

## NOTES ON *DABIQ*, THE ONLINE JOURNAL OF THE IS\*

The so-called Islamic State (IS) headed up by the *amir*, al Baghdadi [successor to Abu Musab al Zarqawi of the defunct jihadi movement, Al Qaida in Iraq], has posted two editions of its webzine called *Dabiq*. [Names utilized by new religious movements have symbolic significance.] Below are notes/commentary on the textual content of the two highly illustrated editions. My asides and statements about the content of the editions are enclosed in brackets.

Dabiq is the name of an area near Aleppo, Syria, of a site where an anticipated great battle during the *malahim* ‘armageddon’ between Muslims and “Crusaders” in the sectarian myth of IS. The *hadith* that mentions Dabiq states, “Jesus ‘*Isa ibn Maryam*’ descends and leads the battle.”

Al Zarqawi linked the expansion of the ‘blessed jihad’ from Iraq into Sham [the Levant, or ‘east’, which encompasses the region from Iraq to Egypt in jihadi discourse] to this particular *hadith*.

The battle in Dabiq will lead to conquest of Constantinople and then Rome [“Rome” generally refers to Europe and the western powers in al Qaida parlance].

[New religious movements develop their own calendars, which are ordered around dates on which significant events in the history of the sect take place.]

On 1 Ramadan 1435 AH the Islamic State declared the *Khilafah*, i.e., the renewed Caliphate based not upon the defunct Ottoman Empire, but upon the kingdom of the first four “rightly-guided” caliphs of the Prophet Mohammad’s own family. This is an actual geopolitical territory occupied by current states from Iraq to Spain. This date marks the beginning of the IS’s sectarian calendar.

The revival of the *Khilafah* was announced by a spokesman and al Baghdadi gave a speech, excerpted in the first edition of *Dabiq*. The *amir*’s full given name is *Amirul-Mu’minin* [title: Commander of the Faithful] *Abu Bakr* [a nom de guerre prefaced by “*abu*” or ‘father of’] *al Hasayni al Qurashi* [Mohammad’s tribe was the Quraish of Mecca]. Husein was the father of the fourth Caliph, Ali. Abu Bakr was a noted follower of the prophet, and it is likely that this name was chosen to signify al Baghdadi’s *kunya*, the person he wishes to imitate.

The *amir*’s words to his followers and readers [prospective recruits] are in quotation marks:

The *Khilafah* “will return your dignity, might, rights, and leadership.” Members are international and universal brothers, i.e., “the faithful brotherhood...standing in one trench [a military term referring to Mohammad’s battles after the *hijra* to Medina against his betrayers and polytheist opponents]...brothers by His [God’s] grace.”

It is a “new era [millennial kingdoms inaugurate a new era, the creation of a new world], in which “the Muslim will walk everywhere as a master, having honor, being revered, with his head raised high and his dignity preserved.” [This is an honor culture that appeals to those who know their religion is superior, but whose grievance is dominance by a usurping power, the secular West. It is clear that ISIS, like The International Jihad of bin Ladin, is a *nativist millennial movement* in the typology of nrms.] “Anyone who dares to offend him will be disciplined and any hand that reaches out to harm him will be cut off....The Muslims today have a loud, thundering statement, and possess heavy boots....They have a statement to make that will cause the world to hear and understand the meaning of terrorism, and boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy, and uncover its deviant nature.” [This language frames the battle as an epic conflict between monotheism and polytheism, referencing early Islam.]

“Shaykh abu Mohammad al-Adnani said: ‘Shake off the dust of humiliation and disgrace...the dawn of honor has emerged anew....The sun of jihad has risen....’”

[All violent new religious movements that commit terror as the hand of god/the divine principle express radical dualism as a central trait.]

“The World Has Divided into Two Camps and two trenches, with no third camp present.” They are the camp of Islam/faith and Muslims/*mujahidin* v. the camp of *kufur*/hypocrisy and Jews/crusaders, allies/rest of nations. The religions of *kufur* are led by America and Russia and mobilised by the Jews.” [It appears from the spelling that the translator is British.]

“The earth is Allah’s (indeed, the earth belongs to Allah. He causes to inherit it whom he wills of his servants. And the [best] outcome is for the righteous [to inherit] (*al A’raf*: 128).” [This verse expresses the Muslim belief that land acquired by conquest is legitimated as Muslim land because Allah has “caused” it to be inherited by Muslims.]

[Note: Should the ISIS military conquest be stopped or turned back, this would dampen its appeal for recruits. One looks for deontological (divinely obligatory) rules in sectarian texts in order to frame a strategy that would use their own divine mandates against the sect. In this case, ISIS parted from al Qaida because its mission is to establish a real Islamic state by military conquest. Military defeat would showcase Allah’s withdrawal of support.]

Al Baghdadi makes a direct appeal for recruits, first establishing that “*hijrah* [migration] to the land of Islam is obligatory” [divinely mandated]. He calls for *fuqaha* ‘experts in Islamic jurisprudence’. [Note: This is very significant. He calls first for authoritative religious judges, not soldiers. The most important task of this religious terrorist movement is legitimation in the eyes of other Muslims. It lacks religious experts who will pronounce its acts divinely sanctioned. It needs not only military successes, but the blessings of religious authorities. This is something our strategists should pay attention to and utilize against the movement.]

He calls for doctors, engineers [bomb makers], scholars, specialists, judges to migrate to the Islamic State.

The Islamic State unites tribes within borders and unites all under one *imam*. It establishes the office of Head of Tribal Affairs. This religious movement is universal in that:

“...the mission of the IS is neither local nor regional, but rather global.” [This conforms to my finding in a published chapter on “Nativist Millennialism” in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* that The International Jihad for the first time extends the nativist paradigm to regain territorial control beyond its traditional homeland to encompass the entire earth. This innovation in the nativist type of movement derives from the nature of Islam historically as a religion of all human beings and Allah as the only God, the universal God. IS truly has a mytho-logical sense of itself. That is why it is not either a conventional nor a rational entity that can be confronted in strictly utilitarian terms and by only conventional tactics. We need to study and accept that it intends to act according to its own logic, not ours.]

Al Baghdadi then turns to the proofs and specifics of the mission to establish the IS:

“...recent victories” include “demolition of the Sykes-Picot borders” and expansion of [IS] territory.” [In common with bin Ladin, al-Baghdadi considers the historic fall of the Ottoman Turk Caliphate as the beginning of the “Crusaders” trespass. Thus, the borders established for the current states in the region by the French and British are illegitimate.]

The [Sunni Arab] tribes are required to give *bay'ah* ‘oath of allegiance’ to the IS.

Those who do not are *safawi* ‘traitors’. [A local example of applied radical dualism.]

The edition then gives details of IS governance in conquered territory.

In the second edition of *Dabiq* the doctrine of leadership and its divinely established origins and assignation to al Baghdadi are expounded at length. [Note: The Center for Counter-terrorism’s discussion of this edition completely avoids analysis of this intensely religious exposition of the *millah* of Ibrahim ‘religio-political leadership’. It is essential to know it if one is attempting to “cut off the head of the snake” and assassinate the leaders, a policy the US has followed in Iraq since at least 2006. This policy is not as effective as one hopes, because leaders are replaced through God’s intervention at the group level.]

According to *Dabiq*, the concept of *imamah* ‘leadership’ is derived from the *millah* ‘path/way’ of Ibrahim. It resides in the *isnad* ‘chain’ of tradition. This *millah* of Ibrahim was said to speak to souls everywhere, including Europe. [Note: This is an old tradition, older than Islam and part of pre-existing monotheism. Ibrahim was the first *muwahhid* ‘monotheist’.] This tradition is dissociated from *kuffar* and *mushrikin* ‘polytheists’. [Please note that this meticulously religious argument tries to establish the authority of IS over and above any of its Muslim competitors by resorting to a common tactic invoked by new religious movements: it appeals to the most

ancient true religious tradition, which is that of Abraham. “Old” and “authoritative” are regarded as synonymous.]

First point in the argument: a story, in this case a *hadith* of a “foolish woman” who spun the thread of a garment [Islam] and then undid it [*kufur*/ignorance/polytheism]. So it happened with the *millah* of Ibrahim and now it is “incumbent upon us to revive this millah,” i.e., to lead them [those who fell away from true religion] to repent and return and follow.

Second point: The decay in the souls of *kuffar* and *mushrikin* was “a result of secularism.” [Regard the influence of Said Qutb on the origins of jihadism in Egypt and why orthodox Salafi Muslims call jihadists “Qutbists.”]

[Note: This statement leads to what is most important in their texts: viz., the reason for and crux of their jihad is to call Muslims back to true religion from their departure into *kuffar*, because of Western influence on their populations and in their lands. Nothing can be more important for us to understand than this point, because their military behavior and terrorism are all employed for one sole purpose: *du’at* ‘call to faith’. Al Baghdadi calls himself ‘commander of the *faithful*’. This title is a messianic title in Islam.]

This is why their Muslim victims are not regarded as “innocent” and our protestations to the contrary carry no weight to those who find their call irresistible.

Thus, they declare, “These Muslims are renegades whom it’s permissible to fight.”

They target Muslims for tolerating rule by man made law, *taghut*.

Third point, the strongest one: They quote a Sura of God granting leadership to Ibrahim (*Al Baqarah*: 124) in *political*, as well as religious, affairs. Here we see a new interpretation of a sacred text. Their heterodox view is presented as “true religion.” An appeal to God’s revelation, the Qur’an, carries the most weight with co-religionists.

[Note: Al Khomeini did a similar thing in 1979 when he asserted for the first time in Shi’a Islam that religious experts should rule (*wilayah*) the political state. The Iranian Revolution in a Mahdi year, 1400 A.H., kicked off the Fourth Wave of modern terrorism,\*\* the religious terrorism wave.]

[I think you now see where this arcane and ignored religious argument in the second edition is leading: toward a theology of the absolute power of the state, founded upon the oldest monotheism in the world, that of Abraham, and devolving upon only al Baghdadi himself and IS as inheritors of the *millah*. West Point Counter-terrorism Center, please take note.]

Here is their culminating statement on the *millah* of Ibrahim and leadership:

“...the people today have failed to understand that *imamah* ‘leadership’ in religious affairs cannot be properly established unless the people of truth [IS] first achieve *comprehensive political imamah over the lands and the people*” [italics mine].

[We cannot defeat IS without grasping this argument about the *millah* of Ibrahim and using it in a counter strategy, imho.]

God words are to be obeyed in action [As historian of religions, Joaquim Wach, posited: religion is practical, religion is praxis, action. It is not mere words or dreams.] God commanded Ibrahim to separate from his people and this made him a leader [Abraham made *hijra* to the Land that was promised]. It made him a political and religious leader, as are his descendants, Muslims. So, true Muslims are called to make *hijra* to the embryonic “Islamic State.”

The IS is “the entity that most emulates the *millah* of Ibrahim with regards to *imamah* in the areas where it exists.” [In otherwards, it is divine authority that authenticates the IS. This trumps all other claims to “true religion.”] Thus, no one may question the IS’s authority.

We face tribulations but we adhere and continue to “strike the neck” of those who dispute our legitimacy/usurp the imam’s leadership. [Note: What opponents of IS consider “barbaric” beheadings are the actual enactments of religious faith in the absolute authority of Ibrahimic leadership. We see this as IS’s patterned “religious” behavior, which can be decoded to rationally apprehend their worldview.]

Other aspects of these two first editions of their online magazine are analyzed and discussed in the West Point CTC article on *Dabiq* <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/dabiq-strategic-messaging-islamic-state>, including the IS’s acknowledged precursor movement, al Qaida in Iraq and its leader, Abu Musab al Zarqawi and its separation from bin Ladin’s international jihadist movement, al Qaida.

\* There has been some disagreement about what to call this new religious movement, IS/ISIS/ISIL. These are all names they have assigned themselves. My position here is to use their self-designation since 1 Ramadan 1435 A.H., the Islamic State. However, as a counter terrorism tactic, I would prefer to refer to them as their Muslim opponents do, as *daish/daesh*. I prefer not to validate their sectarian nomenclature for territory already recognized as nation states.

\*\*David C. Rapoport. (2004) “Modern Terror: The Four Waves,” in Audrey K. Cronin and James M. Ludes (eds) *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, pp. 46-73.

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