

Islamic State's discourse: Some repeated patterns

This short briefing reflects on IS' newsletter, *al-Naba'*, and the three magazines *Dābiq*, *Rumīyyah* and *Dār al-Islām*. It intends to shed light on some of the repetitive patterns and themes that occur in IS's utterances, and set them into a broader religious and political context.

Along with the use of armed violence, the IS also has employed the power of discourse through a careful choice of words in several languages, to promote its cause and ideology. Through this tool, the group succeeded not only to convince thousands of Muslims, locals and foreigners, to join its metaphorical 'war for true Islam', but has also arguably succeeded in redistributing power by reshaping existing socio-political, cultural and historical regional features, reconfiguring geographical borders, and disrupting the regional economy.

A critical observation to be made about IS' discourse is the use of the term *Khilāfah*. The equivalent term in Shi'a tradition is *Imāma*, it means a religious state led by the Imam. *Khilāfah* in the Islamic thought is equivalent to empires of the past. Its essence that it exceeds the national borders created in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A Caliph (*Khalīfa*) leads the *Khilāfah*, and this is where the term *Khilāfah* comes from. The term 'Caliph' means the successor of prophet of Islam, Mohammad. IS is the first Jihadi group to declare the establishment of the Caliphate. The term *Khilāfah* was almost absent in the discourse of the other violent Salafi groups, including al-Qaeda who believed in the establishment of the *Khilāfah* as a long-term objective.

The second observation is this creative use of terminologies, titles, and references to others. For example, the group refers to the Syrian regime and the Syrian army as the *Nuṣayrī* regime. *Nuṣayrī* is a religious doctrine that emerged in Iraq in the 9th century founded by Abū Shu'ayb Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr. IS constantly refers to the fatwa of Ibn Taymīyyah, a Salafi scholar, against the *Nuṣayrī* to legitimise their acts of violence against the Syrian regime. The fatwa in justification of their actions against the Syrian regime stated that the *Nuṣayrī* "are more infidel than the Jews and Christians, and their damage to the nation of Muhammad is greater" (Ibn Taymīyyah, 1987, pp. 181-183).

IS uses the term *Rawāfīdh* or *Rāfīdha*, or 'the rejectionists', in order to refer to Iran, the Iranian-backed Shi'a militias 'mobilisation forces', *al-Hashad Al-Sha'bī* in Iraq, as well as the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The term refers to the followers of Imam Ali who rejected to pledge allegiance to Abū Bakr, the first Muslim Caliph.

In the early days of Islam, on the day of Prophet Mohammad's death, Imam Ali and some of his followers were busy with organising the funeral of the Prophet, while the rest of



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the Muslim elite elected Abū Bakr as the Prophet's successor. Ali's followers rejected the authority of the newly elected Caliph. They were called *Rawāfīdh*. Those who accepted the new Caliph were called *Zaydīyya*.

IS calls the Kurdish forces, including the Peshmerga, the PKK, and the other Sunni armed groups as *Murtaddīn*, the apostates, referring them to those Muslims who rejected to pay Zakat to the Caliph, Abū Bakr, in the early years of the Islamic Caliphate.

The House of Saud in Saudi Arabia is referred to as *Aāl Salul*, who was living in the *Madina* and who collaborated with the leaders of Quraysh against prophet Mohammad.

The third observation noted in IS discourse is the group's social and organisational order. IS emphasises the beliefs and the values of Islam among Muslims to achieve social coordination. The group institutionalised these values and beliefs through a system of rules and laws of *Shari'ah* and Quran and the Hadith of Prophet Mohammad.

The fourth observation relates to IS' reference to the Ummah, the Muslim Society or Community. In the Ummah, nationalism does not exist. For the IS, nationalism is *Shirk*, the greatest sin, because from their perspective it calls for worshiping the tyrant, and because nationalism constrains the principle of '*Hijra*', a principle that legitimises Muslims to seek refuge in the land of the Muslims, where *Sharī'ah* is applied.

The fifth observation is that IS uses the language of "we" versus "others" to attain legitimacy and undermine its rivals in the region. It postulates that Jihad for the Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood is "a political Jihad"... Jihad is a tool not a purpose for those groups ... they will cease fighting tyrants the minute they achieve their political goals, IS argues ... Their Jihad is based on the approaches of Hasan al-Bana (the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood) and Said Hawa (Muslim Brotherhood leader in Syria). IS claims that those groups apply the "laws of men" such as democracy, elections, and parliament; therefore, fighting them in a religious "obligation".

The last observation is the triumph of the language of violence in IS' discourse. There is a tedious repetition of the use of violence to achieve *Khilāfah*, which conveys Islam as the religion of the blade, "*Dīn Al-Saif*".

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