, as well as approval to wage military operations under the banner of IS. Almost a year later, the Siege of Marawi erupted. Likewise, in Malaysia, Muhammad Wanndy Mohamad Jedi who led a terrorist cell called *Gagak Hitam* (Black Crows) declared *bay'at* to IS. Wanndy was instrumental in orchestrating the Movida attack in Puchong, Selangor in June 2016.

***Bay'at* in Singapore**

Bay'at made its first presence in Singapore's security scene in 2002. The Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) detainees revealed they had pledged allegiance to JI and/or leaders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). JI members were also warned that breaking the *bay'at* would result in divine retribution, hence deterring those who had reservations about the group's objectives from leaving.

Today, Singapore's security landscape is once again challenged with the threat of 'religiously-motivated' violence, this time by IS which brings together with it concepts popularised by JI such as *bay'at*. The arrest and detention of IS supporters in Singapore, like Mohamed Omar bin Mahadi (in July 2016) and Imran Kassim among others once again highlight the distortion of religious beliefs and exploitation of practices like *bay'at*.

In the case of Mohamed Omar, he had memorised the *bay'at* which he intended to take to Al-Baghdadi. He and his wife were at IS' disposal to carry out any assignments IS has for them once he had taken the oath. In respect of Imran, he harboured the intention to attack Singapore Armed Forces personnel deployed in the Global Coalition against IS. These examples show that terrorist group supporters are prepared to fulfil their *bay'at* in pursuit of their leader's agenda even if it means resorting to acts of violence and killing.

***Bay'at* from Islamic perspective**

Bay'at is mentioned in both the Qur'an and hadith (Prophetic traditions). Its purpose is for the promotion of good and enjoining what is right and the prevention of evil and forbidding what is wrong. This doctrine is in congruence with Islamic jurisprudence which states that "actions and policies should be in the people's interest".

A *bay'at* to IS, however, is totally at variance with this positive maxim as IS has shown that its actions disregard public interest and welfare and only cause civil disorder and mayhem. IS legitimises indiscriminate killings, torture, forced conversions, and desecration of the deceased, to name a few. *Bay'at* to Al-Baghdadi in effect constitutes support and endorsement of IS transgressions of Islamic laws and ethics.

Militant and terrorist groups like IS and JI in fact use *bay'at* as a mechanism to 'trap' members within the organisation and ensure their commitment and compliance. In Islam, any *bay'at* that advances violations of Islamic doctrines and practices is null and void; it is entirely permissible to break one's oath in such circumstances.

Two types of *bay'at*

There are two types of *bay'at*. The first is *al-bay'at al-muṭlaqah*, an irrevocable pledge. This only applies to Prophet Muhammad. According to Islamic creed, prophets and messengers of God are trustworthy, truthful, wise and divinely guided and protected from violation of God's laws. These guarantee that the *bay'at* given to the Prophet will not be abused to commit acts that violate religious doctrines and precepts.

The other pledge is *al-bay'at al-muqayyadah* or conditional pledge given to a person other than a prophet or messenger of God. This *bay'at* is, according to a prophetic saying, subject to the condition that "There is no obedience to any human being if it involves disobedience of Allah". The pledge is not absolute and it is revocable if it involves the commission of sins and acts against God.

Bay'at to Al-Baghdadi clearly falls into this second category. Individuals who may have pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi can therefore revoke their pledge without any fear of divine retribution.

The recent detention of Imran Kassim again demonstrates the vulnerability of some people to terrorist ideology and propaganda. Continuous vigorous efforts are therefore necessary to counter and expose the flawed and erroneous interpretations of religious texts and exploitation of practices such as *bay'at*.

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The Danger Of *Takfir* (Excommunication): Exposing Islamic State (IS) *Takfiri* Ideology¹

— Muhammad Haniff Hassan

Introduction

IS is challenged not only on the battlefield but also ideologically by mainstream Muslim scholars and within militant circles.

Hundreds of mainstream Muslim scholars have spoken out at international and local levels, both individually and collectively.² The most important one being the *Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi*.³

The ideological challenge also comes from within militant circles, especially rival groups operating in Syria and Iraq such as Jabhah Al-Nusrah and in other places such as Al-Qaeda which is based in Yemen.⁴

One of the many criticisms directed against ISIS is its permissiveness in the practice of *takfir* (declaring a Muslim as apostate) which makes its status as a *takfiri* group well-deserved. This equates IS to the Kharijites who remain traditionally denounced and despised by Sunni and Salafi Muslims.

This article seeks to analyse IS' response to these challenges by mainstream Muslims and rival militants based on materials distributed online by sources known to have an affiliation to IS and distributors of its materials.

Takfir according to IS

IS' doctrine on *takfir* could be found in a 40-points list entitled *'Aqidah Wa Manhaj Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Fi Al-Takfir* (Islamic State's Creed and Methodology of Takfir).⁵

The list carries many similarities with ISIS' publication entitled *Muqarrar Fi Al-Tawhid Li Al-Mu`askarat* (Standard Text for Islamic Creed for Military Camps), dated 1436 (Hijrah calendar) / 2015.⁶

Some of the points are also found in another IS publication titled *Hazih 'Aqidatuna Wa Haza Manhajuna* (This is our creed and our way).⁷

All the above-mentioned documents are distributed online by IS online machineries and among its online supporters.

This article will focus on the 40-points list on *takfir* because of its concise and easily digestible content which also directly addresses the topic at hand.

The 40 points could be summarised as follows:

- ❖ The point begins with a warning against all types of extremism in *takfir*.
- ❖ IS rejects the Murji`ite's doctrines, a) *al-irja'* (deferred judgment on faith) that views God as the sole authority to judge who is Muslim and who is not in the Afterlife, and b) Muslims should regard any person who is outwardly Muslim as part of the Muslim community even if he commits grave sins because sin has no adverse effect on salvation as long as he remains faithful.
- ❖ IS' stand on *takfir* is based on the creed of the Sunni and guided by the tradition of noble Sunni scholars.
- ❖ IS regards all who proclaim the *Shahadah* (Testimony of Faith) as Muslims, until proven otherwise.⁸
- ❖ IS' method of *takfir* on a specific person or organisation is premised on the following conditions:
 - ◇ it must be based on clear and strong evidences that are soundly established, not speculations
 - ◇ it must meet all the necessary requirements required by the shari`ah
 - ◇ it must be free from inhibitions recognised by the shari`ah
 - ◇ the person involved must be presented with the right argument and evidence first
 - ◇ it must be issued by ISIS' authorised bodies.⁹
- ❖ IS do not perform *takfir* on all Muslims today, or those who commit sins except if they regard them as *halal*,¹⁰ or those who do not join ISIS, or those who differ, criticise or fight IS, or Muslims who live in non-Muslim countries.¹¹
- ❖ IS rules the following people as *kafir* (disbelievers)
 - ◇ a person who performs any of the ten nullifiers of faith¹²
 - ◇ all Twelver Shiites – both ordinary persons and scholars¹³
 - ◇ those who reject the *takfir* of Twelver Shiite scholars (not the *takfir* on an ordinary person), as disbelievers
 - ◇ all parties based on communism, secularism, nationalism and liberalism;¹⁴ proponents of democracy and those who participate in its process; all governments that do not rule by the shari`ah and members of its military, police officers, intelligence, executive and judiciary apparatuses¹⁵
 - ◇ all those who seek to judge by civil laws¹⁶
 - ◇ those who mock and insult the Prophet and his noble family members¹⁷
 - ◇ all Baathist¹⁸
 - ◇ all leaders of Islamic Party of Iraq, not its ordinary members
 - ◇ all practitioners of sorcery.¹⁹

Unmasking IS

One feature which stands out from IS' materials on the issue of *takfir* is its attempt to deflect criticism from various parties that it is a *takfiri* movement, and to subsequently portray itself as a staunch Sunni movement that deserves support especially from jihadist circles and from Sunni Muslims in general.

This could be deduced from the way the list was composed.

Firstly, the first point in the list ironically asserts IS' denunciation of all forms of extremism in *takfir*.

Secondly, the first eight points seek to inform what ISIS is not in the matter of *takfir*, instead of describing what its stand on *takfir* actually is. This indicates its apologetic tone due to various accusations of *takfirism* against it. This accusation which comes together with the Kharijite label does not come only from prominent individual scholars and Muslim bodies all over the world but also from radical jihadist circles such as leaders of Al-Qaeda.

Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi who led Al-Qaeda in Iraq – the group that preceded ISIS – was counselled by his religious mentor Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi on, among other things, the former's permissive approach to *takfir* as a justification for Al-Qaeda's indiscriminate bombing of Iraqi civilians.²⁰

However, three examples could be highlighted here that would expose ISIS' mask of fidelity to mainstream Sunni tradition and its claim of rejection of all types of extremist understandings of *takfir*.

Example no. 1

First example is IS' pronouncement of *takfir* on Hamza Yusuf and Yasir Qadhi.

Hamza Yusuf is a Muslim scholar who heads Zaytuna College based in Berkeley, California, United States of America.²¹

Yasir Qadhi is also a Muslim scholar based in the United States. He holds a doctoral degree in religious studies from Yale University and a teaching position in the Religious Department of Rhodes College and is also the Dean of Academic Affairs at Al-Maghrib Institute.²²

This pronouncement was publicly made known in *Dabiq*, IS' official online magazine, issue number 7. Photos of both scholars were published with the caption “*murtad*” (apostate) for their condemnation of the assault on Charlie Hebdo.²³

Theologically, this pronouncement falls under *takfir mu'ayyan* (*takfir* made against specific individuals or organisations).

Other than the photos with the above mentioned caption published under an article that seeks to offer theological justification for the attack on Charlie Hebdo and condemn those who denounce it, there was no detailed explanation for this specific *takfir* based on the statement made by both scholars. They did not explain which aspects of the statements are deemed to cause apostasy and why and on what theological basis do these statements cause apostasy. There was also no clear explanation on the part of IS in detailing the process it has taken to make such pronouncements; whether IS has communicated to them its ruling and given them a chance to defend themselves against IS' arguments and who were the scholars involved in making such rulings.

These are pertinent questions which require answers since they deviate from the *takfir* methodology that IS has laid down for itself in the list – *takfir* cannot be made based on speculation and must go through proper processes and no Muslims should be ruled otherwise except with evidence that is beyond doubt (*yaqin*).

In this respect, ISIS has failed to adhere to its own doctrine of *takfir*. Since this is a serious theological matter, this failure is a serious non-compliance to the shari'ah on the part of IS.

Example no. 2

The second example which exposes the fundamental flaws of IS is its pronouncement of *takfir* on all Muslims who accept democracy, regard it as compatible to Islam and participate in its process.

This pronouncement is problematic on many grounds.

Firstly, the issue whether democracy is compatible with Islam, or Muslims' participation in it could be ruled as permissible (based on rational and pragmatic grounds) are contentious among Muslim scholars.

However, many Muslim scholars today would support democratic governments and permit Muslims' participation in its process, regardless whether they live in Muslim countries or non-Muslim countries or their participation involves them being voters, election candidates or members of parliament.²⁴

In addition to many works that promote such positions such as Al-Qaradhawi's *Fiqh Al-Dawlah* (Islamic Jurisprudence on Government),²⁵ it is also supported by the participation of Islam based parties in democratic processes and also democratic governments in many Muslim majority countries which include Muslim scholars amongst their membership.

Not only did ISIS' pronouncement go against the mainstream position of Sunni Muslim scholars, it is also tantamount to pronouncing *takfir* on them and a significant number of ordinary Muslims.²⁶

Secondly, the established Sunni doctrine is to restrain from *takfir* in contentious theological issues where differences of opinion out of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) are inevitable such as the case of democracy in Islam. Many conservative scholars who reject the compatibility of democracy with Islam and discourage Muslims' participation in it prefer prudence and refrain from pronouncing *takfir* on the opponents due to the seriousness of *takfir* in Islam²⁷ and guided by a hadith (the Prophetic tradition) that says, "Avert the legal penalties from the Muslims as much as possible, if he has a way out then leave him to his way, for if the Imam makes a mistake in forgiving, it would be better than making a mistake in punishment." (Narrated by Al-Turmuzi)

It is argued that this pronouncement of *takfir* by IS itself contradicts point 10 of the list that proclaims the foundation of IS' creed and doctrine on the premise set by Sunni Islam which it explicitly affirms in *Muqarrar Fi Al-Tawhid*.²⁸

Example no. 3

The third example is IS' pronouncement of holding Sunni Muslim scholars in high esteem and respect, although it also denounces those who take the crooked path and sell the religion for worldly pleasures.

This pronouncement is problematic in view of the letter signed by more than 100 Muslim scholars from all over the world denouncing IS. The letter lists down more than 20 points of IS' serious transgression of Islamic teachings.

Takfir is one of the points addressed by the letter. It states:

"...disbelief requires the intention of disbelief, and not just absentminded words or deeds. It is not permissible to accuse anyone of disbelief without proof of the intention of disbelief. Nor is it permissible to accuse anyone of being a non-Muslim without ascertaining that intention. It is, after all, possible that the person was coerced, ignorant, insane or did not mean it. It is also possible that he misunderstood a particular issue... It is forbidden to interpret the implications of a person's deeds; only the person himself or herself may interpret their own deeds - particularly when there is a difference of opinion among Muslims regarding that particular deed. It is also forbidden to declare others as non-Muslims (*takfir*) based on any matter in which there is a difference of opinion among Muslim scholars. It is forbidden to declare an entire group of people non-Muslims. Disbelief applies only to individuals depending on their deeds and intentions... scholars - including

Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Al-Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah - distinguish between the actions of a disbeliever (*kafir*) and declaring people non-Muslim (*takfir*). Even if a person performs a deed that has elements of disbelief, this does not necessitate that that person be judged as a disbeliever for the reasons presented earlier. Al-Dhahabi related that his teacher, Ibn Taymiyyah, used to say near the end of his life: 'I do not declare any member of the ummah non-Muslim... The Prophet said: "Anyone who maintains his ablution is a believer", so whoever observes the prescribed prayers with ablution is a Muslim.' ..."²⁹

The above statement from the letter is relevant to IS' pronouncement of *takfir* against Hamza Yusuf and Yasir Qadhi mentioned in the first example where there is no explanation on the grounds and processes that lead to it.

The statement also contradicts IS' use of *takfir* in contentious theological issues such as the permissibility and compatibility of democracy with Islam.

Up till now, there is no known response to this letter from IS.

Finally, IS' application of *takfir* against a wide range of people such as all members of unIslamic government apparatuses and unIslamic political parties is permissive and goes against the prudence recommended in the final part of the quoted statement.

ISIS' doctrine and application of *takfir* contradicts also with the Amman Message that have been endorsed by hundreds of eminent Muslim scholars and thinkers. This, in particular, relates to ISIS' declaration of all Shiites as disbelievers.

The Amman Message pronounces,

"1) Whosoever is an adherent to one of the four Sunni schools (Mathahib) of Islamic jurisprudence (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali), *the two Shi'i schools of Islamic jurisprudence (Ja'fari and Zaydi)*, the Ibadhi school of Islamic jurisprudence and the Thahiri school of Islamic jurisprudence, *is a Muslim. Declaring that person an apostate is impossible and impermissible. Verily his (or her) blood, honour, and property are inviolable* [emphasis added]. Moreover, in accordance with the Shaykh Al-Azhar's fatwa, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare whosoever subscribes to the Ash'ari creed or whoever practices real Tasawwuf (Sufism) an apostate. Likewise, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare whosoever subscribes to true Salafi thought an apostate.

Equally, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare as apostates any group of Muslims who believes in God, Glorified and Exalted be He, and His Messenger (may peace and blessings be upon him) and the pillars of faith, and acknowledges the five pillars of Islam, and does not deny any necessarily self-evident tenet of religion."³⁰

This declaration also rejects IS' claim that Sunni Muslim scholars are in consensus about the disbelief of all Shiite scholars which it subsequently used to justify *takfir* against those scholars who refuse to perform it on Shiite scholars after explanation has been given (to the Shiite scholars).

Any person familiar with Islamic jurisprudence would know that any claim of consensus (*ijma'*) among scholars is hardly uncontested, be it in the classical period or current times. This declaration is a contemporary testimony to it.

It must be highlighted that the Amman message existed pre-IS. If IS is truthful about honouring Sunni scholars and the creed of Sunni Islam, it must not disregard the message. At the very least, it should explain why it deviates from the pronouncement endorsed by hundreds of contemporary eminent scholars.

The third source highlighting the contradiction between IS' doctrine of *takfir* and the position held by Sunni Muslim scholars is the Mardin Declaration.

The declaration is an outcome of the Mardin conference which was attended by a group of renowned Muslim scholars in March 2010.

It was convened to discuss the use of Ibn Taimiyah's fatwa by radical and extremist groups to justify *takfir*, shedding blood of Muslims deemed to have apostatised and waging perpetual violent jihad against non-Muslims.

Among the content of the declaration is;

"1) Ibn Taymiyya's fatwa concerning Mardin can under no circumstances be appropriated and used as evidence for leveling the charge of kufr (unbelief) against fellow Muslims, rebelling against rulers, deeming game their lives and property, terrorizing those who enjoy safety and security, acting treacherously towards those who live (in harmony) with fellow Muslims or with whom fellow Muslims live (in harmony) via the bond of citizenship and peace. On the contrary, the fatwa deems all of that unlawful, notwithstanding its original purpose of supporting a Muslim state against a non-Muslim state. Ibn Taymiyya agrees with all of this, and follows, the precedent of previous Muslim scholars in this regard, and does not deviate from their position. Anyone who seeks support from this fatwa for killing Muslims or non-Muslims has erred in his interpretation and has misapplied the revealed texts... 7) The notion of loyalty and enmity (*al-wala wa al-bara*) must never be used to declare anyone out of the fold of Islam, unless an actual article of unbelief is held. In all other cases, it actually involves several types of judgement ranging according to the juridical five-fold scale: (permissible, recommended, not-recommended, non-permissible, and required). Therefore, it is not permissible to narrow the application of this notion and use it for declaring a Muslim outside the fold of Islam."³¹

This declaration also precedes IS. Similar to the Amman Message, IS ought to explain its *takfir* doctrine vis-à-vis this declaration if it is truthful in honouring Muslim scholars, past and present. Al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula, at least, took the effort to explain its disagreement with the content of this declaration via the late Anwar Al-Awlaki in its official magazine, *Inspire* no. 2.³²

Here, it could be concluded that the above mentioned letter to Al-Baghdadi, the Amman Message and the Mardin declaration endorsed by hundreds of contemporary Muslim scholars are enough evidences that ISIS' doctrine of *takfir* is incompatible with the position held by many contemporary Sunni scholars.

IS' doctrine does not tally with the position of contemporary Sunni scholars and in view of the contradiction, IS' claim of upholding the scholars in high esteem is, in reality, a hollow statement. Its position also deviates from the Prophet's advice, "My people/followers will not be in agreement over misguidance. When you differ in opinions, be with the *Al-Sawad Al-A'zham* (the majority)." (Narrated by Ibn Majah).

Conclusion

IS' attempt to deflect the label of *takfiri* and Kharijite falls apart in view of the above three examples cited in this article.

The examples expose IS as a wolf in sheep's clothing. IS tries to paint an image of a movement that is truthful to Sunni Islam but the reality is that it is an enemy that is destroying it.

The analysis by this article is significant because it provides an ideological challenge and contestation which further downgrades IS' appeal. One who is familiar with the online debate especially when they come from within jihadist circles can appreciate why such ideological contestations matter to IS. An example can also be found in several issues of *Dabiq* where IS dedicates lengthy articles disparaging Al-Qaeda and its associates in response to their ideological challenge.³³

¹First published in Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2017), "The Danger of *Takfir* (Excommunication): Exposing IS *Takfiri* Ideology", *Counter-terrorist Trends and Analyses*, vol. 9, No. 4, April. Edited and re-published here with permission.

²Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mustazah Bahari (2014), "An Analysis of Muslim Voices Against IS", *Eurasia Review*, 1 October.

³See www.lettertobaghdadi.com (11 Aug. 2015).

⁴Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mustazah Bahari (2014), “An Analysis of Muslim Voices Against IS”, *Eurasia Review*, 1 October; Abdullah Ladadwi (2014), *Conclusively scholarly opinion on ISIS*, 10 July, available at <http://www.islam21c.com/politics/conclusive-scholarly-opinions-on-isis/> (4 Aug. 2015); Muhtasib Al-Sham (2013), *Al-Halaqah Al-Thaniyah Min Niqash Hadi’ Hawl Fikr Tanzim Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Fi Al-’Iraq Wa Al-Sham*, 13 November, available at <http://islamsyria.com/portal/article/show/4721> (4 Aug. 2015); Mu’taz Al-Khatib (2014), “Tanzim Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah: Al-Buniyah Al-Fikriyah Wa Ta’qida Al-Waqi’”, *Aljazeera Center For Studies*, 24 November, available at <http://studies.aljazeera.net/files/isil/2014/11/201411235523312655.html> (4 Aug. 2015).

⁵*Aqidah Wa Manhaj Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Fi Al-Takfir* (n.d.), available at <https://justpaste.it/r3eo> (4 Aug. 2015)

⁶Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Hai’ah Al-Buhuth Wa Al-Ifta’ (1436H), *Muqarrar Fi Al-Tawhid Li Al-Mu’askarat*, available at https://archive.org/details/ad2017_tutanota_415 (4 Aug. 2015).

⁷Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah (n.d.), *Hazih ‘Aqidatuna Wa Haza Manhajuna, n.p.: Maktabah Al-Himmah*, available at https://archive.org/details/matwya_20180214/page/n1 (4 Aug. 2015).

⁸See Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Hai’ah Al-Buhuth Wa Al-Ifta’ (1436H), p. 31-2; *Hazih ‘Aqidatuna Wa Haza Manhajuna*, p. 3-4.

⁹See Ibid; Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁰See Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah (n.d.), *Hazih ‘Aqidatuna Wa Haza Manhajuna*, p. 3.

¹¹See Ibid, p. 4.

¹²See Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Hai’ah Al-Buhuth Wa Al-Ifta’ (1436H), pp. 23-50.

¹³See Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah (n.d.), *Hazih ‘Aqidatuna Wa Haza Manhajuna*, p. 4.

¹⁴See Ibid.

¹⁵See Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Hai’ah Al-Buhuth Wa Al-Ifta’ (1436H), pp. 34-9.

¹⁶See Ibid.

¹⁷See Ibid, p. 2; Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Hai’ah Al-Buhuth Wa Al-Ifta’ (1436H), *Muqarrar Fi Al-Tawhid*, pp. 41-2.

¹⁸See Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah (n.d.), *Hazih ‘Aqidatuna Wa Haza Manhajuna*, p. 4.

¹⁹See Ibid, p. 43-6.

²⁰See Joas Wagemakers, (2011) “Reclaiming Scholarly Authority: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’s Critique of Jihad Practices”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 34:7, pp. 523-39.

²¹See Hamza Yusuf’s short biography at https://www.zaytuna.edu/academics/faculty/hamza_yusuf and <http://shaykhamza.com/biography/> (4 Aug. 2015).

²²See Yasir Qadhi’s short biography at http://almaghrib.org/instructors/yasir-qadhi#profile_and https://www.facebook.com/yasir.qadhi/info?tab=page_info (4 Aug. 2015).

²³“The extinction of the gray zone” (1436H), *Dabiq* no. 7, Rabi’ Al-Akhir, pp. 60-1.

²⁴Tauseef Ahmad Parray (2010), "Democracy in Islam: The Views of Several Modern Muslim Scholars", *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 27:2, pp. 140-8; Yaser Ellethy (2015), *Islam, Context, Pluralism and Democracy*, New York: Routledge; Rashid Al-Ghanushi (2012), *Al-Dimuqratiyah Wa Huquq Al-Insan Fi Al-Islam*, N.p: Aljazeera Centre for Studies and Arab Scientific Publishers; Muhammad `Ammarah (2007), *Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah: Bayn Al-`Imaniyah Wa Al-Sultah Al-Diniyah*, Qahirah; Dar Al-Shuruq; Muhammad Salim Al-`Awwa (2007), *Fi Al-Nizam Al-Siyasiyah Li Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah*, Qahirah: Dar Al-Shuruq; Muhammad, Muslih, Muslih Muhammad and Browers Michaelle (n.d.), "Democracy", *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World. Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, available at <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0185> (10 Aug. 2015).

²⁵See Yusuf Al-Qaradhwawi (2001), *Min Fiqh Al-Dawlah Fi Al-Islam: Makanatuha, Ma`alimuha, Tabi`atuha, Mawqifuha Min Al-Dimuqratiyah Wa Al-Ta`addudiyah Wa Al-Mar`ah Wa Ghayr Al-Muslimin*, Qahirah: Dar Al-Shuruq.

²⁶See "Most Muslim Want Democracy, Personal Freedom and Islam in Political Life" (2012), *Pew Research Center's Global Attitude Project*, 10 July, available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/07/10/most-muslims-want-democracy-personal-freedoms-and-islam-in-political-life/> (11 Aug. 2015).

²⁷See "Ruling on democracy and elections and participating in that system" (2008), *Islam Questions and Answers*, 8 October, available at <http://islamqa.info/en/107166> (11 Aug. 2015).

²⁸Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Hai'ah Al-Buhuth Wa Al-Ifta' (1436H), pp. 32-3.

²⁹See Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi, point 9, available at www.lettertobaghdadi.com (4 Aug. 2015).

³⁰See The Three Points of the Amman Message, available at http://ammanmessage.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=91&Itemid=74 (4 Aug. 2015).

³¹See The New Mardin Declaration, available at <http://www.binbayyah.net/portal/en/tasrehaat/1038> (4 Aug. 2015).

³²Shaykh Anwar Al-Awlaki (2010), "The New Mardin Declaration: An Attempt at Justifying the New World Order", *Inspire* no. 2, Fall, pp. 33-40.

³³See *Dabiq*, no. 7, 8 and 9.

A Rebuttal Of Al-Qaeda And Islamic State (IS)'s Theological Justification Of Suicide Bombing¹

— Muhammad Haniff Hassan

Introduction

Suicide attacks have emerged as a key tactic of contemporary terrorism worldwide.² Militant groups such as Al-Qaeda, the so-called Islamic State (IS) and the Taliban have extensively employed these tactics against their adversaries.

Suicide attacks came into prominence following the 9/11 attacks which killed nearly 3,000 people, injured over 6,000 and involved the use of hijacked passenger planes.³ The determination of 19 Al-Qaeda terrorists who were willing to kill themselves to accomplish their mission became the key factor that made the attacks possible.

Although Muslims around the world view suicide as immoral, abhorrent and clearly prohibited (*haram*) in Islam, so-called jihadists have attempted to circumvent the prohibition by falsely claiming that their suicide attacks are actually ‘martyrdom (*istishhadi*) operations’ that are grounded in the Islamic tradition and therefore legitimate and permissible. This article attempts to debunk the ideological justification of suicide bombings as misleading and flawed. It focuses on suicide attacks conducted by Al-Qaeda and IS, and employs the definition of the concept as provided by the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST) Suicide Attack Database (CPOST-SAD):

“[A suicide attack is one] in which an attacker kills himself or herself in a deliberate attempt to kill others. CPOST includes only suicide attacks perpetrated by non-state actors; attacks authorized by national governments are not included. The classic example is a suicide bomber detonating an explosive vest (a ‘belt bomb’) or explosives in a vehicle the bomber is driving (a ‘suicide car bomb’). The critical aspect is suicide: the attacker must kill him or herself, even if no one but the attacker dies in the attack. The CPOST-SAD does not include (1) failed suicide attacks where explosives do not detonate or are detonated by someone other than the attacker (e.g. the explosives were set off by a gunshot from police); or (2) ‘suicide missions’, where the attacker expects to be killed while killing others, but does not directly kill himself or herself.”⁴

A search on the CPOST-SAD database revealed that there has been a significant increase in suicide attacks post-9/11 across the globe, as well as a steady rise in lethality for military and civilian targets.⁵ The table below presents comparative data of suicide attacks before and after 9/11.

Item	1982-2001	2002-2015
Total attacks	220	4,594
Total deaths	5,895	42,570
Total wounded	18,344	104,262
Ave. deaths per attack	26.8	9.3
Ave. wounded per attack	83.4	22.7
No. of countries involved	18	46
Percentage of car and belt bombs	79.4%	91%

Note: Although suicide attacks may take forms other than bombings, the data shows that bombings constitute the bulk of attacks before and after 9/11.

According to Robert Pape, there were 350 suicide attacks from 1980 to 2003. The number increased significantly to 1,833 (from 2004 to 2009) after the US invasion of Iraq, an increase of 80.9%. The frequency of attacks increased from three attacks per year in the 1980s to 300 attacks per year from 2004 to 2009,⁶ with civilians forming the bulk of casualties in non-conflict zones.⁷ By 2015, suicide bombings had become a significant threat, with 248 attacks and 9,109 killings.⁸ The year was called ‘The Year of the Suicide Bomber’⁹ and the attacks described as an “epidemic”.¹⁰ The situation was also grim in 2016; there were 362 attacks with 4,611 killed and 9,085 wounded.¹¹

Both Al-Qaeda and IS have carried out suicide bombings in several countries, raising the terrorist threat globally.¹² The globalisation of suicide attacks has been fuelled by extremists’ ability to attract aspiring suicide bombers to their cause regardless of ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status or gender. They were able to incite them to attack their enemies, primarily framed as countries and governments involved in the US-led coalition forces in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere. In short, suicide terrorism has emerged as the most important form of terrorism to be deterred.¹³

Among scholars and experts of terrorism, the motivations and justifications of suicide bombings are of great interest and debate. For Al-Qaeda and IS, religion plays an important role; it is central to their actions, their decision-making processes and the rationalisation of their actions to their targeted audiences.¹⁴ These groups are aware of the strong abhorrence of suicide in Islam, and have taken great pains to address this issue through theological arguments to avoid

losing their credibility. For instance, hundreds of pages are devoted to this issue in Al-Maqdese's website (available through archive.org),¹⁵ the largest repository of intellectual materials produced by various 'jihadist' ideologues and groups.

Theological debate on justification of suicide bombing

In this author's view, refuting the ideological justification of suicide bombing is important for the mitigation of the threat. This article seeks to analyse Al-Qaeda and IS' religious rationale of suicide bombing, arguing that the two groups are mistaken in applying the argument found in classical works to justify contemporary suicide bombing. It will also highlight the widespread condemnation of suicide bombing by contemporary scholars as strongly repugnant in Islam.

Al-Qaeda, IS and suicide bombing

Suicide bombings form a key component of Al-Qaeda and IS's military tactics in conflict zones. They are the preferred tactic because they offer an operational and economical advantage, and cause optimal casualties with minimal manpower and financial costs.¹⁶ The attacks usually comprise a motor vehicle laden with explosives driven by a fighter targeting the enemy's positions, convoys, checkpoints or bases. The availability of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and vehicles, along with the devastating impact on the enemy at the cost of only a single fighter, makes it a more viable economic option.¹⁷ All major military operations conducted by IS in Iraq and Syria have included suicide bombings.¹⁸

The use of suicide bombers with explosive vests is resorted to in countries where it is difficult to deploy a vehicular bomb. Examples of such attacks include those in Paris in November 2015, Jakarta in January 2016, Brussels in March 2016 and Manchester in May 2017. The strategic objective of these attacks is to terrorise the public and pressurise targeted countries to change their hostile policies towards the extremist groups.

That Al-Qaeda and IS value suicide bombings can be seen in their claims of responsibility following such attacks in official publications and public statements.¹⁹ They glorify suicide attacks or their perpetrators as a form of jihad, and praise major suicide attacks such as 9/11, the attacks on the USS Cole (2000), and the American embassy bombing in Tanzania (1998).²⁰

More significantly, they seek to legitimise suicide attacks by portraying them as 'istishhadi (martyrdom) operations'. This choice of terminology is preferred by jihadists over 'suicide attack' as the latter is regarded as derogatory, demeaning and more importantly, un-Islamic. Framing it as an act of martyrdom elevates the

attack to a noble status in Islam (as opposed to the heinous crime of killing oneself out of despair). Below is an example of IS presentation of martyrdom operations:

“Sell your lives to Allah, the Mighty and Sublime. Strike with istishhadi operations and explosive belts! These istishhadi operations have proven their benefit and have produced their fruits. Their benefit has become widespread, and they have become a source of calamity and destruction for the crusaders and their corrupt supporters, and they are more harmful than rifles and machine guns. They have planted terror in their hearts, so much so that the enemies of Allah are now afraid of everything and wait for death to come to them from every direction. In addition to that, they result in the least amount of loss out of all the shar’i methods of fighting, while at the same time being the most effective. This is the advice that I [Abu Sinan Al-Najdi, a suicide bomber] wished to convey to my brothers in the Peninsula of Muhammad.”²¹

IS strives to legitimise itself on Islamic principles as exemplified by its theological arguments on the so-called obligation of jihad in Syria and Iraq,²² *hijrah* (migration) to the self-styled caliphate,²³ pledging of allegiance to Al-Baghdadi²⁴ and the permissibility of slavery.²⁵ However, a survey of IS publications has not turned up a single theological article on the issue of suicide attacks. This is in sharp contrast to the copious theological materials on suicide attacks produced by non-IS jihadists and groups. Some of these materials are books of more than a hundred pages.²⁶ This suggests that IS does not have its own religious basis for advocating suicide attacks and relies on arguments of other jihadists.

***Inghimas* (self-immersion into enemy ranks) argument**

Al-Qaeda and others such as Hamas employ many complex theological arguments to justify suicide bombings in Islam. One of them, often referred to as the *inghimas* argument, stands out from the rest.²⁷

Other arguments tend to be supplementary to *inghimas*. These include the *tattarrus* (human shield) argument, which allows the killing of Muslims who are used as human shields by the enemy. Another argument is *nikayah* (infliction of harm), which permits suicide attacks in order to weaken the enemy. *Bayat* is yet another secondary argument, allowing for enemy non-combatants to be killed alongside combatants during night attacks when distinguishing the two is difficult. Such arguments are used to justify civilian collateral damage as a result of suicide attacks, as well as deliberate attacks on civilian populations.²⁸

The primacy of the *inghimas* argument as the basis for suicide attacks by jihadists can be discerned from Sh. G. F. Haddad’s work on the subject entitled *Inghimas In ‘Suicide’ Warfare*.²⁹

Inghimas refers to an act of ‘self-immersion into enemy ranks’ or attacking the enemy in such a manner where the likelihood of survival is low. This is done with three primary motivations: (a) to inflict maximum losses on the enemy; (b) to motivate Muslim fighters to fight and (c) to attain martyrdom.³⁰ Describing *inghimas*, Ibn Taimiyah, the scholar whom extremist and jihadist groups revere and often refer to in theological matters, provided three scenarios:

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 unaware 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.”³¹

There is no verse in the Qur’an that provides explicit approval for *inghimas*. Muslim scholars who permit *inghimas* during armed jihad defend their views by drawing inferences from certain verses such as:³²

“But there is [also] a kind of man who would willingly sell his own self in order to please God: and God is most compassionate towards His servants.” (The Qur’an, 2:207)

“Hence, let them fight in God's cause - all who are willing to barter the life of this world for the life to come: for unto him who fights in God's cause, whether he be slain or be victorious, We shall in time grant a mighty reward.” (The Qur’an, 4:74)

Classical Muslim scholars such as Ibn Taimiyah, Al-Ghazali and Al-Shaibani who permit *inghimas* argue that these verses imply that seeking death or acting in a daring manner and endangering one’s life during armed jihad like *inghimas* is a virtue commended by God.

Direct scriptural support for *inghimas* comes from the hadiths, in the form of reports from battles where Muslim fighters committed *inghimas* and consequently received affirmation from the Prophet Muhammad. Other reports concern the Prophet’s companions committing *inghimas*; these are taken as confirmation of

the Prophet's approval, since his companions would never have committed an act - such as suicide - clearly forbidden by the Prophet. Some of the famous *hadiths* on the matter during the Prophet's time are as follows:³³

- ❖ *Hadith* reports on several companions who, during the Battle of Uhud (3 hijrah calendar), used their bodies to shield the Prophet from the enemy's spears and arrows which caused death to some of them.³⁴
- ❖ "Al Shafi'i said: One of the Ansar was late behind when the killing of the Sahabah [the Prophet's companions] next to the well of Ma'unah took place. By the time he arrived, vultures were already devouring his companions. He told 'Amr bin Umayyah: I am going to go alone and face the enemy so they can kill me. I don't want to be left behind when our companions have been killed. So he did, and he was killed. When 'Amr bin Umayyah (the only survivor of the incident) told the Messenger of Allah what happened, the Messenger of Allah spoke well of the man..."³⁵

Further reports pertaining to such acts by the companions and by others during the companions' time are as follows:³⁶

- ❖ It was reported that during the Battle of Yamamah (11 hijrah calendar) during the rule of Abu Bakr, the first caliph after the Prophet, the Muslim fighters could not penetrate an enemy fortress. A companion, Al-Barra' bin Malik, instructed the fighters to catapult him into the fort so that he could open the fort's gate from within. The fortress was conquered by his daring act.³⁷
- ❖ It was reported that some Muslim fighters rushed their horses to battle elephants of the Persian army during the Battle of Al-Jisr (13 hijrah calendar), despite being warned of the danger of death. The battle was won by the Muslim army.³⁸

Based on such *hadiths*, classical Muslim scholars concluded that such acts do not constitute suicide and are exempted from all scriptural verses that prohibit suicide. These scholars also argued that *inghimas* is excluded from the generality of the verse that say, "...and let not your own hands throw you into destruction..." (The Qur'an, 2:195) and "...And do not kill yourselves [or one another]..." (The Qur'an, 4:29); these verses form the basis for the impermissibility of endangering one's own life or harming one's own body in Islam.³⁹

Classical scholars have highlighted the differences between *inghimas* and forbidden suicide (see table below).⁴⁰ According to them, since *inghimas* and suicide are not the same, the ruling on the latter cannot be applied on the former.

Suicide	<i>Inghimas</i>
Out of desperation and loss of hope	Act of devotion and sacrifice; to uplift God's religion, not out of desperation and loss of hope
To end one's misery	To attain martyrdom and gain God's best rewards in heaven
The main intention is to kill oneself	The main intention is to inflict as much harm as possible on the enemy; death is incidental
Killed by one's own hand / weapon	Killed by enemy's hand / weapon

Contemporary jihadist groups use the abovementioned distinctions to justify suicide bombings. They frame such attacks as *`amaliyah ishtishhadiyah* (martyrdom operation) by drawing a direct analogy between the two. They claim that a 'martyrdom operation' is the contemporary form of the *inghimas* permitted by past scholars. Since this is not a new formulation of theirs, they argue that any condemnation of them is unwarranted. They see opposing views as attempts by those who are on the side of the enemy to delegitimise their 'jihad', and by defeatist Muslims who seek to cover up their own cowardice and negative mindset.⁴¹

Background to *inghimas* argument

Four salient points are worth pointing out in this discussion on the *inghimas* argument.

First, the *inghimas* argument is not constructed by contemporary jihadist groups, but classical scholars. It is an issue that had been discussed since the classical period by *fuqaha'* (Muslim scholars of Islamic jurisprudence) and found in classical works where interpretation of the afore-mentioned *hadiths* was required. Thus, the jihadists' attempt to justify their suicide bombings by drawing parallels with *inghimas* need to be addressed since *inghimas* is found in Islamic jurisprudential tradition.

Second, *inghimas* is a contentious issue among classical Muslim scholars. There were disagreements among them such as Al-Tabari and Al-Shaukani on its permissibility, with those who allowed it doing so only under certain conditions. They also disagreed over how strictly the conditions should be adhered to. This fact is recognised by jihadist groups themselves, as well as by academics who study the theological basis of contemporary suicide bombings.⁴²

Third, the application of the *inghimas* argument by contemporary Muslim scholars and jihadist groups is highly contentious. Beyond disagreeing with jihadists, the scholars also have disagreements amongst themselves. Al-Takruri who wrote a study on the subject from Islamic jurisprudence recorded these disagreements in his book *Al-'Amaliyat Al-Ishtishadiyah Fi Al-Mizan Al-Fiqhi* (Martyrdom Operations in Islamic Jurisprudence). Some of the opinions of Muslim scholars who reject the permissibility of this practice are discussed in the following section.⁴³

Fourth, the response to the *inghimas* argument in this article focuses on its application by Al-Qaeda and IS and not by classical scholars. The discussion proceeds on the premise that there are significant differences between classical *inghimas* and contemporary suicide bombing, differences that will soon be evident. This paper has also contended that the application of the *inghimas* argument to contemporary suicide bombing is erroneous.

Response to *inghimas* argument

First response – the dissimilarity of suicide bombing and classical inghimas (al-qiyas ma`a al-fariq):

Contemporary jihadist groups’ claim that the permissibility of suicide bombing is based on the opinion of classical Muslim scholars that permitted *inghimas*. However, the analogy made between suicide bombing and *inghimas* is considered *al-qiyas ma`a al-fariq* in Islamic jurisprudence or an analogy between two dissimilar things. Consequently, the *inghimas* argument in this case is theologically erroneous.

The illustration below shows the differences between the two concepts:

Classical <i>Inghimas</i>	Contemporary Suicide Bombing
Killed by enemy’s weapon.	Killed by own weapon deliberately.
Committed during battle or in an actual battlefield.	Committed not necessarily during battle or in an actual battlefield. There are many cases where a suicide bombing is deliberately executed outside the conflict zone. These include the 9/11 attacks, the 7/7 attacks on the London underground train network (2005) and the Brussels airport attacks (2016).
High risk; there is a chance of survival, albeit low.	Chance of survival is zero. There is no record of a suicide bomber surviving. All surviving suicide bombers are those who were captured before the bomb was detonated or who aborted the mission.

A closer look at classical *inghimas* cases reveals that they are comparable to contemporary commando-type operations, which are high risk, but not necessarily suicidal. This view is also held by Abu Basir Al-Turtusi, a prominent religious ideologue among jihadists closely linked with Al-Qaeda.⁴⁴

Some proponents of suicide bombings offer *hadiths* where the Prophet praised Muslim fighters found dead by their own hand in battlefields.⁴⁵ However, these *hadiths* show that these were Muslim fighters who **accidentally** killed themselves with their own weapons - quite unlike the deliberate act of killing oneself by detonating a bomb or driving an explosive-rigged vehicle. Thus, these so-called counterargument *hadiths* do not support suicide bombing.⁴⁶

Second Response - impermissibility already has a definitive legal status (al-qat`iy):

The jihadist claim on the permissibility of suicide bombing is built on a contentious *inghimas* argument and scriptural evidence that is not definitive (*al-dalil al-zanniy*). Any ruling made on such a basis is at best speculative in nature since it is a product of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) of individual scholars. Such a ruling has serious implications as it either goes against the prohibition of suicide in Islam or seeks to limit this proscription which already has a definitive legal status (*al-qat`iy*).

Some argue, however, that the Qur'an's stand on suicide is not as definitive as it is claimed. The clearest Quranic verse cited as the basis for the impermissibility of suicide (the Qur'an, 4:29) is said to carry several meanings other than suicide -- such as:

- ❖ "...and do not destroy one another..."⁴⁷
- ❖ "...And do not kill yourselves [or one another]..."⁴⁸
- ❖ "...and do not kill your people..."⁴⁹

However, the different meanings alone cannot invalidate the conclusive ruling on the impermissibility of suicide in Islam.⁵⁰ A measure of a definitive ruling in Islam is not determined solely by the Qur'an. There are numerous *hadiths* that articulate Islam's clear prohibition against suicide. Furthermore, there is no indication in any Islamic intellectual tradition of a Muslim scholar ever holding an alternative view on the impermissibility of suicide. On the contrary, there is, in fact, *al-ijma`* (consensus) among scholars on the prohibition of suicide and this reinforces the definitive status on this issue.

It should be noted that *al-ijma`* among Muslim scholars is not something that is easily achieved. However, on the issue of suicide, there is no evidence of any disagreement. They may have disagreed on whether or not certain acts -- such as *inghimas* -- constituted suicide but not on the ruling of suicide itself.

Jihadists seeking to oppose or work around the prohibition on suicide (which has a definitive legal status) tend to highlight the ruling by classical Muslim scholars on the permissibility of *inghimas*. But such a ruling has a non-definitive legal status, and therefore remains a contentious issue from the standpoint of Islamic jurisprudence. This stratagem amounts to trying to use a non-definitive ruling on an issue to supersede a definitive one.

Jurisprudentially, such a move is wrong as this is not a case of an original ruling of something permissible (*mubah*) being changed to obligatory (*fard*) due to circumstances nor a ruling of something discouraged (*makruh*) being changed to prohibited (*haram*) or permissible (*mubah*). The consequences of such a move are not serious if it is discovered that such a ruling is incorrect. However, in the case of suicide bombings, there is a fundamental shift of ruling from *haram* to permissible where there is a great risk of committing a grave and serious sin in Islam.⁵¹

Overall, there are clear dissimilarities between *inghimas* and suicide bombing, as well as uncertainty on the permissibility of *inghimas*. As such, the *inghimas* argument cannot be used to nullify the certainty regarding the impermissibility of suicide. It can be concluded that the jihadists' standpoint with regard to contemporary suicide bombing is methodologically flawed and should be ruled as incompatible with the principles of Islam.⁵²

Condemnation for the deliberate targeting of civilians

Contemporary suicide bombings by jihadist groups involve the deliberate targeting of civilians. This is admitted by jihadists in many of their statements claiming responsibility for suicide attacks in Paris, Brussels, London and elsewhere. These statements are verified through the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism's suicide attack database where the data identifies groups (e.g. Al-Qaeda and IS) and their targets - military, civilian or both.

Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), a research and advocacy group that seeks to mitigate the impact of armed violence, reports that over 5,000 civilians were killed by suicide bombings from January to June 2015 alone. This is an increase of 45 per cent from the previous year. Fifty-six per cent of 8,990 civilian casualties from all improvised explosive device attacks in the first seven months of 2015 were from suicide attacks.

With regards to IS specifically, AOAV writes,

“However while ISIS have [sic.] used suicide bombings to its tactical advantage against state forces, and the impact has been most profoundly felt by civilians. Globally, ISIS is reported as being the group responsible for the most

civilian casualties from suicide attacks in the first seven months of 2015, with nearly 2,000 (1,977) killed or wounded. An average of 60 civilians were killed and injured in each ISIS suicide attack.”⁵³

In this regard, the impermissibility of suicide bombing arises not only from the immorality of the act itself, but also from the wickedness of killing civilians. This is in line with established legal maxims in Islamic jurisprudence that “*al-wasail laha ahkam al-maqasid* (a means takes the same ruling of its objective [if the objective is impermissible, the means used to achieve it becomes impermissible too])” and “*al-ghayah la tubarrir al-wasilah* (an end does not justify the means)”.⁵⁴

The vast majority of Muslim scholars have issued unequivocal condemnation of attacks that have caused civilian casualties.⁵⁵ More than a hundred Muslim scholars have signed *The Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi* denouncing IS and suicide attacks. The letter states:

“...The slaying of a soul - any soul - is haram (forbidden and inviolable under Islamic Law), it is also one of the most abominable sins (mubiqat). God says in the Qur'an: 'Because of that, We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever slays a soul for other than a soul, or for corruption in the land, it shall be as if he had slain mankind altogether; and whoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind. Our messengers have already come to them with clear proofs, but after that many of them still commit excesses in the land.' (Al-Ma'idah, 32). You have killed many innocents who were neither combatants nor armed, just because they disagree with your opinions.”⁵⁶

Contemporary Muslim scholars against suicide bombing⁵⁷

Numerous prominent Muslim scholars have ruled out the permissibility of suicide bombings. Shaykh `Abd Al-`Aziz Al Shaykh, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia said in 2001:

“As for the question on killing [blowing] oneself in the middle of the enemy or what I termed as ‘by way of committing suicide’, this method, I do not know of any viewpoint from the perspective of the shari`ah allowing it. It is also not accepted as jihad in the path of God. I am afraid it is another form of killing oneself. Yes, killing the enemy and fighting them is required and at times even becomes a personal obligation but it must be done in a manner that does not contradict the shari`ah.”⁵⁸

The Council of Senior Scholars that the Grand Mufti headed had unanimously condemned the bombing incidents in Riyadh in 2004.⁵⁹ They argued that such attacks were prohibited and had no validity in Islam. This could be seen from numerous perspectives:

- ❖ suicide bombing is a transgression upon the sanctity of the land of the Muslims, and frightening those who are guaranteed security and safety therein;
- ❖ it involves the killing of lives that the shari'ah protects;
- ❖ it causes destruction; and
- ❖ it involves destruction of wealth and belongings that are protected.

Blowing oneself up is similar to killing oneself, and thus, falls into the general prohibition mentioned in a hadith, "Whoever killed himself in the world with anything, then God will punish him by the same thing on the day of judgement." (Reported by Abu `Uwanah in his *Mustakhraj* from Thabit bin Al-Dhahhak)

The action is also forbidden because it goes against one of the five fundamental objectives of the shari'ah, which is the protection of life.⁶⁰ In his book *Al-Jihad Wa Al-Fida'iyah Fi Al-Islam*, Shaykh Hasan Ayub, a respected scholar of the Muslim Brothers - while admitting the permissibility of classical *inghimas* - forbids the act of a person wearing an explosive vest and detonating it against an enemy. He makes a distinction similar to what is mentioned above - in classical *inghimas*, there may be a chance of survival and death is incidental to the mission of killing the enemy. In contrast, a suicide bomber has to kill himself/herself in order to kill the enemy.⁶¹

Shaykh Nasir Al-Din Al-Albaniy, an eminent scholar among contemporary Salafis, forbids *inghimas*, unless it is done under the banner and with the permission of a legitimate Muslim authority. He forbids it if it is carried out by an individual or a Muslim group (which applies to suicide attacks perpetrated by Al-Qaeda and IS).⁶²

Imam Zaid Shakir, a Muslim scholar in the United States and co-founder of Zaytuna College in Berkeley, condemned the suicide bombings in Brussels in 2016, stating:

"In the case of the attacks in Brussels, and similar atrocities in the Muslim world that are too numerous to mention, the criminals multiplied the gravity of their murderous crimes by committing suicide. **Suicide is strictly forbidden in Islam**, and one who commits suicide will not only be dispatched to Hell, he will continue to repeat the actions which led to his death over and over for eternity in the midst of the Inferno. In other words, the suicide bomber will suffer the torment of Hell in addition to the pain of blowing himself up, continuously, for eternity... The

‘fatwas’ and ‘commanders’ who justify the suicidal murder committed by their dupes have no weight in this regard. **As for the ‘fatwas’, they are all flawed in that they are based on a false analogy.** Namely, they mention the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah upon him) who launched themselves into a battle knowing they faced certain death. While the incidents being referenced by these ‘fatwas’ are certainly true, in every instance the Companion was killed by the actions of others. None of them killed themselves.”⁶³

Shaykh Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, a prominent Islamic scholar and former law professor in Pakistan, categorically condemns contemporary suicide bombings in his 500-page book entitled *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombing* published in 2010.⁶⁴

A similar work entitled *The Hijacked Caravan: Refuting Suicide Bombing as Martyrdom Operation in Contemporary Jihad Strategy*, compiles the views of notable Muslim scholars and thinkers who condemn suicide bombing. The compilation provides detailed theological arguments on suicide bombings that contradict jihadists’ claims and arguments.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Al-Qaeda and IS seek to justify contemporary suicide bombings by tapping on the classical tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, contending that they are analogous to *inghimas* which was permitted by the majority of classical Muslim scholars. However, as shown above, this analogy is flawed because the two are dissimilar – jihadist suicide bombings involve certain death while *inghimas* does not; *inghimas* is more accurately comparable to a daring commando operation that is risky but does not necessarily mean certain death. On this basis, the jihadists’ justification for contemporary suicide bombing is erroneous, more so when these bombings deliberately target civilians -- an abhorrent act in Islam.

In addition, from a theological perspective, the impermissibility of suicide in Islam is definitive, whereas the permissibility of *inghimas* is non-definitive. Jurisprudentially, it is neither right nor prudent to allow a definitive ruling to be on par with a non-definitive ruling.

The argument that contemporary suicide bombing is disallowed can be further strengthened on the basis of prudence (*wara`*), which is to leave what is theologically contentious and choose what is clearly permissible. Jihadists who argue that suicide bombing is permissible are wrong on all grounds, theological, moral and humanitarian. With the availability of many other legitimate means of attaining a political or religious objective, it is imprudent in Islam to resort to prohibited means such as suicide attacks.

Finally and specifically with regards to IS, the group's endorsement of suicide attacks is incompatible with Islam. IS itself has been thoroughly denounced by the majority of contemporary Muslim scholars in *The Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi*. These extremists go against the Prophet's saying as narrated by Ibn Majah, "My people/followers will not be in agreement over misguidance. When you differ in opinions, be with the *Al-Sawad Al-A'zham* (the majority)." And the majority have made their stand clear by condemning IS and its acts of terrorism and suicide bombings.

¹First published in Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2017), "A Rebuttal of Al-Qaeda and IS's Theological Justification of Suicide Bombing", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis*, Vol. 9, No. 7, July. Edited and re-published here with permission.

²Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman (2010), *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 45-7; Christoph Reuter (2004), *My Life is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 18

³Pape and Feldman (2010), pp. 3-4; Reuter (2004), pp. 142-6.

⁴See Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism's suicide attack database, at <http://cpost.uchicago.edu/database/methodology/> (28 June 2017).

⁵See Ibid, at http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu/search_new.php (28 June 2017); see also Pape and Feldman (2010), p. 2-4 and Mia Bloom (2005), *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. ix-x.

⁶Pape and Feldman (2010), p. 2 and 5.

⁷Ibid, p. 2, 5; Bloom (2005), pp. x and 137.

⁸Iain Overton (2016), *What can be done to stop the rising cult of the suicide bomber?*, AOAV, 22 January, available at <https://aoav.org.uk/2016/what-can-be-done-to-stop-the-rising-cult-of-the-suicide-bomber/> (28 June 2017).

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰AOAV (2015), *2015: an epidemic of suicide bombs*, AOAV, 10 August, available at <https://aoav.org.uk/2015/2015-an-epidemic-of-suicide-bombs/> (28 June 2017).

¹¹See Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism's suicide attack database at http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu/search_results_new.php (28 June 2017).

¹²Reuter (2004), p. 17-8 and 142-6.

¹³Pape and Feldman (2010), p. 6.

¹⁴See Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2015), "The Centrality of Counterideology in Countering Jihadist Terrorism", *Resilience and Resolve: Communities Against Terrorism*, edited by J. Jerard and S. M. Nasir, London: Imperial College Press.

¹⁵See *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad* at <https://web.archive.org/web/20150514060110/https://www.tawhed.ws/> (28 June 2017).

¹⁶Reuter (2004), pp. ix-x; Pape and Feldman (2010), p. 2; *Dabiq*, no. 1, pp. 36-8.

¹⁷Yusuf Al-ʿUyairi (n.d.), “Hal Intaharat Hawa’ Am Istashhadat? – Fasl fi taʿrif al-ʿamaliyat al-istishhadiyah wa atharuha ‘ala al-ʿaduw”, *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20110216181824/http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=hqkfgsb2> (28 June 2017).; ʿAbd Al-Hakim Hassan (n.d.), “Hukm Al-ʿAmaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah”, *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130423224835/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=7wnq2uc7> (28 June 2017).; Abu Qatadah Al-Filistini (n.d.), “Jawaz Al-ʿAmaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah Wa Annaha Laysat Bi Qatl Li Al-Nafs – Bab haqiqah al-aʿmal al-istishhadiyah al-muʿasirah”, *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20110211103615/http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=d3dgishf> (28 June 2017).

¹⁸*Al-Nabaʿ*, no. 10, pp. 2-4; *Al-Nabaʿ*, no. 11, pp. 5-13; *Al-Nabaʿ*, no. 12, p. 8-10; *Al-Nabaʿ*, no. 13, pp. 4-11; *Al-Nabaʿ*, no. 15, pp. 5-9; *Al-Nabaʿ*, no. 23, p. 2.

¹⁹For Al-Qaeda, see *Inspire*, no. 1, p. 5, 13-17 and 20; *Inspire*, no. 3, pp. 7 and 10; *Inspire*, no. 4, pp. 5-7 and 19; For ISIS, see *Dabiq*, no. 2, pp. 3 and 42; *Dabiq*, no. 5, Pp. 11, 15 and 26; *Dabiq*, no. 7, pp. 31 and 41; *Dabiq*, no. 8, p. 18; *Dabiq*, no. 9, pp. 28-31; *Dabiq*, no. 11, pp. 28, 30 and 34; *Dabiq*, no. 12, pp. 25-8; *Dabiq*, no. 13, pp. 15-9.

²⁰*Dabiq*, no. 6, p. 41; *Dabiq*, no. 7, p. 23; *Inspire*, no. 1, pp. 13-17, 20 and 33; *Inspire*, no. 5, p. 28; *Inspire*, no. 6, p. 7; *Inspire*, no. 9, pp. 28 and 53; *Inspire*, no. 10, p. 12; *Inspire*, no. 11, pp. 15 and 28-31; *Inspire*, no. 13, pp. 62-3; *Inspire*, no. 14, pp. 4 and 23; Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2006), *Unlicensed to Kill: Countering Imam Samudra's Justification For the Bali Bombing*, Singapore: Peace Matters, pp. 101-15; Al-ʿUyairi (n.d.), “Hal Intaharat Hawa’ Am Istashhadat? – Fasl fi taʿrif al-ʿamaliyat al-istishhadiyah wa atharuha ‘ala al-ʿaduw”, Online.

²¹*Dabiq*, no. 11, p. 35; see also Al-ʿUyairi (n.d.), “Hal Intaharat Hawa’ Am Istashhadat? – Fasl fi taʿrif al-ʿamaliyat al-istishhadiyah wa atharuha ‘ala al-ʿaduw”, Online; Muhammad Salim ʿAbd Al-Halim (1427H), “Al-ʿAmaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah Wa Muʿadalah Mizan Al-Quwa”, *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130613234457/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=re54xzjh> (28 June 2017).

²²*Dabiq*, no 1, 3, 4, 7 and 9.

²³*Dabiq*, no. 13.

²⁴*Dabiq*, no. 1.

²⁵*Dabiq*, no. 4.

²⁶See *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad* (n.d.), Al-ʿAmaliyah Al-Fidaʿiyah, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130429015954/http://tawhed.ws/c?i=50> (28 June 2017).

²⁷Al-Filistini (1431H), p. 7; Al-Filistini (1415H), Online.

²⁸Turki bin Mubarak Al-Binʿali (1433H), *Al-Aqwal Al-Mahdiyyah Ila Al-ʿAmaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah*, No place: Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad, pp. 27-9, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130429015954/http://tawhed.ws/c?i=50> (28 June 2017).; Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 64-5; Al-ʿUyairi (n.d.), “Hal Intaharat Hawa’ Am Istashhadat? – Fasl fi taʿrif al-ʿamaliyat al-istishhadiyah wa atharuha ‘ala al-ʿaduw”, Online; Ayman Al-Zawahiri (1996), “Shifa’ Sudur Al-Muʿminin – Jawaz itlaf al-nafs li maslahat al-din”, *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20110216210330/http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=ysysgng0> (28 June 2017).; Abd Al-Halim (1427H), Online; Sulayman bin Nasir Al-Ulwan (1422a), “Hukm Qatl Atfal Wa Nisa’ Al-Kuffar Fi Al-ʿAmaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah”, *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130518215522/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=enpuzc42> (28 June 2017).; Hamud bin ʿUqla Al-Shuʿaybi (1422H), “Hukm Al-ʿAmaliyah Al-Istishhadiyah”, *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130613223749/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=dqokvsc5> (28 June 2017).

²⁹Sh. G. F Haddad (2007), “Inghimas In ‘Suicide’ Warfare: Inghimas Or Self-Immersion Into Enemy Ranks”, *Living Islam*, 10 December, available at https://www.livingislam.org/kighm_e.html (28 June 2017).

³⁰Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 7-9; Al-ʿUyairi (n.d.), “Hal Intaharat Hawa’ Am Istashhadat? – Fasl fi taʿrif al-ʿamaliyat al-istishhadiyah wa atharuha ‘ala al-ʿaduw”, Online; Al-Filistini (1415H), Online.

³¹Rebecca Molley (2009), “Deconstructing Ibn Taymiyah’s View on Suicidal Mission”, *CTC Sentinel*, 15 March, available at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/deconstructing-ibn-taymiyya%E2%80%99s-views-on-suicidal-missions> (28 June 2017).; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), *Qaʿidah Al-Inghimas Fi Al-ʿAduw: Hal Yubah?*, n.p.: Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad, pp. 2-3, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130429015954/http://tawhed.ws/c?i=50> (28 June 2017).; Al-Zawahiri (1996), “Shifa’ Sudur Al-Muʿminin – Jawaz haml al-wahid ‘ala al-ʿadad al-kathir min al-ʿaduw”, Online.

³²Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 40-6; Al-Bin`ali (1433H), pp. 12-3; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), pp. 3-6; Al-`Uyairi (n.d.), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi adillah al-mas'alah", Online; Hassan (n.d.), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah - Jawaz ihlak al-nafs wa itlafha li maslahat 'i'zaz al-din wa izharah", Online; Al-Amin Al-Haj Muhammad Ahmad (n.d.), "Al-`Amaliyat Al-Jihadiyah Al-Istishhadiyah: Hukmuha, Syurutuha, Fadhlaha, Thawabuha", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130614010733/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=dfmgjtda> (28 June 2017).; `Ali bin Khudayr Al-Khudayr (1422H), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyah Al-Istishhadiyah", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130520195958/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=wwkmg8u3> (28 June 2017); Al-Shu'aybi (1422H), Online.

³³Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 47-58; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), pp. 6-12; Al-`Uyairi (n.d.), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi adillah al-mas'alah", Online; Hassan (n.d.), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah - Jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-kathir fi al-jihad wa in tayaqqan aw ghalab `ala zannih al-halakah", Online; Al-Zawahiri (1996), "Shifa' Sudur Al-Mu'minin - Jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-kathir min al-`aduw", Online; Al-Shu'aybi (1422H), Online. See Ahmad Al-Jad' (1404H), Al-Fida'iyyun Fi `Asr Al-Rasul, n.p.: Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130429015954/http://tawhed.ws/c?i=50> (28 June 2017).

³⁴Narrated by Muslim in Kitab Al-Jihad Wa Al-Siyar; Nawaf Hayil Takruri (2003), *Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah Fi Al-Mizan Al-Fiqhi*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr, p. 65-7; Safiy Al-Rahman Al-Mubarakfuri (1995), *Al-Rahiq Al-Makhtum*, Riyadh: Maktabah Dar-us-Salam, pp. 269-74.

³⁵*Inspire*, no. 13, p. 43.

³⁶Al-Bin`ali (1433H), pp. 19-23; Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 60-3; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), p. 12; Al-`Uyairi (n.d.),

"Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi adillah al-mas'alah", Online; Hassan (n.d.), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah - Jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-kathir fi al-jihad wa in tayaqqan aw ghalab `ala zannih al-halakah", Online; Al-Zawahiri (1996), "Shifa' Sudur Al-Mu'minin - Jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-k athir min al-`aduw", Online; Ahmad (n.d.), Online; Al-Amin Al-Haj Muhammad Ahmad (n.d.), "Al-`Amaliyat Al-Jihadiyah Al-Istishhadiyah: Bayn Al-Mujizin Wa Al-Mani'in", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130614035014/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=rtwnwykd> (28 June 2017).

³⁷Takruri (2003), p. 66,

³⁸*Ibid*.

³⁹Al-Bin`ali (1433H), pp. 18 and 23-4; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), pp. 11-20; Al-`Uyairi (n.d.), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi adillah al-mas'alah", Online; Hassan (n.d.), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah - Aqwal ahl al-`ilm fi jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-kathir wa in tayaqqan al-qatl", Online; Al-Zawahiri (1996), "Shifa' Sudur Al-Mu'minin - Khuruj man `aradha nafsa li al-qatl fi sabil Allah min al-nahy fi qawlih `Wala tulqu biaydikum ila al-tahlukah", Online.

⁴⁰Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 25-38 and 83-7; Al-`Uyairi (n.d.), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi aqwal al-`ulama' fi man hajama `ala al-`aduw wahdah; Fasl fi ta'rif al-muntahir", Online; Hassan (n.d.), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah", Online; Muslim Muhammad Jawdat Al-Yusuf (n.d.), "Ishkaliyat Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130614010420/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=e48ojrn> (28 June 2017); Ahmad (n.d.), Online; Al-Filistini (1415H), Online; Hamid bin `Abd Allah Al-`Ali (n.d.), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130603035450/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=kyq0jppp> (28 June 2017); Sulayman bin Nasir Al-Ulwan (1422b), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah - 1", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130518204402/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=ome7vuue> (28 June 2017); Sulayman bin Nasir Al-Ulwan (1421H), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah - 2", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130518202109/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=58geq47a> (28 June 2017).

⁴¹*Ibid*, pp. 8-9, 64-5 and 88-95; Hassan (n.d.), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah - Syubhah: Ghayah ma tadul `alayhi hazih al-adillah huwa jawaz al-taghrir bi al-nafs", Online.

⁴²Al-Takruri (2003), pp. 102-225; Hassan (2006), pp. 107-11; Hassan (n.d.), “Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah – Syubbah: Ghayah ma tadul `alayhi hazih al-adillah huwa jawaz al-taghrir bi al-nafs”, Online; Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 69-73; Al-Bin`ali (1433H), pp. 31-6; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), pp. 3 and 11-3; Al-`Uyairi (n.d.), “Hal Intaharat Hawa’ Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi aqwal al-`ulama’ fi man hajama `ala al-`aduw wahdah; Fasl fi ta`rif al-muntahir”, Online; Al-Zawahiri (1996), “Shifa’ Sudur Al-Mu`minin – Jawaz itlaf al-nafs li maslahat al-din; Jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-kathir min al-`aduw”, Online; Yahya Hashim Hasan Farghal (n.d.), “Kashf Al-Tawiyah Fi Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah”, *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130614012046/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=z2agk0jz> (28 June 2017).

⁴³Ibid; Ibid, p. 101; Ibid, pp. 4-5, 9 and 11; Al-`Uyairi (n.d.), “Hal Intaharat Hawa’ Am Istashhadat? – Al-Muqaddimah”, Online; Ahmad (n.d.), Online; Abu Basir Al-Turtusi (1426H), “Mahadzir Al-`Amaliyat Al- Istishhadiyah”, *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130520090319/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=sqavbvh2> (28 June 2017).

⁴⁴Al-Turtusi (1426H), Online.

⁴⁵Hassan (n.d.), “Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah – Syubbah: Ghayah ma tadul `layhi hazih al-adillah huwa jawaz al-taghrir bi al-nafs”, Online.

⁴⁶See for examples (a) “...So when the army files were arranged in rows (for the clash), `Amir’s sword was short and he aimed at the leg of a Jew to strike it, but the sharp blade of the sword returned to him and injured his own knee, and that caused him to die. When they returned from the battle, Allah’s Messenger saw me (in a sad mood). He took my hand and said, ‘What is bothering you?’ I replied, ‘Let my father and mother be sacrificed for you! The people say that the deeds of `Amir are lost.’ The Prophet said, ‘Whoever says so, is mistaken, for `Amir has got a double reward.’ The Prophet raised two fingers and added, ‘He (i.e. Amir) was a persevering struggler in the Cause of Allah and there are few Arabs who achieved the like of (good deeds) `Amir had done.’” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari); (b) Abu Salam reported on the authority of a man among the companion of the Prophet. He said, ‘We attacked a tribe of Juhaynah. A man from the Muslims pursued a man of the tribe, and struck him but missed. Instead, he struck himself with the sword.’ The Messenger of Allah said, ‘Your brother, O group of Muslims.’ The people hastened towards him, but found him dead. The Messenger of Allah wrapped him with his clothes and his blood, and offered (funeral) prayer for him and buried him. They said: Messenger of Allah, is he a martyr? He said, ‘Yes, and I am witness to him.’” (Narrated by Abu Dawud).

⁴⁷Meaning by Muhammad Asad, see <http://www.islamicity.org/quransearch/> (28 June 2017).

⁴⁸Meaning by Sahih International, see <http://quran.com> (28 June 2017).

⁴⁹Meaning by Shakir, see <http://quran.com> (28 June 2017).

⁵⁰Reuter (2004), pp. 118-9.

⁵¹See Al-Turtusi (1426H), Online.

⁵²See Al-`Uyairi (n.d.), “Hal Intaharat Hawa’ Am Istashhadat? – Al-Muqaddimah”, Online.

⁵³AOAV (2015), Online.

⁵⁴Al-Turtusi (1426H), Online; “Sharh Qa`idah: “Al-Wasa’il Laha Ahkam Al-Maqasid” (2004), *islamweb.net*, fatwa no. 50387, 24 June, available at <http://fatwa.islamweb.net/fatwa/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=50387> (28 June 2017).

⁵⁵Charles Kurzman (2015), *Islamic Statements Against Terrorism*, 15 March, available at <http://kurzman.unc.edu/islamic-statements-against-terrorism/> (28 June 2017); Sheila Musaji (2015), *Muslim Voices - Part I - Fatwas & Statements by Muslim Scholars & Organizations*, 13 May, available at http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/muslim_voices_against_extremism_and_terrorism_part_i_fatwas/ (28 June 2017).

⁵⁶See Point 6, Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi, available at <http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/> (28 June 2017).

⁵⁷See Fatawa Al-`Ulama' Al-Kibar Fi "Al-`Amaliyat Al-Intihariyah", sahab.net, available at <http://www.sahab.net/forums/index.php?showtopic=114416> (28 June 2017).

⁵⁸Hassan (2006), p. 110. Reuter (2004), p. 123.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰The five fundamental objectives of the *syariah* known as *maqasid asy-syariah* are to safeguard 1) religion; 2) life; 3) the mind; 4) lineage; and 5) property. See Abu Ishaq Al-Shatibi (1997), *Al-Muwafaqat*, Beirut: Dar Al-Ma'rifah, vol. 2, p. 324-7; Mohammad Hashim Kamali (1989), *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, pp. 397-9.

⁶¹Hasan Ayyub (1983), *Al-Jihad Wa Al-Fida'iyah Fi Al-Islam*, Beirut: Dar Al-Nadwah Al-Jadidah, pp. 243-4.

⁶²Takruri (2003), pp. 105-6.

⁶³Zaid Shakir (2016), "Not in Our Names: Islam's Total Rejection of Suicidal Terrorism", *ummahwide.com*, 31 March, available at <https://ummahwide.com/not-in-our-names-islam-s-total-rejection-of-suicidal-terrorism-by-imam-zaid-shakir-b02e59c9ac99#.7qv58osv4> (28 June 2017).

⁶⁴See Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri (2010), *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombing*, London: Minhaj-ul-Quran. Available at <http://www.quranandwar.com/FATWA%20on%20Terrorism%20and%20Suicide%20Bombings.pdf> (28 June 2017).

⁶⁵See Ihsanic Intelligence (n.d.), *The Hijacked Caravan: Refuting Suicide Bombing as Martyrdom Operation in Contemporary Jihad Strategy*, available http://www.ihsanic-intelligence.com/dox/The_Hijacked_Caravan.pdf (28 June 2017).; Ihsanic Intelligence (n.d.), *Condemnation of Suicide Bombings By Muslims*, available at <https://www.abc.se/home/m9783/jr/ez/isl/0-sbm/Condemnations%20of%20Suicide%20Bombing%20by%20Muslims.pdf> (28 June 2017).

*Al-Wala' (Loyalty) To Government In The Context Of Muslim Minority In Singapore*¹

— Muhammad Haniff Hassan

Introduction

A *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* (WB) known as “Loyalty and Disavowal” is a popular concept professed by activists of *da`wah* and Islamic movement.

The WB concept of loyalty and disavowal comes with the tide of Islamic revivalism that arrived in Southeast Asia and the Malay region in the late 1970s. It had tremendous influence on Islamic revivalist (popularly known also as *da`wah*) movements, regardless of whether they operated as a social or political movement.

WB could be regarded as an ideological pillar to these movements. However, WB is not unique to the region's *da`wah* movements because the same features could be found in similar movements internationally such as the Muslim Brothers, Hizb Al-Tahrir and Salafiyah.

The concept of WB is generally understood as an important pillar of Islamic faith (*`aqidah*) that must be embraced by all Muslims, failing which, a person's faith is seriously defected to the extent that he may not be regarded as Muslim anymore. This incorrect aspect of WB is unfortunately widely understood among *da`wah* activists and propagated by *da`wah* movements to Muslim youths and society at large.

This article seeks to address and clarify this misunderstanding. It argues that WB concept is not among the fundamental matters in the Islamic faith. It is a concept that is formulated and based on *ijtihad* (human effort to deduce meanings from Islamic scriptures). As such, WB concept should not be regarded as an absolute truth that cannot be critically reviewed, reconsidered or closed to disagreements.

This article will cover three broad areas. Firstly, it gives a broad introduction of WB concept and a short history of its emergence in the last century. Secondly, it highlights the negative effects arising from WB concept through the experiences of various global *da`wah* movements since early last century to date. Finally, the article ends by highlighting the primary reason of these negative effects in order to support the argument that the permissibility of reviewing and reformulating Islamic ruling pertaining to *al-wala'*, specifically towards non-Muslim government for minority Muslims living in non-Muslim countries, such as Singapore.

WB concept

WB is a concept that seeks to protect the purity of the Islamic faith. The concept determines to whom Muslims should (known as *al-wala'*) and shouldn't (known as *al-bara'*) give their loyalty, obedience and love.

Within the WB concept, three important elements of *al-wala'* must be upheld by Muslims:

1. *Al-Wala'* to the one and only God through absolute obedience and submission to His shari`ah (Islamic law) and, as a consequence, to manifest complete *al-bara'* from all man-made laws that are not in line with the shari`ah.
2. *Al-Wala'* to the Prophet by adhering to his authentic Sunnah (traditions) and, as a consequence, to manifest *al-bara'* from any man-made laws that are not in line with the shari`ah.
3. *Al-Wala'* to fellow Muslims in general and to specifically a Muslim ruler and, as a consequence, to manifest *al-bara'* from all non-Muslims, non-Muslim ruler and non-Islamic authorities.

Both *al-wala'* and *al-bara'* are constituted as inseparable; the former cannot be fully upheld without the latter. *Al-Wala'* is often framed as having positive sentiment (love, fraternity, etc.) and *al-bara'* is the opposite (hate, enmity, etc.).

While the WB concept pertains primarily to the domain of Islamic faith, its consequences extend to the day-to-day social life of a Muslim. It also expounds on how Muslims should relate with non-Muslims and non-Islamic institutions.¹

For the purposes of this article, the focus will be on the Islamic ruling of giving loyalty and allegiance to a non-Muslim ruler or non-Islamic authorities or appointing a non-Muslim as a state leader.

Influence of WB concept

Emergence of WB as a concept came from the early writings by Al-Qahtani, published as a book in 1982 titled *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara' Fi Al-Islam*. This particular book is arguably the most famous reference on the WB.²

Many subsequent volumes were published on the same topic after Al-Qahtani's book. However, one volume that had an important contribution in popularising WB concept after Al-Qahtani's is *Al-Islam* published in 1988 by Sa'id Hawwa, a leader of Syrian Muslim Brothers who lived in exile in Saudi Arabia as a professor.³

WB concept were discussed by Muslim scholars during classical period and can be found in many works of that period. Unfortunately, they were scattered under various topics, not under one coherent WB concept. Combining these scattered discussions under the WB concept in a single volume is a recent trend that began in the last few decades of the past century and the influence could be traced from the works of Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, whose ideological lineage could be traced to Sheikh Muhammad bin Taimiyah, a 14th century scholar who has tremendous influence on contemporary *da'wah* movements.

The **history** of WB concept is similar to the emergence of *Al-Tasawwur Al-Islami* (aka Tasawwur Islam, Islamic Worldview) as a subject within Islamic studies. The latter exists as a coherent topic in Islamic studies like *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), *Tawhid* (Islamic Creed), *Usul Al-Fiqh* (Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence) and *Tasawuf* (Sufism) only until the last decades of the 20th century as a result of the Islamic revivalism and became popular in the 1980s.

In the Malay region, *Al-Tasawwur Al-Islami* and WB concept are rarely taught as a subject by students in traditional *pondoks* (Islamic traditional boarding schools). They are taught in modern religious schools and as a module in institutes of higher learning.

Although the **emergence** of WB as a concept occurred in recent times, it has its basis in the Qur'an and hadith (the Prophet's tradition). In fact, the words *al-wala'* and *al-bara'* and their derivatives are plentiful in the Qur'an.

It is the discussion on the verses that contain *al-wala'* and *al-bara'* as a standalone theme that is a fairly recent trend. Furthermore, the treatment of these verses is closely linked to the author's perception of the realities that they are facing.

The **influence** of WB concept could be seen from its spread and acceptance by society. Today, it can be found in *Al-Tasawwur Al-Islami* which is taught as a subject at religious schools at a secondary school level in majority Muslim countries in the region. In Malaysia, *Tasawwur Islam* which contains elements of WB is offered as a subject at national schools. The issues under WB concept are regarded as a mainstream understanding of Islam. Books related to the concept are sold abundantly in mainstream bookstores. Articles propagating WB could be read in mainstream newspapers and issues related to it are frequent topics for public religious talks at public mosques.

Negative effects of WB concept, criticism and root problem

The focus on negative effects of WB provides a primer for the need to have a contextual understanding of Islam with regards to Muslims' relationships with non-Muslim authorities faced by a significant segment of Muslims living as minorities in non-Muslim countries.

The following highlights several negative influences of WB concept:

- ❖ The justification for *takfir* against fellow Muslims due to differences of opinion in issues under WB concept.
- ❖ The justification for armed rebellion against Muslim authorities.
- ❖ The justification for shedding blood of fellow Muslims.
- ❖ The social exclusivism i.e. tendency to live separately or far away from other non-Muslim communities.
- ❖ The self-righteousness (holier-than-thou attitude) towards those who have different views on issues under WB concept.⁴

Root problem

It has been mentioned in the preceding paragraphs that WB concept has its basis in Islamic scriptures. The methodology used in its formulation is part of the accepted methodology within the field of Islamic studies. Many of the WB concept's propositions fall within the domain where disagreements are acceptable in Islam. This is similar to the disagreements in jurisprudential issues within or among the four accepted schools (*mazhab*) of Islamic jurisprudence.

It can be observed that many proponents and subscribers of WB concept do not manifest the negative effects. They are able to keep an open mind and accept differing views with an open heart. However, the real problem lies in the absolutist attitude towards WB concept held by some of its proponents and subscribers. The absolutist attitude here refers to the belief that WB concept and the issues under it are absolute or the divine truth that cannot be challenged. To them, there cannot be an alternative interpretation. Often, this is simply framed as the issues of the fundamentals of faith or pillars of religion or divider between Islam and *kufr* (disbelief); where any disagreement or contestation constitutes a serious challenge or a rejection of faith leading to apostasy. In this regard, there cannot be any compromise in WB related issues because it is tantamount to nullification of the *shahadah* (Muslim's testimony of faith), or at the very least, to major heresy.

In addition, the absolutist attitude in upholding WB concept has resulted in:

- ❖ treating what are not definitive scriptural evidences (*qat'iyyat / muhkamat*) as definitive,
- ❖ framing issues that are not religious fundamentals incorrectly as fundamentals,
- ❖ denying space for permissible disagreements,
- ❖ suppressing criticism in the name of preservation of faith,
- ❖ self-righteousness because of the belief that there cannot be disagreements,
- ❖ generalisation that all non-Muslims are anti-Islam and cannot be appointed as ruler,
- ❖ binary thinking i.e. either you are with us or against us.

However in stark contrast to the preceding paragraph, WB concept is a product of human *ijtihad* and not from a definitive divine source. This statement of *ijtihad* stems from the following examples below.

First example pertains to the meaning of the words *al-wala'* and *al-bara'*. The etymology of both words can carry several meanings in Arabic. For example, love, loyalty, friendship, rulership in reference to *al-wala'* are just a few possibilities. There is no definitive scriptural evidence that supports a definitive meaning for *al-wala'* or *al-bara'*.

This can be compared with the discussion on the meaning of the word “*mawla*”, which shares the same root word with *al-wala'*. There is a famous hadith known as the *Ghadir Qum* between Sunni and Shi'ite scholars. In the hadith, the Prophet reportedly said, “Of whomsoever I had been *mawla*, Ali here is to be his *mawla*. O Allah, be a supporter of whoever supports him (Ali) and an enemy of whoever opposes him and diverts the truth to Ali...” (Narrated by Ahmad)

According to Sunni scholars, the Prophet's statement is not a definitive scriptural evidence for Shi'ite's claim that Ali (the Prophet's son-in-law) and subsequently his descendants is the rightful caliph after the death of the Prophet because the word “*mawla*” does not necessarily mean imam or leader in Arabic.⁵

Second example lies in the notion of *al-wala'* towards God, the Prophet and fellow believers. Hypothetically, do the three entities carry the same notion and status?

A careful look at the three entities highlight that they neither carry the same notion nor status. *Al-Wala'* to God is absolute. Consequently, absolute *al-bara'* from other Gods than Allah is necessary.

However, *al-wala'* to the Prophet is not as absolute as to God. Muslims are not commanded to uphold absolute *al-bara'* from other Prophets. In fact, Muslims are required to believe in Prophets other than Muhammad.

In the same vein, must *al-wala'* to fellow believers be understood as total *al-bara'* from all non-believers/non-Muslims?

Third example relates to the verse, "...for they who do not judge in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high are, indeed, deniers of the truth [*kafirun*]!" (The Qur'an, 5:44). This verse mentions God's *hakimiyah* (absolute power to legislate laws and rules for mankind). This is an important sub topic within the WB concept.

The verse is often used to denounce all modern and secular governments (regardless of whether the rulers are Muslims or non-Muslims) and democratic practices and call on Muslims to stay away (*al-bara'*) from them. The common claim stemming from this verse is that this understanding is the divine truth that must not be compromised.

However, a deeper look at this verse reveals that there are many points open to various interpretations that would challenge such a rigid claim. For example:

- ❖ The word "judge" could possibly mean "to rule", "to legislate", or "to adjudicate" and each carries different connotations and implications.
- ❖ The word "*kafirun*" may relate to major *kufr*, which makes a person out of the religion, or minor, which makes a person sinful but not out of religion.
- ❖ The verse must be understood concurrently in relation with two other similar verses; "...and they who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed - they, they are the evil doers [*zalimun*]!" (The Qur'an, 5:45) and "...for they who do not judge in the light of what God has bestowed from on high - it is they, they who are truly iniquitous [*fasiqun*]!" (The Qur'an, 5:47). When these three verses are viewed concurrently, it then raises a question as to when a person falls under "*kafirun*", "*zalimun*" or "*fasiqun*". Nevertheless, it is clear from the three verses that the mere act of "do not judge in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high" does not make a person automatically out of the religion.

There are also additional issues within WB concept that are open to various interpretations and further contemplation. For example;

- ❖ Must *al-wala'* and *al-bara'* be inseparable in all circumstances?
- ❖ Are negative feelings/attitudes supposed to be directed to all non-Muslims or only to non-Muslims who are hostile?
- ❖ Must the negative feeling/attitude be directed to *kafr* (person) or *kufr* (value)?
- ❖ Must *al-wala'* be given to fellow Muslims even if he is an evil person?
- ❖ Must *al-bara'* be upheld against non-Muslim even if he is a good person?
- ❖ How does WB concept relate to the issue of integration and nation building in a multi-cultural society where Muslims are a part of?
- ❖ How does one practice WB concept in the context of minority Muslims living in a non-Muslim country?

WB and minority Muslims

WB concept could pose a problem to Muslim minorities living in non-Muslim countries on a wide range of issues. One of them concerns the Islamic ruling of Muslims under the authority of a non-Muslim government.

Minority Muslims exposed to WB concept are often in a dilemma of their relationship with a non-Muslim government and state that is not based on Islamic systems. For example;

- ❖ How do minority Muslims protect their rights as citizens?
- ❖ Should they actively participate in the social and political arena or live in seclusion among themselves as enclaves and separate from the larger community?
- ❖ Should they remain in their current non-Muslim country as minority Muslims or migrate to a Muslim majority country?
- ❖ Should they practice the rule of *`azimah* (original ruling in theological matter) or the rule of *rukhsah* (concessionary ruling applied to exceptional or special situations)?
- ❖ What constitutes the rules of *`azimah* and *rukhsah* in the context of minority Muslims vis-a-vis WB issues?

Contextualising

One of the approaches to address the dilemma is by contextualisation; through a process of reformulating, reviewing or reinterpreting the original and popular WB concept to suit a minority Muslim context. This process is done in accordance with the relevant scriptural evidences and in line with the methodology of Islamic studies that has been developed and used by Muslim scholars throughout history.

Contextualising WB as a concept comes hand in hand with an understanding and recognition that WB is a product of *ijtihad*. Therefore, WB is open to diverse interpretations and reinterpretations. As a result, Muslims have the inherent flexibility to formulate their Islamic rulings pertaining to their lives in different contexts which may include living as a minority in non-Muslim countries.

This understanding and recognition of *ijtihad* is crucial as it helps to minimise potential negative effects as a result of absolutism that could potentially lead to extremist viewpoints.

Singapore context

The contextual approach in addressing the issues minority Muslims face has been realised by local Muslim scholars. The Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers Association (Pergas) is the only body that represents the religious elites. In 2003, Pergas organised an Ulama Convention to discuss the contemporary issues related to the minority Muslim community in Singapore. Alongside the overarching contemporary theme, the event also discussed the threat of terrorism and extremist ideology that promotes strict adherence to WB concept from the likes of groups such as Al-Qaeda⁶ and its affiliates in the regions such as Jemaah Islamiyah⁷ and, more recently, Da'esh⁸ (IS).

This Ulama Convention produced seminal papers and resolutions which led to the book publication titled *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Malay Community in Singapore* in 2004.⁹

The book offered different perspectives on issues related to WB concept for minority Muslims by local religious elites on a variety of contemporary issues. The following is a summary of some of the main points published.

The basis of relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. The book asserts that the basis is peace, not war. Furthermore it stressed that it is permissible to have positive feelings towards non-Muslims and not hating them.¹⁰

The position towards nationalism. The book asserts that nationalism does not contradict with Islam as long it is not used to cause injustices on others.¹¹

The position towards democracy. The book views democracy as compatible with Islam.¹²

The position towards secularism. The book views that Muslims should not necessarily be anti-secularism if it is not anti-religion.¹³

The position towards Qur'anic verse, "...for they who do not judge in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high are, indeed, deniers of the truth [kafirun]!" (The Qur'an, 5:44). The book asserts that recognising non-Muslim rule does not necessarily contradict Islam and does not automatically lead to *kufr*.¹⁴

The same understanding is upheld and reiterated by the Singapore Islamic Religious Council (Muis) through its 'Singapore Muslim Identity' project which formulated 10 excellent attributes for Singaporean Muslims in a monograph titled *Risalah for Building a Singapore Muslim Community Excellence*.¹⁵

Obedience to non-Muslim authority for minority Muslims in Singapore

There is agreement that appointing a non-Muslim as a state leader is permissible for minority Muslims in Singapore and it is in line with the fundamentals of faith in Islam as long as the leader is capable, just, does not have a hostile attitude towards Islam, and as long as the policies implemented are compatible with Islamic principles. The above represents a united viewpoint among elite Muslim scholars in Singapore, whether from Pergas as a civil society, or Muis as a government-linked statutory body.

In other words, it is permissible to appoint or vote for a person to be a state leader that will rule over Muslims if the person fulfils all the required criteria of a Muslim ruler, with exception of his personal faith.

The above viewpoint by the Muslim scholars in Singapore is based on the following arguments:

- ❖ Not all non-Muslims are alike i.e. hostile towards Islam or having anti-Islam attitude as stipulated in the Qur'an itself (3:113).
- ❖ The above argument is supported by many historical examples such as Abu Talib (the Prophet's uncle who protected him from the persecution of Meccan people), Negus (a Christian king who ruled Abyssinia where the Prophet's companions migrated to seek protection from the persecution of the Meccan people) and an Egyptian king whom Prophet Joseph served as treasurer.

- ❖ The principle of justice in Islam necessitates a different kind of non-Muslim be given different ruling or be treated differently, not with one general rule only.
- ❖ Islam has laid down peace as the basis of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, not war or hostility. War or hostility is not directed to all non-Muslims, but to those who are hostile, even if they are Muslims.
- ❖ Thus, *al-wala'* is forbidden only towards hostile non-Muslim (*kafir harbi*), not towards all of them.
- ❖ The right and effective verses on this issue is the Qur'an, 60:8-9 that differentiate between friendly and hostile non-Muslims:

“As for such [of the unbelievers] as do not fight against you on account of [your] faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity: for, verily, God loves those who act equitably. God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards such as fight against you because of [your] faith, and drive you forth from your homelands, or aid [others] in driving you forth: and as for those [from among you] who turn towards them in friendship; it is they, they who are truly wrongdoers!”

All the above are further supported by the following facts in history;

- ❖ The Prophet's command of his companions to migrate to Abyssinia despite being a non-Muslim land.
- ❖ The companions who migrated to Abyssinia were not called to join the Prophet in Medina until after six years of his migration to Medina from Mecca.
- ❖ Even after Negus, the ruler of Abyssinia had converted to Islam, the land that he ruled remained an unIslamic kingdom. However, the Prophet did not denounce him and his companions for remaining there.
- ❖ The Prophet himself sought security protection from persecution from Meccan people.
- ❖ God permitted Prophet Joseph to serve under an unIslamic kingdom in Egypt.¹⁶

It cannot be argued that the early Muslims' stay in Abyssinia under a non-Muslim ruler was permissible as the Muslims were weak and persecuted and, thus, it is no more applicable after they gained power in Medina and the revelation of verses that prohibits *al-wala'* to non-Muslims. This was because Muslims remained

in Abyssinia even after the Prophet established his political power in Medina. Muslims who were in Abyssinia only joined the Prophet in Medina almost 7 years after the *hijrah* (migration). The Prophet would have recalled them as soon as possible if their stay in Abyssinia was no more permissible after *hijrah*. Also, there was no evidence that the verses on WB abrogated the permissibility of such practice. In fact, 60:8-9¹⁷ from the Quran was revealed during the Medinan period that differentiated hostile and non-hostile non-Muslims in manner of treatment.

It cannot also be argued that Prophet Joseph's service under a non-Muslim ruler in Egypt as a past *shari`ah* that does not apply to *shari`ah* brought by Prophet Muhammad because such practices can be validated by the Muslims' migration to Abyssinia and 60:8-9.

Case study

The incident of an Indian-born *imam* (one who leads prayer at the mosque) who prayed for the victory of Muslims over infidels, Christians and Jews during one Friday prayer session in a local mosque in March 2017 highlights the significant response of Muslim scholars on issues of WB.

The *imam* was employed because the mosque serves primarily Muslims from the Singapore Indian ethnic community. In the incident, the *imam* was recorded in a video by a congregant at the end of his Friday's sermon uttering an Arabic supplication, "*fansurna `ala al-qawm al-kafirin, fansurna `ala yahudiyyin, fansurna `ala al-nasraniyyin*" that could be simply understood as "O Lord! Grant us victory over infidels, grant us victory over Christians and grant us victory over Jews". The video recording was made viral by the congregant who viewed such a prayer as theologically and socially inappropriate and wrong. A police report was also made against the *imam*.

The incident received a robust negative response from Muslim and non-Muslim political leaders made up of cabinet ministers, members of parliaments and community leaders. Such a supplication is regarded as offensive and hurtful to non-Muslim Singaporeans and, thus, could jeopardise the social harmony in a multi-racial and multi-religious Singapore. Many community leaders from Malay and Muslim communities were shocked and expressed disagreement with the *imam's* act.

As a result of strong negative responses from various parties, the *imam* made a public announcement of his mistake and offered his apology. He was charged in court and found guilty for committing an act that may cause disharmony among people of different faiths. He pleaded guilty and was fined SG\$ 4,000. His work permit was revoked and, as a result, was required to leave Singapore. Subsequently, he returned back to his hometown in India.¹⁸

Both Pergas and Muis responded, individually, to the incident by issuing a public statement clarifying the meaning of the supplication, “*fansurna `ala al-qawm al-kafirin* (grant us victory over infidels)” which could be found in the Qur’an, 2:286. Both organisations assert that the verse does not refer to all non-Muslims, but to those who are hostile to Islam and Muslims. This verse was revealed in relation to the conflict between the Prophet and his followers with the hostile Meccan Arabs. This is the context to which that particular verse should be understood. Both organisations also reaffirm that the principle that should guide Muslim and non-Muslim relations should be based on the Qur’an, 60: 8-9, as mentioned in the above preceding paragraphs.¹⁹ In essence, this case study of the incident highlights a contemporary usage of WB contextualisation for minority Muslims living in a non-Muslim country.

Unfortunately, Muis and Pergas statements do not provide detailed theological arguments to aid the understanding of the theological underpinnings of the stand and thus enable others to scrutinise its validity. This may be due to the nature of the statement – a press statement which was meant as a quick response to a situation and for press consumption, not as a treatise that seeks to provide a detailed theological explanation of the issue.

Here, it is argued that the points offered in the above section of this article could be regarded as the supporting theological evidences for the stand. Also, Pergas and Muis’ stand can be validated in detail by a paper published by the Mufti of the Federal Territory of Malaysia which addressed a similar issue – whether it is permissible for Muslims in Malaysia to vote for non-Muslim candidates during a General Election. In the paper, the Mufti of the Federal Territory held the view that it is permissible to vote for non-Muslims as members of a consultative body, be it at state or federal level. He cited views held by classical and contemporary scholars in support of his stand, while also mentioning those opposed to the choice of non-Muslim candidates and their argument. Like Pergas and Muis, he argued that Qur’anic verses that imply the prohibition of appointing non-Muslims as political leaders should be understood as referring to those who are “enemies” of Islam like pagan Arabs who fought the Prophet during the period of revelation. He also seeks to boost his stand by arguing that;

- ❖ the contemporary concept of citizenship of a nation state that have been accepted as a norm and a valid social contract between Muslims and non-Muslims entails equal rights of everybody to either choose (vote) or be chosen to political posts
- ❖ not respecting the prevailing norm will not serve the *maslahah* (interest) of the Muslims and risk serious *dharar* (harm) for Malaysian’s multicultural society where the percentage of Muslims compared to non-Muslims is only minimally more.

- ❖ the ruling must be based on the holistic view of a contemporary political system where a person does not hold absolute power to rule, legislate law and make policies and, thus, the choice of having non-Muslim as political representatives or ministers itself would cause harm (*dharar*) to Islam and Muslims' interest.²⁰

Closing remarks

The unanimous statements made by both Muis and Pergas has clarified Islam's stand towards non-Muslim and the guiding principle of Muslim and non-Muslim relations.

The act of appointing or voting for a non-Muslim as a state leader or political party or representative is permissible as long the person is assessed to be fair, just, competent and does not harbour any hostility towards Islam and Muslims. The formation of a non-Muslim government and its public policies requires a level of loyalty to these non-Muslim and non-Islamic systems. As a result, obeying a leader who have been appointed to the position in accordance to law and democratic principles does not contradict the fundamentals of a citizen's Islamic faith.

However, this does not mean that the Muslim community cannot have disagreements or criticise the legitimate leader. It has been recognised in any democratic country that disagreement and criticism on matters of policies and public interests does not equate to disobedience or disloyalty. Even a good government under the steer of a good and righteous leader could still err and has no monopoly of wisdom. Thus, good counsel and different viewpoints is necessary and a hallmark of a democratic society.

¹See Muhammad Sa'id Al-Qahtani (1413H), *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara' Fi Al-Islam*, Makkah: Dar Tayyibah, available at <https://archive.org/stream/wwwbfi#page/n0/mode/2up> (28 September 2017); Mohamed bin Ali (2015), *Roots of Religious Extremism: Understanding the Salafi Doctrine of Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'*, London: Imperial College Press.

²See Ibid.

³Sa'id Hawwa (2001), *Al-Islam*, Qahirah: Dar Al-Salam, available at <https://archive.org/stream/saidhawa/islam#page/n0/mode/2up> (28 September 2017).

⁴See Abd Al-Rahman bin Mu'alla Al-Luwayhiq (1992), *Al-Ghuluw Fi Al-Din Fi Hayat Al-Muslimin Al-Mu'asirah*. Bayrut: Mu'assasat Al-Risalah, available at https://www.4shared.com/file/109878278/8fd4d89/_-1_.html (28 September 2017); Abdul Rahman b. Mualaa Al-Luwayhiq Al-Mutairi (transl. by Jamal Al-Din M. Zarabozo) (2001), *Religious Extremism in the Life of Contemporary Muslims*, Denver: Al-Basheer Publications, available at <https://archive.org/details/ReligiousExtremism> (28 September 2017).

⁵See for example "The status of the hadeeth, "If I am someone's mawla then 'Ali is his mawla too" and its meaning" (2002), *islamqa.info*, fatwa no. 26794, 4 May, available at <https://islamqa.info/en/26794> (28 September 2017).

⁶See *Inspire*, no. 1, p. 17; *Inspire*, no. 8, p. 26; *Al-Risalah*, no. 1, p. 18; *Al-Risalah*, no. 3, p. 24.

⁷See General Guidelines on the Struggle of Jama'ah Islamiyah in Bilveer Singh (2007), *Talibanization of Southeast Asia: Losing the War on Terror to Islamist Extremist*, Westport: Praeger Security International, pp. 159-80.

⁸See *Dabiq*, no. 1, pp. 35-42; *Dabiq*, no. p. 40; *Dabiq*, no. 7, p. 70; *Dabiq*, no. 7-8, 22; *Dabiq*, no. 10, pp. 38-9; *Dabiq*, no. 11, paxim; *Dabiq*, no. 12, paxim; *Dabiq*, no. 14, pp. 8-17; *Rumiyah*, no. 1, pp. 6-7, 29; *Rumiyah*, no. 2, p. 5; *Rumiyah*, no. 3, p. 18; *Rumiyah*, no. 4, p. 6; *Rumiyah*, no. 5, pp. 2-4; *Rumiyah*, no. 6, pp. 22-4; *Rumiyah*, no. 7, pp. 26-9; *Rumiyah*, no. 9, pp. 28-35; *Rumiyah*, no. 10, pp. 13, 37; Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah (n.d.), *Hazih 'Aqidatuna Wa Haza Manhajuna*, n.p.: Maktabat Al-Himmah; Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Hai'ah Al-Buhuth Wa Al-Ifta' (1436H), *Muqarrar Fi Al-Tawhid Li Al-Mu'askarat*, n.p.: n. pub..

⁹See Pergas (2004), *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Malay Community in Singapore*, Singapore: Pergas.

¹⁰Ibid, pp. 213-44.

¹¹Ibid, pp. 201-7.

¹²Ibid, pp. 135-44.

¹³Ibid, pp. 120-33.

¹⁴Ibid, pp. 300-36.

¹⁵Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (2006), *Risalah for Building a Singapore Muslim Community of Excellence*, Singapore: Muis, available at <http://www.muis.gov.sg/officeofthemufti/documents/Risalah-eng-lr.pdf> (28 September 2017).

¹⁶See Pergas (2004), *Moderation in Islam*, chapter 5.

¹⁷See, "As for such [of the unbelievers] as do not fight against you on account of [your] faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity: for, verily, God loves those who act equitably." (The Qur'an, 60:8)

"God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards such as fight against you because of [your] faith, and drive you forth from your homelands, or aid [others] in driving you forth: and as for those [from among you] who turn towards them in friendship; it is they, they who are truly wrongdoers!" (The Qur'an, 60:9).

¹⁸Charissa Wong (2017), "Clerics or not, the law treats all equally: Shanmugam", *The Straits Times*, 9 April, available at <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/cleric-or-not-the-law-treats-all-equally-shanmugam> (28 September 2017); Mohamad Alami Musa (2017), "No doctrinal basis for enmity towards non-Muslims", *The Straits Times*, 12 April, available at <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/no-doctrinal-basis-for-enmity-towards-non-muslims> (28 September 2017); Toh Yong Chuan (2017), "No room for religious extremism in Singapore, say Muslim leaders", *The Straits Times*, 5 March, available at <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/no-room-for-religious-extremism-in-singapore-say-muslim-leaders> (28 September 2017).

¹⁹Pergas (2017), Pernyataan Media: Panduan Agama Dalam Mendoakan Terhadap Penganut Agama Lain (Media Statement; Religious Guidance on Making Prayers Towards People of Other Faiths), 3 April, available at http://www.pergas.org.sg/media/MediaStatement/mediarelease_PanduanAgamaDoaTerhadapPenganutAgamaLain_3April.pdf (28 September 2017); Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (2017), *Media Statement on the Case of Mr. Nalla Mohamed Abdul Jameel*, 3 April, available at <http://www.muis.gov.sg/documents/Media%20Statement%20on%20the%20case%20of%20Mr%20Nalla%20Mohamed%20Abdul%20Jameel.pdf> (28 September 2017).

²⁰Zulkifli bin Mohamad al-Bakri (2018), "Mengundi Calon Bukan Muslim Dalam Pilihanraya (Voting Non-Muslim Candidate in General Election)", *Bayan Linnas*, no. 129, 11 April, available at <http://muftiwp.gov.my/ms/artikel/bayan-linnas/2367-bayan-linnas-siri-ke-129-mengundi-calon-bukan-muslim-dalam-pilihanraya> (22 March 2019).

Forging Positive Muslim And Non-Muslim Relationship Contesting The Doctrine Of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'*¹

— Mohamed Bin Ali

One of the issues in contemporary Islamic thought which has attracted much attention amongst Muslim scholars and within the Muslim community is the valid and appropriate attitude of Muslims to relationships with non-Muslims. A major source of confusion and controversy with regards to this relationship comes from the allegation that Muslims must reserve their love and loyalty for fellow Muslims and to reject and declare war on the rest of humanity.

This idea and allegation can most acutely be seen through the Islamic concept of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* (Loyalty and Disavowal), which appears as central in the ideology of modern Salafism.

Modern Salafis argue that the concept of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* is an important shield and tool for the Muslims to face the challenges of modernism in the current world. This is so as Muslims are struggling to maintain Islam's authenticity and legitimacy amidst an onslaught of foreign values and belief systems as a result of a series of conquests, colonialisations and the current wave of globalization.

Understanding modern Salafi conceptions of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* is an urgent priority in the lives of Muslims today. This understanding is critical, as Muslims increasingly live as minority communities across the globe and the concept has specific implications for whether (and how) Muslims can live harmoniously with non-Muslims. The consequences of applying the modern Salafi concept of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* are serious – it promotes a way of life that is insular and hostile towards non-Muslims and this, it might be argued, is at variance with the more tolerant, inclusive nature of Islam.

What is *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'*?

In its most fundamental definition, the concept of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* prescribes the relationship Muslims are enjoined to have with God and their fellow human beings. The term *wala'* refers to the undivided loyalty Muslims should portray to God, Islam and their Muslim co-religionists over all other things, while *bara'* refers to the disavowal of anything deemed un-Islamic.

Fundamentally, *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* in modern Salafism describes the posture Muslims should take in their relationship with non-Muslims, their cultures, systems and environments. Sometimes, modern Salafis consider cultures which one might normally view as Islamic to be “un-Islamic” since they have “deviated” from the practice of the Prophet and the salaf al-salih (the pious predecessors or early Muslims).

The four dimensions of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'*

A critical study of the concept of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* in modern Salafism reveals that the concept has four dimensions namely (1) creedal (*aqidah*); (2) social; (3) political; and (4) *Jihadi* (literally means struggle or fighting). Generally, all Salafis agree on the concept of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* at the *aqidah* level. This means they claim Muslims must believe and uphold the concept as it is connected to the faith. Also at the *aqidah* level, they claim that *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* is important to fight any religious innovations or bid'ah that has crept into the religion.

However, they differ in the application of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* at the social and political level. At the social level, *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* is characterised by a portrayal of non-Muslims as potential enemies, and un-Islamic practices as dangerous acts that could threaten the purity of Islam and *tawhid* (monotheism).

Examples of this dimension include giving and accepting gifts from non-Muslims, joining them in their religious festivals and even using the Gregorian calendar which according to some Salafis constitutes *al-tashabbuh bil kuffar* (imitation of the non-Muslims). For instance, the former mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah bin Baz said that it is impermissible for a Muslim to participate in the celebrations and feasts of non-Muslims as it will lead to forming loyalty with them.

The political dimension of the doctrine refers to the use of the concept by those who actively incorporate elements of politics into their belief. For example, some Salafis assert that Muslims must give their loyalty only to Muslim rulers who rule according to an Islamic system or the shari'ah (Islamic law). Muslim rulers who rule not with the shari'ah must be disavowed, and that Muslims must abandon any un-Islamic political system such as democracy, nationalism and secularism, just like they are required to perform *bara'* of the non-Muslims. In its political form, *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* was linked to the concept of *tawhid al-hakimiyyah* (the unity of governance), relating to the judgement that a Muslim leader who does not rule by the entirety of the shari'ah is an infidel who should be overthrown, by violent means if necessary.

The political dimension of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* can lead another dimension known as the *Jihadi* dimension. Salafis who apply this role of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'*

usually incorporate the practice of *takfir* (ex-communication of Muslims) especially to Muslim rulers who do not implement shari'ah or, who apply any non-Islamic political systems which are seen by some Salafis as against Islamic teachings. The act of *takfir* will eventually lead to the concept of jihad which is commonly manifested in the form of overthrowing and attacking them.

Contesting the doctrine of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'*

The concept of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* as portrayed in modern Salafism poses great challenges to the realities of modern living. This is so especially in the context where Muslims are living as minority communities in non-Muslim countries.

Practising the modern Salafis version of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* could be seen as a barrier that could hinder integration between different ethnic and religious groups, develop intolerance amongst them and could lead Muslims to leave in isolation and inconvenience. At the very worst, the concept could be the foundational basis for the very extreme Salafis to incite hatred and legitimize violence against the disbelieving majority.

Due to these effects and consequences of applying modern Salafis version of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'*, the so-called mainstream Muslims or non-Salafi Muslims have made attempts to challenge the modern Salafis and prove that their understanding of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* is incorrect and not appropriate especially in the context of modern living.

As a divine code of conduct, the consequences of applying the modern Salafis version of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* are serious – arguably it promotes a life that is insular and hostile towards non-Muslims. As such, there is a need to reach a legitimate meaning and position of the principles of *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* as it applies to contemporary Islam in light of the primary Islamic sources.

A “sophisticated” understanding of the concept is seen as critical to guide direction of integration and is crucial to assist Muslims to confidently lead good lives wherever they may be. In this globalised world, many Muslims feel that their key beliefs are challenged and their identity is threatened. As a result, Muslims are searching for signposts and guidelines to practice Islam in a world seemingly at odds with Islamic principles.

¹First published in Mohamed Bin Ali (2015), “Forging Positive Muslim and Non-Muslim Relationship Contesting the Doctrine of *Al-Wala' Wal Bara'*”, *RSIS Commentaries*, 19 November. Edited and re-published here with permission.

“Enemies” Of God: Muslim Extremists Perception Of The Religious Other¹

—Mohamed Bin Ali

In current times, one highly debatable issue discussed in contemporary Islamic thought is the acceptable code of conduct between Muslims and non-Muslims. A major source of debate with regards to this issue comes from Muslim extremists who claim that love and loyalty should only be reserved for fellow Muslims while all others should be disavowed.

These Muslim extremists consider people of the Religious Other as “enemies” of God. Their extreme position covers a spectrum of resulting actions: from hating and disavowing the Religious Other to declaring war on them and justifying their killings. The hostile perception of the Religious Other is derived through perverted interpretation of Quranic verses.

Hatred and disavowal of the religious other

Muslim extremists’ hatred of the Religious Other can be acutely observed through their strong belief in the concept of *Al-Wala’ Wa Al-Bara’* (Loyalty and Disavowal). Through this concept, they claim that Muslims can only give their loyalty and associate with their co-religionists and perform disavowal of the Religious Other.

Muslim extremists believe that the Quran provides the instruction for Muslims to hate and disavow people of the Religious Other. For example, the sixtieth chapter or surah of the Quran known as *Surah Al-Mumtahanah* (literally: Chapter of ‘The Woman Who is Examined’) is often used by them to justify their hatred and enmity.

A comprehensive understanding of this chapter is vital to comprehend how hatred of the Religious Other by Muslim extremists is formulated. The chapter exposes the characteristics of the “enemies of God and Muslims” where alliance with them is forbidden. It is also from this chapter that the concept of *Millat Ibrahim* (The religion of Abraham) is believed to be taken by Muslim extremists to illustrate the importance of disavowing the Religious Other. Muslim extremists refer to *Millat Ibrahim* to show the urgency of following the footsteps of Prophet Abraham in disavowing non-Muslims.

The chapter's first verse was revealed on the story of Hatib Bin Abi Balta'ah, a companion of Prophet Muhammad who was perceived as a traitor when he discreetly informed the Meccans of the Prophet's plan to conquer Mecca. This forms the basis for Muslim extremists' claim that Muslims are prohibited from giving their loyalty to non-Muslims. They argue that Hatib's action of betraying the Muslims by revealing their secret to the enemies clearly indicates disbelief (*kufr*) due to his loyalty and alliance to the enemies of the Muslims.

“Enemies” of God and Muslims

The first verse in *Surah Al-Mumtahanah* uses the term *`aduw* (enemy) to refer specifically to the hostile Meccans who were non-Muslims. In fact, the use of the term “enemy” in its different variations are mentioned four times in this chapter. The use of these words repeatedly is significant as it sends a strong message that those who do not believe in *tawhid* (oneness of God) are the real enemies of God, Islam and the Muslims who should be disavowed.

From the story of Hatib, which becomes the reason for the revelation of this verse and from the subsequent verses too, it is evident that the term “enemy” here refers to the hostile pagan Meccans. These enemies as stipulated in the verse are described as “people who have disbelieved”; “have fought the Muslims because of their religion” and “have driven the Prophet and Muslims out of their homes”.

The historical context of this verse shows that the enemies are no ordinary non-Muslims but those who are hostile to the Muslims. Hence, the definition of the “enemies” here suggests that the verse excludes other non-Muslims who do not fight the Muslims because of their religion and neither chase them out of their homes. As such, these non-Muslims must not be regarded as enemies of Muslims. This notion is reinforced in the same chapter where the Quran instructs Muslims to treat non-Muslims who do not fight them with justice and kindness.

Following the steps of Abraham

The chapter also speaks about the story of Prophet Abraham who disavows his own idol-worshipping community including his father who refused to believe in *tawhid*. Like the story of Hatib, this story also becomes the basis for Muslim extremists' negative perception of the Religious Other. It is from this story that disavowal of non-Muslims by Muslim extremists is conceptualized. Based on this story, they claim that disavowal of non-Muslims is a necessity of *tawhid*.

The verses that reveal the story of Abraham is “Indeed there has been an excellent example for you in Abraham and those with him when they said to their people: “Verily we are free (*bura-a-u*) from you and whatever you worship

besides God. We have rejected you, and there has started between us and you, enmity and hatred forever until you believe in God alone”, except the saying of Abraham to his father: “Verily I will ask for forgiveness for you, but I have no power to do anything for you before God”.

The concept of *Millat Ibrahim* as contained in this verse refers to the sincerity and loyalty of Abraham who submits himself devotedly to the worship of one God. His sincerity towards *tawhid* is further shown by his destruction of the idols which are worshipped by his community and his disavowal of them as illustrated in this verse. The verse portrays Abraham’s disavowal of those who worship idols including his own father. Abraham and his followers uttered the word “*bura-a-u*” (literally: free from or disavow) which shows that they were free from what is being worshipped other than one God. In essence, the word “*bura-a-u*” was misconceived and taken out of context for Muslim extremists to push for the necessity of disavowing the Religious Other.

Conclusion

Muslim extremists have misused the true meaning of Qur’anic verses to conceptualize and justify the type of relationship they desire with people of the Religious Other. However, what these extremists fail to appreciate is the holistic nature of Islam’s guiding principles and the need to engage the Qur’anic verses in context. Once these two considerations are employed, their negative perception can be successfully countered and nullified.

In conclusion, a nuanced understanding of the religious scriptures in tandem with contemporaneous issues is critical to guide Muslims towards the direction of positive inter-religious relations and integration. This is especially crucial as a negative perception of the Religious Other vis-a-vis the concept *Al-Wala’ Wa Al-Bara’* is especially problematic and injurious to today’s living environment where minority Muslims need to co-exist and live harmoniously among plural communities around the world.

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Abrogation And The Verse Of The Sword: Countering Extremists' Justification For Violence

—Mahfuh Haji Halimi

Introduction

Muslim extremists such as Muhammad `Abd Al-Salam Faraj and the terrorist group, the so-called Islamic State (IS), have distorted the concept of abrogation, and the Verse of the Sword (hostilities towards polytheists) into a purportedly divinely-mandated call for offensive global 'jihad' (warfare).

This study examines how Muslim extremists have mis-applied the theory of abrogation and the Verse of the Sword when the Qur'an does not even specify the verses that have been abrogated. Their claim that the Verse of the Sword abrogates numerous Qur'anic verses cannot be taken as conclusive, especially when the abrogated verses are those that direct Muslims to seek peace, exercise tolerance, and show compassion and forgiveness.

This study posits that Muslim extremists have made erroneous claims on the issue of abrogation by omitting the rich discussion on the subject among Muslim scholars and falsely presenting it as something consensual among the scholars when that is not the case.

There is an extensive body of literature on the issue of abrogation. Many scholars of the Sciences of the Qur'an (*'Ulum Al-Qur'an*), Sciences of the Prophetic Tradition (*'Ulum Al-Hadith*) and Sciences of Islamic Jurisprudence (*'Ulum Al-Fiqh*) have written to explain and define abrogation (*naskh*). There have also been numerous attempts to specify the abrogating (*nasikh*) and the abrogated (*mansukh*) Qur'anic verses. Sometimes, abrogation has been discussed in the literature as a methodology in resolving apparent contradictions between religious texts (*al-ta'arud bayn al-adillah*). There are, however, several requirements that must be satisfied before abrogation can be applied. Although the literature has explained abrogation in the Qur'an, the Prophetic traditions and Islamic Jurisprudence (Al-Fiqh), there has been no attempt to relate these to violence and terrorism in the name of religion. Concerns about the opinions expressed by Muslim extremists on abrogation and The Verse of the Sword or *Ayat Al-Sayf*¹ came to the fore following the September 2001 attacks.

To date, there has been no analysis of extremists' application of abrogation and the verse of the sword. Given the paucity of what has been written on the

subject, this study offers arguments that could be used to counter their mis-application of the concept and verse. By exposing their false claim that the Verse of the Sword abrogates more than one hundred Qur'anic verses, this study refutes the extremists' justification for violence and advocates peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims as a well-established teaching of Islam.

For the purpose of this study, Muslim extremists refer to Sunni extremist groups or individuals who have used abrogation and the Verse of the Sword "to justify perpetual war against non-Muslims."² While the theory of abrogation also applies to the Sunnah, this study will only focus on its application to the Qur'an.

This study starts by providing a brief foundational understanding of the abrogation concept that is extracted from discourses on the topic in the Sunni Islamic religious sciences. It will then discuss the Verse of the Sword, analyse the mis-use of the verse by extremists, and highlight the views of contemporary scholars before concluding.

Foundational understanding of abrogation

Abrogation is one of the methods to resolve a conflict between two Qur'anic verses of equal strength, which contain opposing instructions. The application of abrogation is not exclusive to the issue of idolaters or jihad as abrogation also occurs in other Islamic rulings, such as the waiting period of widows (*'iddah*), slanderous accusations (*qazf*) and the direction of the *qiblah* (the direction that Muslims should face in prayers).

A case in point is the change in the direction of the *qiblah* from the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Bayt Al-Maqdis to the *Ka'bah* in Mecca. The Qur'an explains:

"We have seen the turning of thy face unto Heaven, and indeed We will turn thee toward a *qiblah* well pleasing to thee. So turn thy face toward the Sacred Mosque, and wheresoever you are, turn your faces toward it. Truly those who have been given the Book know that it is the truth from their Lord. And God is not heedless of what they do." (The Qur'an, 2:144)

The verse shows that the earlier ruling on the direction of the *qiblah* (the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Bayt Al-Maqdis) has been abrogated by the new ruling, "So turn thy face toward the Sacred Mosque," which requires Muslims to face the direction of the *Ka'bah* (in Mecca) in their prayers. Since the ruling is clear, there is no disagreement among scholars with regards to abrogation in this instance.

However, there are cases where one verse of the Qur'an affirms something while another verse negates it. In such cases, the scholars will first attempt to reconcile the two conflicting verses. If this is possible and successful, abrogation becomes unnecessary. When an attempt at reconciliation and preference fails, the *mujtahid* (scholars qualified to carry out *ijtihad* or personal reasoning) after concluding that the two Qur'anic verses cannot be reconciled, uses abrogation – prefers one verse to the other.

When the chronological order of the two texts cannot be determined, abrogation cannot be applied, and action based on the two conflicting texts must be suspended altogether.³ The scholars' inability to reconcile some of these conflicting verses accounts for their disagreement on the actual number of abrogated verses (*mansukh*) in the Qur'an. Al-Nahhas, an Egyptian scholar of grammar and an Qur'anic exegete during the Abbasid period, mentioned that the Verse of the Sword alone had abrogated 113 verses of the Qur'an.⁴ Later, Al-Suyuti, a religious scholar and jurist expert, concluded that there were only twenty-one abrogated verses in the entire Qur'an, considering that “...inna ayat al-sayf lam tansakh” – “...the verse of the sword indeed did not abrogate the verses on forgiveness and patience.”⁵ Twelve of these verses were then successfully reconciled by Al-Shawkani, a Yemeni scholar,⁶ leaving nine verses which he considered irreconcilable and therefore, abrogated.⁷ After scrutinising the twenty-one abrogated verses, according to Al-Suyuti, Shah Wala Allah Al-Dihlawi, a scholar, *muḥaddith*⁸ and reformer, concluded that there were only five abrogated verses in the Qur'an.⁹

In contrast, Al-Khudari, a shari'ah scholar demonstrated that all the verses that Al-Suyuti considered as abrogated could be reconciled.¹⁰ The verses cover a broad range of topics, and only three were related to *jihad*.

Although the scholars differed on the number of abrogated verses, the majority of them agreed that there are abrogated verses in the Qur'an.

Nevertheless, Abu Muslim Al-Isfahani rejected the notion of abrogation in the Qur'an. He argued that Qur'anic rulings would never be annulled and held that abrogation is a form of *takhsis*, where one verse specifies the generality of another.¹¹

The discourse on abrogation in the Islamic religious sciences is determined more by *ijtihad* (personal reasoning) of the scholars than by the texts of the Qur'an, and because of that there is no consensus among the scholars (*ijma' al-ulama'*) on the abrogating (*nasikh*) and the abrogated (*mansukh*) Qur'anic verses. Any claim of consensus, therefore, is not only inconsistent with the religious sciences but must be rejected.

According to the majority of scholars, abrogation (*naskh*) refers to “the suspension or replacement of one Sharia ruling by another, provided that the latter is of a subsequent origin, and that the two rulings are enacted separately from one another.”¹²

Abrogation can only take place during the lifetime of Prophet Muḥammad and not after his death because the revelation of the Qur’an ceased upon his death.¹³ Principally, only a Qur’anic verse can abrogate another Qur’anic verse. The Prophetic traditions or any other sources of Islamic law such as *al-ijma`* (consensus), *al-qiyas* (analogical deduction) and other forms of *ijtihad* (personal reasoning) cannot abrogate a Qur’anic verse because they are weaker in comparison to the strength of the textual rulings of the Qur’an, and so, the Qur’anic ruling prevails. Likewise, the rulings that the Qur’an has established cannot be abrogated even by opinions of scholars of the highest eminence and authority.¹⁴

While the scholars are unanimous on the occurrence of abrogation (*naskh*) in the Prophetic traditions, disagreements exist both in principle and the instances in which abrogation has occurred in the Qur’an. Often, after scrutiny, there is a possibility that the conflict is more of form than of substance. In such cases, it may be possible to reconcile the two verses and eliminate the conflict.¹⁵

In the Qur’an, verses classified as *muhkamat* are perspicuous verses containing words or texts conveying a firm and definite meaning. As a rule, abrogation does not apply to such verses of the Qur’an. These verses are often phrased in such a manner as to preclude the possibility of repeal. Likewise, verses on the attributes of God, belief in the principles of the faith, and the doctrine of *tawhid* (the doctrine of divine unity) as well as on the Hereafter, cannot be abrogated.

The scholars agree that moral truths such as acting justly or treating one’s parents well are not open to abrogation. The same also applies to vices such as the enormity of telling lies. A situation is inconceivable where a vice becomes a virtue and vice versa by the application of abrogation. Similarly, the historical events narrated in the Qur’an cannot be abrogated because that would imply that the Qur’an is mistaken and therefore cannot be entertained.¹⁶

In short, the concept of abrogation can only occur when the following conditions are satisfied.

First, the possibility of abrogation has not been precluded by the Qur’anic text. Second, the subject is open to the possibility of repeal. Third, the abrogating verse is revealed after the abrogated verse. Fourth, the two verses are genuinely in conflict and cannot be reconciled with one another. Finally, the two texts are separate and are not related to one another and thereby ruling out the possibility

of one of the two verses being the *shart* (condition), *wasf* (qualification) or *istithna* (exception) to the other. If this is indeed the case, then *takhsis* (specification) or *taqiyid* (qualification) takes precedence over abrogation.¹⁷

Interpretation of surah *Al-Tawbah*, abrogation and the Verse of the Sword by various extremists

The earlier section illustrates that the majority of the Sunni scholars accept abrogation (*naskh*) as one of the fundamental concepts in Islamic religious sciences. However, these scholars had applied abrogation only after attempts to reconcile the conflicting verses by using other methodologies had failed.

Even so, Gasser Auda observes that jurists have used abrogation liberally and this has sometimes resulted in the issuance of some controversial decrees. For instance, The Verse of the Sword (*Ayat Al-Sayf*) was said to have abrogated more than two hundred Qur'anic verses, which preach "dialogue, freedom of belief, forgiveness, peace and even patience!"¹⁸ These include verses such as:

"There is no coercion in religion..."
(The Qur'an, 2:256)

"...So leave them [disbelievers?] and that which they fabricate"
(The Qur'an, 6:112)

"And if they incline towards peace, incline thou toward it, and trust in God..."
(The Qur'an, 8:61)

"Repel evil by that which is better..."
(The Qur'an, 23:96)

"So be patient. God's Promise is indeed true. And let not those without certainty disquiet thee."
(The Qur'an, 30:60)

"Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion."
(Al Qur'an, 109:6)

i. 'Abd Al-Salam Faraj

A staunch advocate of loose abrogation was Muhammad 'Abd Al-Salam Faraj, leader of the Egyptian terrorist group *Jama'ah Al-Jihad*, who was executed in 1982 for his involvement in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat. An engineer by training and not a scholar of Islamic Religious Sciences, Faraj wrote a

political treatise, *Al-Jihad Al-Faridah Al-Ghaibah*.¹⁹ Later, Maktabah Al-Ansaar Publication published its English translation entitled *The Absent Obligation*.²⁰ In the treatise, Faraj quoted several classical scholars who held that the Verse of the Sword “abrogated every treaty, every contract, and term made between the Prophet and any of the Mushrikin.”²¹ He subscribed to the opinion that there is “no treaty or covenant of protection left for any of the Mushrikin after the Surah Al-Bara’ah [i.e. surah *Al-Tawbah*] was revealed.”²² He argued that the Verse of the Sword, “abrogated every verse of the Qur’an in which turning away from the enemies and being patient with the harm they cause is mentioned. It is strange to find someone still using these abrogated verses as evidence for abandoning fighting and jihad.”²³

Faraj was obsessed with fighting and his conception of jihad that he merely quoted the earlier scholars verbatim and out of context to support his view on the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, including apostates. A closer examination of the treatise reveals that Faraj did not follow the foundational understanding that was discussed in the earlier section of this article. Resultantly, he linearly concluded that Muslims should wage war against non-Muslims and apostate rulers. He did not attempt to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the Verse of the Sword and verses on dialogue, freedom of belief, forgiveness, peace, and patience. His distorted argument also ignored the context of the time when the verse was revealed.

ii. Sayyid Qutb

Contrary to Faraj, Sayyid Qutb, a member and an ideologue of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers organisation (*Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun*), held a different view on the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in his commentary of Surah Al-Tawbah.

Qutb insisted that the provisional rulings were still applicable under certain conditions as spelt out in earlier Qur’anic *surahs* (chapters). He concluded that Islamic activism is both flexible and firm.²⁴ As such, those provisional rulings on dialogue, freedom of belief, forgiveness, peace and even patience have not been abrogated.

Qutb acknowledged that the Muslim community is allowed to apply the ruling that is most suited to a particular situation, time and place. However, he insisted that the Muslim community must implement the final decrees that are contained in surah *Al-Tawbah*, whenever that is possible. Implementing the final rulings is not restricted to the time of the Prophet when surah *Al-Tawbah* was revealed as these same rulings were applied during the Islamic conquests after the Prophet’s demise, in the treatment of both non-believers and the people of earlier revelations.²⁵

Although Qutb's thoughts provide the ideological direction for most Sunni militant groups, in his commentary on the Verse of the Sword, he did not consider it as having abrogated more than one hundred other verses of the Qur'an. However, he remained critical of Muslims who use Qur'anic texts which promote unconditional peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims. Qutb advocated conditional implementation of these when Muslims do not have political power. When such a condition recurs, there is nothing to prevent the Muslim community from applying the rulings in these verses. However, he emphasised that these verses do not represent the final rulings on Muslim and non-Muslim relations.

iii. Al-Baghdadi's 'Islamic State'

When the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group occupied the Iraqi region of Sinjar in Nineveh in 2014, it justified its action against the members of the Yazidi community by using the Verse of the Sword. IS described the Yazidis as "a pagan minority existent for ages in regions of Iraq and Sham." The group argued that the continued existence of Yazidis goes against the ruling on idolaters in the "Ayat as-Sayf (the Verse of the Sword) over 1,400 years ago."²⁶ While there is no evidence to suggest that IS was following Qutb, the striking similarity of its action and Qutb's abovementioned explanation of the final ruling in the Verse of the Sword is irrefutable.

iv. Abdullah Azzam

Abdullah Azzam, who was deeply involved in the Soviet-Afghan War, reads surah *Al-Tawbah* and the Verse of the Sword differently. He argued that people could be classified into three categories: the Muslim fighter (*muqatil*), the non-Muslim who makes a treaty and pays an exempt tax (*jizyah*) with a willing hand after having been humbled in war, and the idolater who must be fought. Azzam only recognises these three categories of people based on surah *Al-Tawbah*. To Azzam, if one is not a Muslim, then one is a *zimmi* – a non-Muslim living under the protection of Muslim rule on payment of the *jizyah* (a protection tax paid as a tribute to a Muslim ruler) or an idolater who must be fought.²⁷ Although Azzam did not mention abrogation in his explanation of the verse of the sword, his classification of people is controversial and goes against the concept of citizenship. Today, Muslims do not reside in one contiguous territory but are citizens of different nation-states.²⁸ Muslims who are minorities in many countries are constitutionally recognised and treated as citizens of the state having equal rights as the majority.

Although the militants differ in their use and application of surah *Al-Tawbah*, abrogation and more specifically, the Verse of the Sword, there is a common (mis)understanding among them. From the preceding discussion, it

is clear that these militants use surah *Al-Tawbah*, abrogation and the Verse of the Sword, to argue that the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims are one of perpetual war. No attempt is made to reconcile conflicting verses using the standard methodology as discussed in the religious sciences. They fail to incorporate the contemporary developments where peaceful co-existence of Muslims and non-Muslims is the rule, not an exception. Qutb seems to be the only one who had given a detailed commentary of surah *Al-Tawbah* and the Verse of the Sword. Although he did not use abrogation to delineate the hostile relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Nonetheless, by advocating the implementation of the final rulings in Surah *Al Tawbah*, and the verse of the sword, Qutb concurs with the others.

Contemporary scholars' stand on abrogation and the Verse of the Sword

The militants are wrong in their application of abrogation and interpretation of surah *Al-Tawbah*.

First, their position is at odds with peace, one of the most basic tenets of Islam which God instructed the Prophet and his followers to observe.²⁹

Second, a substantial majority of the Qur'anic verses are on matters of belief and morality, the six pillars of the faith and verses extolling tolerance, forgiveness, conciliation, inclusiveness, and peace. Less than one-tenth of the 6,235 verses of the Qu'ran relate to law and jurisprudence. There is, therefore, no dispute that these messages are the main focus of the Qur'anic message.

Third, accepting abrogation of more than one hundred verses of the Qur'an by just one verse (the Verse of the Sword) will diminish the universal message of the Qur'an on peace, dialogue, forgiveness, patience, and freedom of belief. The Qur'anic message, instead of being inclusive will become exclusive, and this is at variance with God's description of the Qur'ān as "guidance for mankind."³⁰

Fourth, proper guidance from the Qur'an could not be attained by reading individual verses in isolation and ignoring other parts of the Qur'an. The Qur'an must be studied in its entirety to grasp the full spectrum of the message of the Qur'an. For this reason, contemporary authorities on the Qur'an insist on a re-evaluation of what scholars have written during the war-filled medieval period. They do not believe that the 'warlike' verses in the Qur'an or those that were revealed very late in Prophet Muhammad's time had annulled the Qur'anic teachings which praise tolerance, reconciliation, inclusiveness, and peace.³¹ If this were the case, then the twenty-three years during which the Prophet spent delivering the message of Islam becomes meaningless when only the 'warlike' verses in the Qur'an are allowed to define Islam.³²

Furthermore, scholars like Zakaria Bashier, an Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, consider the Qur'anic verses that instruct Muslims to be peaceful, tolerant and non-aggressive as *muhkamat* – texts conveying a firm and definite meaning and therefore, cannot be abrogated. In Bashier's assessment, to arrive at a proper understanding of the Verse of the Sword requires understanding the *asbab al-nuzul* (the historical conditions leading up to a revelation or in which particular verses were revealed or situational exegesis). Claiming that it prevails over the established policy of tolerance is, in Bashier's words, "not borne out by the facts of history."³³

Wahbah Al-Zuhayli, a Syrian professor and scholar specialising in Islamic law and legal philosophy, wrote that most jurists of the second *hijrah* century (eighth century CE) considered war as a rule rather than the exception, in relations between Muslims and non-Muslims because of excesses in using abrogation (*naskh*). The underlying reason for the stand was the pressing need for Muslims living in those times to remain in a constant state of battle readiness to protect Islam. The political circumstances of those times also contributed to the technique of abrogation being adopted to reinforce the morale of the Muslims when facing their enemies.³⁴

Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman, a renowned Muslim scholar and thinker, also expressed the same view.³⁵ Classical jurists used abrogation not only to gain legitimacy but also to rally moral support against the hostile, neighbouring non-Muslim powers. Their preoccupation with the issue of the day had prevented them from looking beyond their immediate circumstances. As such, the interpretation of the Verse of the Sword was deeply influenced by the hostile attitudes of non-Muslims during the early Muslim era. Continuing this interpretation today would reduce the appeal of the Qur'an's universal message. It is wrong to confine the meaning of Islam within the perimeters of events which occurred during the time of hostilities and near the very end of the Prophet's era. A fundamental change to this mindset requires re-examination of the meaning of the Qur'anic experience and the place of abrogation.³⁶

Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, an Egyptian theologian based in Qatar, and chairman of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, disagrees with the view that the Verse of the Sword had abrogated about 140 to 200 verses of the Qur'an when these verses still exist in the Qur'an and continue to be read. Such an opinion, according to Al-Qaradhawi, is not supported by any definitive evidence that has been authentically transmitted or by clear logic. The mere assumption is insufficient to rule that a written verse of the Qur'an is no longer applicable. There must be definitive evidence supporting the opinion. In his study, Al-Qaradhawi finds it possible to reconcile the conflicting verses when they are carefully read, scrutinised and linked by looking at their context and connection with other verses in the Qur'an.³⁷

Conclusion

In Islamic religious sciences, abrogation is one of the methods of overcoming conflicts between verses of the Qur'an. The success in reconciling these conflicts by some scholars had caused several revisions in the number of abrogated verses, thus indicating the absence of a consensus among scholars on the number of verses that have been abrogated as well as the abrogating verses. It is also a fact that the interpretation of surah *Al-Tawbah* was coloured by the hostile environment of the early Muslim era.

As such, insisting that relations between Muslims and non-Muslims should be one of perpetual war is devoid of any sense when developments in the contemporary world that accept plurality and diversity in religious beliefs are taken into consideration. The extremists' misapplication of abrogation and the Verse of the Sword must be shown as erroneous. The conclusion made by many contemporary Muslim scholars that verses advocating peace, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness are perspicuous verses that cannot be abrogated, can act as a counterweight to the extremists' claims. These are the verses that Muslims should insist as the basis for relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Ample evidence exists to show that the extremists' arguments are erroneous, without merit and cannot be allowed to take root in a society where the collective interest is better served by promoting moderation and countering violent extremism. Given the enormity of the current situation, more academic works and scholarly efforts are required to expose the extremists' manipulation of Qur'anic verses. The operational strategies for the dissemination of such public awareness campaigns can be done through various means such as Friday sermons, religious classes, madrasahs and mass publications.

¹The Qur'an, 9:5.

²Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2006), "Refuting the idea of jihad as perpetual war between Muslims and non-Muslims", *RSIS Commentaries*, 6 October, available at <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/863-refuting-the-ides-of-jihad-as/#.XJxr5NIzbs1> (21 March 2019).

³Abd Al-Wahhab Khallaf (1978), *Ilm Usul Al-Fiqh*, 12th edition, Kuwait: Dar Al-Qalam, p. 229.

⁴Abu Ja'far Al-Nahhas (1938), *Kitab Al-Nasikh Wa Al-Mansukh Fi A-Qur'an Al-Karim*, n.p.: Al-Maktabah Al-Alamiyyah, pp. 264-6.

⁵Jalal Al-Din Al-Suyuti (n.d.), *Al-Itqan Fi 'Ulum Al-Qur'an*, vol. 3, Saudi Arabia: Wizarat Al-Shu'un Al-Islamiyyah Wa al Awqaf Wa Al-Da'wah Wa Al-Irshad, p. 65.

⁶Al-Shawkani was born into a Zaydi Shi'a Muslim family, but his books such as *Irshad Al-Fuhul Ila Tahqiq Al-Haq Min 'Ilm Al-Usul* were often referred to by Sunni scholars.

- ⁷M. Hasbi Ash Shiddieqy (1987), *Sejarah dan Pengantar Ilmu Al-Quran/Tafsir*, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, p. 109.
- ⁸The term refers to one who transmits and studies of the *ahadith* or all that is narrated from the Prophet, his acts, his sayings and whatever he has tacitly approved.
- ⁹Ahmad bin `Abd Al-Rahim Al-Ma`ruf bi Waliy Allah Al-Dihlawiy (2008), *Al-Fawz Al-Kabir fi Usul Al-Tafsir*, Damascus: Dar Al-Ghawthani Li Al-Dirasat Al-Qur`aniyyah, p 67.
- ¹⁰Muhammad Al-Khudari (1981), *Usul Al-Fiqh*, 7th ed., Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr, pp. 250-6.
- ¹¹Manna` Al-Qattan (1985), *Mabahith Fi `Ulum Al-Qur'an*, Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, pp. 227-8.
- ¹²Wahbah Al-Zuhayli (1986), *Usul Al-Fiqh Al-Islami*, vol. 2, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr, pp. 933-4 and Muhammad `Ali Al-Shawkani (1999), *Irshad Al-Fuhul Ila Tahqiq Al-Haq Min `Ilm Al-Usul*, vol. 2, Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al `Ilmiyyah, pp. 71-4.
- ¹³Mohammad Hashim Kamali (1998), *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence, Second Revised Edition*, Malaysia: Ilmiah Publishers, p. 151.
- ¹⁴Khallaf (1978), p 227.
- ¹⁵Muhammad Abu Zahrah (1985), *Uşul Al-Fiqh*, Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr Al-`Arabi, pp.192-5.
- ¹⁶Abu Al-ynayn Badran (1984), *Usul Al-Fiqh Al-Islami*, Alexandria: Mu`assasah Shabab Al-Jami`ah, p. 454 and Muhammad Hasan Hitu (1984), *Al-Wajiz Fi Usul Al-Tashri` Al-Islami*, 2nd edn., Beirut: Mu`assasah Al-Risalah, p 244.
- ¹⁷Kamali (1998), 153-4.
- ¹⁸Gasser Auda (2004), ““Abrogation of Rulings” Methodology: A Critique.” *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol. 12, No. 2, p 196.
- ¹⁹Muhammad `Abd Al-Salam Faraj (1981), *Al-Jihad Al-Faridah Al-Ghaibah*, Egypt: Jama`ah Al-Jihad.
- ²⁰Muhammad `Abdus Salam Faraj (2000), *The Absent Obligation*, Birmingham: Maktabah Al-Ansaar Publication.
- ²¹Faraj (1981), pp. 16-7.
- ²²Ibid.
- ²³Ibid.
- ²⁴Sayyid Qutb (1985), *Fi Zilal Al-Qur'an*, Vol. 3, Beirut: Dar Al-Syuruq, p. 1564.
- ²⁵Ibid, p. 1580.
- ²⁶*Dabiq* (2014), no. 4, September-October, p 13.
- ²⁷Abdullah Azzam (2013), *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah*, Trans., Al-Qudsi, Abdurrahman, Ed., Tim Editor Jazera, Vol. 2, Solo: Jazera, p. 177.

²⁸Georgetown University Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and Word Affairs (2019), "Demographics of Islam", available at <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/demographics-of-islam>, 25 Mar., (25 Mar. 2019).

²⁹The Qur'an, 8:61.

³⁰Ibid, 2:185 and 3:4.

³¹Joel Hayward (2012), "Warfare in the Qur'an," *MABDA English Monograph Series*, p 18.

³²Abdul Hamid Ahmad Abu Sulayman (1993), *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations*, USA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, p 45.

³³Zakaria Bashier (2006), *War and Peace in the Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, United Kingdom: The Islamic Foundation, Hayward, "Warfare in the Qur'an," p. 18.

³⁴Wahbah Al-Zuhayli (1998), *Athar Al-Harb Fi Al-Fiqh Al-Islami: Dirasah Muqaranah*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr, pp. 130-1.

³⁵Abu Sulayman (1993), pp. 43-4.

³⁶Ibid, p 45.

³⁷Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi (2009), *Fiqh Al-Jihad*, Cairo, Maktabah Wahbah, p 13.

³⁸Al-Misr Al-Yawm (2007), "Al-Syeikh Jad Al-Haq Syeikh Al-Azhar Al-Sabiq Yaruddu 'Ala Al-Faridah Al-Ghaibah: Al-Islam La Yatawaqqaf 'Ala Al-Khilafah Wa Al-Jihad Mustamir Ila Yawm Al-Qiyamah", 18 November, available at <https://today.almasryalyoum.com/printerfriendly.aspx?ArticleID=83379>, (25 Mar. 2019).

Refuting Islamic State (IS)' Call For The Revival Of Slavery¹

—Mustazah Bahari

The fourth issue of *Dabiq*, IS official online magazine, published an article which argued for the enslavement of members of the Yazidi tribe captured in Iraq and, hence, arguing for the revival of slavery in today's context. For over three years since the conflict started in 2011, both the Assad regime and its opponents have committed war crimes that include mass-killings, kidnappings, indiscriminate bombings, executions and murders.

One of the basis for their arguments is the verse from the Qur'an,

“And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.” (The Qur'an, 9:5)

They then argued using the Prophet's sayings about the birth of children who will become masters to their domiciled mothers who happen to be slaves. The hadith indicates that at the end of times, there will be plenty of such births. There is therefore, a clear sign in the hadith which justifies making the Yazidi women slaves as well as sex slaves which ISIS claims to be desirable as the precise time has come for such an act as mentioned in the hadith.

They are proud and boastful with the number of Yazidi women being their slaves while quoting the hadith of Abu Hurairah which means, “God marvels at people who enter paradise in chains.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari) They further explained that according to hadith scholars, the hadith refers to those who embraced Islam after being slaves and that resulted in them entering Paradise.

They also used a hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah by Al-Bukhari as the basic argument. According to the hadith, when Abu Hurairah explains the verse of the Qur'an which means, “You (the people of Muhammad) are the best of the people sent onto Man”, he said, “You are the best of men to all of mankind; you take them as slaves so that they embrace Islam.”

Finally, they claimed most of the lustful deeds such as adultery, close proximity between *non-mahrams* (not close relatives) and others have become widespread as a result of the failure to implement the Qur'anic verses with regards to slavery which could have provided a permissible alternative to the vices mentioned above.

Slavery in Islam

Historically, slavery has been practiced long before the birth of Islam and it is neither created nor innovated by Islam.

In Islam, slavery can only be practiced over the enemy who has been defeated in war and even that can only occur if they differ in religion and if the captive has already served as a slave.

Hence, a Muslim who is originally a free person cannot be taken as a slave by another Muslim unless he is already a slave.

There is no single verse in the Qur'an or hadith that mentions the obligation to enslave prisoners. In fact, Islam encourages the freeing of prisoners when they show signs of remorse and are willing to return to Islam and become good citizens.

When Islam emerged in the Arab world, slavery was already widely practiced and its practice was defended stoutly by its perpetrators. As a religion full of wisdom, Islam took a more conscientious approach to encourage people to free the slaves they owned. This was done gradually with an eye on abolishing the slavery system totally. According to Ibn Qudamah, Man was born free, whereas his slavery was caused by war, which therefore makes it unjustifiable for the latter to be imposed upon anyone if there is no oppression or war.

The correct method in Islam with regards to the liberation of slaves is to encourage Muslims who own slaves to free them and they shall be granted a bountiful reward.

Allah says in the Qur'an, "And what can make you know what [breaking through] the difficult pass is? It is the freeing of a slave." (The Qur'an, 90:12-13)

Furthermore, by freeing slaves, one can atone for the sins he has done such as killing without intention and false oaths.

Even in the practice of slavery itself, Islam commands the masters to deal with their slaves with good manners and prohibits cruelty which is completely different from the existing practice by IS. This was mentioned by the Prophet, "Your friends from among the slaves were made under your control, so anyone who has someone under his power, let him feed him with the kind of food you would eat, and cloth him with the clothes you are wearing and do not bog him down with difficult tasks. If you should command him to do so, then help him (in his performance)." (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Rebuttal to IS

The verse from chapter nine of the Qur'an that is put forth as an argument to practice slavery is one of the few verses that mentions the rulings when dealing with infidels. IS did not include other verses that encourage and extol the act of doing good and being just towards everyone, including the non-Muslims. It is stated in the Qur'an, "Allah does not forbid you, with regards to those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes – from being righteous towards them and acting justly towards them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly." (The Qur'an, 60:8)

The late Shaikh Muhammad Al-Amin Al-Shinqiti in his book *Tafsir Adhwa' Al-Bayan*, explained that the context of the verse in chapter sixty still exists and therefore, is still applicable. The ruling has not been abrogated or replaced contrary to the claims of some scholars. For such claims to be accepted, evidence is required to prove that the ruling for the verse had been abrogated.

The hadith about the End of Times mentioning that a slave woman will bear her own master is just one of the many opinions from the scholars of hadith. There are other interpretations offered in understanding the phrase. Ibn Hajar said that it could refer to disobedient children, indicating that at the End of Times, due to the extensive erosion of morality, children are becoming disrespectful towards their parents that they behave like masters to their parents. This is his preferred opinion because if it is literally understood as slaves bearing the masters, then it is not considered as a sign of prophethood due to its already prevalent existence in the time of the Prophet himself.

As for the narration referring to a group of people entering paradise with chains, Ibn Hajar in explaining the meaning of the narration, laid down a few opinions from various scholars. One of them is the view of Ibn Al-Jauzi who said that those people in chains are those who were originally slaves and converted to Islam willingly, without being forced. There is also a view that Muslims who are slaves to non-Muslims and eventually dying in slavery while holding firmly to their belief will enter paradise.

The point on lustful deeds and wrongdoings by humans has nothing to do with the non-enforcement of the shari'ah rules. It is an obligation for all Muslims to be good, well-mannered and exercise control over his evil desires even in a land where the shari'ah is not implemented.

Dr. Muhammad Ammarah, a renowned Muslim thinker, said in his book *Al-Islam Wa Huquq Al-Insan*, that those with the right mind will understand that Islam clearly removes and eliminates the practice of slavery.

Likewise, there are other scholars who have the same understanding with regards to the abolishment of slavery in Islam like Shaikh Mutawalli Al-Sha`rawi from Egypt, Shaikh Dr. Muhammad Al-`Iwadhi from Kuwait and Dr. Yasir Qadhi a renowned religious scholar from the United States.

Conclusion

IS's call and arguments for the revival of slavery in their territories by quoting from the past scholars do not conform to the true spirit of Islam when viewed in the light of the classical scholars' opinions. Indeed, their views are totally against the view of a majority of the Islamic scholars today. This proves their ignorance and their lack of Islamic knowledge and understanding of its traditions as well as the inability to exercise proper application of Islamic knowledge to the current situation.

Unlike Islam, IS has taken a liberal approach in passing a sentence on humans without looking into the goodwill of Islam holistically. The method they applied in reasoning from Al-Qur'an, hadith and the scholars' opinions are biased and not comprehensive. Shaikh Muhammad bin Nasir Al-Ja`wan in his book *Al-Qital Fi Al-Islam: Ahkamuh Wa Tashri'atuh*, said,

“Whoever claims that Islam encourages and legitimizes slavery, it is actually forbidden unless to those who remain as infidels in the aftermath of the war, and even if that happens, the way to deal with them is by giving them just retribution, not by using them and making slaves out of them.”

¹First published in Mustazah Bahari (2014), “Refuting ISIS Allegations on the Revival of Slavery”, *Eurasia Review*, 11 December. Edited and re-published here with permission.

Islamic State (IS) Supporters' Misreading Of Islam¹

— Mahfuh Haji Halimi and Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah

In February 2019, Singapore authorities arrested 48-year-old Malaysia-based businessman Mohamed Kazali bin Salleh and 28-year-old Hazim Syahmi bin Mahfoot on terrorism-related charges. Kazali had funded a Malaysian Islamic State fighter for his trip to Syria as well as provided him with material assistance there. He was also willing to facilitate the travel of others who wished to fight in Syria.

Kazali's role as a financial and material supporter of IS fighters throws a spotlight on how certain Islamic concepts that outline the conditions under which a Muslim should help another have been misinterpreted by terrorist groups, including IS. The first is about helping one another in furthering virtue and *taqwa* (piety or God-consciousness); the second concerns martyrdom; and the third is over the question of a martyr's intercession for fellow Muslims to enter paradise.

Misreading Islamic doctrines

Kazali had funded Malaysian Akel Zainal for his trip to Syria because he believed Akel was doing something good and acting out of piety. Kazali's support was likely based on an often misconstrued belief among supporters of Islamist militant groups that the assistance provided could earn him a ticket to paradise should Akel be killed and achieve 'martyrdom'.

Firstly, jihadist supporters like Kazali tend to wrongly believe that they are doing a service to Islam by providing the means for others to be involved in the fighting in conflict zones where Muslims are seen to be "persecuted". While the Quran calls on Muslims "to help one another in furthering virtue and God-consciousness" (the Qur'an, 5:2), it also warns them not to "help one another in furthering evil and enmity" (the Qur'an, 5:2). In this light, Kazali's action cannot be considered as promoting righteousness and piety; instead, it constitutes advancing nefarious activities and conflicts.

This is because Akel had joined IS, a designated terrorist organisation which had violated numerous Islamic laws upheld by Muslim scholars and the wider Muslim community. Among others, IS explicitly went against Islamic laws which forbid the killing of innocents and non-combatants, the desecration and destruction of places of worship, the torture of prisoners, the mutilation of corpses and forced conversions. IS also revived slavery and misinterpreted and distorted Islamic teachings and doctrines to suit its religio-political ends.

In doing so, IS revolted against the Muslim community, rulers and scholars who oppose them. IS waged armed and violent opposition against Muslim states for not ruling according to the Sharia and rejected advice by prominent Islamic scholars around the world to stop the fighting. Instead, IS labelled the scholars, rulers and governments as apostates. Using this as an excuse to declare jihad, IS has legitimised terrorising and killing of government and community leaders, members of the armed forces, and public servants, treating them as legitimate targets.

Questionable jihad

Secondly, Kazali would have defined Akel's fight against perceived oppression, persecution and injustice against Islam and Muslims as a jihad. This is supported by his view that the IS fighters were "righteous" individuals defending Muslims in Syria. However, it is essential to underscore that not only Akel but also IS' claim of jihad does not automatically qualify it to be legitimate and in accordance with Islam.

IS has waged jihad in a manner that flouts all guidelines which the Qur'an and Traditions of the Prophet (hadith) have stipulated. IS' so-called jihad has been based on hatred, revenge, bloodlust and military adventurism, resulting in the killing of non-combatants, women and children.

It is clear that IS' motive for jihad has departed from the one prescribed by an authentic Prophetic saying which explains that jihad cannot be waged without having both the right intention and just cause. This is a fundamental issue because in the end, how jihad is waged determines God's acceptance. As such, IS' war is not jihad, and its dead fighters are not martyrs.

Related to jihad is the concept of martyrdom. Linking martyrdom and martyrs predominantly with military actions as IS has done is fundamentally wrong. Individuals like Kazali should have heeded the fact that Prophet Muhammad himself had defined martyrdom and martyrs in an expansive manner. The Prophet included "the believer who suffers a painful death from a variety of debilitating illnesses, from a difficult labour in the case of women, or from falling victim to an unfortunate accident, such as being crushed to death by a falling wall, in addition to falling on the battlefield".

Thirdly, Kazali could have wrongly connected Akel's supposed martyrdom with his own afterlife reward. That is, should Akel be "martyred in battle", Akel's intercession (*shafa'ah*) would allow him (Kazali) to enter paradise. In principle, intercession is only applicable to those who are killed while fighting a legitimate jihad which IS' war is clearly not.

Also, the privilege of intercession demands complete compliance with the prerequisites of martyrdom as discussed earlier. In simple terms, a fighter cannot expect to dwell in paradise and intercede for others when he fights alongside those who engage in atrocities instead of just acts. Hence, the understanding of intercession by jihadist supporters like Kazali is theologically and logically flawed.

Moving forward

To fortify the community against supporting the erroneous beliefs of terrorist groups, it is critical that the religious authorities and scholars develop a clear understanding of the religious doctrines and their proper contextual application. Reading the religious texts and knowing the context should not be devoid of independent reasoning that empowers them with the wisdom to put things in its rightful place.

In this regard, MUIS and the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) are moving in the right direction with their efforts to educate and raise the awareness of the Muslim community, both in the virtual and physical space. For instance, MUIS' MuslimSG smartphone app engages netizens with bite-size contemporary Islamic guidance.

Among its initiatives, RRG recently completed its second run of the Awareness Programme for Youth (APY) that focuses on the practice of Islam in a secular, plural society like Singapore. These outreach strategies are commendable; they could be developed further to reach out to more Muslim segments on the misinterpretation of Islamic concepts by terrorist groups. They can also help anticipate extremist narratives in an ever-changing religious landscape.

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Conclusion - Strategic Counter-Terrorism: The Primacy Of Ideology

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Threat declination

A comprehensive understanding of the ideological threat is the first step to manage the threat of terrorism by groups like the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda.

Unfortunately, most governments understand only the operational dimension and not the ideological dimension. Due to this superficial understanding, counterterrorism officers serving in the military, law enforcement and intelligence services have failed to grasp the exact nature of the threat from the abovementioned groups and, thus, fail to develop and deliver a comprehensive response. To develop a deep understanding of the threat, they should master the ideological and theological underpinnings of the threat.

Today, it is imperative for governments to fight on two fronts - to fight fire with fire and fight fire with water. Governments have armies of war fighters but their capabilities to fight the ideological battles are rudimentary to non-existent. To develop the counter ideology and to promote moderation, governments should work with their religious, educational and Infocomm partners. The source of the threat is ideological, where theology is distorted and history is twisted to fit the political and social agenda of terrorists, extremists and exclusivists. In this context, the government's partnership with Muslim clerics is vital.

The context

After Al-Qaeda attacked America's iconic landmarks on September 11, 2001, the world identified terrorism as a high order threat. However, the Western-led global response to fight terrorism largely focused on the operational dimension. The overwhelming focus of the security forces - military, law enforcement and intelligence - to inhumane acts of violence was kinetic and lethal. It is to catch if not kill terrorists and disrupt their operations and degrade their infrastructure. To this date, there is no global plan to fight exclusivism and extremism - the precursors of terrorism.

Every region and every country should develop regional and national policies, strategies and plans. Like 9/11 was a failure of imagination, most governments did not understand the primacy of ideology and to fight the ideological battle. They had no vision to engage Muslim leaders to counter the ideological threat and promote moderation.

To address the real threat, governments should understand that the fuel of faith is the reservoir exploited by threat entities - movements, groups, networks, cells and individuals. They should transform the educational and religious institutions to support the national security imperative. The restructured secular and religious schools should mentor a new generation of warriors to defend their faith, community and country. Except in a handful of countries, the ideological and information battle is either ignored or neglected. To win the fight a sufficiently large, trained and organised force of networked Muslim clerics and teachers sitting 24/7 in front of their laptops and computers is a must. Otherwise, by focusing solely on deploying military forces and law enforcement authorities, governments will be fighting the old war. In the current war, the centre of gravity of the threat has shifted to cyber space where terrorists, extremists and exclusivists have found safe haven and sanctuary. To fight this new war, both in the physical and the virtual space, governments should invest in cooperating, collaborating and partnering with educational and religious institutions.

The role of clerics

To address the threat from Al-Qaeda and IS, government leaders in Singapore work together with Muslim leaders and reached out to Muslim community especially to their clerics and religious teachers who can influence the community. They understood that the bedrock of countering the threat is for the government to cooperate, collaborate and build partnerships in the religious, educational and digital domains. The Government of Singapore supports a number of partners. Among the most enduring gems were the clerics and teachers working and studying at the Nanyang Technological University, the first university in the world to build a counter-ideology capability.

The counter-ideology program was first developed by Ustaz Dr. Muhammad Haniff Hassan. It then expanded rapidly to counter the rising national, regional and global threat. Located at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, the clerics working as researchers developed the skills and the core competencies to delegitimise terrorist ideology and to promote moderation.

To disrupt the extremist ideological penetration of the religious space, Singapore's clerics working with the counter-terrorism research staff took a tough and courageous stand. To protect the community, society and the country, and to safeguard the cyber space, these clerics played a frontline role in developing national, regional and global networks to impart to the Muslim community the correct understanding of religion coupled with the promotion of moral and humane values. Their rigorous efforts to monitor the seepage of skewed religious ideas and to counter them and promote moderation received wide praise from the Singapore community and national leaders.

Throughout history, whenever their faith was challenged, clerics with mastery of religious knowledge and understanding rose to protect the faith and the faithful. They issued opinions and rulings for the betterment of Muslims and humanity. Trained both in the East and the West, these well-versed clerics in religion, history, sociology and politics were trained to interpret Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions appropriately. Rather than be dogmatic and literalistic, the clerics trained their fellow clerics to interpret Islamic teachings with due consideration of the context where they live in and rebut ideas and concepts advocated by the terrorists and extremists.

Understanding the threat

To counter the ideas subscribed by a segment of Muslims idealising IS, Al-Qaeda and likeminded groups, the competencies do not rest with the military forces, law enforcement authorities and intelligence service. They rest with Muslim leaders, clerics and religious teachers in the community. More than anyone else, the mainstream clerics understood the virulent ideology and knew its harmful effects. They are best suited to counter the narrow and literalist interpretation by radical clerics critical of Islam's progressive role in politics and development. As they do not want their faith tarnished and community poisoned, Muslim clerics and leaders can counter the distortion of religious beliefs and exploitation of practices.

Like most Muslims worldwide, most clerics and teachers are against violence. They can go a step further drawing a line between classical Muslim theology from militant ideology that emerged and evolved during the early, classical, medieval and modern period using their understanding and knowledge to convince others of what is Islamically right and wrong.

IS and Al-Qaeda have succeeded influencing some Muslims to leave their lands of birth, family, and friends, and fight for the "caliphate." They bought into the themes presented by the groups' ideologues and participated in the "caliphate" project to the point of sacrificing their lives. Arguing that participating in building

the “caliphate” is obligatory upon Muslims, IS presented itself as the legitimate Islamic “caliphate” of today. The themes advocated by IS were pledging allegiance to its caliph is obligatory upon all Muslims and joining the group is a legitimate and obligatory jihad for Muslims. IS also states that it is forbidden for Muslims to live in non-Muslim countries under an unIslamic system and under a non-Muslim ruler and it would nullify Muslim’s testimony of faith. IS urges Muslims to either migrate (*hijrah*) to their territory or mount attacks in countries they live in. To facilitate migration to the caliphate territory, IS rules parents’ permission is not necessary. The group also claims that fighting for the caliphate will be a catalyst for the coming of Imam Al-Mahdi and Armageddon. The black banner is used to represent the prophesised army that would fight with Al-Mahdi.

Such outlandish claims can only be effectively rebutted by clerics who are well versed in Islam and Muslim history.

The ideological foundation

IS, Al-Qaeda and likeminded groups project themselves as fighting for Allah, Islam and Muslims. Portraying itself as the champion of the Sunnis, to build its Islamic credentials, and gain recognition as the vanguard of Islam and Muslims, these groups exploit and harness Islamic theology and Muslim history. They promote their hateful ideology against mainstream Islam and non-Muslims. However, most Muslims regard the groups as deviant and heretical. The ideological foundation of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda relies heavily on selected Muslim scholars and thinkers only such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad bin Abd Al-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb.

According to Ustaz Dr Muhammad Haniff Hassan, who pioneers counter-ideology work in Singapore, “The ideology adopted is masked with theological arguments and opinions of past classical scholars which can influence young Muslims with limited religious knowledge.”

The problem of ideology comes also from radical clerics. Although they do not promote violence as propagated by IS, Al-Qaeda and the like, they reject the use of reason and the need for contextualising religious texts. They propagate ultra-conservative and exclusivist strand within Salafi Islam through their publications, mosque sermons and madrasah teachings. The ideas and doctrines of this strand contribute partly to vulnerable Muslims being recruited to violent groups like IS and Al-Qaeda.

Ideological underpinning

Is Islam inherently intolerant and disdainful of other faiths? The type of Islam that arrived from abroad in the last few decades as opposed to the locally entrenched syncretic Islam disrupted both intra and interfaith relations. As ethnicity and religion is close to the hearts of people, political groups usurp ethnicity and religion to mobilise and galvanise people into action. Rather than uniting communities, what is heart wrenching is that they polarise entire communities.

IS, Al-Qaeda and like-minded groups draw their legitimacy from religion and authority from power. By interpreting the religious texts literally and crafting compelling narratives, they call for and justify their attacks against Muslims and non-Muslims. From forced conversions to desecration of the deceased, they transgressed Islamic laws and ethics. As the fighters of Allah (mujahidin), they believe that they are “the best of Allah’s slaves” and have the divine mandate to mount attacks.

In the early 21st century, ethnic and religious violence has emerged as the preeminent threat. All Islamic religious movements seek to preserve and advance a distinctive identity. They do so by selective use of Islamic doctrines. Over time, their doctrines become beliefs and the beliefs become actions. The power of religion should never be underestimated. With religious entrepreneurs becoming assertive, there will be tension, clashes and violence polarising communities and breaking up societies, unless they are checked.

As long as they do not cross the line, by spreading hate, inciting communities to violence, harming social cohesion and national unity, they have the right to function. However, to maintain oversight and regulate, governments should work with the religious leaders and institutions. In the larger national interest of harmony and coexistence, they need to work together to monitor, guide and regulate what religious-men and women preach, teach, and write.

Threat architecture

Al-Qaeda and IS are the most prevalent terrorist and guerrilla movements on planet earth today. Despite being the two most targeted terrorist and guerrilla movements, they have survived and sustained. Although they fought with each other, IS built upon the ideological foundation of Al-Qaeda. Their tenacity and resiliency is due to both their ideology and infrastructure. Having co-opted like-minded groups, IS and Al-Qaeda maintains a global presence. While some have territorial control, others operate underground. Their cyber presence is deep, far reaching, and operates in the surface and deep dark web.

The contours of the threat architecture are both ideational and organisational. The ideological structure is more resilient than the physical structure. The focus of governments should be to dismantle and degrade threat infrastructure which is both physical and ideological. The physical infrastructure is in the form of fighting formations, groups, networks, cells and personalities, their operational bases and safe houses, educational and training facilities, and their front, cover and sympathetic organisations. Their ideological infrastructure is ideologues and propagandists, infiltrated madrasah and mosques, media and communications capabilities, and support groups.

Threat contours

Both IS and Al-Qaeda understand the centrality of ideology. They institutionalised it by building an infrastructure for selected scholars and propagandists to write, produce, disseminate and teach ideological content. While Al-Qaeda relied on their training camps and affiliated madrasahs to produce a generation of indoctrinated fighters, IS developed an entire system to train teachers to raise a generation of children indoctrinated to fight and die. To stop critical thinking, IS removed humanities and social sciences from the system. IS leaders and thinkers develop both the software and hardware - from syllabus, curricula, to lesson plans - to be administered in the system.

The bulk of the leadership of IS, Al-Qaeda and like-minded groups are not theologians. Poorly educated in religion, they use religious scripture and symbols to manipulate Muslim sentiments and emotions. Their version of Islam gives no space for other religions to coexist. They also colour their political and economic grievances and aspirations through hatred and incitement, intimidation and violence. The twisted fantasies of extremists feed into the cycle of terrorism and Islamophobia.

***Takfiri* movement**

The rise of Muslim militancy was gradual. Its origins can be traced back to infighting between the Muslims - a phenomenon that continues to this date. Muslim militancy is a greater threat to Islam and to Muslims more than to non-Muslims. To consolidate power, Muslim militant leaders and their movements excommunicated moderate and mainstream Muslims. This is one by way of *takfir* - a process by which radical Muslims would rule other Muslims they believe are not as devout as them to have become apostates. Often, this is followed by violence against them. The militant movements that excommunicate and fight mainstream Muslims are called the *takfiri* movement.

IS and Al-Qaeda synthesise the ideas of ideologues from Khawarij, Ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad bin Abd Al-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb. The Kharawij sect broke off and targeted members of the Umayyad Caliphate in the seventh century stating that they did not follow the shari'ah as prescribed by Allah. After the Mongol invaders in the 14th century sacked Baghdad, Ibn Taymiyyah condemned and excommunicated the Mongols en masse. Those who failed to abide by Wahhabi-Salafi practices were permitted to be excommunicated by Muhammad bin Abd Al-Wahhab in the 18th century, a practice followed worldwide by Wahhabis against Sufis to this very date. Stating that until Muslims practiced Islam they are not Muslims, Sayyid Qutb in Egypt regarded government leaders and officers as in jahiliyah (pre-Islam) state. Qutb's doctrine became the backbone of the Egyptian terrorist groups that formed the core of Al-Qaeda, the organisation that subsequently gave birth to IS. They demonise politicians, bureaucrats, military, law enforcement, intelligence personnel and other officers who serve the government as taghut - an evil, an idol or Satan. As a result, they fight both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The caliphate – an obligation?

The last caliphate in Turkey, the symbol of Muslim unity was abolished in 1924. After the fall of the Ottoman caliphate, threat groups propagate the idea that establishing an Islamic state is a religious obligation upon all Muslims. Although establishing an Islamic State is not prohibited, it is wrong to frame those who do not participate in the establishment of the Islamic State as sinners because, neither the Qur'an nor the hadith, clearly stipulate such obligation. There is also no consensus amongst scholars. In contrast, the groups present it as an indisputable principle of the Islamic faith that cannot be compromised.

The groups view that an Islamic state cannot be secular because they regard Islam as inseparable from politics. Accordingly, implementing God's laws (shari'ah) in an Islamic State is obligatory, failing which the ruler and population could be regarded as unbelievers. They advocate Islamic rule on earth by opposing man made laws and ideologies of democracy, nationalism, communism, and others.

Us versus them

Islam forbids discord and violence and promotes peace and harmonious living. However, the conduct of the groups is in stark contrast. Central to the groups' ideology is *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'* – a concept regarded as a fundamental aspect of Islamic faith which calls upon Muslims to have allegiance to fellow Muslims only and to hate all non-Muslims.

The groups regard war as the basis of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus, the conflict is a perpetual one. Both on the battlefields and off the battlefields, non-Muslims labelled as infidels (*kafir*) are targeted.

Stating that it is a sin to live under non-Muslim rule, their narratives polarise Muslims *Dar Al-Islam* (domain of peace) and non-Muslims *Dar Al-Harb* (domain of war). Although referenced in Islamic law, such divisions do not appear in either the Qur'an or the Hadith (Prophetic traditions).

Not only do the groups commit acts of violence forbidden by Islam, the groups glorify such acts and cheer those who commit the same. For example, they not only photographed children holding the heads of the decapitated but publicised children executing their captives.

Misinterpretation of jihad

Throughout history, Islam has been harnessed to incite, mobilise and conduct attacks both in violence-wrecked conflict zones and beyond. In contemporary times, Muslim groups have exploited Muslim sentiments to respond to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Arab Spring in 2011, and other political events. Although they are political conflicts, they have been declared as religious battles or “jihad” in order to attract recruits and resources.

IS, Al-Qaeda and like-minded groups manipulate religious scriptures commanding all Muslims to wage holy war (*jihad qital*) as a means to dominate and expand their control of territories. Although jihad could also mean inner struggle, to the groups, it is primarily an armed jihad. They present jihad as an individual obligation (*fard `ayn*), although the Prophet did not issue such ruling, when two of the holiest sites in Islam – the Kaabah in Mecca and Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem were occupied by pagan Arabs and Roman Christians.

Misinterpretation of hijrah

The latest reiteration of jihad followed the declaration of a “caliphate” by IS in June 2014. Under the pretext of restoring the dignity of Islam and might of the Muslims, they call for the obligatory migration to Muslim lands to fight for and build the new “caliphate”.

To take refuge from persecution by the then pagan Mecca's Quraish clan, the first *hijrah* of the Muslims were to Ethiopia, then ruled by a Christian. Although the final *hijrah* denoted the flight of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, the concept is misused by IS, Al-Qaeda and like-minded groups because the Prophet has said that there is no more *hijrah* after the conquest of Mecca.

The characterisation of these groups that it is a sin for Muslims to live with non-Muslims has neither a theological nor historical basis. When Muslims travelled from its heartland of Arabia to other lands, they made adjustments and accommodations and lived with non-Muslims. The groups capitalise on Muslims' lack of understanding of their religion to instil fear that they will be going to hell by remaining in non-Muslim countries. After reaching the IS controlled territory, those who migrated are indoctrinated to a point of removing their other than Muslim identities in order to integrate into IS "caliphate" system.

The doomsday narrative

All Muslims believe in two worlds - they believe that *dunya*, the current world they live in is temporary, and *Akhirah*, the life after death is eternal. Martyrdom is the highest level of death in *dunya*. A special status in the eyes of Allah, Muslims believe martyrs can enter paradise, meet Allah, redeem their sins, bring 70 relatives to heaven, and many other privileges.

Muslims believe *Akhirah* will begin with the End of Times. They also believe Jesus is not dead and he will return before the End of Times. The earth will perish during the Armageddon and everyone will die. Although they will be resurrected in the Hereafter, they will proceed to hell or heaven after the Judgment Day based on their actions.

IS capitalise on this central belief. IS founder, Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi, an Afghan veteran and the leader of Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad group, propagates that Muslims are currently living at the End of Times.

In the "blessed land of greater Syria" (Sham/Levant), IS argues that migrants (*muhajirin*) who break away from their family and tribe gathered to fight a series of battles (*malahim*) and the Grand Battle (*Al-Malhamah Al-Kubra*). Just before the Grand Battle or Armageddon, anti-Christ (*Dajjal*) will lead an evil army and Jesus (Prophet Isa) assisted by Imam Mahdi will lead a Muslim Army. The Muslims believe that the prophesied redeemer of Islam, Al-Mahdi, will rule before the Day of Judgment and before the coming of Jesus.

Through its publications, writings and speeches, IS places it a precursor to Mahdi's Muslim Army fighting the anti-Christ. IS promotes the conflict in Syria as a prelude to the anticipated End of Times (*Yawm Al-Qiyamah*).

Misinterpretation of Ramadan

Muslims believe that good deeds during Ramadan, a blessed month of the Islamic calendar, will lead to a multiplication of the spiritual rewards. To gain

Allah's consciousness and piety, Muslims fast during Ramadan. This belief has been misinterpreted by IS stating that if they attack Islam's enemies during Ramadan, their blessings, praises and rewards from Allah will be multiplied.

Referring to the Battle of Badr, the first battle in Islam, where the Quraish of Mecca was defeated, they call for attacks during the month of Ramadan. They claim that Ramadan is the month of jihad and martyrdom, although the nature of attack differs qualitatively from the original Battle of Badr. Often, IS attacks involve indiscriminate killing of innocent Muslims and civilians.

Bay`at to bind?

To bind all its members to the group, IS capitalise on the concept of *bay`at* (pledge of allegiance) in Islam practiced by the Prophet. IS would designate a person on behalf of its Emir (leader) to administer *bay`at* on those who want to join the group. Once *bay`at* is taken, the members are warned that breaking it would result in divine retribution in order to deter them from leaving and to make them commit to its agenda and leaders.

The pledge states, "I give my allegiance to ... to hear and obey in times of difficulty and comfort, in hardship and ease, and to endure being discriminated against, and not to dispute about rule with those in power, except in case of evident infidelity regarding that which there is a proof from Allah."

With the reality that the Islamic State was violating Islam's precepts by conducting killings, maimings and injuring and destroying property of both Muslims and non-Muslims, anyone who took an oath should have no hesitation or fear whatsoever of breaking the oath.

Black Flag - origins and development

The origin of IS can be traced back to a Jordanian criminal Ahmad Fadeel Al-Nazal Al-Khalayleh alias Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi who was radicalised in prison by Abu Muhammed Al-Maqdisi. After the government of Jordan pardoned them under a general amnesty given to prisoners, Abu Musab travelled to Afghanistan and formed Jund Al-Sham. With support from Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, Abu Musab built and operated a training camp for recruits from the Levant. After the US-led coalition intervened in Afghanistan in 2001, he traveled from Herat through Iran to Khurmal in Iraq.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 created the climate for the rise of IS. In Iraq, Abu Musab named his group, Jama'at Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad. After pledging allegiance on October 17, 2004, to Osama bin Laden, Abu Musab renamed the

group as Al-Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers (Tanzim Qaidat Al-Jihad Fi Bilad Al-Rafidayn). After Abu Musab's death on June 7, 2006, the group he founded changed the name to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS / Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah Fi Al-'Iraq Wa Al-Sham). The name was changed again to the Islamic State (IS) when Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi declared the establishment of the new caliphate on the pulpit of a mosque in Mosul after the capture of the city from Iraqi government forces.

IS manipulated hadiths narrating the emergence of Al-Mahdi's army under Black Banner from Khurasan - the region of northeastern Iran, southern Turkmenistan and northern Afghanistan in today's time, to fight evil forces under the leadership of *Dajjal* (Anti-Christ).

Permissibility of suicide attacks

Until the rise of IS, the terrorist group that mounted the largest number of suicide attacks was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a non-Muslim group. Seeking to create a Tamil state, the LTTE motivation is ultra-Tamil nationalism. The LTTE members are Hindus and Christians. This demonstrated that there is nothing inherently wrong with Muslims who profess Islam or the Islamic faith.

Suicide attacks, both on and off the battlefield, are efficient. They kill, maim, injure, inflict property damage and destruction, and generate fear. In the foreseeable future, the favoured modus operandi of terrorist groups is likely to be suicide attack. To fight the threat of suicide attacks, the religious rationale of the threat groups needs to be countered. The clerics and teachers are the best placed to argue that suicide attacks are repugnant, immoral, abhorrent and prohibited in Islam.

Overreaction

While targeting Al-Qaeda infrastructure in Afghanistan was a right decision, the American invasion of Iraq created an environment for the rise of IS. The most ruthless and terrifying threat movements in recent history, Al-Qaeda and IS practice unspeakable atrocities in the name of Muslims, Islam and Allah. However, both the overreaction of governments and the sustained propaganda by the groups made the ordinary populations disillusioned. As in Iraq and Syria, a segment of the public either justifies forbidden acts or turns a blind eye to terrorist and cruelty and brutality. As such, government response should always be proportionate to the threat in order to win and maintain public support.

Government strategy should be to safeguard all communities especially the Muslim communities. When the groups attack, the ingrained communal reflux should be disrupted. To prevent fragmentation and preempt communal backlashes, it is imperative to build bridges across communities. By creating a harmony framework to unite all communities, the classic tit-for-tat response can be halted. The key is to disrupt the escalation of non communal incidents between Muslims and non-Muslims to a communal incident and communal violence.

How to fight?

IS, Al-Qaeda and like-minded groups are not mainstream Islamic groups. As such, all governments should strive to gain Muslim public support in order to contain, isolate and eliminate support for the groups. Getting Muslim organisations and individuals to condemn and denounce the groups is critical. However, this can be achieved by countering the groups' extremist ideology and promoting moderation understanding of Islam (non-kinetic strategy) together with conventional (kinetic) counter-terrorism strategy.

Often the ideologues survive in western liberal democracies under the cover of freedom of expression. There should be zero tolerance against those who advocate extremism and terrorism. Influential ideologues are much more dangerous than terrorist operatives because they are able to politicise, radicalise and mobilise large numbers of people. They contribute to perpetuating terrorism threat by legitimising and justifying attacks. There should be no safe haven or sanctuary for them either in the virtual or physical space.

Governments have been slow to act against radical clerics and preachers. On and off the battlefield, military forces and law enforcement authorities should restlessly target them.

A robust legal framework is vital in order to either contain, isolate or eliminate them or investigate, charge, prosecute, sentence and rehabilitate them. If they are incarcerated, there should be capabilities to rehabilitate their thinking through ideological, educational, psychological and other interventions. If they are not willing to reform, they should remain incarcerated due to the threat they pose to the community. Their release should be conditional to their transformation.

Securing the religious space

Unless religious space is guarded, the religious space can become a breeding ground for future extremists and terrorists. Well educated and trained clerics with

a broad and wide knowledge should come forward to defend their faith and the faithful. Curriculum of religious schools should be reviewed and reformed to address the extremism problem. Introduction of religious knowledge where they also learn about other faiths is a must. All religious teachers should be trained on promoting moderation, toleration and peaceful coexistence. In addition to screening and certifying teachers, there should be constant vigilance of the internet sites with extremist content run by terrorists and their supporters.

Throughout history, every society is affected by extremists within them. Some of the extremists may turn violent and engage in terrorism. Both hard and soft power are essential to contain, isolate and eliminate this problem.

Except on the battlefields, where the military should be deployed in strength, the capabilities most needed to counter the threat is soft power. In parallel with shaping the religious, educational and virtual space, it is vital to win the hearts and minds by developing the economy through investment and job creation. Off the battlefield, the strategy should be 90 percent community engagement and 10 percent military/law-and-order operations.

The community engagement efforts to influence the communities should be supported by intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Government should strive to keep the communities united. While maintaining Islamic principles, Muslims should understand the reality and adapt to living in contemporary society.

The strategy to break the cycle of violence is for Muslim leaders, especially clerics and Muslim intellectuals to work on six fronts with both society and community.

First, those who are manipulating Islam for personal and political gain must be condemned and denounced. Second, extreme understanding of Islam especially promoted and practiced by radical clerics must be rejected. Third, to promote living in peaceful coexistence despite differences with fellow Muslims and non-Muslims. Fourth, to preserve local Muslim tradition and heritage, not Islam imported from elsewhere. Fifth, to practice mainstream Islam. Sixth, to build bridges of trust across religions. Seventh, to restore friendship with non-Muslims affected by exclusivism, extremism and violence by radical Muslims.

Conclusion

Violence and terrorism, in the name of Islam, have traumatised Muslims and non-Muslims. The darkest periods in Islamic and Muslim history emerged not when non-Muslims fought Muslims. Muslims experienced great tragedies in the face of Muslim rebellion. The battle within Islam threatened Muslims. From time to time, Khawarij (Kharijite), Qaramitah (Qarmatians), Mongols and today's Al-Qaeda, IS and like-minded groups threaten the well-being of Muslims. Islam and Muslim history itself have the answer to this current and future challenge. National and other leaders have to work with Muslim religious and community leaders to bring out the true message of Islam - Peace.

With the global expansion of IS with the defeat of its fighting formations and loss of territorial control in Iraq and Syria, the second generation of clerics cannot rest. With ideologies of violence continuing to aggressively penetrate the religious space, especially harnessing the cyber space, the Islamic religious education especially its institutions, clerics and teachers will have to battle day and night to protect Islam and Muslims.

The Singapore experience will help in two ways. First, for the second generation of clerics to know what the pioneers did to rise to the occasion. Second, the international community can learn why Singapore is relatively more secure.

Short Biography of Editors and Contributors

Editors

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Haniff holds a PhD and M.Sc. in Strategic Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (formerly known as the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies), Nanyang Technological University. He received his early education in Aljunied Islamic School. He then continued his tertiary education at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia, with honours in Shari`ah and Civil law.

He is also active in social activities as a member of the Islamic Religious Council Appeal Board and Asatizah Recognition Board. He writes extensively in Berita Harian (a local Malay newspaper) and has also published articles in The Straits Times. He has published many books in his name, co-authored a monograph and helped publish two books for PERGAS and the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore. He has a personal blog at www.haniff.sg and a blog to counter Al-Qaeda violent ideology at <http://counterideology2.wordpress.com>.

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Rohan Gunaratna is Professor of Security Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at the Nanyang Technology University, Singapore.

He received his Masters in International Peace Studies from the University of Notre Dame in the US where he was Hesburgh Scholar and his doctorate in International Relations from the University of St. Andrews in the UK where he was British Chevening Scholar. A former Senior Fellow at the Combating Terrorism Centre at the United States Military Academy at West Point and at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, he served as an instructor for counter terrorism intervention units. He interviewed terrorists worldwide including in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Gunaratna is the author of “Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror” (University of Columbia Press), co-author of “Three Pillars of Radicalization: Needs, Networks and Narratives” (Oxford University Press) and edited the Insurgency and Terrorism Series of the Imperial College Press, London.

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Firdaus obtained his first degree in Arabic Language and Literature from Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Subsequently he completed his memorization of the Holy Quran in Malaysia before obtaining his Masters in Al-Quran and Prophetic Sayings from the International Islamic University of Malaysia. He then obtained his Doctorate in Islamic Science from International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation. Firdaus Yahya is a member of the Fatwa Committee since 2005.

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Mahfuh completed national school education with GCE A Level before going through an informal, but traditional curriculum, studying under the tutelage of local religious scholars for 15 years before pursuing his first degree.

He obtained a First Class Honours in Islamic Studies from the Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia (UKM) in 2001 and a Masters of Science in Strategic Studies from RSIS, NTU in 2007. He then went on to secure his PhD in Strategic Studies from RSIS, NTU in 2018.

Before joining RSIS, he was a manager at Andalus Corporation (1997 – 2002), and Head of Education and Community Services Department of PERDAUS (Association of Adults Religious Class Student of Singapore) (1996 – 1997).

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Mohamed is Assistant Professor at Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. His areas of research include Islamic Jurisprudence, Islamist ideology, religious extremism, inter-religious relations and rehabilitation of Muslim extremists. Well-versed in Arabic language and Islamic knowledge, Dr Mohamed obtained his Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Islamic Jurisprudence from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt in 2002, Masters of Science (MSc) in International Relations at RSIS, NTU in 2007 and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Arab and Islamic Studies from the University of Exeter, United Kingdom in 2013. Prior to that, he studied Islam and Arabic language at Aljunied Islamic School in Singapore from 1990-1995. Dr Mohamed also graduated with a Specialist Diploma in Counseling Psychology from Academy of Certified Counsellors, Singapore in 2006. Since 2003, Dr Mohamed has been involved in the rehabilitation programme of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) detainees in Singapore. He is the Vice-Chairman and counsellor of the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), a group of voluntary Muslim clerics

who provide religious counselling to detainees arrested for terrorism-related activities. Dr Mohamed has lectured and made numerous presentations locally and abroad; conducted courses and published widely on Islamic issues and issues of religious extremism and terrorist rehabilitation. He has also conducted field trips in many countries including Iraq, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines. Dr Mohamed is also actively involved in community-related works. He is currently Vice-Chairman, Geylang Serai Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circle (IRCC), member of the Syariah Appeal Board of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), associate member of MUIS Fatwa Committee, member of MUIS Wakaf (Endowment) Dispute Resolution Committee and member of Khadijah Mosque Management Board. Dr Mohamed was a former President of the Singaporean Students Welfare Assembly in Cairo, former member of Council for Asian Terrorism Research and former counselor at the Singapore Prison Department. He has also delivered lectures and sermons in many mosques in Singapore.

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Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Islamic Theology from Al-Azhar University, Egypt in 2003. He later obtained his Master in Counselling from Monash University, Australia in 2009. Saiful also read Master of Science in International Relations from RSIS, Nanyang Technological University in 2014. He is a religious counsellor of the Singapore's Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) and has been engaging detained and former terrorists for more than a decade.

His research interest includes Islamism, Salafism, Islamist extremist ideologies, governance and political system in Islam and Islamist terrorist rehabilitation. Saiful had briefed local government agencies namely the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA), the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and the National Security Coordination Secretariat (NSCS). He also had the opportunity to engage the international audience through conferences and workshops such as the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Conference 2018 at Durham University (UK), Global Center - Expert Workshop on Management, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration of VEO (UK), CT workshop held at International Islamic University (Malaysia), SEARCCT Regional Workshop on Countering DAESH Narratives (Malaysia), International Symposium on Terrorism and Transnational Crime (Turkey), CVE Workshop at John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding, Dartmouth College (USA), GCTF Working Group Workshop (USA), GCTF Expert Workshop on Reintegrating Returning FTF (Italy) and UNICRI Yemen Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts Steering Committee (Saudi Arabia).

Mustazah Bahari, Associate Research Fellow, RSIS-NTU

Mustazah attained his Masters in Quranic Sciences and Prophetic Traditions from the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in 2005. He obtained his Bachelor Degree (Honors) in Shariah from Islamic University of Madinah in Saudi Arabia in 2000. Subsequently, he pursued his studies at LEE Community College in Singapore and obtained a diploma in Psychology Counseling. He is an active writer who wrote several books in the field of Fiqh, Hadith and Haj. His book '40 Hadith untuk orang muda' (40 Hadiths for Youth) and '100 Hadith Kompilasi E-AHAD'(Compilation of 100 Hadiths) are still being used as the standard textbook for some mosque madrasah students. In collaboration with PERGAS, he launched another hadith book '40 Hadis Seruan Nabi Kepada Umatnya' (Compilation of 40 Hadiths for Ummah). He co-authored other books i.e '100 Soal Jawab Agama dan Isu-Isu Kontemporari' and 'Operasi Kasino di Singapura dan Implikasinya Terhadap Hukum Pekerjaan dan Muamalah'. He is also a freelance writer for Berita Harian and BeritaMediacorp in Islamic issues. In the field of Hadith, he obtained several ijazah sanad for hadith in Kutub Sittah from Syria. He has been invited to speak about Islamic matters for WARNA, Mediacorp in the Firman & Sabda program. He is an appointed resource person for Syariah Court Singapore. He was appointed as a member and advisor of Shariah Board for AEPim Investments and Securus Partners, which manages Islamic Funds. He is also active in voluntary works. He is a member of the RRG, a Syariah Court Resource Person, a member of Board of Visitors for MINDEF and a member of MUIS Appeal Board.

Syed Huzaifah Alkaff, Associate Research Fellow, RSIS-NTU

Syed Huzaifah Alkaff is an Associate Research Fellow at the Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He was previously with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), at RSIS. He graduated with a Master's Degree in Strategic Studies from RSIS, NTU, and holds a Bachelor of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage and Principles of Jurisprudence from the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM). His research interests include Middle Eastern and North African Politics, Political Islam, Islamic Jurisprudence and Islamist Movements in Southeast Asia.

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