

THE PARTICULAR ROLE OF RELIGION

In Islamic State
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CENTRAL ROLE OF RELIGION IN IS

- Key to their identity – building cohesion inside the organization from different nationalities
- Basis of religious doctrine that AQI (later IS) was to develop tensions with Al Qaeda central – takfiri doctrine – who is an apostate?
- “Caliph” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi uses religious justifications to claim legitimacy of his rule – that he is a member of the Quraysh tribal grouping from whom the Prophet Muhammed also emanated
- IS authentic representative of Sunni Islam – taking the fight to Shi’a Islam – do not forget Shia predominant in Iraq, and dominant Alawite sect also related to Shiism – assisted by Shia Iran and Shia Hezbollah

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IS IS A MINORITY LUNATIC FRINGE IN ISLAM?

- NO! IS is the result of 300 years of discourses on political Islam – each act committed justified by Islamic precedent – e.g. sexual slavery of Yazidi women – women the “right hand possess”, Abd al-Rahman al-Tamimi, senior official of IS’ Sharia committee drew parallels between establishment of the first Islamic state by the Prophet in Medina and IS’ establishment of a state
- Deeply linked to Saudi Wahhabi doctrine
- Abdel Bari Atwan: “IS has not sprung from nowhere. It is the latest evolutionary step in the Salafi-jihadi movement...”
- August 2015, report surfaces IS used mustard gas against the Kurds – Saudi IS-supporting Sheikh – Nasser bin Hamad al-Fahd issues fatwa (religious ruling) justifying this use declaring such weapons permissible to repel infidels

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IS IS A MINORITY FRINGE IN ISLAM?

- Can we see no parallel between IS now and Abd al-Qadir's jihad in North Africa in the 1830s and 1840s who like al-Baghdadi called himself "Commander of the Faithful"?
- Similarly in the late 19th century Muhammed Ahmad called himself the Mahdi (Redeemer) and conducted his own jihad in Sudan
- Ideologically, too, there is little to separate IS from its Islamist antecedents
- Muhammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) famously declared all those who did not conform to his purist vision of Islam to be apostates, worthy of death
- Pakistan's Maulana Abul Ala-Maududi (1903-1979) is perhaps the best exemplar on the use of force to deal with difference. He had this to say:

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- “... force may be used, in fact should be used to prevent people from doing wrong. Non-Muslim countries and cultures cannot be allowed to practice immoral deeds”
- Can policy-makers not witness the ideology of Wahhab and Maududi when IS beheads Coptic Christians, destroy Muslim Sufi shrines or executes members of the Yazidi community?
- The global ambitions of IS, also follows a logical trajectory from a previous generation of Islamists
- Egyptian Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), founder and Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood declared: “It is the nature of Islam to dominate and not to be dominated, to impose its laws on all nations and to extend its power to the entire planet”

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- In similar vein, Maududi stated: “Islam does not want to bring about the revolution in one country or a few countries. It wants to spread it to the entire world.”
- In keeping with the teachings of al-Banna and Maududi, ISIS saw itself as a global caliphate and renamed itself in 2014 as THE Islamic State. The new name suggests two things. First, that there are no geographic boundaries. Second, “the” implies singular, the only Islamic State – one to which all 1.5 billion Muslims owes allegiance to. In other words – one global caliphate for one global ummah (worldwide body of Muslims)
- Al Baghdadi: “Rush O Muslims to your State. Yes, it is your state. Rush, because Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis”.

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IS AND THE END OF DAYS

- IS is quite aware of Islamic tradition and its version of the “End Days” which witnesses the forces of Al-Masih ad-Dajjal (literally the False Messiah) or in Christian terms – the Anti-Christ pitted against the forces of the Mahdi which would pave the way for the second coming of Jesus.
- Significance of the territory under IS control and threatened by IS cannot be under-estimated. According to tradition, the Dajjal is to appear on the way between Iraq and Syria, whilst Jesus is to re-appear to the east of Damascus
- Damascus also has great symbolic significance. It was the capital of the first Ummayyad Caliphate when Muslim Arab Armies overran the Eastern Roman and Sassanid Empires

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IS AND THE END OF DAYS

- IS believes the End of Days is near and they are preparing for the Mahdi and the final battle between good and evil which according to tradition will take place in Syria – Dabiq, also name of their magazine
- These views have resonance with many Muslims: Pew poll suggests that a large number of Muslims across the world believe that the end of days is already here and they will personally witness the final battle between good and evil.
- In Afghanistan, 83% of respondents believe this, the figure for Iraq is 72%, Tunisia 67% and Malaysia 62%.
- Various IS recruits from around the world gave this as the answer to their joining IS in Raqqa

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COUNTDOWN TO ARMAGEDDON

- IS document *A Brief History of the Islamic State Caliphate* refers to 6 phases of their operations which aim to bring about the end of the world
- Phase 6 runs from 2017-2020 where open warfare, including an apocalyptic confrontation with America will begin.
- Their plan is also to conquer Rome by 2020. This conquest of Rome is in line with Islamic prophecy that before the Muslim messiah – the Mahdi – appears that two great Roman cities must be conquered. The first was Constantinople which became a Muslim city – Istanbul. Rome then is next on the agenda
- Tone of the document is uncompromising: “Accept the fact that the caliphate will survive and prosper until it takes over the entire world and beheads every last person that rebels against Allah. This is the bitter truth; swallow it”.

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MUSLIM SUPPORT FOR IS

- IS narrative finds resonance amongst a large number of Muslims worldwide
- As Saladdin Ahmed noted, “*The discourse of the complete rejection of the Other has a long history in both Islamism and Arab nationalism*”.
- Viewing IS as an aberration is extremely problematic given the support their views have amongst large sections of Muslims
- Believing such a fairy tale as the Obama White House would have us believe, obfuscates reality and serves to undermine any serious counter-terrorism effort by drawing a false dichotomy between mainstream Islam and the purported aberration which is IS. In the process, intelligence agencies are blind-sided from the real trajectories of radicalization

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MUSLIM SUPPORT FOR IS

- University of Maryland and World Public Opinion survey found that 76% of Moroccans and 74% of Egyptians want the strict application of shari'a law
- Survey also revealed that 71% of Moroccans and 67% of Egyptians desired this outcome: “To unify all Islamic countries into a single Islamic State or Caliphate”
- Al Jazeera survey of its Arabic viewers: 81% voted `yes' to the question: “Do you support the victories of the Islamic State in your region?”
- Qatari-based Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies found that those Muslims who find IS appealing are drawn to its military achievements, its commitment to Islamic principles, its declaration of an Islamic Caliphate and its willingness to stand up to the West

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MUSLIM SUPPORT FOR IS

- A COMRES Research Institute poll conducted amongst British Muslims found that 27% were sympathetic towards the motives behind the attack on the Charlie Hebdo offices. In other words, more than 1 in 4 British Muslims felt that a person insulting Prophet Muhammed deserved death
- Pew and European Social Surveys covering 42% of the global Muslim population reveal that 17.38% of Muslims worldwide express terror sympathies
- To put it differently 1 in 5 Muslims or 295 million people globally are potential IS recruits
- Saladdin Ahmed states large numbers of Muslims, “...not only excuse murder, torture, rape, sexual enslavement and genocide against minorities, but also consider them religious duties”

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COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (CVE)

- Given the importance of a comprehensive approach to radicalization, Western nations have engaged in various CVE measures
- These include recognizing the link between non-violent extremism and violent extremism (David Cameron), e.g, non-violent Jamaat al Tabligh wal-Da'wa (Society for Propagation and Preaching) which has a quietist and non-political image, playing a crucial role in the radicalization and recruitment of Muslims for the Islamist cause
- US putting out counter-IS videos, e.g highlighting their atrocities
- US and Britain go after members of IS' CyberCaliphate, such as British citizen and hacker Junaid Hussain who played a crucial role in inciting Western Muslims to engage in lone-wolf terror attacks

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CVE – A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

- Arab governments have also gotten their religious leaders to denounce IS as distorting the teachings of Islam, such as Egypt's House of Fatwa
- Muslim scholars also playing a role here
- Ebrahim Moosa calls for a doctrinal overhaul of Islam – one which negates the Salafist rejection of interpretation of scriptural sources
- Aziz Patel argues for the “de-Islamisation of politics” which seeks to neutralize the cultural tendency to enforce Islamic codes of morality and religious adherence in the public domain
- Cawo Abdi: Need to move away from a dogmatic, literal Islam which lends itself to justify decapitations, sexual slavery and war towards one which is regarded as an organic text, a living Qur'an adapting to the needs of particular peoples

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CVE WILL FAIL – TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

- While US engaging in counter-IS messaging with videos on You Tube and the like , the sheer volume of these hardly match the jihadis own prolific outputs
- On the killing of Junaid Hussain of the CyberCaliphate, Raffaello Pantucci of RUSI stated: “Undoubtedly his online skills will be missed by the group, but it is unlikely to dramatically change the pattern of dangerous plots from the group, or the phenomenon of some young Westerners being drawn to fight alongside the group”
- British police complaining the sheer magnitude of the threat and given austerity measures, they do not have the resources to keep bringing websites down, doing long-term investigations etc. French police also complain of the same – re surveillance – Jan/Nov

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CVE WILL FAIL: TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

- Arab states getting their clergy to condemn IS will fail. First, IS narrative intimately grounded in Islamic traditions. Second, clergy in these states deemed to have sold out to authorities, lacking legitimacy
- Need to fix structural conditions like the 39% of Muslim Europeans classified as poor – radical IS narratives appealing
- Danger of creating a moderate but uncritical Islam – de-legitimizing moderate forces
- Resistance to any Islamic reformation – Muslim political elites draw legitimacy from conservative reading of Islamic texts, resistant to reforms that may challenge their position – note the silence regarding Malala Yousufzai's campaign to educate Muslim women – feted in the West, little support in Muslim world

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ON THE ROAD TO ARMAGEDDON

- Things are going to get much worse. Since 9/11, there were 27000 terrorist attacks globally linked to radical Islam demonstrated that radical Islam is on the ascendancy
- IS has sleeper cells in 60 countries and 17 regional affiliates from Indonesia to Nigeria. These include: Afghanistan's Junallah, Pakistan's Terek-e-Khilafat and Jamaat al-Arhrar, Egypt's Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, Algeria's Soldiers of the Caliphate, Libya's Islamic Youth Shura, the Philippines' Abu Sayyaf, Gaza's Beit al-Maqdis, Lebanon's Free Sunnis of Baalbek Brigade, Jordan's Sons of the Calls for Tawhid and Jihad, Indonesia's Ashortu Tauhid and Nigeria's Boko Haram
- Al Qaeda affiliates now increasingly defecting to IS, consolidating IS further.

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ON THE ROAD TO ARMAGEDDON

- Abdel Bari Atwan:

“Numerous former al-Qaeda affiliates have shifted their allegiance to Islamic State, meaning that they have a wide-ranging geographic network – from the Caucasus to Somalia – upon which to build. Regional instability produces the security vacuum in which jihadi groups flourish. There are currently 7 civil wars in progress in Muslim countries – in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and northern Nigeria – and in each country Islamic State is active and growing in strength. Egypt, too, is in danger of descending into chaos ... The nightmare scenario would see all the major jihadi groups uniting under the IS umbrella and sectarian violence escalating into region-wide war”

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ON THE ROAD TO ARMAGEDDON

- IS also growing strong in Western Europe, situation made worse with the flow of Middle East migrants – IS fighters having penetrated Europe
- Situation is dire in West. Between July 2014 and August 2015, there were 32 IS plots targeting the West. They spanned 10 countries and involved 58 individuals from 14 separate nationalities.
- Most worrisome, is that 29% of the individuals involved in the terrorist plots were converts to Islam. Why? Cold War, it is not. Occupy Wall Street, Indignado Movement, Black Lives Matter, Edward Snowden Revelations, loss of faith in status quo, growing austerity – alienation of youth. IS is a vehicle to fight back
- PEGIDA, Donald Trump, Geert Wilders, growing polarization – between Muslims and the proverbial other as well as Shia-Sunni conflict works to add more recruits to IS

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ON THE ROAD TO ARMAGEDDON

- Demographic variables: Muslims to increase by 73% between 2010 and 2050. More kids for more conservative families not good and also happening in the most fragile polities – think here of Sahel (desertification, fight for arable land) or India with its historic tensions between Muslims and Hindus, Myanmar between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims and Israel where conservative Jews and Muslims are having more kids changing the political dynamics
- The world is headed towards a global confrontation between the forces of liberal democracy and those of Islamist extremism
- Al-Baghdadi will have his Armageddon!

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