

The Role of Apocalyptic Prophecies in ISIS Terrorism

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Received: 11/11/2020

Revised: 23/3/2021

Accepted: 4/5/2021

Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to reveal how ISIS exploits apocalyptic prophecies stated in the Qur'an and hadiths to find new recruits and legitimize its ideology. The study tries to identify how sensitive issues of Islam are misinterpreted to mislead and terrorize young Muslims. It also elucidates how the misuse of innocent verses and hadiths leads to terrorism in the hands of people with fundamentalist beliefs

Approach: All issues of two ISIS magazines, namely, *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, were reviewed, and the related articles were selected, examined and compared with traditional Sunni Islam's eschatology. In addition to the content analysis of the two magazines entitled with the apocalyptic names, previously written literature was also examined for this study

Findings: ISIS used eschatology to persuade Muslim youth to immigrate to its so-called lands and fight for its lofty cause. The terrorist group tried to realize this goal mainly by reinterpreting prophetic promises of Islam for its ends in the media. The analysis shows that ISIS did not serve religion but benefited its radical ideology. However, time has shown that ISIS's brutal cause was far from the Islamic faith, as none of ISIS's apocalyptic prophecies came true

Originality: While there are many studies about ISIS, few or none of them analyzed how the movement deceived people with apocalyptic ideas, which need to be considered during an examination of the conflicts in the Middle East, where states (e.g., Israel) or regimes (e.g., Iran) are founded on the basis of apocalyptic prophecies. ISIS was another trial that failed. By not examining the core of ISIS ideology stemming from the distorted interpretation of Islamic prophecies, gray zones would be left in the literature. This study makes that zone clearer

Keywords: Apocalypse; Terrorism; Religion; ISIS; Politics

Cite this article as: İbrahim Karataş, "The Role of Apocalyptic Prophecies in ISIS Terrorism", *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies*, Volume 39, Issue 1, (2021).

<https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2021.0292>

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دور النبوءات في إرهاب داعش

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تاريخ استلام البحث: ٢٠٢٠/١١/١١ تاريخ تحكيمه: ٢٠٢٠/٣/٢٣ تاريخ قبوله للنشر: ٢٠٢١/٥/٤

ملخص البحث

الأهداف: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن كيفية استغلال داعش للنبوءات الواردة في القرآن والأحاديث؛ للعثور على مجندين جدد ولإضفاء الشرعية على أيديولوجيتها. تحاول الدراسة التعرف على كيفية إساءة تفسير القضايا الحساسة للإسلام لتضليل وترهيب الشباب المسلم. كما أنها تسعى إلى إيضاح صلة الاستخدام الخاطيء للآيات والأحاديث النبوية البريئة بواسطة الأصوليين بالإرهاب.

المنهجية: تمت مراجعة جميع أعداد مجلتين لداعش، وهما دابق ورومية، وتم اختيار المقالات المتعلقة بها وفحصها ومقارنتها مع الأخرى السنية التقليدية. بالإضافة إلى تحليل محتويات المجلات المعنونة بأسماء النبوءات، كما تم فحص الأدبيات السابقة لهذه الدراسة.

النتائج: استخدمت داعش الأخرى لإقناع الشباب المسلم بالهجرة إلى ما يسمى بأراضيه والقتال من أجل قضيته السامية. حاولت الجماعة الإرهابية تحقيق هذا الهدف بشكل رئيسي من خلال إعادة تفسير الوعود النبوية للإسلام في وسائل الإعلام. يُظهر التحليل أن داعش لم تخدم الدين بل خدم أيديولوجيته المتطرفة. ومع ذلك، فقد أظهر الوقت أن القضية الوحشية لداعش كانت بعيدة كل البعد عن الدين الإسلامي حيث لم تتحقق أي من نبوءات داعش المروعة.

أصالة البحث: على الرغم من وجود العديد من الدراسات حول داعش، إلا أن القليل منها، أو أيًا منها، لم يحلل كيف ضلل داعش الأشخاص بالنبوءات، التي يجب أخذها في الاعتبار أثناء دراسة النزاعات في الشرق الأوسط؛ حيث تم تأسيس كيانات (مثل إسرائيل)، أو أنظمة (مثل إيران) على أساس نبوءات الرؤيا. داعش كانت تجربة أخرى باءت بالفشل. إن عدم ذكر جوهر أيديولوجية داعش النابعة من النبوءات الإسلامية المحرف تأويلها من شأنه أن يترك مناطق رمادية في الدراسات العلمية. وهذه الدراسة ستزيل ذلك اللبس.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النبوءات، الإرهاب، الدين، داعش، السياسة

للاقتباس: إبراهيم كارتاش، «دور النبوءات في إرهاب داعش»، مجلة كلية الشريعة والدراسات الإسلامية، المجلد ٣٩، العدد ١، ٢٠٢١.

<https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2021.0292>

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1. Introduction

Seen as a type of moral power by Ferguson, religion is occasionally used by states in their domestic and international politics to realize their goals.¹ The degree of religion in politics may change from politician to politician and regime to regime, but there are some traces of religious belief in the policies of many political leaders and states. Sometimes a state or a policymaker may have nothing to do with religion, but if adversaries use faith as a tool, statesmen may also have to consider that tool as a countermeasure. For example, France, a secular state, cannot neglect the motives of Iranian and Saudi regimes when conducting relations with them. In terms of international politics, religion rose in the 20th (and 21st) century after having fallen under the influence of modernization in the 18th and 19th centuries.² Kazarian argues that it was never entirely out of the picture.³ In contrast, Sandal and James argue that, theoretically, religion was/is still not a variable in international relations based on IR theories.⁴

On the other hand, religion-based politics wield some unusual, as yet unfulfilled, miraculous and apocalyptic Biblical prophecies whose sources are the Old Testament and the New Testament. There also prophecies in *Hadiths* of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). While religion has a common role in state politics, prophetic expectations are more appealing among people, especially terrorist organizations. Regionally, the Middle East is unrivaled in terms of religion's role in domestic and foreign politics.⁵ From the view of the people of the faith, Muslims are waiting for the second coming of Prophet Isa (Jesus) and Mahdi (eschatological savior of Islam), while Jews assume their return to Palestine as apocalyptic since they claim it was promised by God to them. On the other hand, Evangelical Christians expect Jesus' second coming in the Middle East. Nonstate actors such as terrorist groups wield religion in their fundamentalist causes perhaps more than any other stakeholders. This study asserts that apocalyptic prophecies are one of the most effective tools utilized by terrorist groups in the region. Openly, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (hereafter ISIS) used/uses eschatology to persuade Muslim youth to immigrate to its lands and fight for its lofty cause. The terrorist group tried to realize this goal mainly through the media. In addition to the active use of social media, ISIS accessed its worldwide sympathizers and the global audience via prominent magazines such as *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah*, *Al-Naba*, and *Konstantiniyye*. Leaving aside the analysis of the general character of ISIS's information warfare, this study reviews *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* magazines to reveal how the group interpreted Islamic apocalypticism for its own goals and benefited from it.

1 N. Ferguson, *Think Again: Power*, 2009. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/03/think-again-power/> (accessed March 22 2019).

2 Y. Xu, Religion and International Relations in the Age of Globalization. *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* 6(4), 2012, 19-50.

3 N. Kazarian, *What is the Future of Religion in International Affairs?* (Washington: IRIS, 2015), 1.

4 N. A. Sandal, and P. James, Religion and International Relations Theory: Towards a Mutual Understanding. *European Journal of International Relations* 17(3), 2017, 3-25.

5 N. Uslu, Türkiye'nin Yeni Ortadoğu Yaklaşımı. *Bilig* 52(Kış), 2010, 99-132.

2. Religion, Apocalypses and Politics

Religion is influential in almost any individual's private life as well as in society. It creates communities such as Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists. In addition, it can also divide people of the same faith into subcommunities through sects, which have different interpretations of the same religion. This divisive aspect may cause conflicts between societies, or lead to rivalries among its members. Like human beings, states as corporate actors might be affected by religious beliefs as well. For instance, Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran determine their domestic and international politics according to Islamic law called *Sharia*. Israelis are also in the process of making a purely Jewish state through new legislation. In the case of Christianity, Scandinavian countries emphasize in their constitutions that they embrace "Lutheran Protestant" Christianity. According to their constitutions, a person cannot be a cabinet member unless he is a Lutheran Protestant. In addition to domestic politics, religion is a variable in a state's foreign policy, although its impact may vary from state to state¹ As an example of how people push politicians to act according to their faith, surveys conducted in the United States show that pious Christians (particularly Evangelists) support U.S. military aid to Israel and intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq²

Religion-based clashes changed their character at the beginning of the 21st century, literally with the September 11 attacks. The difference between the religious clashes of today and previous religious wars is that there are more nonstate actors, namely, terrorist groups that are the self-declared saviors and guardians of religion(s). What motivates terrorist organizations is both the idea of protecting the honor of their faith and supernatural beliefs. According to Juergensmeyer, the self-sacrifice/martyrdom that defends the faith and promotes allegiance exists in all religions³ Dying for the faith is sacred and a type of worship. Such reasonings are more vivid in terrorist organizations, especially in those attributing their violence to Islam. From Al-Qaeda to ISIS, such organizations fight against both Muslim countries and non-Muslim countries. Several reasons can briefly be listed for their terrorism. First, it is a kind of resistance to oppressive and corrupt dictatorships that do not share power with other groups⁴ Second, external factors such as invasions led to the emergence of such groups. Third, inherent radicalism in some Islamic creeds, such as Wahhabism, boosts enmity among Muslims⁵ Finally, other secondary reasons, such as easy access to weapons, discrimination

1 C. Warner and S. Walker, Thinking about the Role of Religion in Foreign Policy: A Framework for Analysis. *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, 2011, 113–135.

2 I. Petrikova, Religion and Foreign-Policy Views: Are Religious People More Altruistic and/Or More Militant? *International Political Science Review*, 2018, 1–23. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512118756242>.

3 M. Juergensmeyer, Sacrifice and cosmic war. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 3(3), 2007, 101–117. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546559108427118>.

4 N. Melvin, Islam, Conflict and Terrorism, 2005. Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/YB06%20123%2002C.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2020).

5 N. Tampio, Promoting Critical Islam: Controversy, Civil Society, Revolution. *Politics and Religion*, 6(04), 2013, 823–843.

against migrants in Western countries, rising nationalism and anti-Islamic campaigns, might also foment religious terrorism.

Eschatology, one of the core topics of this study, while not a basic cause of terrorism, is a strong driving force inherent to almost all religions. It is a gait for terrorist groups to feed their members and sympathizers. However, it should be noted that apocalyptic prophecies are not only the focus of evil groups but also the majority of believers. What these groups do differently is reinterpret them for their malicious causes. For example, American Evangelists support the Israeli state due to verses such as Genesis 12:2-3 (I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee). They claim that God will bless America only if America blesses Jews. According to Salleh and Zakariya, their concern about the future of Israel is allegedly based on more than that of Jewish lobbying groups such as AIPAC and ADL.¹ They assume that the establishment of the State of Israel is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy.² According to Evangelist dispensationalist theology, humanity is living in the last dispensation of the Book of Revelation, meaning we live in end-times.³ Hence, Evangelical Christians claim that Jesus will return to the earth for the second time if certain prophecies, such as the return of Jews to the promised lands, the foundation of Israel and the preaching of the Bible to the whole world, come true. Then, the Armageddon war will take place at the plains of Meggido Mountain in Northern Israel. Jesus will defeat the Anti-Christ during the war, in which each side will lose 200 million soldiers, including nine million Jews.⁴ Only 144,000 Jews will acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah.⁵

Like the Bible, the Torah also contains many apocalypses and promises of God. In the Torah, Moses says that when the Jews return to God with all their soul and heart, the curse will be undone, and they will return to their land.⁶ This land is called the “promised land” in many parts of the Old Testament, such as Genesis and Daniel. For example, in Genesis, the borders of promised lands are clearly stated as stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates.⁷ According to the verses of Genesis, these lands were promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In addition to the lands, the Jews are deemed “chosen people”, meaning that they are superior to other people. As another example, a

1 M. A. Salleh, and H. Zakariya, The American Evangelical Christians and the U.S. Middle East policy: A case study of the Christians United for Israel (CUFI). *Intellectual Discourse* 20(2), 2012, 139-163.

2 Y. Malachy, *American fundamentalism and Israel: The relation of fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1978), 43.

3 M. R. Haija, The Armageddon Lobby: Dispensationalist Christian Zionism and The Shaping of Us Policy Towards Israel-Palestine. *Holy Land Studies* 5(1), 2006, 75-95.

4 O. Cide, Ortadoğu’da Göçü Tetikleyen Savaşların Nedeni Olarak Din. *İlahiyat Akademi Dergisi* 3(4), 2016, 149-158.

5 R. R. Stockton, Christian Zionism: Prophecy and Public Opinion. *Middle East Journal* 41(2), 1987, 234-253.

6 S. R. Hewitt, *The Jewish Messiah and the End of Days*, 2013. Available at: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jewish-messiah-and-the-end-of-days_b_2332919?guccounter=1 (accessed July 7, 2019).

7 Bible, Genesis, 15: 18-19.

verse from the Bible says, “Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me from all the peoples, for all the earth is mine”¹ Other verses claim that Jews are the chosen people provided that they are faithful to Yahweh. Therefore, according to those who believe in the Torah’s promises, the world will see the chosen people living in promised lands.

On the other hand, Shiite doctrine posits that prophethood continues after Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through the Imams, eleven of whom performed their duty, and the invisible one, Imam Mahdi, is yet to reappear² The Twelfth Imam was allegedly hidden by God in 874 and last seen in 941. Since then, the Shiites have been waiting for the hidden Imam to come back and endure justice and equity together with Jesus during his second coming. Mahdi will fight Sufyan (a Muslim tyrant), Dajjal (Anti-Christ), and, interestingly, the Sunnis. According to Shia Islam, the Sunnis are usurpers of real Islam, and they must be fought³ Such fatalities were given immediately after the Shiite last imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, disappeared, and the claim was narrated by current Ayatollahs as well.⁴ Thus, Mahdi will take vengeance from Sunnis, which prevents Muhammad’s (pbuh) family from ruling and will establish a messianic state across the world⁵ Indeed, not only Shiite apocalyptic literature but also the Shiites in real life distance themselves from the Sunnis. According to Shia theology, while Sunnis are supposedly the “near enemy”, Christians and Jews are the “far enemy”. Historically, Shiites rarely fought non-Muslims as long as their lands were not invaded by them. Finally, Sunni Islam also has various prophecies, but they will be used for comparison of ISIS versions below since the group also claims to be a (Salafi) Sunni organization. Salafis “aim at a return to what they believe was the golden age of Islam, where the faith was correctly understood and practiced”⁶

3. ISIS vs. Apocalypse

ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) was founded by Abu Mus’ab Al-Zarqawi, an Al-Qaeda leader, in Iraq in 2006. Its attacks were not so conspicuous until it conquered the city of Mosul in 2014. It then occupied territories in Syria and controlled a vast area that stretched from Mosul to Aleppo. Despite being a terrorist group, it was able to establish a state structure headed by Abu Bakr

1 Bible, Exodus, 19: 5.

2 S. Mousavi, *The Twelfth One: Imam Mahdi (PBUH) in the Bible, Quran, Islam and Other Religions ad The Promised Savior (and His Enemies and Friends)*, 2017. Available at: <https://en.calameo.com/read/00544387085a660b5b776> (accessed June 23, 2019).

3 A. Moghadam, *The Shi’i Perception of Jihad*, 2003. Available at: <http://insct.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Moghadam-Assaf.Shia-Perception-of-Jihad.pdf> (accessed June 20, 2019).

4 (Grand Ayatollah) V. Khorasani, *His Holiness Leh Explicitly Warns Those Who Have Distorted His Words* (See Persian version in website), February 22, 2016. Available at: <http://bit.do/fP7Xp> (accessed March 29, 2021).

5 D. Cook, Messianism in the Shiite Crescent. *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 11, 2011, 91-103.

6 H.S. Gregg, Three Theories of Religious Activism and Violence: Social Movements, Fundamentalists, and Apocalyptic Warriors. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28(2), 2014, 338–360. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.918879>.

Al Baghdadi, a.k.a. Caliph Ibrahim¹ After being effective in Iraq and Syria for several years, it was defeated by a U.S.-led coalition, the Iraqi army, the Turkish army and smaller groups supported by the U.S. and Iran on various fronts² However, although ISIS was defeated and its leader was killed by American forces, the group is still active in several countries, such as Afghanistan, Yemen, and Egypt. ISIS is a Sunni-Salafi group that adheres to Wahhabism³ It has a fundamentalist ideology that sees other Muslim groups as apostates. In addition, it claims to fight Romans (Christians/the West) and assumes this war as a religious duty.

It should be noted that apocalypses exist in all religions and sects. However, even if they might be correct, it would not be possible to verify their accuracy unless they come true. ISIS apocalypses are the same as those of Sunni Islam and quite opposite to those of Shia Islam. According to the Sunni creed, Jesus will return to the world at the end of days because when he was about to be crucified by Jews, according to the Qur'an, he was raised by God to himself. Thus, he was not killed but rather appeared to the Jews as if he had been crucified. The reality was that they had killed another person, but were unaware of it. According to Islamic thought, Jesus will return to the world at the end of days from the second and third layers of the sky and first purify Christianity. Then, he will live as a Muslim and make his community convert to Islam. While doing so, Mahdi will collaborate with him to fight against atheists and kill Dajjal (Anti-Christ). He will also renew and adjust Islam and bring justice to the world. In addition, he will not return as an incumbent prophet but will live according to Islamic order. When he is invited to be the Imam by Mahdi during prayer time, he will not accept and pray behind Mahdi, a sign of his allegiance to Islam⁴ Jesus' duties will be to clear Christianity from superstitions, e.g., abandoning the trinity and introducing monotheism; bringing peace to the world; destroying Dajjal (Anti-Christ) and his thoughts; and killing Dajjal's Jewish followers in the War.

4. Analysis of the Apocalyptic Content of Dabiq and Rumiya

ISIS utilizes Islamic apocalypses to attract Muslims across the world. It tries to legitimize itself by self-interpreting Qur'anic verses and *hadiths* (Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) sayings) according to its ideology. For example, Jacoby counted 1,235 (out of 6,666) verses mentioned only in *Dabiq*⁵ Besides *Dabiq*, all other ISIS magazines are from objectivity and quite biased, justifying El-Khatib's

1 E. Koç, Ortadoğu Siyasetinde İran ve Suudi Arabistan İlişkileri (Bursa: Dora Yayınları, 2020), 295.

2 E. Koç, İran-Lübnan İlişkilerinin Kimliksel Bağlamda Analizi, In Biz ve Ötekiler: Uluslararası İlişkilerde Kimlik Perspektifinden Dış Politika, G. Çapar (Ed.), pp. 165-184 (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2020), 173.

3 M. Bozorgmehr, Roots of Violence by ISIS, An Analysis on Beliefs. *International Journal of Social Science Studies* 6(3), 2018, 1-8.

4 Sorularla İslamiyet, Hz. İsa, Kıyamet Kopmadan İnce Tekrar Yeryüzüne İncecek Mi?, 2007. Available at: <https://sorularlaislamiet.com/hz-isa-kiyamet-kopmadan-once-tekrar-yeryuzune-incecek-mi> (accessed August 28, 2019).

5 T. Jacoby, Islam and the Islamic State's Magazine, *Dabiq. Politics and Religion*, 2018, 1-23. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1755048318000561>.

arguments in his concerning article¹ :

4.1 *Dabiq*

Beginning with the content analysis of *Dabiq*, its apocalyptic discourse starts with the second page of each issue where the following saying of Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi's is written: "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*". ISIS used al-Zarqawi's words to call its followers and other Muslims to fight in a war that would take place in the Dabiq town of Aleppo² As Zarqawi was killed in 2006, ISIS seemed to believe that his prophecy came true as they were already controlling a large territory in Syria at the time when *Dabiq* began to be published. On the other hand, all issues of *Rumiyah* include the words of Zarqawi's successor Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir's: "O muwahhidin, rejoice, for by Allah, we will not rest from our *jihād* except beneath the olive trees of Rumiyah (Rome)". This change shows that while *Dabiq* was replaced by *Rumiyah*, Zarqawi's prophetic words were changed with those of his successor. In *Rumiyah*, the targeted town is no longer Dabiq but Rome. Thus, there is an adjustment of prophecies due to the nonmaterialization of the first one.

According to the arguments in both magazines, ISIS believes and tries to convince people that its existence is already a prophecy and that it is the chosen community that will launch apocalyptic wars and glorify Muslims. To persuade the Muslim audience, it hijacks Islamic terms such as *hijrah* (migration), *jama'ah* (congregation), *bay'at* (allegiance) and *jihād* (struggling/fighting). For example, in the third issue of *Dabiq*, ISIS claims that *muhajirin* (migrants) will break off from their families and will gather in *Sham* (Damascus) and finally conquer *Baitul Maqdis* (Jerusalem)³ In addition, an article titled "The Concept of Imamah Is from the Millah of Ibrahim" in the first issue of *Dabiq* explains why Muslims must gather around Caliph Ibrahim⁴ The article argues that the Muslim nation should be united behind a single *Imam* (leader) to guard religion and implement *Shari'ah*. To strengthen its claim, the article likens Caliph Ibrahim (Al-Baghdadi) to the prophet Abraham by quoting Al-Baqarah's 124th verse that reads, "And (remember) when Ibrahim was tried by his Lord with certain words (i.e., commands) and he fulfilled them. (Allah) said, 'Indeed, I will make you a leader for mankind.' (Ibrahim) pleaded, 'And also (leaders) from my offspring.' (Allah) said, 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers'". *Dabiq* argues that, like Prophet Abraham, Caliph Ibrahim was also separated from his people, and he had to migrate to other places. It then openly states that "Through the course of this discussion, we can see that the Islamic State is the entity that most

1 A. El-Khatib, "The Journal of Quranic Studies published by SOAS London University The Question of Objectivity and Prejudice", *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies*, vol.38 (1), 2020, pp.91-120.

2 E. El-Badawy, *Inside the Jihadi Mind Understanding Ideology and Propaganda* (London: Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2015), 30.

3 *Dabiq*, No.3, pp. 8-35.

4 *Dabiq*, No.1, p. 23; Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi was born as Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai.

emulates the millah of Ibrahim with regards to imamah (leadership) in the areas where it exists”¹ It then reinforces its claim by quoting a verse of *surat* (chapter) Al-Baqarah that states:

“And who would turn away from the religion of Ibrahim except one who makes a fool of himself. Truly, we chose him in this world, and indeed in the Hereafter he will be among the righteous” and self-interprets it as such; “And upon every scholar who calls to, or writes about, the obligation to follow the millah of Ibrahim (Abraham’s nation) is to not detest the imamah of The Islamic State today, and do not seek to undermine it or destroy it”²

Therefore, according to *Dabiq*, the ISIS nation is similar to Abraham’s nation, and the self-declared Caliph Ibrahim has the same destiny and duty as Prophet Abraham.

In addition to claiming to be the chosen apocalyptic nation, ISIS is also striving to form that nation. Therefore, it calls on Muslims to emigrate (*hijrah*) to Iraq and Syria. To that end, *Dabiq* quotes Al-Baghdadi, who calls on scholars, Islamic jurisprudence, doctors, people with military and administrative experience, judges, and so on. He also stresses that migration to ISIS lands is obligatory for all Muslims³ What if people cannot immigrate? They should declare their allegiance (*bay’at*) to Caliph Ibrahim⁴ Migration is important because, as quoted from Ibn Taymiyyah, “Islam at the end of times will be more manifest in Sham...So the best of the people on the earth at the end of times will be those who keep to the land of Ibrahim’s hijrah, which is Sham”⁵ In addition, today’s migration is argued to resemble that of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The authors of the magazines again refer to *hadiths* and verses to support their claim. For example, in *Dabiq*’s fourth issue, it shares the *hadith* “I order you with five things that Allah ordered me with: jama’ah, sam’ (listening), ta’ah, hijrah, and *jihad*”⁶ In *Rumiyah*’s first issue, they support their argument with a verse that reads: “Indeed, those who have believed and performed hijrah and fought with their wealth and lives in the cause of Allah and those who gave shelter and support - they are allies of one another. However, those who believed and did not perform hijrah - for you there is no guardianship of them until they perform hijrah”⁷ In addition to migration, congregation (*jama’ah*) is advised (and enforced) on Muslims so that the nation can be created. Again, it tries to convince people why congregation under the rule of their Caliph is a necessity through *hadiths* and verses. For example, the *hadith* of “Stick to the jama’ah (congregation) of the Muslims and their imam.’ I said, ‘And if they have neither a jama’ah nor an imam?’ He said, ‘Then, avoid every group, even if you have to bite onto the root of

1 Dabiq, No.1, p. 27.

2 Qur’an, 2: 130.

3 Dabiq, No.1, p. 11.

4 Dabiq, No.2, p. 4.

5 Dabiq, No.3, p. 10.

6 Dabiq, No.4, p. 3; See Al-Tirmidhi, *Jami At-Tirmidhi*, (English Version), (New York: 2007), Hadith no: 2863, vol. 5, p. 206.

7 Rumiyah, No. 1, p. 8; Qur’an, 8: 72.

a tree until death reaches you while you're in that condition”¹ Finally, *jihad* is an important subject used for both attracting people and proving that ISIS is the true nation (millah) of the end days. ISIS announces that *jihad* is an obligatory work for Muslims and calls on them to immigrate to its lands to perform *jihad* for its cause. It argues that abandoning *jihad* is hypocrisy² It quotes many verses and *hadiths* that ask Muslims to fight in the name of Allah³ *Jihad* is necessary for ISIS because, in apocalyptic terms, it is the only way to conquer Dabiq, Konstantiyye, Rumiyyah and Baitul Maqdis. In addition, *jihad* is used to legitimize the terrorist organization's mass murders⁴ (Celso, 2014). However, it should be noted that *jihad* is more than fighting in Islam. Perhaps the correct interpretation of *jihad* might be “to struggle” or “to strive”. For example, Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) says in a *hadith* that “The real *jihad* is to struggle with your nafs (evil side of your ego)”⁵ There is also another unverified *hadith* that considers fighting as the “small *jihad*” and struggling for being a good person as the “big *jihad*”. Overall, *jihad* includes fighting, but it is not only about that.

In addition to ISIS's efforts to justify that it is a prophetic group, the terrorist organization benefited from Islamic eschatology, which it self-interpreted for its goals to legitimize its war. While the apocalyptic language is felt in all articles of *Dabiq* and *Rumiyyah* and there are a large number of mentions, three articles (one in *Dabiq*'s first issue, the other in the 4th issue and the final one in *Rumiyyah*'s third issue) are exclusively dedicated to this subject. The first issue of *Dabiq* begins with the following long *hadith*:

“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 al-Madinah of the best people on the earth at that time will leave for them. When they line up in ranks, the Romans will say, ‘Leave us and those who were taken as prisoners from among 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 will be killed; they will be the best martyrs with Allah. 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 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 at Sham he comes out. Then, while they are preparing for battles and filling their ranks, the prayer is called. So ‘Isa Ibn Maryam (Alayhi-Salam) will descend and lead them. When the enemy of Allah sees him, he will melt as salt melts in water. If he were

1 Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, (English Version), (New York: 2007), Hadith number 3979, vol. 5, p. 179.

2 *Dabiq*, No.1, p. 26.

3 *Dabiq*, No. 3, p. 31; *Dabiq*, No.4, p. 3; *Rumiyyah*, No. 3, p. 32; *Dabiq*, No. 12; *Dabiq*, No.13.

4 A. N., Celso, *Dabiq: IS's Apocalyptic 21st Century Jihadist Manifesto*. *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs* 2(4), 2014.

5 Al-Tirmidhi, *Jami At-Tirmidhi*, (English Version), (New York: 2007), Hadith no: 1621, vol. 3, p. 380.

to leave him, he would melt until he perished, but he kills him with his hand, and then shows them his blood upon his spear”¹

This *hadith* encompasses almost the entire Islamic apocalypse regarding the Armageddon War, the second coming of Prophet Jesus and the Anti-Christ. The war that is supposed to happen in Dabiq is called Al-Malhamah Al-Kubra (the Great War). Malhamah means “too much meat”, which refers to too many casualties at the end of the war. ISIS claims that it controls the lands where this war will take place and calls on foreigners to join its militants to fight on the correct side against the enemies of God. In addition to the above *hadith*, some other *hadiths* are laid down in an article named “Sham is the Land of Malahim”. While in one *hadith* it says that the victorious group will be in Sham together with the caliph during the end of times, another one encourages people to go to Sham since God will look after the people of this region² The article also quotes Ibn Taymiyyah’s interpretations regarding the above and other related *hadiths*.

In *Dabiq*’s fourth issue, an article titled “Reflections on the Final Crusade” posts new *hadiths* under the title of “Prophecies Regarding Roman Crusaders”. One of the newly posted *hadiths* briefly says that Muslims will have a treaty of security with Romans to fight a common enemy³ Then, Romans will betray the treaty and gather for the Malhamah (the Great War/Armageddon War). They will come for Muslims with eighty banners, under each of which there will be twelve thousand people⁴ The anonymous author of the article claims that Muslims and Romans will fight against the enemy not together, but separately. This comment is probably made to demonize Christians and deny any likelihood of cooperation since accepting joint action would delegitimize their murders of Christians. In another *hadith*, the fierceness of the war is described⁵ According to the *hadith*, the fight will be so violent that “even if a bird were to pass their flanks, it would fall dead before reaching the end of them”. The *hadith* says that 99% percent of warriors will be killed at the end of the war. The article argues that this war (Al-Malhamah al-Kubra) will take place before the descent of the Messiah and the emergence of Dajjal (Anti-Christ). According to the article, this battle will end the era of Romans, and Muslims will then conquer Constantinople and Rome.

In addition to the Prophet’s prophecies, the article shares the views of the ISIS founders. While Zarqawi’s words written on the second page of each *Dabiq* issue are repeated, the following words of Zarqawi’s deceased successor, Abu Hamzah Al-Muhajir, are quoted: “We are the army that will pass on the banner to the slave of Allah the Mahdi. If the first of us is killed, then the last of us will pass

1 Dabiq, No.1, p. 26; See Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, (English Version), (New York: 2007), Hadith number 6924, vol. 7, p. 104.

2 Dabiq, No.1, pp. 9-26.

3 Dabiq, No.4, pp. 33.

4 Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, English Version, (New York: 2007), Hadith number 4095, vol. 5, p. 281.

5 Dabiq, No.4, pp. 34.

it on to him”¹ On the other hand, Abu Umar Al-Baghdadi (predecessor of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi) says they will attack the Jewish state and retake Baitul Maqdis (Jerusalem). He also says, “It is as if I stand before the bands of Iraq that leave from here to give support to the Mahdi while he holds on to the curtains of Ka’bah”² It should be noted here that ISIS believes that Imam Mahdi will lead the Muslim (ISIS) army during that war.³ According to ISIS members, their deceased leader Caliph Ibrahim was Imam Mahdi, whose army would invite Al Malhamah al-Kubra (the Great War)⁴ Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani (ISIS number two official after Al-Baghdadi for a long time) also calls on ISIS militants to be ready for the final campaign of the crusaders, in which he claims Romans will be defeated. In addition, he says that they will conquer Rome, break crosses and enslave women. However, it should be noted that all ISIS top militants mentioned here were killed. Thus, their prophecies did not come true while they were alive.

In addition to the above article, in another article published in *Dabiq*’s fifth issue, it is claimed that Isa Ibn Maryam (Prophet Jesus) will lead the Muslims who will engage the Christians and Jews and confront Dajjal⁵ The belief that Jesus will join Muslims is indeed very common in Islamic eschatology. According to Islam, when Jesus comes back, he will purify some Christian groups from superstitions and unite them with Muslims. Moreover, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi’s challenge to non-Muslims is quoted in *Dabiq*’s twelfth issue.⁶ Al-Baghdadi says that they live in a new era when they will take revenge that will enable Muslims to walk as masters everywhere with honor and their heads raised high. On the other hand, in issue 13 of *Dabiq*, it is argued that “Messiah comes forth and a sword descends from the heavens”. Furthermore, the article describes Dajjal’s attributes cited from various sources.⁷ According to the article, Dajjal is tan, having a reddish skin tone, and bulky, of Jewish origin, living on an island in the eastern seas, chained and imprisoned. However, it claims that all these characteristics are the same as those of Mahdi of Rafidah (Shiite Muslims). The *Dabiq* article quotes from books written by Shiite scholars to support its claims. Finally, issue 15 of *Dabiq* argues, by referring to a *hadith*, that when the Messiah is back, “He will debunk once and for all are those of his crucifixion and divinity. This will be when he breaks the cross... He shall (also) kill the swine, and put aside the jizyah. Wealth shall flow until no one accepts it”⁸

4.2 Rumiya

In addition to *Dabiq*, *Rumiya* is also a magazine of the apocalypse. Its first issue begins with a

1 Dabiq, No.4, pp. 35.

2 Dabiq, No.4, pp. 36.

3 A., Fauzi and A., Hamid, *ISIS in Southeast Asia: Internalized Wahhabism is a Major Factor*. Singapore: Iseas Yusof Ishak Institute, 2016, p. 2.

4 Celso, *Dabiq*, p. 2.

5 Dabiq, No.5, p. 5.

6 Dabiq, No.2, p. 2.

7 Dabiq, No.13, pp. 33-34.

8 Dabiq, No.15, p. 48.

prayer for the realization of prophecies: “O Allah, make the conquest of Constantinople and Rome be at our hands and make us from among your patient and grateful slaves”¹ As seen, there is no mention of Dabiq town. In addition, *Rumiyah*’s third issue includes a special article titled “Towards The Major Malhamah of Dabiq”² This article reflects ISIS’ insistence on the belief that its prophecies will come true. In addition, it tries to convince its members that the dream continues, as this issue was published on November 16, 2016, one month after Dabiq town was recaptured by the Turkey-backed Syrian opposition forces. The content of the special article also proves that claim since it goes back to the Battle of Ahzab that took place under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). When Muslims were besieged by enemies, some *munafiqun* (those pretending to be Muslim) said that Muhammad (pbuh), who said Muslims would conquer Rome and Persia, had lied. *Rumiyah* claims that ISIS is in the same position as that of the Prophet during the Al-Ahzab War. It argues that people may think that ISIS has lost, but God’s help will come soon. The article contains five verses to support its claim. It also claims that what is happening now are signs of the Al-Malhamah Al-Kubra war. It then repeats apocalyptic *hadiths* presented in *Dabiq* (see above) and claims that “This war of attack and withdrawal occurring in Dabiq and its surrounding areas – the minor battle of Dabiq – will inevitably lead to the Major Malhamah of Dabiq, even if a withdrawal were to precede it by Allah’s decree”. Finally, a *hadith* is posted on the last page of *Rumiyah*’s sixth issue: “Allah’s messenger was asked, ‘Which of the two cities will be conquered first? Constantiniyye or Rumiyyah?’ He replied, ‘The city of Heraclius will be conquered first’”, meaning Constantinople³ Interestingly, *Rumiyah* does not mention the city’s current name (Istanbul), as it will probably be the acknowledgment of the conquest of Constanniyye by the Turks in 1453.

However, time has shown that ISIS is not the actor that will realize the above prophecies. For example, Al-Malhamah Al-Kubra did not take place. Not only Dabiq but also all the territories conquered by ISIS were lost. In addition, all ISIS leaders were killed, and the group maintained its survival only through sleeper cells. Therefore, even if all the apocalypses came true, it is clear that the Muslim army is not the ISIS army, Mahdi is not the ISIS leader and the Great War did not happen during ISIS’ most powerful era. Will they ever happen in the future? The answer to this question is unknown. Islamic sources, including Qur’an and *hadiths*, use metaphors when mentioning the end of days. For instance, it is now widely accepted that Mahdi may be more than one person. In other words, there may be several Mahdis at the same time or at different times, as the term also refers to religious congregations, which may consist of many people. In other words, Mahdi may be a person or even a community. Likewise, Dajjal might be either an individual living in a different or at the same time or an ideology of materialism and atheism. For instance, communism was affiliated with

1 Rumiyah, No. 1, p. 1.

2 Rumiyah, No. 3, pp. 24-26.

3 Rumiyah, No. 6, p. 44.

Dajjalism by some Muslim groups. In contrast, there is no metaphor for Jesus. It is believed that he will come back to the world in his genuine body. However, fewer people will know that he is Jesus. In addition, while Sham is known as the city of Damascus, it is also used as the name of the region comprising contemporary Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel. Sham also means North in some dictionaries.¹ Since such different meanings and uncertainties cause confusion and incorrect interpretations by Muslims, anyone may get it wrong and find himself believing something unrealistic.

5. Findings on the Impact of Apocalyptic Prophecies in ISIS Terrorism

Apocalypticism begins from the very names of the ISIS magazines. While *Dabiq* is the town where, allegedly, Muslim and Western armies will fight in an apocalyptic war, *Rumiyah* (Rome) is the last place to be conquered by Muslim armies after *Konstantiniyye* (Istanbul), which is the name of ISIS' Turkish magazine. Thus, except for *Al-Naba* magazine published as a bulletin in Arabic, all other ISIS magazines have symbolic names. In addition to these cities, the mention of Baitul Maqdis and Sham is very common in prophetic literature, as it is in ISIS magazines and practices. These two cities were identified as upcoming targets of the group in ISIS media. In addition, ISIS leaders use prophetic verses or *hadiths* in their writings and speeches instead of political speech (see above). The articles of the magazines were also implicitly or explicitly referring to prophecies. For instance, Al-Baghdadi resembled prophet Ibrahim. Even the ISIS flag was considered a harbinger of the final battle at the end of days²

Regarding the content of the magazines, *Dabiq* mainly focuses on propaganda, migration (*hijrah*), allegiance (*bey'at*), *jihad*, the caliphate, and militancy. Additionally, it uses an apparent apocalyptic language since it excessively mentions cosmic war and end of times in a bipolar world. According to Ingram, *Dabiq* uses eschatological and jurisprudential triggers to remind readers of the Armageddon war and to frame *jihad* as obligatory in the eyes of Muslims³ Likewise, *Rumiyah*, the successor of *Dabiq* after the town was lost to Turkey-backed Syrian armed groups, has a similar language that aims to attract readers with prophecies. Regarding apocalyptic content, this study argues that ISIS tries to prove that it is the group (together with its leader, lands, and army) referred to in Qur'an and *hadiths*. Thus, for *Dabiq*, the first phase (the conquest of Dabiq town) was achieved with the emergence of ISIS. The second phase (the Armageddon war and other related developments before and after the war) will allegedly come true thanks to ISIS. On the other hand, ISIS makes an effort to materialize its prophetic claims by encouraging *hijrah* (migration), asking for allegiance to Caliph Ibrahim (Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi) and legitimizing *jihad*.

1 C.E. Bosworth, *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, p. 261.

2 McCants, *How ISIS Got Its Flag*, 2015.

3 H. J. Ingram, An analysis of Islamic State's Dabiq magazine. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 51(3), 2016a, 458-477.

It can be argued that both *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* have a merciless language that shows all human beings, including Muslims, as infidels that deserve to be killed. The magazines do not deny that ISIS is a terrorist organization, since some articles teach militants how to conduct terrorist acts in *Dar-ul Harb* (non-Muslim countries) and with which tools to carry out terrorism. The articles in the magazines indicate that it assumes terrorism to be an ordinary and legitimate method to achieve its goals. For example, in *Rumiyah*, the title of one article is “Just Terror Tactics”, which lists techniques of killing non-ISIS people.¹ It also claims in a few issues that Islam is not the religion of peace but rather of the sword. *Dabiq*, for example, quotes from Ibn Taymiyyah, a Salafi scholar living in the 13th century, who claims that the word “Islam” does not originate from “salam” (peace) but “istislam” (submission), meaning that Islam has nothing to do with peace but instead with fighting with *kuffar* (infidels).² However, as Esposito contends, there is no verse of the sword in either Qur’an or *hadiths*.³ It is true that Islam orders war, but it also establishes conditions for fighting. For example, if the country is not under an external threat, it does not force Muslims to battle against non-Muslims. There should be a reason for engaging in combat, but *Dabiq* never mentions that. For instance, you cannot see the following verses or similar ones in the magazine: “Fight for the cause of God with those who fight you, but do not be aggressive: God does not like aggressors”;⁴ “You may also fight them to eliminate oppression and to worship God freely. If they refrain, you shall not aggress; aggression is permitted only against the aggressors”.⁵ In addition, unlike ISIS’s claims, Islam announces from its holy book that “There is no compulsion in religion”.⁶ Therefore, there is no excuse to kill non-Muslims. Despite these facts, *Dabiq* orders militants to kill anyone who is not allegiant to their self-declared Caliph.

In addition to ISIS magazines, some analysts’ investigations have shown that ISIS supporters are addicted to the group’s prophecies. ISIS claims that it is an already actualized prophecy by referencing a *hadith* narrated by Abu Hurayrah that reads: “If you see the black banners coming from Khurasan, join that army, even if you have to crawl over ice; no power will be able to stop them. They will finally reach Baitul Maqdis [Jerusalem], where they will erect their flags”.⁷ While this *hadith* is not mentioned in the magazines, O’Shea says that an ISIS sympathizer claimed that their black flag is the black banner mentioned in the *hadith*.⁸ McCants also posits in one of his articles that the ISIS “flag was not only the symbol of its government and the herald of a future caliphate; it was the

1 Rumiyah. Monthly Magazine. ISIS, No.3, 2016-2017, p. 10.

2 Dabiq. Monthly Magazine. ISIS, No.7, 2014-2017, pp.20-22.

3 J.L. Esposito, Islam and Political Violence. *Religions* 6, 2015, 1067-1081.

4 Qur’an, 2:190.

5 Qur’an, 2:193.

6 Qur’an, 2:256.

7 Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah* (English Version), (New York: 2007), (Hadith number 4084), vol. 5, p. 277.

8 J. O’Shea, ISIS: The Role of Ideology and Eschatology in the Islamic State. *The Pardee Periodical Journal of Global Affairs* 1(2), 2016, 51-65.

harbinger of the final battle at the End of Days”¹ Moreover, Wood says that he met an ISIS supporter who claimed that there are twelve legitimate caliphs and Al-Baghdadi is the eighth² The supporter also propagated that armies of Islam (ISIS militants) will meet Roman armies in Northern Syria. On the other hand, according to McCants, who has authored a book on ISIS apocalypses, ISIS tried to make people believe that Al-Baghdadi is the true caliph since he not only descends from Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh) tribe but also his family, a requirement for being a caliph in Islamic theology.³

Finally, this study suggests three assertions about apocalyptic prophecies. First, prophecies are both the impulse and the power that mobilize militants. While prophecies provoke fighters to fight, they also generate moral power that keeps them strong and makes them believe that they are fighting for a holy cause. Such power can also be found in ideologies. Second, as no one can guarantee whether prophecies will be realized, those who lure militants know full well that they will not be held responsible for failure. In addition, even militants remain silent against the nonmaterialization of prophecies since they believe that their duty is to fight for God but not realize prophecies, as they are not in a position to change destiny. In the same vein, a man of faith is expected to sacrifice his life for his religion without any physical or spiritual expectation, as dedication is a kind of worship. That is why the term “martyr” exists. A martyr fights only for his religion and should not expect a victory, as the result of his efforts is determined not by him but by God; thus, his only mission is to fight. Third, since prophecies are of God or his prophet(s), a believer has to accept them without question. This being the case, a militant can never accuse any scholar or terrorist leader, as they are supposedly narrating what is written in the holy book or said by prophet(s) or saints. Consequently, terrorist groups benefit from apocalyptic prophecies, as they are costless and do not result in any accusations against group leaders. For militants who are personally desperate, illiterate, or fundamentalist and want to realize their vital goals by fighting, prophecies represent a new hope for their future life and afterlife as well as a way of obtaining God’s favor.

6. Conclusion

Eschatology exists in every religion and motivates believers to be hopeful about the future. Religions, as well as sects, promise serenity and comfort in the future and after death, mainly through prophecies expected to come true. However, religions may be hijacked by malicious groups such as terrorist organizations to encourage people to join them and fight for their causes. ISIS has used this method through speeches by its leaders, meetings, the internet and particularly its media outlets.

1 W. McCants, *How ISIS Got Its Flag*, 2015. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/isis-flag-apocalypse/406498/> (accessed February 21, 2020).

2 G. Wood, *What ISIS Really Wants*, 2015. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-truly-wants/384980/> (accessed January 31, 2020).

3 N. Robins-Early, *Inside The Islamic State’s Apocalyptic Belief*, 2015. Available at: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/islamic-state-apocalyptic-beliefs_n_56044f37e4b08820d91c21a3 (accessed January 30, 2020).

This study analyzed apocalypses mentioned in ISIS magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* to reveal the prophetic messages it has used to attempt to convince its members and foreigners. The magazines claim that the group is the chosen “nation” led by self-declared Caliph Ibrahim (Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi) and that the ISIS army will represent both the Muslim side in the Al-Malhamah Al-Kubra War (Armageddon War) and the soldiers of Jesus Christ during his second coming. In addition to trying to prove its holiness in the magazines, ISIS has also strived to attract people to join its armies for the supposed upcoming wars. For that purpose, it referred to many *hadiths* and Qur’anic verses to justify its arguments. However, since the group was defeated and lost all its prominent leaders in a few years, none of the prophecies it relied on came to be true. Nonetheless, the radical views of ISIS are still alive, and apocalypses stolen from Islam are prone to be misused in the future. Therefore, by analyzing the case of ISIS, it can be argued that religion, particularly apocalypses, will continue to be influential in both state and nonstate actor politics.

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