

Smashing the Borders of the Tawaghit: Islamic State (IS) Utilization of Apocalyptic Narratives to Subvert the Modern Nation- State

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“Years after the [Sykes-Picot] agreement, invisible borders would go on to separate between a Muslim and his brother, and pave the way for ruthless, nationalistic tawaghit to entrench the ummah’s divisions rather than working to unite the Muslims under one imam carrying the banner of truth.”

– *Smashing the Borders of the Tawaghit* (2015)

The Islamic State (IS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or *Da’esh* (in Arabic), is a Salafi-Jihadist militant organization that seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate in Iraq and Syria and to create a global Salafi-jihadist movement (Stanford University, 2021). The Islamic State gained international attention in the summer of 2014 when IS militants successfully captured swaths of territory in northwestern Iraq and eastern Syria. The Islamic State then declared a *khalifah* (Islamic caliphate) and put out a global call for Muslims to join. At its height, the Islamic State controlled about a third of Syria and forty percent of Iraq (Wilson Center, 2019). IS operatives forced local Syrian and Iraqi populations to adhere to their interpretation of Islam and Sharia law, resulting in some of the worst human rights violations in recent times. Individuals found guilty of crimes were subjected to violent punishments: thieves had their hands cut off, adulterers were stoned to death, and drug users were hanged. The Islamic State’s

sophisticated propaganda campaign marketed the caliphate as an “Islamic utopia” which allows Muslims to practice IS’s ultra-conservative interpretation of Sunni Islam without restrictions. Propaganda was then, and continues to be, a critical source of recruitment. About 30,000 fighters from at least eighty-five countries joined IS by December 2015 (Vision of Humanity, 2022). In 2019, the Syrian Defense Force captured the last pocket of IS controlled territory, the small Syrian village of Baghouz, effectively dismantling the caliphate. As of 2023, there are between 5,000 to 7,000 active members of the Islamic State (Zimmerman & Vincent, 2023). The Islamic State vows they will establish a new caliphate better than its predecessor.

From a theological standpoint, the Islamic State follows a subbranch of Salafism called Jihadi-Salafism which combines Salafi theology with militant jihad. Jihadi-Salafism aims to overthrow what IS views as apostate regimes in the Muslim world through militant jihad (Wagemakers, 2016). In general, modern-day Salafis aim to imitate the early generations of Muslims who lived after Prophet Muhammad's death as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible (Wagemakers, 2016). Salafism is unique from other conservative branches of Islam in trying to recreate the lifestyle and behavior of these early Muslims, instead of simply adhering to the same religious beliefs (Wood, 2015). Salafis of all types stress the unity of God (tawhīd) and reject any power association with something or someone besides God (Olsson, 2020). Salafis believe anything invented by human beings, even the Muslim schools of law, is not created or legislated by God (Olsson, 2020). They believe God is the only legislator for Muslims and submission to something other than God is considered idolatry. *Shirk*, the sin of idolatry or polytheism, is one of the gravest sins a Muslim can commit. Salafis point to Quranic verses 4:48, 5:72, 30:31 to support their contention that a person who commits shirk will go to Hell (Olsson, 2020). Some Salafi groups, such as the Islamic State, use these theological views on tawhid and shirk to reject political ideas such as the modern nation-state, democracy, or elections, as well as to instill fear of God’s judgement in Muslims.

Additionally, the Islamic State believes they are playing an active role to usher in the apocalypse. IS figures prophesize that the establishment of their caliphate will bring God's realm to Earth. In

their narratives, the establishment of the caliphate will set off a series of battles that will culminate in a final armageddon battle in which an army of the caliphate, fighting under black banners, will defeat the armies of the Antichrist. During this period, Jesus will return and the Mahdi (a prominent figure in Islamic eschatology) will appear to play a crucial role in the fighting. The defeat of the Antichrist's armies will result in the end of the world. At this point, the Day of Judgement will occur in which all human beings will have to face God, be judged, and sent either to Heaven or to Hell. While apocalyptic narratives are present in many different Muslim (and Christian) theologies, IS believes the apocalypse is imminent and they must hasten it through violence. Practically speaking, through its actions and publications, IS has claimed to fulfill major signs believed to signify the apocalypse's approach (Stern & Berger, 2015). This essay argues that the Islamic State's desire to annihilate the modern nation-state is motivated by an array of political and theological factors, set within apocalyptic narratives that culminate in their ultimate goal of re-establishing an Islamic caliphate on the world stage.

I. Literature Review

Over the past decade, the Islamic State's sophisticated propaganda campaign has captivated global attention. IS has employed various media strategies to recruit new members, spread its ideology, and incite fear worldwide. Scholars have analyzed the rhetoric in IS propaganda from different angles and methodological approaches to better understand the ideology and sociopolitical agenda of the Islamic State. This review focuses on recent scholarship that analyzes the implications of the Islamic State's apocalyptic narratives, recruitment narratives, and iconoclasm in its propaganda. My study analyzes narratives, themes, and rhetoric in IS propaganda magazines and speeches related to the apocalypse and the modern nation-state.

Several scholars have analyzed the role of apocalyptic narratives in legitimizing IS ideology in propaganda magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*. Erkan Toguslu (2018) argues *Dabiq* uses Islamic narratives derived from the Quran, hadith, and Islamic history in a fragmented manner to strengthen IS's arguments on issues such as jihad and the apocalypse. *Dabiq* employs these narratives to motivate their supporters and sympathizers to join the Islamic State or wage

jihad on their behalf. The rhetoric of Islamic narratives employed in *Dabiq* aim to influence the readers' beliefs and actions with the goal of compelling them to perform these actions in real life. Toguslu suggests *Dabiq* legitimizes IS's antagonistic ideology by framing their ideas within Islamic narratives, themes, and concepts such as the caliphate, jihad, and the apocalypse. Similarly, Ibrahim Karatas (2021) argues the Islamic State exploits apocalyptic prophecies from the Quran and hadith in IS magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* to legitimize their ideology and recruit new members. Karatas argues *Dabiq* uses eschatological and jurisprudential triggers to remind readers of the impending apocalypse and to frame jihad as obligatory in the eyes of Muslims. The magazines claim that the group is the "chosen nation" led by self-declared Caliph Ibrahim i.e. the current leader of IS. Additionally, IS's army will represent both the Muslim side in the Armageddon War and the soldiers of Jesus Christ during his second coming. Karatas believes IS uses eschatology to persuade young impressionable Muslims to immigrate to IS territory to fight for their cause. Christopher Fuhriman, Richard M. Medina, and Simon Brewer (2020) argue that *Dabiq's* significance goes beyond its military value. The magazine includes diverse content such as news articles, reports of successful operations, messages for potential recruits, religious expositions, and warnings for enemies of IS. Fuhriman, Medina, and Brewer argue the word "Dabiq" has eschatological significance that ties IS narratives to broader ideological beliefs and the symbolic importance of specific locations. The magazine emphasizes that ISIS militants are engaging in the early stages of Armageddon in places of prophecy. *Dabiq* communicates an apocalyptic narrative centered around geography to motivate readers to wage jihad. Fuhriman and colleagues believe this variety in narratives helps shape a comprehensive master narrative that resonates with different audiences.

Several studies have examined recruitment narratives in IS propaganda magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* from various perspectives. According to Haroro J. Ingram (2018), *Dabiq* aims to establish credibility and authority by using formal language and extensively quoting Islamic sources, particularly hadith. Ingram suggests the intention of *Dabiq* is to present the magazine as a source of authoritative information for Muslims. *Dabiq* features profiles of Westerners supporting the caliphate which are intended to inspire

action and establish social norms among its readership. This narrative promotes the idea that joining IS's caliphate is a commendable and expected behavior of true, practicing Muslims. Ingram believes *Dabiq* serves multiple purposes, including establishing credibility, countering perceived adversaries, promoting specific behaviors among supporters, and contributing to a broader propaganda campaign. The key narratives presented in *Dabiq* depict IS as a legitimate and authoritative entity that addresses potential criticisms and inspires real world action, which strategically fits into IS's broader objectives as a terrorist organization. Axel Heck (2017) suggests *Dabiq* can reveal insights about how IS creates a narrative identity. Heck argues IS justifies their actions by claiming self-defense and taking revenge in reference to the eye for an eye norm prevalent in Islamic law. Heck believes IS builds its collective identity through a victim narrative which states Muslims are oppressed by the West. IS aims to kill all people who reject the rules of their caliphate and anyone who they deem as disbelievers or apostates. In propaganda sources, IS attempts to create an image of itself in which their influence as a non-state actor is not limited to a specific region but the whole world.

Samantha Mahood and Halim Rane (2016) examine recruitment narratives disseminated through IS media productions. According to Mahood and Rane, IS strategically employs master narratives in its propaganda and recruitment tactics, leveraging historical experiences of Islam. These narratives exploit the grievances, victimization, and discrimination experienced by Western Muslims, particularly emphasizing feelings of isolation. The crusader narrative is highlighted for its effectiveness in capitalizing on existing discrimination against Islam, portraying a deep-seated Western hatred. The jahiliyyah (meaning ignorance i.e., those who are ignorant of truth) and hypocrite narratives reinforce cultural separation, justifying violence against non-supporters and encouraging recruits to sever ties with their past connections. Mahood and Rane underscore the selective use of Islamist narratives by IS, pointing out differences with previous Islamist groups and highlighting the group's distinct approach to shaping Islamism and utilizing religion in its objectives. Shahira S. Fahmy (2020) argues photography in IS's transnational propaganda magazines played a critical role in framing its visual narratives. IS's efforts to ensure the

transnational dissemination of ISIS propaganda is evident by multi-language publications such as *Dabiq* (English), *Istok* (Russian), *Konstantinyye* (Turkish), and *Dar al-Salam* (French). Fahmy analyzes visual themes in *Dabiq* (mercy, victimhood, belonging, brutality, utopianism, and war) which IS juxtaposes to legitimize their actions. For example, photos depicting victims of attacks are strategically placed alongside images of brutality to justify IS's retaliatory attacks. Fahmy asserts that the strategic objectives of *Dabiq* visuals to frighten, support, unite, and inform its readership have shifted over time. Fahmy found IS did not continue to use graphic visuals of violence to promote its projection of power, rather they used idealistic imagery to garner support and new recruits. Fahmy argues IS uses a potent visual communication strategy to promote and convey positive ideology, values, and justifications to increase the likelihood of its readership supporting or joining the ranks of the IS group.

Additionally, scholars have studied Islamic State's utilization of iconoclasm in propaganda to symbolize the destruction of the modern nation-state. Ariel I. Ahram (2017) suggests that entities or individuals challenging conventional notions of statehood and sovereignty have the potential to significantly alter the landscape of statehood in the Middle East and North Africa, resulting in new territorial arrangements characterized by a diminished sense of sovereignty. Ahram believes the Islamic State launched a true systemic challenge to the state system by extolling Muslims worldwide to revolt against their governments. The Islamic State's caliphate rejected territoriality based on geographical boundaries and ethnonationalist affiliations. Ahram believes revolutionary actors like the Islamic State posed the most severe systemic challenge to the modern nation-state. Christopher W. Jones (2018) argues the Islamic State's campaign to destroy historical artifacts and antiquities is an attack on the modern nation-state. Jones believes the link between archaeology and national identity has become deeply rooted in the nation-state system and sovereignty over territory in the twentieth century. Archaeological remains are controlled, reconstructed, and preserved by nation-states. Thus, IS uses archaeology to symbolize the modern nation-state. By attacking valued cultural heritage of Iraq and Syria, IS rejects the idea that sharing geographic boundaries with past civilizations makes them part of one's cultural heritage. IS's

destruction of archaeological artifacts is an attack on nation-states themselves, a construct they view as idolatry. Benjamin Isakhan and Jose Antonio Gonzalez Zarandona (2018) argues IS's heritage destruction is situated within IS theological framework to create a new and ideologically pure Islamic State. Isakhan and Zarandona assert iconoclasm perpetuated by ISIS falls along two key axes: symbolic sectarianism (Shia and Sufi mosques and shrines) and pre-monotheistic iconoclasm (ancient polytheistic sites). Isakhan and Zarandona conclude that IS's iconoclasm is a rejection of colonial powers which constructed the political borders of the modern Middle East.

My argument that the Islamic State's apocalyptic narratives are strategically employed to undermine and destroy the modern nation-state both aligns with and challenges existing literature. Scholars like Toguslu and Karatas have shown how IS uses apocalyptic themes to legitimize its ideology and attract recruits by invoking divine purpose. While this aligns with my recognition of the critical role of apocalyptic narratives, I argue that their primary function extends beyond recruitment and radicalization to actively facilitating the destruction of nation-states. Studies by Ahram and Jones highlight IS's symbolic attacks on cultural heritage, viewing these as an ideological rejection of the nation-state. However, these studies focus on physical destruction without fully capturing IS's broader apocalyptic strategy. Recruitment narratives discussed by Ingram and Mahood and Rane emphasize immediate goals and personal grievances but often overshadow the ideological aim of dismantling the nation-state. My study argues that IS's apocalyptic narratives justify and facilitate the destruction of the modern nation-state. Apocalyptic narratives frame the establishment of IS's caliphate to initiate the apocalypse, in addition to being the only legitimate state for Muslims. This interdisciplinary analysis of IS propaganda revealed a complex symbiotic relationship between IS's apocalyptic and anti-nation-state narratives in IS's militant campaign to eradicate the modern nation-state.

II. Apocalyptic Narratives

The Islamic State is the first group from the Salafi-jihadi ideological matrix that relies fundamentally on apocalypticism in its discourse and propaganda (Laghmari, 2020). First, the Islamic State's

intense focus on Syria is noteworthy due to Syria's geographical importance in Islamic eschatology. Islamic apocalyptic literature repeatedly emphasizes Syria's geographic significance in the end times. The ninth century *Book of Tribulations* by Nu'ayn B. Hammad Al-Marwazi, the earliest surviving complete Muslim apocalyptic text, asserts the center of Islam is in Syria:

A caliph will descend upon Kufa [city in Iraq] who will defeat the Syrians, then he will be desirous of going to Syria, so it will be said to him: Go to Syria, for it is the holy land, and the land of the prophets, the residence of the caliphs, and to it wealth flowed, and from it expeditions would come out. (p. 169)

According to Islamic traditions, Damascus, the Syrian capital, is where Jesus (Isa) is expected to descend from the heavens to defeat the false messiah (Al-Masih ad-Dajjal) and restore justice and peace (al-Sijistānī & Hasan, 1984). Additionally, Syria is prophesied to be a site of significant apocalyptic battles between Muslims and enemy forces. The title of the Islamic State's flagship English-language magazine *Dabiq* draws directly from Islamic eschatology. The small village of Dabiq, Syria, located twenty-five miles northeast of Aleppo, is the location where the first apocalyptic battle of the end times is prophesied to take place. In Islamic eschatology, Dabiq is one of two possible locations where a massive battle between Christians and Muslims will take place. This battle is prophesied to end with Muslims being victorious, marking the beginning of the end of times. The use of Dabiq as the magazine's title emphasizes the eschatological significance of Dabiq in Islamic State ideology. The apocalypticism of Dabiq originates from only one hadith in the authoritative collection *Sahih Muslim* (c. 822–875) compiled by Imam Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Naysaburi:

The Hour will not arise until the Byzantines [the Christians] descend upon the A'maq (valleys) or in Dabiq, so an army from Medina will emerge against them, who are the best of the earth's people at that time. ... One third will retreat, who God will never accept their repentance, one third will be killed, who are the best martyrs in God's eyes, and one third will conquer, who will never be tempted, then [the army from Medina] will conquer Constantinople.

The Islamic State's literal interpretation of apocalyptic events and eschatologically significant locations outlined in hadith heavily influences its ideology and geostrategic agenda. During the expansion into Syria in 2014, the Islamic State made a special effort to capture Dabiq despite its limited military importance. This demonstrates that Syria holds ideological importance for the Islamic State because controlling it proves to their members they are fulfilling apocalyptic prophecies. In the first ten issues of *Dabiq* alone, Syria was mentioned 128 times and Dabiq was mentioned a staggering 430 times (Fuhriman et al, 2020). The Islamic State propaganda consistently reminds its followers they are participating in the early stages of the final jihad before the end of time, in the very locations foretold in Islamic apocalyptic prophecy. Each issue of *Dabiq* begins with a quote from the Islamic State's founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, "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" (The Carter Center, 2015). This demonstrates the Islamic State truly believes the apocalypse will be initiated by fighting between IS militants and Western forces in Dabiq and other prophesied locations throughout Syria. The location-specific framework of apocalyptic narratives attracted fighters from around the globe to travel and join the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

In 2007, Al-Furqan Media released an audio speech titled "The Harvest of the Years in the Land of the Monotheists" by Abu Umar al-Husayni al-Qurashi al-Baghdadi, the fourth leader of the Islamic State (not to be confused with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who rose to power later), on various jihadist websites. The speech celebrated the fourth year since the U.S. invasion of Iraq, which marks the beginning of jihad in Iraq for the Islamic State. The chaos of the Iraq War provided the Islamic State with substantial momentum to achieve its goal of establishing a caliphate. The speech celebrates the benefits jihad brought to Iraqi Sunni society: an increase in the practice of monotheism, a more conservative culture, and the embrace of the Salfi tenet of association with Muslims and disassociation with so-called apostates (Ingram et al., 2020). The beginning of Abu Umar's speech outlines the Islamic State's discontent with Iraq's sociopolitical makeup and uses apocalyptic

narratives to convince Muslims that jihad is the only path to absolve their sins:

Praise be to God first and foremost for helping us to make the people of Iraq today among the greatest peoples on earth in terms of safeguarding monotheism. There is no propagation of polytheist Sufism, no mausoleums to be visited, no heretical days, no candles to be lit, or an idol to be worshipped. ... Governance has also begun with the implementation of the law of God so that the legal origin, God's shari'ah [law], prevails instead of the lowly misshapen midgets; namely the man-made constitutions of the infidel West. ... Fear God and do not forget the lofty goal, namely that the word of God prevails, not abhorrent nationalism. You have only one soul and you are responsible for it on Judgement Day. ... Let everyone know that our aim is clear: the establishment of God's law and the path to that is jihad in its wider sense.

Abu Umar reenforces the idea that Muslims cannot accept a society that does not govern solely through Islamic law. Apocalyptic narratives serve to incite fear in Muslims of eternal damnation if they do not actively reject and militaristically destroy the modern nation-state. The belief in an imminent, decisive apocalyptic battle at Dabiq, Syria, as foretold in Islamic eschatology, provides the Islamic State with a powerful rhetoric that justifies the need for a caliphate. The Islamic State propaganda frequently merges the fulfillment of the apocalypse with jihad, against the modern nation-state, as a divinely sanctioned mission by God to replace corrupt, man-made systems with a caliphate governed by Islamic law. This fusion of eschatological expectation and anti-nation-state rhetoric not only justifies IS actions but also radicalizes and recruits new members. Apocalyptic narratives in Islamic State propaganda frames the destruction of the modern nation-state as a religious obligation and a prelude to the end times.

III. Anti-Nation-State Narratives

The Islamic State's fundamental discontent with "democracy" is rooted in the belief that Islam and popular sovereignty are inherently incompatible. This notion originates from

the Islamic concept of tawhid, the absolute sovereignty of God. For IS, tawhid implies that only God has the authority to legislate and govern, which conflicts with popular sovereignty, where governance is derived from the will of the people. IS argues popular sovereignty directly contradicts tawhid because it places legislative power in the hands of people rather than God. For IS, laws are understood to be divinely foretold through the Quran, the Sunnah (the actions and sayings of Prophet Muhammad), and Sharia (Islamic law).

The Islamic State believes Islam is immutable and beyond human modification. Thus, democratically elected parliaments that modify, revoke, or ban Islamic law are viewed as blasphemous as this implies humans rather than God are the ultimate sources of legal authority. For IS, there is no theological distinction between mosque and state, God's will is intended to dictate all aspects of life. Tawhid, IS operatives argue, calls for Muslims to submit to God's will as revealed in the Quran and the Prophet's Sunnah in every facet of daily life. Consequently, the Islamic State perceives submission to man-made laws as worshipping something other than God. IS perceives popular sovereignty as shirk, the sin of idolatry, which is considered one of the gravest sins in Islam.

This theological stance against popular sovereignty implicates all modern nation-states because no state is exclusively theocratic or adheres to the Islamic State's ideal system of governance. In the context of the Islamic State, the term "democracy" is understood purely in terms of its etymological roots—the Greek words *demos* meaning "people" and *kratos* meaning "rule" (Council of Europe, 2024). IS interprets democracy as popular sovereignty, "rule of the people," rather than the liberal democracy associated with Western political systems. This semantic interpretation of democracy as popular sovereignty underscores the Islamic State's perception that any system of governance deriving its authority from the people rather than from God is fundamentally flawed and idolatrous. This idea was heavily influenced by Islamic State's ideological grandfathers Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who both defined democracy as a "man-made infidel religion" that gives legislative rights to the people instead of God. In Zawahiri's book *The Bitter Harvest: The [Muslim] Brotherhood in Sixty Years*, which first surfaced around 1991, he defines democracy as the following:

Know that democracy, that is, “rule of the people,” is the new religion that defines the masses by giving them the right to legislate without being shackled down to any other authority. For sovereignty ... is [the] absolute authority; nothing supersedes it. ... In other words, democracy is a man-made infidel religion, devised to give the right to legislate to the masses—as opposed to Islam, where all legislative rights belong to Allah ... those people who legislate for the masses in democracies are partners worshiped instead of Allah.

Similarly in Maqdisi’s book, *Democracy: A Religion!* (c. 1989-1993), he defines democracy as an idolatrous religion and emphasizes its Greek origins meaning “the people’s judgement” or “the people’s legislation”:

You should be aware of the origins of the evil word of democracy, and you should know that it is not Arabic, but Greek in origin. It is a mixture and abbreviation of two words: Demos meaning people, and Cracy meaning judgement, authority, or legislation. That means that the literal translation of this word democracy is the people's judgement, or the people's authority or the people's legislation. (p. 26)

Popular sovereignty is the foundational political claim of the modern nation-state, regardless of a nation-state’s specific form or practice of governance, be it liberal democracy, communism, oligarchy, or another system. Zawahiri provides the strongest evidence to support the claim that Salafi jihadist are criticizing popular sovereignty, broadly construed as opposed to liberal democracy:

Indeed, throughout the world and in most governments, people take each other for lords and masters in place of Allah ... This occurs in both the most progressive democracies and in the basest of dictatorships. ... the foundation of democracy is built atop the premise “ruled by the people for the people” and rejection of the Commandments of Allah, which are all-comprehensive for mankind.

Zawahiri clearly articulates that his issue with democracy is exclusively popular sovereignty, not liberal democracy. He states popular sovereignty occurs in both progressive democracies and

dictatorships. Therefore, it is likely Zawahiri uses the word democracy to refer to all modern nation-states. Zawahiri's assertion that the foundation of democracy built on the premise of popular sovereignty signifies that as long as a country claims to govern through popular sovereignty, he defines that nation-state as a democracy. This infers Zawahiri and his predecessor, Islamic State founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, recontextualized the word democracy to simultaneously connote two separate entities, popular sovereignty and the modern nation-state, at the same time. Take for example the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which despite its autocratic nature, still nominally adheres to the principle of popular sovereignty. Zawahiri would consider the DPRK a "dictatorial democracy" because article two of DPRK's constitution proclaims, "The state power of the D.P.R.K. belongs to the people." (Law Library of Congress, 1992). In practice, North Korea is clearly not democratic in any sense of the word: state power belongs exclusively to a military dictatorship by the Kim family, not its citizens. Nonetheless, Zawahiri would define and refer to the DPRK as a democracy simply because article two insinuates popular sovereignty. The significance of this interpretation of democracy is paramount because it supports the argument that IS's frequent attacks on "democracy" are actually attacks on popular sovereignty and, by extension, an attack on all modern nation-states. Therefore, whenever Islamic State operatives target democracy, they are specifically targeting the modern nation-state as a political form. This helps explain why destroying the modern nation-state system is central to the Islamic State's sociopolitical agenda. For IS, the ideological clash between tawhid and popular sovereignty justifies militancy against the modern nation-state. Additionally, this narrative legitimizes the caliphate because it establishes a society where God's laws, as interpreted by Islamic State's strict Salafi jihadist ideology, dictates all aspects of life.

In 1994, Islamic State's founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi gave his first public speech "Deposition of a Captive: O My People, Why Am I Calling You to Salvation and You Are Calling Me to Hell!" during his and Maqdisi's sentencing hearing before a Jordanian court for terrorism activities. In the speech, Zarqawi is angry that Jordan claims to be an Islamic nation despite implementing man-made legislation, not Islamic law. From Zarqawi's perspective, the state of

Jordan is an apostate regime because they do not enforce Islamic law. Zarqawi believes Jordan is hypocritical for imprisoning him for criticizing Jordan's failure to enforce Islamic law:

Clearly, you are calling for democracy—a heretical modern religion. You kill people, permit alcohol, adultery, and corruption, all in the name of democracy. ... Your slogan is: “Allah, the homeland, and the King.” Allah’s book should come before “the Homeland, and the King.” Too, the punishment for “offensive speech” against the king is harsher than the punishment for “offensive speech” against Allah, his Highness! Who, then, is the right god, according to your laws?

Many modern nation-states adopt a rhetoric of popular sovereignty even if genuine democratic processes are lacking or nonexistent. Zarqawi argues that freedom of speech, a democratic principle, safeguards his right to express opposing views even if they are considered offensive. He argues that if Jordan truly upholds “democracy” i.e., popular sovereignty then his imprisonment is unlawful. Zarqawi is deeply troubled by the discrepancy he sees: criticizing the King of Jordan results in harsher consequences than actions he deems as insults to Islam. In his speech, Zarqawi is criticizing modern nation-states, Jordan in particular, who either claim to represent the people but actually represent those in power or claim to represent Islam and uphold God’s laws but actually represent the people. Zarqawi argues Jordan is advocating for popular sovereignty, not Islamic law, which incited him to take revolutionary actions in protest. He perceives it as deeply unjust that Jordan would imprison him for criticizing the country’s failure to enforce Islamic law. Zarqawi argues that he committed no crime by conspiring to attack Jordan because his actions are permissible according to his interpretation of Islam. The scholarship of Zawahiri, Maqdisi, and Zarqawi on democracy highlights militant dimensions of the broader Salafi jihadist movement. They view jihad as a compulsory act in which all Muslims must participate in order to destroy “man-made systems” i.e., the modern nation-state. Their justification for violent jihad is rooted in the belief that any adherence to non-Islamic laws constitutes an act of worship that must be eradicated. Consequently, the Islamic State and similar jihadist groups see their struggle as not only a political or military endeavor

but a religious obligation to fight against polytheism and idolatry in all forms.

Additionally, the Islamic State asserts that only an Islamic caliphate, governed by what they consider the purest form of Islamic law, can fulfill the true essence of Islam and usher in the apocalypse. In 2015, the Islamic State published “The Extinction of the Grayzone,” an article written by an unknown author in issue 7 of *Dabiq*, during the height of IS power in Syria and Iraq. “The Extinction of the Grayzone” portrays a stark division between the Islamic State and the modern nation-state system, entrenched within an apocalyptic framework. According to the author, after the September eleventh attacks, the world was polarized into two camps: Islam and kufr (disbelief), with the latter referring to the modern nation-state, namely the United States and its allies. Within this narrative, the modern nation-state is portrayed as inherently antithetical to Islam, the ultimate adversary conspiring against Muslims. The author implies that the nation-state forces Muslims into a perpetual state of apostasy described as “blatant Christianity and democracy”:

Muslims in the crusader countries will find themselves driven to abandon their homes for a place to live in the Khilāfah [caliphate], as the crusaders increase persecution against Muslims living in Western lands so as to force them into a tolerable sect of apostasy in the name of “Islam” before forcing them into blatant Christianity and democracy.

The author portrays a stark dichotomy between the modern nation-state and IS’s caliphate. The modern nation-state is depicted as an oppressive regime that forces Muslims to abandon Islam. In contrast, the caliphate is presented as a haven where Islam can be practiced without any restriction. The author asserts that Muslims living in Western countries, referred to as “crusader countries,” will face increasing persecution for practicing Islam. According to the author, the “persecution” by Western nation-states will persuade Muslims to relocate to the IS caliphate in Syria and Iraq. This migration is a necessary step to preserve Islam and live in a society governed by Islamic principles, as interpreted by IS. This idea is rooted in the belief that the caliphate represents a pure and unadulterated form of Islamic governance, in stark contrast to the compromised and

apostate practices allowed or enforced by the modern nation-state. This narrative serves to justify the existence and appeal of the caliphate, while condemning the ideological and political structures of the modern nation-state. The author portrays this persecution as a deliberate strategy by the nation-state to force Muslims to abandon Islam or adopt a diluted version of Islam compatible with Western values. The phrase “tolerable sect of apostasy” implies the modern nation-state might tolerate a version of Islam that conforms to Western values in order to manipulate Muslims into embracing popular sovereignty. The author views popular sovereignty as a form of idolatry, suggesting any expression of Islam, or individual that adapts to or coexists with the modern nation-state, is heretical.

“The Extinction of the Grayzone” calls for Muslims to abandon any form of allegiance to nation-states. The Islamic State argues that the caliphate provides Muslims with a superior alternative to the modern nation-state. The caliphate is the only legitimate form of governance because it diametrically eradicates popular sovereignty. The caliphate is depicted not only as a political entity but also as the epicenter of a global jihad against the modern nation-state. The caliphate is portrayed as essential for defending Islam against popular sovereignty and fulfilling the apocalyptic prophecies believed to ignite the end times. The call for individual attacks in Western countries is framed as a direct response to threats posed by the modern nation-state against the caliphate. This underscores the Islamic State’s belief that only under the caliphate can the true essence and practice of Islam be actualized. These narratives legitimize militancy against the modern nation-state as a means to defend and expand Islam on global scale. The Islamic State leaves no room for the modern nation-state to coexist with the caliphate in their ideological framework.

IV. Sykes-Picot Narrative

A major goal of the Islamic State insurgency in Iraq and Syria was the reversal of the Sykes–Picot Agreement. The Islamic State views the Middle Eastern and African borders that were established by the Western powers in the early twentieth century as “imaginary borders” that should be dismantled (Jabareen, 2015). The Sykes–Picot Agreement (1916) was a pivotal moment in reshaping the borders of the Middle East. The secret treaty between Britain and

France made during World War I, provided the initial road map for how to divide the provinces of the Ottoman Empire into zones of direct and indirect British and French imperial control, primarily serving the interests of the colonial powers (Gelvin, 2020). It infamously set up these zones without considering ethnic, religious, or tribal boundaries. Once it leaked to the public in 1917, it caused resentment in communities throughout the Middle East that remains to this day. While the specifics of the Sykes-Picot Agreement were not implemented, it formed the basis for the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), which solidified the postwar settlement and formalized the modern boundaries of the Arab Mandate nations (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine). The Mandate System established by the League of Nations placed these territories under the temporary administration of Britain and France until they were deemed capable of self-government. The borders created by the Treaty of Sèvres set the groundwork for the modern nation-state system in the Middle East.

While the Sykes-Picot agreement was not fully implemented, it is often perceived, especially by jihadists, as the impetus of the “artificial” borders in the Middle East. The Sykes-Picot agreement is widely criticized for creating the modern-day borders of the Middle East without consideration for the ethnic, tribal, and religious make-up of the region. Some believe this oversight resulted in various past and present regional conflicts. For many across the Middle East, the downfall of the Sykes-Picot agreement has become somewhat of an obsession. Sykes-Picot is a symbol, an emblem of all that is wrong with the Middle East’s regional state system (Ahram, 2017). To the Islamic State, the Sykes-Picot agreement is the modern sin which broke up the *Ummah*, or Muslim community, into idolatrous regimes, or modern secular nation-states. The Islamic State argues that the creation of nation-states with their “artificial boundaries” divides the *Ummah* along nationalistic lines rather than uniting them under Islamic religious identity. The Islamic State believes nationality causes divisions and infighting within the Muslim community. The Islamic State argues that in their envisioned caliphate, where Islam is the central unifying force, such divisions would not exist. They emphasize Islam as the paramount factor that should unite all individuals under its banner, rejecting Western ideals, which they believe have tainted Islamic governance in the Middle East. The

Islamic State holds the West responsible for corrupting the Middle East by dividing the Muslim community into nation-states.

“Smashing the Borders of the Tawaghit,” the June 2014 cover story of *Islamic State Report*, was published by an unknown author at the height of the Islamic State’s second resurgence in Iraq and Syria. During this period, the Islamic State controlled territory the size of Great Britain and continued its expansion into new regions. “Smashing the Borders” implies that the destruction of the Sykes-Picot border and establishment of the caliphate represents the fulfilment of “a khilafah [caliphate] on the prophetic methodology” (Smashing the Borders of the Tawaghit, 2014). Or, in other words, the Islamic State’s efforts to overthrow modern nation-states and instill an Islamic caliphate are not just divinely sanctioned, but foretold in apocalyptic prophecies:

It was only matter of time before the oppressive tawaghit [tyrant] of the Muslim world would begin to fall one-by-one to the swords of the mujahidin, who would raise the banner of tawhid [monotheism], restore the hukm [authority] of Allah, directing the masses back to the prophetic manhaj [doctrine] of jihad and away from the corruption of democracy and nationalism, and unite them under one imam. (Islamic State Report, p. 3)

The Islamic State believes the destruction of the modern nation-state will directly facilitate the apocalypse as its militancy initiates fighting in Syria where the end times are prophesied to unfold. The author claims the fall of the tyrant, i.e. the modern nation-state, by the Islamic State is imminent and evidence of the Islamic State’s belief in apocalyptic prophecies. “Smashing the Borders” also claims to vehemently fight against the imperialism of the West which forces Muslims to adhere to Western ideals and laws. Western intervention in the Middle East prevented Islam from being a central and unifying force within the region. While not everyone is Muslim in the Middle East, being Muslim, generally speaking, was a strong identifier and stabilizing force. Religious identity was the regional “nationalism” before secular nationalism was introduced to the Middle East. The Islamic State believes the modern Middle East was corrupted by modern nation-states established after the Treaty of Sèvres. Additionally, the abolishment of the caliphate in 1924, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the subsequent division of its

territory at the hands of Western imperialists, is another reason why the Islamic State wants to re-establish an Islamic caliphate in the region:

The consequences of the crusader partitions would play directly into the hands of the enemies of Islam, with the average Muslim's unconditional wala' [loyalty] for his fellow Muslims and bara' [disavowal] for the kuffar [disbeliever] being tampered by the notion of patriotism towards a piece of land demarcated by imaginary lines on a map, and the idea of an Islamic khalifah [caliphate] appearing more and more as an exotic fantasy and less and less as an attainable goal. (p. 2)

The Islamic State found fault with the secular and democratic governments established post-Sykes-Picot. These governments, including Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, are accused of committing war crimes and atrocities against their own people. Widespread corruption and ongoing conflicts have contributed to the region's economic woes. Western involvement in the Middle East, according to the Islamic State, has eroded Islam's role as a central unifying force in the region. While the Middle East is not universally Muslim, the religious identity served as a stabilizing force before the introduction of secular nationalism by Western powers. The Islamic State argues that the Middle East was better without Western interference in its political affairs. The Islamic State's militancy is a revolutionary rejection of the modern political borders of the Middle East and the modern nation-state. The Islamic State believes the nation-state eroded the centrality of Islam as a unifying force in the Muslim world. They see destruction of the modern nation-state as a means to restore the authority of God, unify Muslims under one banner, or initiate the end times. The rejection of modern nation-states is intertwined in the Islamic State's apocalyptic narratives, asserting that the destruction of the nation-states will directly facilitate the onset of the apocalypse. Militancy is seen as a religious obligation, not solely a political statement against the modern nation-state. "Smashing the Broaders" shows apocalyptic narratives that legitimize and feed into historical grievances against the nation-state. These narratives also recruit new members who are attracted to the idea of initiating the apocalypse by attacking the modern nation-state.

V. Media Jihad: Weaponization of Narratives

The Islamic State places equal importance on narratives and militancy to destroy the modern nation-state. IS utilizes propaganda as psychological warfare that subtly undermines the nation-state by projecting a hyper-violent image designed to instill fear and incite their members to commit terror attacks on IS's behalf. IS's use of violent rhetoric against the nation-state in their propaganda, coupled with apocalyptic narratives that justify its militancy, actively attacks the modern nation-state. IS's engagement in warfare through propaganda complements their physical attacks and serves a vital role in achieving and maintaining IS's broader sociopolitical ambitions. Every IS narrative has a self-serving organizational purpose in their campaign. For example, apocalyptic narratives portray the caliphate as divinely foretold in apocalyptic prophecies to defend Islam against the idolatrous modern nation-state. These narratives are disseminated with the intention to delegitimize the jurisdiction of nation-states by turning Muslims against them and encouraging jihad. The Islamic State recognizes fighting on the rhetorical front is equally important as fighting on the battlefield, victory cannot be achieved solely through armed conflict. IS understands they must conquer the hearts and minds of people in order to actualize their sociopolitical agenda.

The fervent militancy of the Islamic State frequently overshadows concerted efforts to weaponize narratives that facilitate physical and psychological attacks against the modern nation-state. In 2014, the focus of IS propaganda shifted away from rival Islamist factions and started targeting an international audience (Fernandez, 2015). The shift in IS's marketing strategy proved successful as over eighty percent of IS offenders arrested in the U.S. had watched IS propaganda (Yoder et al, 2020). In April 2016, the Islamic State published a document titled, "Media Operative, You Are Also a Mujahid," on IS's official propaganda channel on Telegram Messenger. The identity of the author is unknown, but the document was linked to al-Hikmah Publications, the Islamic State's main publishing house. "Media Operative" underscores the significant role of "media jihad" or propaganda production, and the critical position held by IS propagandists, or "media operatives," within the

organization. The author stresses that waging “media jihad” against the modern nation-state is as crucial as engaging in physical militancy:

Media jihad against the enemy is no less important than the material fight against it. ... To alert media operatives to the need to win media victories as well as military victories, and to bring their attention to the importance of inflicting psychological defeats upon the enemy before material defeats—as they say, “half the battle is media.”

The concept of media jihad demonstrates IS has a sophisticated understanding of modern warfare. The author’s emphasis on winning media and military victories indicates IS recognizes the strategic advantage of inflicting psychological damage on adversaries through rhetorical means. The deliberate effort to inflict “psychological defeats” on their enemy before engaging in physical confrontation reveals a nuanced military strategy that leverages the power of propaganda. IS’s use of media as a weapon demonstrates their intent to undermine the authority and stability of the modern nation-state. This bolsters the notion that IS narratives are indeed a form of psychological warfare. The author’s deliberate comparison of discourse as a potent weapon more powerful than atomic bombs is particularly revealing: “On the contrary, verbal weapons can actually be more powerful than atomic bombs! ... it is no exaggeration to say that the media operative is an *istishadi* [suicide bomber] without a belt!” By equating “verbal weapons” to the destructive capability of atomic bombs, the author elevates the status of propaganda to a weapon capable of inflicting more damage than militancy. Furthermore, IS propagandists are not only supportive assets for militants but an independent and powerful attack against the enemy. The strategic use of propaganda to inflict psychological damage highlights IS’s intent to undermine the mental and emotional state of the enemy. IS believes this generates physical confrontations that are more likely to succeed due to the weakened mental state of their opponents. “Media Operative” is evidence IS strategically utilizes propaganda to subvert the enemy. By deploying narratives intended to destabilize their target, the Islamic State is deliberately attempting to destroy the modern nation-state. Furthermore, the concept of verbal jihad is more evidence that IS weaponizes propaganda to attack the modern nation-state:

Verbal jihad includes disputing with unbelievers and hypocrites, calling them to Allah the Almighty, intimidating them, threatening them with violence, pointing out their defects, and shedding light upon their deceptive ways. ... It also includes shedding light on the deceptions pedaled by detractors, exposing the deviance of secularists and hypocrites and responding to those who dishearten, alarm or discourage the Muslims from among the rulers scholars and call for tolerance and coexistence with the unbelievers.

The goal of verbal jihad is to erode people's trust in the modern nation-state by making the state appear weak and incapable of protecting its citizens or upholding its constitutional principles. IS narratives feed into collective grievances by criticizing the hypocrisy of modern political systems. This creates distrust and doubt between people and their governments within these societies. IS wants people to believe Islam and the nation-state cannot coexist in any circumstance. This is evident in IS efforts to deter Muslims from moderate or liberal interpretations of Islam that believe in "tolerance and coexistence" with non-Muslims. Moreover, verbal jihad suggests IS uses rhetoric to mobilize and radicalize individuals. By framing IS organizational missions within religious and moral narratives, they aim to radicalize sympathizers disillusioned with their own governments. The author's portrayal of media operatives as "mujahids," or warriors, in an ideological battle against the nation-state, elevates importance in the broader Salafi-jihadist movement. Media jihad is more than dissemination of information because it actively compromises the ascendancy of the modern nation-state.

In addition, IS uses media jihad as a defensive mechanism against the "intellectual invasion" perpetrated by the modern nation-state. The author asserts mainstream media, an apparatus of the nation-state, engages in an intellectual war aimed at corrupting the minds and hearts of Muslims. This "intellectual invasion" is viewed as more insidious and dangerous than military conquest because it undermines the identity and faith of the Muslim community:

[Mainstream media] is an intellectual invasion that is faced by the Muslims in both their minds and their hearts, corrupting the identity of many of them, distorting their ideas, inverting their concepts, substituting their

traditions, drying the headwaters of their faith and deadening their zeal ... and there is no power except with Allah. The primeval enemies of the Muslims—the Crusaders, the Jews, the Safavids, and the Secularists—understand that colonizing the heart is even more successful than colonizing the land and enslaving Allah's servants!

The author argues that mainstream media is an existential threat to Muslims because it distorts the teachings and practice of Islam. Thus, IS perceives the dissemination of Western ideas, like popular sovereignty, as more dangerous than military defeat because it alters the religious and cultural identity of Muslims. The defensive aspects of media jihad incite military reprisals to distract members from mainstream media. By portraying the nation-state as compliant in the “intellectual invasion,” IS narratives solidify the nation-state as a legitimate military target. IS propaganda erodes people’s trust in the nation-state, making them more willing to commit violence against anything or anyone deemed antithetical to Islam. Therefore, “Media Operative” provides compelling evidence that IS utilizes narratives to psychologically and militaristically destroy the modern nation-state.

Transitioning from the broader concept of media jihad, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s 2014 speech, titled “A Message to the Mujahidin and the Muslims Ummah in the Month of Ramadan,” best demonstrates how the Islamic State utilizes narratives to psychologically and militaristically destroy the modern nation-state. Baghdadi’s speech begins with a direct call for Muslims to attack the modern nation-states: “[The Muslims today] have a statement that will cause the world to hear and understand the meaning of terrorism, ... [they] will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy and uncover its deviant nature.” Baghdadi’s statement “destroy the idol of democracy” is conclusive evidence of IS intending to destroy the modern nation-state, not liberal democracy. As established previously, the word “democracy” simultaneously connotes popular sovereignty and the modern nation-state. In actuality, Baghdadi communicates that, “Muslims will destroy the idolatry of popular sovereignty and the modern nation-state.” Baghdadi’s call to action is a clear directive to carry out terror attacks against the modern nation-state.

Additionally, Baghdadi claims abolishment of the caliphate in 1924 allowed the modern nation-state to “weaken, humiliate, and dominate Muslims.” The Sykes-Picot narrative seeks to delegitimize the political borders of the Middle East by painting them as tools of oppression crafted by Western nation-states to control and exploit the Muslim community:

Indeed the Muslims were defeated after the fall of their khilafah [caliphate]. Then their state ceased to exist, so the disbelievers were able to weaken and humiliate the Muslims, dominate them in every region, plunder their wealth and resources, and rob them of their rights. They accomplished this by attacking and occupying their lands, placing their treacherous agents in power to rule the Muslims with an iron fist, and spreading dazzling deceptive slogans such as: civilization, peace, co-existence, freedom, democracy, secularism, baathism, nationalism, and patriotism, among other false slogans.

Baghdadi’s rhetoric strategically exploits historical grievances to garner support for the Islamic State. Central to his argument is the profound sense of loss and injustice that many Muslims feel due to the abolition of the caliphate in 1924. The abolishment of the caliphate, which represented both religious and political authority for Muslims worldwide, is portrayed by Baghdadi as a direct assault on Muslim identity. He argues the abolishment of the caliphate allowed Western nation-states to dominate and exploit the Muslim community. Baghdadi frames political borders as tools of oppression created by nation-states to conspire against Islam. Baghdadi exploits historical grievances to argue that Muslims are systematically oppressed and humiliated by the modern nation-state. According to Baghdadi, the modern nation-state’s “deceptive slogans” force Muslims to abandon Islam by submitting to such an inherently un-Islamic system. These narratives reinforce IS’s belief that Muslims are obligated to seek retribution by destroying the modern nation-state.

Furthermore, Baghdadi presents a false dichotomy where Muslims must choose between abandoning Islam to live under the modern nation-state or resisting and being accused of terrorism. Similar to Zarqawi’s “Deposition of a Captive,” Baghdadi asserts practicing Islam under the legislative framework of the modern

nation-state is impossible. This narrative attempts to persuade Muslims to escape the persecution of modern nation-states by traveling to join the IS caliphate in Syria and Iraq:

Those rulers continue striving to his enslaved Muslims, pulling them away from their religion with those slogans. So either the Muslim pulls away from his religion, disbelieves in Allah, and disgracefully submits to the man-made shirk (polytheistic) laws of the east and west, living despicably and disgracefully as a follower, by repeating those slogans without will and honor, or he lives persecuted, targeted, and expelled, to end up being killed, imprisoned, or terribly tortured, on the accusation of terrorism.

In essence, Baghdadi argues Muslims can only live honorably under the IS caliphate where IS interpretations of Islamic law encompass all aspects of daily life. This narrative aims to attract Muslims to join the IS caliphate, the divinely prophesied alternative to the modern nation-state. Baghdadi exploits feelings of disenfranchisement and persecution among Muslims by suggesting that joining the Islamic State is not just a political choice but a religious obligation to escape oppression and defend Islam. This narrative not only calls for the destruction of the modern nation-state but also aims to establish IS as the sole legitimate authority for Muslims worldwide.

Baghdadi concludes “A Message to the Mujahidin” by asserting that if Muslims remain loyal to the Islamic State, God will allow IS to conquer Rome and the world. Baghdadi argues that God preordained the modern nation-state to be destined for destruction, bringing the entire world under the control and authority of IS’s interpretation of Islam: “So prepare your arms, and supply yourself with piety. Preserve in reciting the Quran with comprehension of its meanings and practice of its teachings. ... If you hold to it, you will conquer Rome and own the world, if Allah wills...” Apocalyptic narratives serve multiple purposes in justifying the destruction of the modern nation-state. Firstly, it portrays the existence of modern nation-states as contrary to God’s will. Baghdadi positions IS as the executor of God’s plan and the destruction of the modern nation-state as a necessary step toward fulfilling apocalyptic prophecies. Baghdadi argues that the destruction of the nation-state is both a religious duty and a guaranteed outcome if followers remain devoted

to IS. The struggle between the Islamic State and the nation-state is portrayed as part of a larger, apocalyptic battle the modern nation-states cannot win. This strategic use of propaganda serves both psychological and militaristic purposes: it boosts the morale and dedication of IS fighters while simultaneously facilitating the destruction of the modern nation-state.

The comprehensive approach of IS's propaganda, as demonstrated in "Media Operative" and "A Message to the Mujahidin," leverages apocalyptic narratives, historical grievances, and anti-nation-state narratives to facilitate the destruction of the modern nation-state. IS propaganda exemplifies how media jihad operates as an integral part of IS's broader geopolitical strategy. IS narratives exploit both psychological and material dimensions of warfare to achieve their ultimate goal of destroying the modern nation-state and establishing their version of an Islamic caliphate on the world stage.

VI. Conclusion

The Islamic State strategically utilizes narratives to facilitate the destruction of the modern nation-states and establish a universal Islamic caliphate. IS propaganda not only undermines the legitimacy of state authorities but also unifies supporters through a sense of religious obligation. Apocalyptic narratives transform IS's political struggle into a prophesied battle that justifies extreme violence against adversaries and fosters unwavering ideological commitment among its members. My research suggests IS utilizes narratives to exploit psychological and militaristic dynamics of warfare in order to fulfill the destruction of the modern nation-state and establish a universal Islamic caliphate on the world stage.

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