

An Investigation into the Interpretations and Manipulations of Scripture Embedded in Texts Produced by Salafi-Jihadi Organisations

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Abstract

This thesis identifies and analyses the Qur’anic quotations that are referenced by the Salafi-jihadi group Islamic State (IS) and, their affiliate and offshoot in Afghanistan, Islamic State in Khurasan Province (ISKP), in their propaganda materials. The thesis analyses online magazines produced by these groups to determine the ways Qur’anic verses are utilised to support and justify the political and military aims of the groups, which rests on a paradigm that amalgamates religion and politics. By identifying the teachings of extremists, the context in which the Qur’anic scriptures were revealed, as well as the recontextualisation (and manipulations) by such groups, it is hoped that there can be a clearer understanding of the specific teachings that must be taken into consideration when counter narratives are offered by de-radicalisation programmes in the UK. To examine the data collected, a theoretical and methodological framework has been adopted which employs elements of Roy Bhaskar’s critical realism (CR) and Norman Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis (CDA) as its foundation. Fairclough’s 1989 blueprint for how to carry out CDA, which is based on Michael Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (SFL), has been adapted and developed using John O’Regan’s (2006) Text as a Critical Object (TACO) procedural framework for CDA. Through the use of this framework, emphasis is placed on the description, interpretation, and social analysis of texts, with the intention of understanding the ideologies and values underlying the claims and proclamations of Salafi-jihadi groups. With the research conducted in mind, the thesis serves, at its core, as a government recommendation for ways Channel, particularly the Desistance and Disengagement Programme (DDP), can be strengthened and made more effective.

Statement of Confirmation

I declare that all work presented in this thesis, except where I have explicitly acknowledged other sources of information, is entirely my own.

Impact Statement

This thesis takes influence from post-structuralist positions to the interpretation of text, including religious scripture. While I cannot argue that one interpretation is correct and another false, I present a case for the preference of one reading over another and develop a case for the validity of practising judgemental rationality.

Through analysing propaganda materials produced by Salafi-jihadi groups, I have been able to determine some of the ways scripture is used to justify and validate the violence that is encouraged and practised by such groups. By identifying the specific verses that are appropriated and the narratives that are attached to them, I hope to highlight the areas of Islamic radicalisation and fundamentalist ideology that require the attention of counter-terrorism policy makers and practitioners in the UK.

By developing a linguistic approach to understanding and debunking such ideology, I stress the importance of the relationship between language, discourse, and ideology, and how they interact in the dissemination of extremist literature. With the insights achieved through conducting this research, I propose a shift in the way de-radicalisation is approached in the UK, particularly through the UK government's Desistance and Disengagement Programme (DDP). While those working in the DDP show great awareness and sensitivity towards the religious elements of radicalisation, I wish to propose a method that is more expansive in its focus, and which pays closer attention to the philosophies and manipulation tactics of the radicalisers. While it is important to have knowledge of Islam and offer a counter narrative if one is to de-radicalise an individual who has been influenced by extremist and fundamentalist Islamic teachings, it is equally important that those who deliver these de-radicalisation efforts are also well versed in the ideas, values, and belief systems of terrorists and extremists, which can be learned and understood through education and training.

With this in mind, the work attempts to emphasise ways the current counter-terrorism strategy in the UK – CONTEST – can be improved, through identifying the types of ideologies and narratives being propagated by groups such as IS and ISKP and which require attention.

Acknowledgements

The initial conception of the project was not what it is now; it has evolved over the course of four years while I figured out the specifics of how to achieve my intended objective. The one thing that has remained a constant over that time has been, my supervisor, John O'Regan's patience in reading many drafts and providing helpful comments. For his support, I am ever grateful. My thanks are also extended to Joe Chislett, who encouraged my academic path in Philosophy, and who taught me to think critically about the world and how we engage with it. His teaching style and guidance inspired my young mind, which has largely shaped (the positive parts of) the principles I hold today. Finally, eternal thanks to my late grandfather (nana), Mokassim Ali, who taught me to think about words and how we use them, and to read and write. When we lived together, he helped me memorise poems I loved by candlelight, and when we lived apart, we wrote each other letters; but we always shared words. A project such as this would not have been possible without his influence.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Statement of Confirmation	2
Impact Statement	3
Acknowledgements	4
Glossary	8
List of Figures	12
Chapter 1 Introduction	13
1.1 Rationale	13
1.2 Research Questions and Aims	17
Chapter 2 Multiculturalism and the Post-Imperial Legacy in the UK	19
2.1 Decolonisation and South Asian Migration to the UK	19
2.2 Multiculturalism and Stakeholdership	23
2.3 Cultural Memory and the British Post-imperial Legacy	29
2.4 Muslims and Islamophobia in the UK	32
2.5 Multiculturalism in the Wake of 9/11	37
2.6 Identity Formation and Disenfranchisement	39
Chapter 3 Extremist Interpretations of Islam	42
3.1 Religion and Politics	43
3.2 Islamism and Pan-Islamism	46
3.3 The Fourth Wave of Terrorism – Modern Jihads	52
3.4 Radicalisation and the Use of the Internet	60
3.5 Understandings of Jihad	70
3.6 Scriptural Support in al Qaeda’s Training	82
3.7 Meaning-Making and Interpretation	86
Chapter 4 The UK’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy	91
4.1 Counter-Terrorism and the Politics of Radicalisation Post-9/11	91
4.2 Prevent	95
4.3 Pursue	97
4.4 Protect	98
4.5 Prepare	99
4.6 Channel, and the Desistance and Disengagement Programme	99
4.7 Concerns with and Recommendations Made for CONTEST	102
4.8 Developments in Countering Extremism Online	111
Chapter 5 Methodological Approach and Theoretical Framework	114
5.1 Positionality	114

5.2 Critical Realism	118
5.3 Critical Discourse Analysis	122
5.4 Description	125
5.5 Interpretation	129
5.6 Explanation	130
5.7 The Text as a Critical Object	131
5.8 The Islamic State's Publication Dabiq	136
5.9 Islamic State in Khurasan Province's Publication Voice of Khurasan	140
5.10 Methodology	144
5.11 Secondary Texts – Tafsirs and Hadith	147
5.12 Data Collection	151
Chapter 6 Descriptive Interpretation	155
6.1 The Islamic States' Shirking of Responsibility	155
6.2 Target Audiences for Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan	160
6.3 Arguments Made for Performing Hijrah and Joining Jihad	167
6.4 Just War	172
6.5 Language Choices and Word Associations	178
6.6 Chapter Summary	185
Chapter 7 Representative Interpretation and Social Interpretation	186
7.1 Representative Interpretation	186
7.2 Common Themes and Underlying Messages in Dabiq and VoK	193
7.3 Preliminary Findings from the Data Collection	204
7.4 Qur'anic History and Interpretation of the Data	221
7.5 Surah 5:51	227
7.6 Surah 8:39	233
7.7 Surah 3:103	237
7.8 Surah 60:4	240
7.9 Surah 59:14	245
7.10 Interpretations of Just War	247
7.11 Chapter Summary	255
Chapter 8 Deconstructive Interpretation	257
8.1 Division	257
8.2 Free Will	268
8.3 Nationalism	271
8.4 Chapter Summary	272
Chapter 9 Conclusion	274
9.1 Aims of the Thesis	274

9.2 Limitations of the Research	278
9.3 Summary of Findings	280
9.4 Recommendations	284
Bibliography	292
Appendix I – Excerpt from Analysis of Dabiq 15	319
Appendix II – Excerpt from Analysis of Voice of Khurasan 1	321
Appendix III – Details of Dabiq Publications	324
Appendix IV – Details of Voice of Khurasan Publications	325

Glossary

Words

Definitions

Amir/emir

A ruler, leader, or commander in Islamic countries

Bay'ah

To give bay'ah is to pledge allegiance to a ruler. This was practised by the Prophet Muhammad

Bid'ah

Innovation, often used to refer to religious innovation. Bid'ah can be both good and bad. Good bid'ah may be, for example, innovations in technology which can be used to propagate Islam, while bid'ah which is considered evil may be innovations in the production of new intoxicants

Fida

Devoted, loyal, trusting or sacrifice

Fitnah

Trial, conflict, or stress. The interpretation of the term in its use in Qur'anic scripture is often debated

Fitrah

One's natural disposition or innate nature

Hanafi

The Hanafi school of thought is one of four traditional Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Of the four schools, it is the largest in following, comprising of 30% of Sunni Muslims. Other Sunni schools include the Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali

Hijrah

The hijrah refers to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina. It is often commonly used to refer to the migration of Muslims to states governed by Islamic jurisdiction

Iblis

Iblis is the leader of the devils (or shaytan) in Islam. In Islam it is believed that Iblis was banished from heaven when he refused to prostrate before Adam

Imam

A religious leader who leads prayer in mosques

Jihad

Jihad means to strive in the way of Allah. There are two forms of jihad in Islam: the lesser jihad and the greater jihad. The lesser jihad refers to the physical struggle against an aggressor or oppressor,

	while the greater jihad refers to one's inner struggle to become a better person and Muslim
Jizyah	A tax which is paid by non-Muslims to the rulers or leaders of a Muslim country or state. In return, the individual is granted protection from Muslims and will not be required to join an army in the event of a religious war
Kafir, kufr, kuffar	Unbelief, disbelief, and those who reject Allah
Mahdi	A messianic deliverer who will grace the world when Islam is at its most corrupt point, guiding the world and restoring the purity of the religion. This will be a short golden age, which will last between seven and nine years marking the end of the world
Mahram	A person with whom marriage is unlawful (considered haram), such as those with whom you have a close blood relation.
Muhajir	An immigrant
Mujahid/Mujahideen	An individual or group of individuals who wage jihad, respectively
Mujaddid	A reformer, or one who brings renewal to the religion of Islam
Munāfiqīn	An individual who portrays themselves as being a believer of Islam in public, while concealing their disbelief or propagates against Islam with the 'enemies'
Murtaddīn	An apostate; one who rejects Islam. The difference between a murtadd and a kafir is such that a murtadd is a particularly heinous disbeliever
Mushrikīn	An idolator or polytheist
Muwahid	Those considered to be muwahids are individuals who are focused on <i>tawhid</i> , or the oneness of Allah
Sahabah	The Sahabah are the companions, family, and friends of the Prophet Muhammad who accepted him as the Prophet and believed in Islam during his life, as well as after his death, dying as Muslims themselves

Salafism	This refers to the belief that Islam was at its most pure form during the first three generations of Muslims, advocating a return to the ways of this time
Salafi-jihadism	An ideology which combines Salafism and jihadist philosophies seeking to establish a global caliphate through advocating lesser (military) jihad
Salat	Prayer; this is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Muslims are required to observe five prayers a day. Other pillars of Islam include shahada, zakat, sawm, and Hajj
Shahid	Martyr or witness; this is a term which is often used to describe individuals who lost their lives while performing a religious duty, including jihad
Shahada	Profession of faith; the belief that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger. This is one of the Five Pillars of Islam
Shaytan	Evil spirits or devils in Islam, which incite people to commit sins
Shia	The second largest branch of Islam. Shia Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad appointed Ali as his successor, who was prevented from succeeding Muhammad by his other companions
Sufi	A branch of Islam also known as 'Islamic mysticism,' which focuses on spirituality and ritualism
Sunni	The largest branch of Islam. Followers of Sunni Islam believe that the Prophet Muhammad did not appoint a successor, and Abu Bakr was chosen to lead by Muhammad's other followers
Taghut	An individual who is worshipped and accepts being worshipped
Tawhid	The oneness of Allah; belief that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger
Ulama	A body of scholars in Islam who are recognised as possessing a great wealth of specialist knowledge on Islamic jurisdiction and theology

Ummah	The Islamic community; this is not a physical community but refers to the unity of all Muslims who are connected through the sharing of religion
Wahhabism	A strictly orthodox Sunni Muslim tradition which was founded and spread by Abdul ibn Wahhab. It advocates a purification of Islam in accordance with Salafism, and rejects Islamic philosophies and theologies which were developed after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Wahhabism promotes strict adherence to the teachings of the Qur'an and hadith
Zakat	The obligation on the Muslim to donate a portion of their wealth to charity each year. This is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and is compulsory for all Muslims who are able

List of Figures

Figure 1. Number of Anti-Islamic Hate Crimes Reported Prior to and Following 9/11 (Byers & Jones, 2007:49).	38
Figure 2. Concepts Contained in Mainstream, Islamist, and Salafi-Jihadi Texts (Comerford & Bryson, 2017)	80
Figure 3. Components in al Qaeda's Cadre Training (Stenersen, 2017: 110)	86
Figure 4. Cover of issue 7, Dabiq	88
Figure 5. CONTEST, Referrals Made to Channel (GOV.UK, 2018: 38)	100
Figure 6. TACO (O'Regan, 2006: 148)	134
Figure 7. Changes in Diacritical Markers	146
Figure 8. Example of Data Analysis from Dabiq 7 – From Hypocrisy to Apostasy	153
Figure 9. Front Cover of Dabiq, Issue 3	157
Figure 10. Terror Trends in the European Union (Council of the European Union, 2023)	163
Figure 11. Stills from Incite the Believers (Islamic State, 2020)	188
Figure 12. Pages 5-6 of Al Risalah, Issue 2 (Al Qaeda, 2015: 5-6)	190
Figure 13. Front Cover of Dabiq, Issue 1	191
Figure 14. Front Cover of Voice of Khurasan, Issue 1	192
Figure 15. Front Cover of Voice of Khurasan, Issue 22	192
Figure 16. Most Frequently Referenced Verses in Dabiq	209
Figure 17. Most Frequently Referenced Verses in Voice of Khurasan	213
Figure 18. Verses Referenced Most Frequently Between the Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan Series	214
Figure 19. Surahs Referenced in Dabiq	216
Figure 20. Surahs Referenced in Voice of Khurasan	217
Figure 21. Comparison of Surahs Referenced in Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan	218
Figure 22. Number of Verses Per Surah / Number of Times Surah is Referenced	219
Figure 23. Surahs with the Highest Number of Verses / Number of Times Referenced	220
Figure 24. Meccan or Medinan, in the Twenty Most Referenced Surahs	223
Figure 25. Distinguishing Between Muslims and Non-Muslims for the Islamic State	262
Figure 26. Distinguishing Between True Sunni Muslims and the Taliban	263
Figure 27. Number of People Engaged in the DDP	286

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Rationale

I have a long history of interest in religion and language, which have had many influences on my life including my pursuit of education in philosophy – specialising in the philosophy of religion, and then the philosophy of art. I do not credit either of these qualifications, however, for my undertaking of a PhD project, which I largely attribute to one man, and what I like to say is a product of the environment.

In 2017, when I had completed my MRes, I became a member of a Bible study group that was being run by my friend's mother, and which met every Tuesday afternoon. I was not particularly interested in converting to Christianity as much as I had an academic interest in the religion and to gain better understanding of biblical exegesis. On one of these Tuesdays and while consuming a baked sweet potato (which is another thing the Bible study group taught me about), one of the ladies at lunch asked if I would be attending a talk that was happening in the coming weeks; this talk in question would be taking place in a hall in Oxford and would be given by a self-styled 'Christian apologist' and proselytiser (whom I have chosen not to name). I was informed that the talk would be centred around biblical proofs of God's existence and assured that it would be something I would be most interested in, especially as the speaker had an academic background in Islamic history and I am a Muslim. I was told that he was renowned for speaking in public places such as Speakers Corner in Hyde Park, London, and would be able to answer any questions I had relating to both Christianity and Islam. This was not an offer I could turn down.

On the day of the talk, we arrived at the location around 6 or 7pm and gathered in a hall which was filled with somewhere between one and two hundred people who helped themselves to hot drinks and biscuits. As they took their seats and settled in, the Christian speaker came out on to the stage. One of the first things he said, and which has stayed with me since, was "what does the word radical mean?" In my head, I was beginning to quickly weigh up a couple of different answers – more as a mental exercise than because I wanted to share an answer with the crowd of people – which included a deviation from the norm, and an extreme version of a thing. In the second or two

that it took me to think these thoughts, a large proportion of the audience shouted back “root” in unison, which struck me as odd. I did not think this was the definition we employed for the word ‘radical’ in our everyday use. I had heard many people use the word ‘radical’ before but never to mean ‘root.’ The speaker confirmed that the audience were correct and used the definition to illustrate the point that the ‘radical Muslim’ was one who followed Islam to the ‘root’ and had a literalist interpretation of Qur’anic scripture, while the ‘moderate’ Muslim was not one who followed Islam or the ways of the Prophet Muhammad. The moderate Muslim, he explained, was one who was choosing to ignore the fundamental tenets of Islam and therefore could not be considered a Muslim at all. This interpretation of ‘radical,’ ‘root,’ and what it means to be a Muslim set alarm bells off in my head, which only grew in intensity throughout the duration of the talk – as well as during the two months that followed.

For the remainder of the talk, the speaker referenced several verses of the Qur’an which were used to support his account of Islam, its history, and its growth – verses which I dutifully made note of, along with the ideas that the verses were being used to support. As well as this, claims were made which struck me, not only as odd, but as being incredulous, such as that olive trees do not grow in the Middle East. While I was very aware at the time that olives are a staple of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern diet, I still made a note to double check that olive trees do in fact grow in the Middle East, just on the off chance that I had been wrong my whole life. (I would find out that I was not wrong but had been made to question my beliefs by someone who spoke with such conviction, and an audience who accepted every word without question.)

The talk ended with the speaker holding up a book in each hand. In the one hand, he held an A5 copy of the Bible, and in the other an A6 pocket-sized copy of the Qur’an. “The bigger, the better,” he said. The crowd cheered and laughed as I sat in disbelief. What I thought would be a talk on biblical proofs of God’s existence in Christianity was a sermon, instead, of the perceived inconsistencies and contradictions in the Qur’an, given to a crowd of people who were too in awe of his command of Qur’anic scripture to question his claims. I was under no illusions about my own knowledge and had good faith in its accuracy, but I suspected that there was some disinformation being disseminated.

Over the two months that followed, I researched the notes that I had made which included the history and family tree of the Prophet Muhammad, and verses of the Qur'an that had been referenced in the talk and the context in which they had originally been written. Unsurprisingly, my suspicions were proven correct: the references had been heavily decontextualised and manipulated. Verses that were mentioned by the speaker included 9:5 and 9:29 of the Qur'an which read

But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war). But if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful (9:5).

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Prophet, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued (9:29).

These verses (which are discussed in depth in the following chapters), as well as others, were used as evidence of the violence that is perpetuated in Islam. The speaker noted that Christians are exempt from following “barbaric instructions” in the Bible and are told instead to follow more loving commands. While arguing that the ‘true’ Muslim is one who follows a literalist interpretation of the Qur'an, the speaker argued that the ‘true’ Christian does not follow a literalist interpretation of the Bible, holding Christians and Muslims to two different standards.

At some point in the research that I was conducting, I came to the realisation that if it was possible for a Christian proselytiser to use Qur'anic scripture to aid his narratives and justify Christianity, essentially, to ‘radicalise’ a group of people, then it is wholly possible that Islamic fundamentalists are utilising scripture in the same way. It was at this point that I began researching the use of scripture and religion in propaganda materials produced by IS (and later ISKP also) and contacted John O'Regan at UCL with the idea of a PhD project.

The project itself has evolved over time to become what it is in its current form, which is an exploration of the ways scriptural references are used to legitimise acts of terror, and the politicising of religion. The subject and the area of expertise within which I situate myself is niche. However, I am aware of the real-world impact and benefits of researching and understanding the ideologies of jihadi groups and individuals, particularly if we hope to be more efficient and effective in countering extremism. Over the duration of the four years I have spent researching the employment of religion and Qur'anic scripture by extremists, I have analysed dozens of propaganda materials including (but not limited to) online magazines, videos, posters, and manuals, and have developed a large database of my analyses, which have been used to guide the research conducted.

While I have offered the long form answer on my motivations for pursuing this project, my short answer remains my favourite: I wanted to prove a man wrong. Through the undertaking of such a project, I hope I have proven several men wrong.

1.2 Research Questions and Aims

With the analysis that I have carried out on the data collected, I hope that this research will be able to make a contribution to improving the way current de-radicalisation programmes in the UK are undertaken, particularly the Desistance and Disengagement Programme (DDP). Those partaking in the DDP tend to be individuals who have already been convicted of terror related offences. While counter narratives are offered to those individuals partaking in the DDP whose terror offences have been driven by or related to religion, my aim is to assist the re-education of such individuals by providing some insight into IS and ISKP produced propaganda materials consumed online, and the radicalising effect this has. I believe that it is through understanding the narratives that are disseminated, and the discourses contained in the propaganda materials produced that we can hope to offer a counter narrative that is specific and specialised. Discussion on the current counter-terrorism strategy and de-radicalisation programmes can be found in Chapter 3, where I offer some explanation of how the de-radicalisation programmes work, concerns relating to their ethics and effectivity, and suggestions for how they can possibly be improved.

In light of the above discussion, the following questions were used to guide this study, and which I have endeavoured to answer:

RQ1 What are the justifications presented for acts of violence in extremist literature produced by Salafi-jihadis, and in what ways is Qur'anic scripture used to give credibility to this?

I address RQ1 in Chapters 6 and 7. In Chapter 6, I provide a discussion of the preliminary observations from the initial reading of the materials. I consider the narratives and underlying ideologies presented in the discourse that are used to justify and prescribe acts of violence against the perceived enemies of Islam. In Chapter 7, I examine the data that I have collected in depth. I take into consideration the linguistic choices made in the production of the text, the contexts in which the magazines were produced as well as the preferred reading of the scriptural references utilised. This offers some insight into the geopolitical issues that the IS and ISKP writers draw upon to validate their calls for action.

RQ2 When Qur’anic scripture is offered as a means of legitimising acts of terror, how are the verses which are drawn upon recontextualised so as to be applicable to modern times?

I answer RQ2 in Chapter 7, in which I look at the situational and intertextual contexts of the texts produced. I discuss the verses that have popularly been employed to give credibility to the teachings of proscribed terrorist organisations, and the contexts in which they were produced to provide a historical account for the violence that is prescribed in the Qur’an. In IS and ISKP produced literature, fragments of scripture are often decontextualised to fit a current event or situation. I provide the readings of such verses in full, with historical and social commentary to demonstrate how such manipulations and recontextualisations are being delivered.

RQ3 In what ways are language and scripture utilised on online platforms for the purposes of radicalisation?

RQ3, which focuses on online radicalisation, is not a question which I answer directly in the thesis but is one which guides the work. The focus of my research is on the materials that are disseminated online and the radicalising effect of using religious scripture to validate the claims made. In Chapter 3 (section 3.4) I discuss how the Internet has been used by extremists to radicalise people en masse. The language choices and the scripture used on online platforms for the purposes of radicalisation are discussed throughout the course of the thesis.

The radicalisation that I focus on is centred around extremism in the UK that is driven by Islamic fundamentalism. The following chapter, therefore, begins with a discussion of the history of Muslim migration to the UK, and the concepts of Islamism and pan-Islamism.

Chapter 2 Multiculturalism and the Post-Imperial Legacy in the UK

Radicalisation refers to the process by which individuals come to adopt extreme political, social, or religious ideologies – often to the point of supporting or engaging in violence to achieve their goals. It typically involves a gradual shift in beliefs, sometimes influenced by personal grievances, ideological narratives, or social pressures, leading a person to reject mainstream values in favour of more extreme views. Understanding Islamist extremism and radicalisation in the UK requires recognising the various factors that can make individuals more susceptible to radicalisation. These factors are diverse and can include experiences such as unemployment, financial hardship, substandard housing, inadequate educational opportunities, and struggles with identity and a sense of belonging. In a report on terrorism in Great Britain produced by the House of Commons, it states that of those convicted on charges of terrorism or extremism, 36% are White, while 41% are Asian or Asian British, 8% are Black or Black British, 9% belong to other ethnic groups, while 5% are mixed. 1% are unrecorded. This means that almost half of the prison population convicted on charges of terrorism or extremism are Asian/Asian British or Black/Black British (Grahame et al., 2022: 27). This is greatly disproportionate to the national UK demographic where 9.3% of the population are Asian and 4% are Black. An overwhelming majority of the UK population (81.7%) are classified as White. (GOV.UK, 2022). As well as this, the proportion of British nationals who have been arrested for terrorism or extremism offences in the UK has increased over time. In 2001/02 29% of those arrested on such charges were British nationals. By 2021/22 this figure had increased to 78% (Grahame et al., 2022: 17). The statistics indicate that ethnic minorities who are also British nationals are more vulnerable to radicalisation, with many contending that problems of identity formation play a catalysing role in this. The question of identity formation for migrants in the UK is particularly complex given the history of the UK and its relationship with the rest of the world, especially during the colonial period. In this chapter I first give an overview of the British colonial legacy as this affected South Asian migration to the UK and then discuss some of the issues around UK multiculturalism in the present day.

2.1 Decolonisation and South Asian Migration to the UK

The British Empire comprised of territories, dominions, and colonies which were either ruled directly by Britain or which Britain played an administrative role in ruling. It was during the Age

of Exploration¹ in the 15th and 16th centuries that England (along with France and the Netherlands) began to establish overseas trading posts and territories. At the height of the British Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was the largest empire in all of history and was the leading global power. The relationship between Britain and its colonies overseas is a complicated one, and for the purposes of this thesis I will focus on the colonisation and decolonisation of India, and the subsequent migration and state sponsored assimilation of South Asians to Britain.

The impact the British had on India is one which is contested. Some argue that British rule in colonial India had a largely negative impact, with the British pushing a policy of deindustrialisation in India for the benefit of British export, which left India poorer than before British rule. Others argue that the impact was either neutral or positive, blaming the catastrophic decline of India's GDP on other factors such as civil conflict. Many historians contend that the industrial revolution in the UK was fuelled by the colonisation in India, including Mukherjee who states that, from the Age of Exploration, the economic development in Europe was tied to its relationship with the rest of the world.

The imperial connection between Britain and India contributed to British industrialisation and its emergence as a hegemonic power in the world, sustained Britain through her period of relative decline in global competition in the industrial sphere, enabled her financial supremacy in the world till the first world war to finally seeing her through the crisis years of the 20th century and up to the second world war (Mukherjee, 2010: 73).

Mukherjee reports that in the 1500s, Asia (excluding Japan) produced more than three times what Western Europe did of world GDP. Through the Age of Exploration, as Europe began to engage with and colonise other societies, its share of global GDP rose while that of Asia's fell. A few centuries later, by 1913, Asia's share of the global GDP was no more than two-thirds that of Western Europe's. The myth of Europe's (and particularly Britain's) success dating back to antiquity is brought into question when we acknowledge that up to the late 19th century, China and India combined produced over double the GDP of all of Western Europe. In the 18th century, India's

¹ The Age of Exploration was a period between the 15th and 17th centuries which was characterised as a time in which Europeans explored the world in search of wealth, knowledge, and new routes for trading.

share of the GDP began to shrink, and in the 19th century the same occurred to China, which were years in which the countries were colonised respectively. It seems evident that ‘colonial contact did not develop the colonised countries while it clearly led to rapid development in the colonising ones. The former colonies experienced growth only when the colonial contact was broken’ (ibid: 75).

The East India Company (EIC), which was a joint-stock company in operation between the years 1600 and 1874, was founded to trade in the region of the Indian Ocean and eventually ruled large areas of South Asia. It was initially an English company which then became British owned, and at its peak was the largest corporation in the world, complete with their own armed forces. The army of the EIC comprised of 260,000 soldiers, which at the time was double the size of the British army, with convoys of soldiers stationed in countries under British rule to maintain control.

The EIC opened up the Indian market to buying British goods, which were sold without any duties or tariffs added, unlike locally produced Indian goods which were heavily taxed making Indian produce largely unaffordable. As well as this, bans and tariffs as high as 70-80% were implemented in the UK on goods produced in India which restricted the sale of Indian textiles in Britain. Such bans and tariffs were only implemented on Indian produced textiles and not on raw cotton, which was often imported without any tariffs to factories in Britain, where it would be turned into textiles to be sold back to the Indian market (Karmakar, 2015). In this way, India had been

converted into a reservoir of cheap raw materials like cotton, tea, indigo, coffee, etc. While British merchants and its industries prospered in this course, India had to suffer losses on all accounts. Indian handicraft industries were ruthlessly killed in this process (Thakur, 2013: 406).

Although Britain was victorious in both world wars, the second world war left Britain, the Empire, and Europe in ruins, with the Soviet Union and United States emerging as the new global powers. Following World War II, the UK was no longer viewed as the world's creditor (Mukherjee, 2010), as the war left the UK bankrupt, and requiring and receiving a loan from the US of \$3.75 billion, the last of which was repaid in 2006. During this time of economic instability for Europe, the

European colonies were also experiencing anti-colonial movements and protests, which resulted in the number of people under British rule in overseas colonies falling from 700 million to five million in the post-war 1945-1965 years (White, 2014: 3). Of the five million people still under colonial rule, three million resided in Hong Kong.

By 1945, India's two largest political parties – the Indian National Congress, which was led by Mahatma Gandhi, and the Muslim League, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah – had been campaigning for the independence of India for decades. The two parties and leaders however disagreed on what the implementation of the independence from Britain should look like. The Indian National Congress wanted India to remain a unified and secular state but without British control, while the Muslim League wanted India to be partitioned into a Hindu and Islamic state, for fear that if India remained one unified secular state, it would become a Hindu dominion (Moore, 1982).

With violent civil unrest growing in India, which was suspected to be on the brink of a civil war, Clement Attlee – the Prime Minister in the United Kingdom and head of a pro-decolonisation Labour government who had just won the general election – moved quickly to squash the unrest and drew up new borders partitioning India into a Hindu India and an Islamic Pakistan in 1948. With the decline of British influence globally and the rapid disbanding of the Empire, British politicians believed it would be possible to remain a world power with influence over other nations if it was the head of a “Commonwealth” – which would be a free association of sovereign states, typically made up of previous territories of the British Empire. Both India and Pakistan chose to become part of the Commonwealth following the gaining of their independence. This partition of land to create these two states saw millions of people migrate from India to join the Islamic state of Pakistan and vice versa to join the Hindu nation of India, a period which cost hundreds of thousands of lives. In 1971, following an internal crisis in Pakistan which resulted in a third war between India and Pakistan and eventually the secession of East Pakistan, the People's Republic of Bangladesh was created.

In the same year that India and Pakistan gained independence, the British Nationality Act was passed, which allowed entry and citizenship in the UK to those who were citizens of Commonwealth countries. Millions of people moved between different British colonies, including

large numbers of people migrating from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to the UK. Although there had been some migration from South Asia to the UK in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the greatest increase in Muslim migration came in the 1950s. With this mass migration of people from former British colonies, the demographic of the UK changed drastically following the second world war. Citizens of Commonwealth countries were invited by the UK government to aid in the economic reconstruction of the UK in the aftermath of the war (buildings, infrastructure etc.), and then in the boom decades of the 1950s and early 1960s to take up employment in a range of industries both in the service sector and in manufacturing.

At this point in time when mass migration from post-colonial territories to European countries was on the rise, in the Western European countries ‘indigenous cultures were deemed abhorrent and inferior so it was felt that they had to be uprooted and re-moulded in order to benefit from the so-called more advanced and civilised European and Christian cultures’ (Tawat, 2016: 3). This resulted in the promotion of a synthetic British culture and values which ethnic minorities were expected to integrate into. While Britain had undoubtedly become more multicultural, in the sense that its population of ethnic minorities had grown, it is important to consider the assimilation and integration of post-colonial migrants in the wake of a new Empire-less Britain.

2.2 Multiculturalism and Stakeholdership

Multiculturalism in the UK and whether or not it is (or has been) successful is an ongoing debate in which an individual’s answer will be determined in part by their understanding of what multiculturalism is. At its core, multiculturalism is the presence of different cultural groups or ethnicities within a society and is often used synonymously to refer to ethnic or cultural pluralism. For some, multiculturalism is only counted as being successful when minority cultural groups are able to integrate with the dominant culture, while for others the ability of different cultural communities to exist harmoniously side by side is sufficient.

The concept of integration and what it entails comes with considerable social and political implications. The notion of integration in which diverse communities peacefully coexist is entirely at odds with the view that there exists a dominant culture into which individuals from ethnic minorities must assimilate.

Former Conservative Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, was widely condemned for claiming in a speech given in the United States on migration in Europe, that multiculturalism in the UK had ‘failed’ by allowing people to enter the UK who had the aim of ‘undermining the stability and threatening the security of society.’ In her reasoning for what had caused the failure of multiculturalism, Braverman says that there are

no demands on the incomer to integrate. It [multiculturalism] has failed because it allowed people to come to our society and live parallel lives in it. They could be in the society but not of the society (The Independent, 2023).

Although Braverman’s sentiments drew heavy criticism from many who argue that the UK is a multicultural society, other right-wing political figures have expressed similar xenophobic views. In 2017, following the London Bridge attack in which 11 people were killed (including the perpetrators) with a further 48 people injured, Nigel Farage – the then leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), and since 4 July 2024 the Reform Party MP for Clacton – blamed multiculturalism for the attack. In the wake of the attack, Farage claimed that

We’ve made some terrible mistakes in this country, and it really started with the election of Tony Blair back in 1997 who said he wanted to build a multicultural Britain. [...] If you open your door to uncontrolled immigration from Middle Eastern countries you are inviting in terrorism (The Independent, 2017).

The nationalist ‘dog whistle’ argument presented by Farage and hysterically echoed most recently by Braverman is that there is a malevolent alien group or ‘fifth column’ operating in the UK, whose members are actively seeking to undermine UK society from within, usually with the backing of a perceived enemy nation or non-state sponsor. Divisive thinking such as this is indicative of an underlying threat mentality from the direction of the political right in which individuals and groups of people are defined as either being compatriots or enemies and accepted or demonised accordingly. Such attitudes are deliberately contentious, by requiring individuals confronted with such views to choose a side.

When asked if he agreed with Braverman's claims, the then UK Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, sidestepped answering the question directly, instead appearing to disagree with Braverman through the somewhat vague assertion that what was 'incredible about our country, is that it is a fantastic multi-ethnic democracy. We have done an incredible job of integrating people into society' (The Guardian, 2023). Quite what he meant by integration here is left unclear.

That said, since 2010, successive Conservative governments have implemented an increasingly nationalist agenda targeted at the assimilation of ethnic minority groups through the contentious promotion of so called 'British values.' It is stated in government documents online that the five fundamental 'British values' that underpin what it means to be a citizen of the UK are the rule of law, democracy, individual liberty, mutual respect, and tolerance for other faiths, beliefs and practices (GOV.UK, 2014). However, the term 'British values' is not always used to denote such a specific meaning and is often used colloquially and subjectively to refer to a way of living that one views as being characteristic of what it means to be British.

In speaking about British values in an essentialist way, there is an underlying assumption in nationalist circles that the 'British' way of life is to be prioritised over the ways of lives of others and that those wishing to live in the UK should conform to it. By calling for 'integration' ethnic minorities are expected to take active steps to adopt the language – English – and adapt themselves to the dominant UK culture and its perceived associated 'values.' This inevitably requires a trade-off – which nationalists deem reasonable and necessary – between the values and practices that migrant groups bring with them and those which they find when they arrive. For the Conservative governments that have promoted this view, any trade off that occurs should of necessity be in favour of the latter. A cultural hierarchy is thus created in which British culture and values are privileged over the cultures and values of others and viewed as an endpoint.

In reflection of this perspective, in his first speech on radicalisation and the causes of terrorism held at a security conference in Munich in 2011, the then UK Prime Minister David Cameron criticised the legacy of so-called 'state multiculturalism' as pursued by previous Labour governments. He accused the policy of having

failed to provide a vision of society to which they [ethnic minorities] feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values (BBC, 2011).

He argued that the UK needed to promote a stronger national identity to prevent people from turning towards extremism of any kind. The notion of ‘Britishness’ and of a British identity to which all should ascribe was presented by Cameron as a monistic and totalising concept. It forms the basis for the promotion of nationalist assimilation policies based on invented ‘British values,’ and has been pushed by nationalists and nationalist parties alike. Similar to the sentiments portrayed by Cameron, there is resentment held by nationalists for the perceived refusal or unwillingness of ethnic minorities to adopt ‘our [British] values.’ A byproduct of this for nationalists is feelings of ‘tolerance’ as opposed to acceptance of ethnic minorities – a sentiment which has grown since the 7/7 bombings of 2005, which I have discussed further in section 2.5 of this chapter. This works to further the divide between the White British population and ethnic minorities by placing a duty on the ethnic minority to assimilate into British culture and adopt their ‘values’ and identity while also having structural and societal inequalities present in the UK which do not view, treat or accept them as equals. The underlying assumption in Cameron’s statement seems to be that if individuals (including ethnic minorities) have a strong national identity, this will provide necessary protection from the draws of extremism, radicalisation, and terrorism.

This raises the question of whether or not a strong ‘British identity’ in itself is sufficient to prevent individuals from being drawn towards extremism. A core focus of de-radicalisation programmes in the UK (which are discussed in Chapter 4) is the reintegration and rehabilitation of those in prison on terrorism and terrorism related charges into society. However, if it is the society itself and its political and social structures which lead to the alienation of the individual, is it possible to reintegrate the individual into the same society successfully when it is this society itself that the individual rejects? Without structural change in society it is possible that, despite de-radicalisation and reintegration efforts, the individual will continue to experience issues around identity, and belonging.

When thinking about the concept of multiculturalism, it is important to consider its ideological implications around identity formation and stakeholdership as well as the political aspects of policy and integration, which forms the basis for the argument that there are two types of multiculturalism: ideological and political multiculturalism. Ideological multiculturalism ‘is crucial for thinking through issues of identity, belonging and stakeholdership, whilst the latter [political multiculturalism] is equally important for turning these discursive concepts into legislation’ and policy (Clennon, 2015: 26). Stakeholdership in terms of multiculturalism refers to an individual or citizen who is involved in and has responsibilities towards a society and, therefore, has an interest in its success.

Clennon states that stakeholdership may be the most important element of ideological multiculturalism, with stakeholdership implying a horizontal relationship between a population of equals, rather than a vertical relationship between ‘majority stakeholders and minority non-stakeholder ‘others’” (ibid: 36). It is argued that often post-colonial and ethnic minorities are not perceived to be stakeholders in a nation until they adopt the psyche and cultural memory and narrative of the majority. This majoritarian bias places the burden of assimilation on the minority but does not put the same burden on the majority to accept, accommodate or aid the adaptation of the minority. This poses a two-fold problem: first the problem of the minority who are treated like the ‘other’ for not having the same cultural psyche as the majority and are expected to adopt an identity which is more ‘British,’ and the problem of the majority who are not expected to view the post-colonial or ethnic minority population as equal. The minority are viewed as being an inferior ‘other’ unless the same cultural memory and practices are adopted, which would symbolise their stakeholdership, and even so race, colour, and ethnicity are often used to alienate and view migrants as ‘invaders.’ This was demonstrated particularly poignantly during the race riots involving right-wing extremists that exploded across the UK in the summer of 2024 following a widespread campaign of disinformation on social media concerning the status of the perpetrator of a fatal assault in Southport in which three children aged five, six, and nine were killed, and a further ten individuals – eight of whom were children – critically injured (Davies, 2024). Information circulated that the perpetrator was an ‘undocumented migrant’ who had ‘arrived on a boat.’ All of which was false. He was in fact Axel Rudakubana, a 17-year-old of Rwandan descent who was born and raised in the UK as a Christian. The spread of disinformation was exacerbated

by prominent figures online including influencers such as Andrew Tate. Seeking to inflame the situation, in addition to repeating these falsities, Tate hyperbolically posted on X that the ‘soul of the Western man is so broken that when the invaders slaughter your daughters, you do absolutely fucking nothing’ (The Times, 2024).

On the same day, Tommy Robinson (born Stephen Christopher Yaxley) who is a British anti-Muslim campaigner, far-right activist and former leader of the English Defence League (EDL)² shared sentiments on X stating that the Southport stabbing was ‘more evidence to suggest Islam is a mental health (*sic*) rather than a religion of peace’ (Robinson, 2024).

As a result of such disinformation, Muslim communities were targeted by far-right extremists who started riots across numerous cities in the UK, including London, Birmingham, and Hull. The riots led to dozens of police officers being injured, and mosques and Islamic centres being damaged, as well as the private property of Muslims, including businesses, homes and cars being attacked. The right-wing extremists began attacking hotels and accommodation they believed to be housing migrants and indiscriminately assaulting persons of colour in the street. After a week of riots, it was apparent that the message the right wished to get across was that migrants to the UK were not welcome.

The perceived religion of the perpetrator was used as the decisive dividing factor, with Islam and Muslims being blamed for the many problems of UK society. Once the religion followed by Rudakubana’s family was revealed to be Christianity and not Islam, Rudakubana’s ethnic background became the principal dividing factor. This would indicate that the riots have little to do with Rudakubana, his acts of violence, his religion, or his ethnicity in themselves, but have to do with the fact that he is categorised as ‘foreign’ in relation to an ideologically White and racist perception of ‘Britishness.’ In this conception, those of an ethnic background that is not British or

² The EDL was a far-right organisation that was founded in 2009 and was active until the mid-late 2010s. The group presented itself as a movement and pressure group which carried out street demonstrations as their main tactic to fight against Islamist extremism. In reality, the group was opposed to Islam as a whole, targeting Islam, Muslims and Islamic centers and places of worship. The reputation of the group was damaged significantly in 2011 when links were drawn between the Norwegian far-right terrorist Anders Breivik, and some supporters of the EDL were convicted for planning to bomb mosques in the UK.

those who follow a religion that is not Christianity are often viewed as being alien and ‘un-British,’ and having no stakeholdership in the UK. The causes of such tensions are discussed below.

2.3 Cultural Memory and the British Post-imperial Legacy

Clennon (2015) has argued that multiculturalism (in both an ideological and political sense) is not only a question about the civic unity of a nation and how it treats its ethnic minorities but is also about how a nation ‘manages to assemble a sense of itself by equitably balancing the historical narratives and concerns of both its majorities and minorities’ (Clennon, 2015: 29). In the UK, this ‘sense of itself’ seems to be portrayed in the call for people to abide by essentialist ‘British values’ which presupposes the idea that Britishness itself is monistic, while disregarding the various cultures and histories that have helped build the Britain of today. Clennon (ibid) refers to this as *cultural memory*. Cultural memory, also often referred to as collective memory, is the ‘institutional curating of history in order to form a synthetic form of national identity’ (ibid). It has been argued that the misplaced nationalist perception of British cultural superiority stems from a post-imperial nostalgia for the power that Britain once had during the height of its empire, and which is held on to, particularly by White nationalist groupings in the UK, as cultural memory (Gilroy, 2006). Cultural memory nostalgists include significant sections of the British Conservative Party, the quasi-fascist UK Reform Party, and various extreme right-wing organisations and their affiliates. In addition, there are many individuals having no association to any organisation or group, but holding extreme nationalist views, who are brought into common alignment through their shared use of social media which channel this kind of right-wing thinking – e.g. X. Historians and sociologists alike question whether it is our experience of the present which affects our understanding of the past, or if it is the past which shapes how we experience the present, but whichever it is, there is no doubt that perceptions of Britain’s imperial past weigh heavily on the present with negative effects on wider society and notions of inclusive multiculturalism. To mitigate such effects, Kymlicka argues that the cultural memory of a nation should consider the histories of its minority populations as well as the majority. In Kymlicka’s general principles for the integration of minority groups, he suggests that nation states should acknowledge the historical injustices done to its minority groups, thus avoiding this sense of majoritarian amnesia in which the histories of the minority are forgotten or rewritten (Kymlicka, 2011).

If integration is understood to be the equality and acceptance afforded to the individual both civically and legally while expecting them to conform to the cultural memory and narrative of the nation and ascribing to ‘British values,’ this serves to oppress the minorities to whom it is supposedly offering equality by erasing their history. For post-colonial minorities, it means that they ask for acceptance and equal rights as citizens in a nation that they helped to build by virtue of the colony (Clennon, 2015: 30).

Multiculturalism is often blamed for promoting difference rather than civic unity. The former Shadow Home Secretary, David Davis, accuses multiculturalism of allowing individuals of different cultures and faiths to pursue their differences further while settled in the UK, without placing any responsibility on them to integrate into society. Davis argues that the authorities in the UK have become preoccupied with promoting differences in identities rather than core and common British values (ibid). Sentiments such as this indicate a fear in society of ‘difference’ which was illustrated clearly in the riots that took hold of the UK following the fatal stabbings carried out by Axel Rudakubana, and by a series of other societal and governmental scandals, including the controversies around the Prevent strategy (which is discussed in Chapter 4) and the Trojan Horse scandal.

The Trojan Horse scandal, often known as the Trojan Horse affair, is a conspiracy theory which claims that Muslim teachers are plotting to introduce Islamist philosophies in schools around Birmingham. The scandal began with an anonymous letter which was sent to Birmingham City Council in 2013 which was allegedly written by Islamist extremists in Birmingham who detailed an elaborate plan to infiltrate the city’s schools (Jackson, 2022). In early 2014, the letter was leaked to the press, following which hundreds of similar allegations were received by Birmingham City Council. As a result, numerous investigations were opened into schools and teachers, as well as the counterterrorism policies and strategies in the UK being hardened.

Former chairman of the Park View Education Trust, Tahir Alam, which ran three schools in Birmingham, was accused of writing and sending a 72-page document to the Muslim Council of Britain in 2007 which apparently explained in detail how to make secular state schools more in line with Islamic teachings – allegations which were widely debunked. Alam was removed from

his role in education, along with fourteen other teachers across various schools in Birmingham. Alam, as well as two other teachers were given lifetime bans from teaching (Homer, 2018). The affair caused significant public outcry on two counts: the first came from those who viewed this as clear racism, and the second from those disagreeing with the perceived 'Islamic' teaching of their children in secular state schools, calling for majoritarian conformity. The coalition government of the time promoted a return to the teaching and upholding of 'British values' in schools and colleges in the UK, with an implication that Islam has no place in British culture, viewing religious schools and Islamic faith lessons as taking a step away from core British values.

Some argue that this may be a case of how religious demands placed on schools are coded. For example, in an examination of the relationship between migrants' group rights and the states' policies for accommodating cultural and religious differences, it is argued that

Within schooling, a Muslim demand for 'Islamic religious lessons' is clearly for particular cultural provision and coded as a group demand, whereas one for 'better schooling provision' demands only greater participation rights within education, and is coded among the social equality claims (Statham et al., 2005: 437).

Statham et al. argue that although religion is relegated to remaining a private matter for individuals, the state continues to privilege and prioritise the Church of England in political spheres. For many, the limits placed on the rights of minority religions by British law were demonstrated 'by the Rushdie ruling that blasphemy does not extend to Islam.' This judgement was not passed because religious laws were considered to be archaic, as a blasphemy law had been used in 1977 for prosecution against a poem which depicted Christ as a homosexual (ibid: 434). It was denied because the same rights are not afforded to all ethnic and religious minorities.

In practice, this puts pressure on ethnic and religious minorities to integrate into a society that asks them to not only forget their history to adopt a new synthetic cultural memory, but does not view or treat their civic rights as equal, especially in religious regards. This becomes increasingly problematic when we consider that there is mounting evidence that South Asians, particularly Muslims, give their religious identity saliency over their national or ethnic identities (Modood &

Ahmad, 2007: 187). This means that when conflict arises, it often is not between South Asians and non-South Asians, but rather between Muslims and non-Muslims, creating a rift in society that for some seems irreparable. Some argue that this is a failing of multiculturalism as it works at present.

2.4 Muslims and Islamophobia in the UK

It has been reported in the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue that multiculturalism has been found to be inadequate and so achieving 'inclusive societies needed a new approach, and intercultural dialogue was the route to follow' (Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs, 2008: 9). While the term 'multiculturalism' is used simultaneously as a label to describe pluralism or diversity in society as well as the ways the state should recognise and support this diversity (Meer & Modood, 2016), the Council of Europe provide a more stringent definition of interculturalism. For the purposes of the White Paper, intercultural dialogue is understood as

A process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. [...] It aims to develop a deeper understanding of diverse world views and practices, to increase co-operation and participation (or the freedom to make choices), to allow personal growth and transformation, and to promote tolerance and respect for the other (Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs, 2008: 17).

This differs from multiculturalism because multiculturalism tends to preserve one dominant culture and attempts to accommodate and integrate all minority cultures, religions, and ethnicities into that, whereas interculturalism is seen as acknowledging and enabling all cultures as having equal currency. Kymlicka proposed three general principles which were to be afforded to all ethnic minorities, which can be summarised as the following, and which would be in keeping with a proposed intercultural society:

1. The state must be seen as belonging to all of its citizens equally, without exclusion or discrimination.

2. All individuals belonging to a state must be able to access all institutions and be able to act as full and equal political citizens without concealing their identity, irrespective of if this is their racial, religious, or ethnic etc. background.
3. The state should acknowledge the injustices experienced and history of its ethnic minorities (Kymlicka, 2011).

With respect to postcolonial migrants, the question arises of if it is possible to have ‘intercultural dialogue’ when the post-colonial migrants’ history is not remembered in the cultural memory of the nation? Meer and Modood, in line with this final point of Kymlicka’s, argue that ‘when new groups enter a society, there has to be some education and refinement of [...] sensitivities in the light of changing circumstances and the specific vulnerability of new entrants’ (Meer & Modood, 2016: 34). It is by understanding this that we, as a society, can move away from blaming migrants for the structural inequalities they find themselves facing.

While there seems to be underlying melancholia about the disbanding of the Empire, the history of how the colonial countries helped build and strengthen the UK’s industrial revolution and economy seems to have been forgotten from the cultural memory. This puts postcolonial immigrants in an odd situation as they were ‘already integrated into the fabric of de facto UK history when they arrived. However they were later denied equal citizenship that should have been inherently assumed’ (Clennon, 2015: 33). As the demographic of Britain has changed in the post-second world war years, Gilroy argues that the nation has become particularly concerned about the shifting content of its national identity, calling for greater civic unity and a call for a return to core ‘British values’ as a way to combat this (Gilroy, 2006). In the period of time that saw the end of the second world war as well as the British Empire, and mass migration from postcolonial states to the UK, Gilroy states that the melancholia associated with the cultural memory of the greatness of the Empire

dictates that immigration can only be experienced as invasive war. From that point of view, successive waves of immigrants have merely accomplished what the Nazis had never been able to do. They wrecked an unsuspecting England from within (Gilroy, 2006: 347).

This theory goes some way to explain the preoccupation that some of the British public have with ethnic and religious minorities attempting to cause harm to the UK from within. This is all too explicitly obvious in the very aptly named Trojan Horse scandal, as well as Farage's claims of there being a fifth pillar, with the majority of the suspicion being directed towards Muslims – who are often viewed as being unable to integrate into or adopt British values. This is demonstrated in attitude surveys conducted in Britain which showed that 77% of people believed that 'Islam has a lot of fanatical followers,' 68% consider Islam to be closer to the Middle Ages than to modern times, and 64% believe that women in Islam are treated badly (Meer & Modood, 2016: 46).

These beliefs, coupled with the visible physical differences in how Muslims dress such as veiling in public have conflated such practices with others such as forced marriage, child marriage, genital mutilation, and a rejection of state enforced law in favour of Sharia law. In this way, Muslims are often perceived as being 'in contravention of liberal discourses of individual rights and secularism' (Meer & Modood, 2009: 481). This drives, what Enoch Powell referred to as, 'an alien wedge' between the British and immigrants (Gilroy, 2006: 345). British journalist and commentator, David Goodhart, writes that 'we feel more comfortable with, and are readier to share with and sacrifice for, those with whom we have shared histories and similar values. To put it bluntly – most of us prefer our own kind' (The Guardian, 2004). There is a conflict here between wanting to celebrate each other's diversity and accommodate it, while also calling for civic unity, a shared cultural memory, and homogenisation.

Edward Said argues that in Western discourse about colonised people, there is a notion of the 'good' and the 'bad' Orient, of which Muslims are perceived as comprising the latter (Said, 1979). He argues that it is this lingering attitude towards Islam and Muslims alike which affect perceptions in the mainstream British consciousness. This was clearly illustrated in the example provided above of Axel Rudakubana who was assumed to be Muslim because he had committed a violent crime. This reaction seems illustrative of a wider paranoia and suspicion among some sectors of UK society concerning Muslims in Britain, while also being indicative of a deeply held negative estimation of Islamic culture.

While there is an argument to be made for compromises being an inevitable consequence in a majority/minority dichotomy when the relationship is such that the minority are attempting to interact with and integrate into mainstream British culture, it may also be argued that the extent of the compromises that are expected of the minority is wholly dependent on the dominant society and its willingness to accommodate the minority (Khan, 2000: 37).

Within the Muslim community, which Said argues comprises largely of the perceived 'bad' Orient, there is a further classification to determine the 'good' from the 'bad' by identifying individuals as 'moderate' or 'non-moderate' Muslims. Modood and Ahmad argue that the concept of the moderate Muslim is a relational concept dependent on the way the Muslim interacts with the West, with moderate Muslims being identified as those

who seek positive mutual interaction between things Western and things Islamic, including socio-political integration and self-integration, that is, integrating aspects of one's thinking and behaviour that are Muslim and aspects of one's thinking and behaviour that are Western, so that there is no clear boundary or antagonism between the two (Modood & Ahmad, 2007: 192).

If this is the basis for what draws a distinction between the moderate and non-moderate Muslim, it would be a safe assumption that the non-moderate Muslim is viewed as being 'unworkable' in that they will be unable to or will have great difficulty integrating into British culture. There is a greater emphasis placed on Muslims assimilating into society rather than integrating. This returns us to the question of how much the minority population are expected to compromise to be afforded equal civic rights?

The 1980s and 90s, following mass migration between postcolonial nations but focusing on migration to the UK, was characterised by considerable reporting of societal and structural racial discrimination, hate, and prejudice, and saw many violent attacks against ethnic minorities. This forced authorities to prioritise tolerance and respect in political multiculturalism in the face of a more diverse Britain, which was pursued through the offering of support to local communities,

monitoring diversity in the workplace as well as making accommodations in public services such as education and health, displaying positive images of ethnic minorities in the media etc.

On the 22nd of April 1993 Stephen Lawrence, a black British eighteen-year-old was fatally stabbed in London by a group of six white youths in a racially motivated attack. This event played a crucial role in British changes of attitude on racism and the police. An investigation into the police handling of the case, known as the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry, was the first time that institutional racism had been identified and made public. The use of the term ‘institutional racism’ itself marked a change in the way the public viewed its institutions, which now could be seen as being deliberately ‘malign [...] and capable of (re)producing structural inequalities’ (Clennon, 2015: 55). Structural inequalities greatly affected the workplace. Looking at the employment rate of ethnic groups (individuals identified as being of working age, i.e. between sixteen and sixty-four), the two ethnic groups with the lowest employment rates in the UK have been the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, with employment rates of only 58.2% and 54.9% respectively (Office for National Statistics, 2018).³ The pay gap for those of the age of sixteen to thirty-years in ethnic minority groups tends to be narrower than the pay gap which exists for members of older ethnic minority groups over the age of thirty, when compared with White British employees doing a similar job. The most significant pay gap is found in the older Bangladeshi ethnic group, who earn 27.8% less than the equivalent White British employees, while the sixteen to thirty-year old Bangladeshi group have a pay gap of 3.1% (Office for National Statistics, 2018). The pay gap in the older generation reflects the disparity which has been faced by first-generation immigrants from the time they arrived in the UK. Employment has been an issue that has significantly challenged the Muslim community in the UK.

While there have been attempts made to flatten institutional and societal racism, the undercurrent remains. This has been illustrated in the case of Axel Rudakubana most recently, but can also be seen in the portrayal of Muslims in the media, associations made between Islam, Muslims, and

³ For the purposes of this research, I have chosen to take statistics from 2018 and not a more recent year. In 2019, the Coronavirus, an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, began to spread globally. In an effort to combat the spread, many countries worldwide called for ‘lockdowns’ where people were confined to their homes, unable to socialise or go to work. It also sparked mass unemployment and redundancy. Due to this, more recent records of employment rates and figures will be skewed and will only provide a picture in the context of a global pandemic between the years 2019-2022; as such, records from 2018 have been used.

terrorism, and perspectives on Islamic culture which deem it barbaric and uncivilised. These issues have been exacerbated in the aftermath of terror attacks carried out in the West in the name of Islam by Islamist extremists and have increased feelings of cultural estrangement experienced by those belonging to Muslim ethnic minority communities, as I discuss in the following section.

2.5 Multiculturalism in the Wake of 9/11

Between July 7th and July 21st 2005, following a coordinated attack on the London transport system, there was a significant increase in the number of hate crimes recorded in the UK, mostly in the form of an increase in randomised attacks on symbolic Muslim targets (prayer halls, community centres, mosques etc.) and acts of threatening behaviour as well as assault towards members of the South Asian community. The perpetrators of the attacks, when apprehended, would often turn out to be disaffected White males acting alone or in groups, some of whom had become involved in locally organised racist political groupings or were on the fringes of them. The July 7th 2005 attacks (commonly known in the UK as 7/7) were a series of coordinated violent attacks. They consisted of four suicide bombings, three of which were carried out in quick succession on trains during the morning rush hour targeting commuters on their way to work, and a fourth was detonated on a bus in London's Tavistock Square. The resulted in the deaths of 52 individuals (including the four perpetrators) and over 700 people were injured. In the three months following the attacks, 365 anti-Islamic incidents were recorded (Kielinger & Paterson, 2013). Between 7th April and 7th October 2005, 636 faith related hate crimes had been recorded by the Metropolitan police, of which 409 were identified as being anti-Islamic (ibid).

A similar trend has been noted for the US. In an early US study, Byers and Jones (2007) reported that according to the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program '27.2% of all hate crimes reported in 2001 (N=546) were anti-Islamic,' 455 (83.3%) of which occurred after 9/11 (ibid: 48). In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, incidences of hate crimes in the US markedly increased (figure 1). For their study the 9/11 attacks were treated as a triggering event in order to measure hate crime reporting before and after the attack. A 'triggering event' is 'an event which has the potential to produce changes in social behaviour' (ibid: 47). In figure 1, the week of 9/11 is designated week 0 and is marked by a dashed line. The figure shows an average of 0.6136

reported anti-Islamic hate crimes per week prior to 9/11 and an average of 28.44 in the weeks following 9/11, dropping from a peak of nearly 200 reports on week 0.

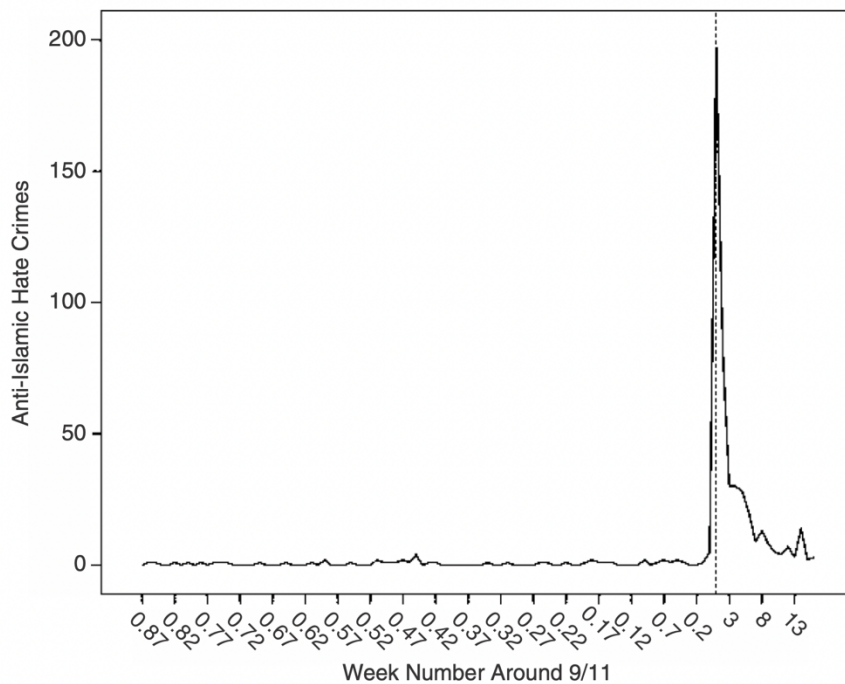


Figure 1. Number of Anti-Islamic Hate Crimes Reported Prior to and Following 9/11 (Byers & Jones, 2007:49).

The FBI report that, in the US, anti-Islamic motivated hate crimes ‘were previously the second least reported [among religious bias incidents], but in 2001, they became the second highest reported (anti-Jewish religious incidents were the highest), growing by more than 1,600 percent’ (FBI.GOV, 2001). Although the number of hate crimes towards Muslims decreased thereafter, it did not return to the levels it had been prior to 9/11 but remained high at an average of 139 a year between 2001 and 2014.

The growing hostility towards Muslims in the West as a response to the rising wave of terror globally that has its roots in Islamic fundamentalism greatly contributed to feelings of non-belonging among the Muslim community living in Western countries. This particularly affected young men, many of whom became attracted to narratives that offered alternative and more radical interpretations of their situation, and which were more accepting of them as individuals and provided a sense of belonging in the form of religious acceptance.

There is ‘a sense of disenfranchisement from society, where although integrated in many ways, one does not quite fit in’ (Hedges, 2017: 13); this disenfranchisement coupled with a combination of poor socioeconomic background, instability or dysfunction in the family home, and personal grievances at perceived injustices often by one’s own government or the West at large as well as other factors, play roles in radicalising an individual – there is no standalone factor.

For those who may not understand the structural inequalities present in the UK or view Muslims or ethnic minorities as being disenfranchised from society, there may be feelings of outrage and disbelief that young British Muslims could potentially feel so alienated from mainstream society that they are driven to partake in acts of terrorism against their fellow citizens (Clennon, 2015: 55). This seems to validate suspicions of there being a fifth pillar, Trojan Horses, or invaders attacking Britain from within, which in turn causes further divide and, as a consequence, further disenfranchisement. When Labour MP Tony Wright disapproved of funding for Islamic schools shortly after 9/11, he stated that ‘before September 11 it looked like a bad idea, it now looks like a mad idea’ (Meer & Modood, 2009: 481). Rhetoric such as this establishes a relationship between Islam and Islamic education with terrorism – a narrative which some have accepted as fact.

2.6 Identity Formation and Disenfranchisement

The lives that were led by the first generation of migrants differed greatly from those of their children. The children of such migrants grew up attending English speaking schools and gaining a formal education with educational qualifications, which would provide them with greater opportunities and prospects in life, including access to professional careers. Newer generations of South Asians and Muslims having greater English language proficiency allows for the formation of greater inter-cultural relations, breaking down cultural barriers. The new generation represent a meeting point between two cultures, as they grapple with the Britain that they experience personally and the traditions upheld by their parents regarding culture, politics and religion (Ansari, 2018), resulting in a feeling of double-identity or non-belonging – a subject that has been written on widely (Al Raffie, 2013; Balmer et al., 2017; Ingram, 2018; Wiktorowicz, 2005). This is not to argue that the second and third generation migrants did not face any inequalities or prejudices in society, but only that they were better equipped to attain equality in their education

and professional careers etc. While the racism faced by migrants in the UK decreased significantly between first, second and third generations, it has not disappeared, resulting in ongoing struggles with British identity and feelings of belonging, which remains prevalent for many as a result of factors such as public policy that favours White people, the existence of institutional racism and discrimination, and the demonisation of the migrant population by some vocal sections of the mainstream media.

The issue of ‘identity’ and disenfranchisement is one which is broad and covers a wide range of traditions, beliefs, and practices – essentially what it is that makes a person who they are. In the context of the relationship between the first-generation immigrant and their child, the issue of forming an identity presents itself in various ways including the way the child is expected to dress according to cultural norms and the traditions of the parent, and food and drink that can and cannot be consumed as per cultural and religious customs, as well as many other religious, cultural, and social proscriptions. Some second and third generation migrants display a preference towards particular religious and cultural traditions over others. For example, they may choose to say a prayer before starting a meal,⁴ but may not practice prayer which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam⁵ (Hussain, 2012). This may be the influence of secular attitudes towards religious identity and expression as experienced in Western societies (Al Raffie, 2013: 73). This perceived need to choose some traditions over others causes inner conflict as the individual navigates an identity for themselves that rests between the two cultures, which can result in a double feeling of ‘non-belonging’ and equating Islamic traditions as cultural norms (Al Raffie, 2013; Jaspal & Coyle, 2009).

Identity has been described as being ‘crucially, about conveying to one another what kind of people we are; which geographical, ethnic, social communities we belong to, where we stand in relation to ethical and moral questions; or where our loyalties are in political terms (De Fina et al., 2006:

⁴ There are many prayers in Islam which are recited before or after partaking in specific actions, including starting a meal or entering a home or bathroom etc. Prayers for meal times include *Bismillahi wa’ala barakatullah*, which translates to ‘in the name of Allah and with the blessings of Allah, I begin (eating, drinking).’ Such prayers are not compulsory in Islam, however, it is compulsory to say *bismillah* (meaning ‘in the name of Allah’) at the start of a meal.

⁵ The Five Pillars of Islam are the five acts that are considered to be mandatory. The Five Pillars are the profession of faith (*shahadah*), prayer (*salat*), almsgiving (*zakat*), fasting (*sawm*), and pilgrimage (*Hajj*).

263). Carving out an identity for oneself is not a singular event. ‘Individuals do not take up identity context free. It involves acts of embodiment as individuals perform and display their identities (Zotzmann & O’Regan, 2018: 113). According to social identity theory, the identity one chooses for oneself is fundamentally determined by the social position(s) with which one self-aligns – this is the individual’s sense of who they are based on their group membership(s) (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

Social identity theory posits that ‘people derive part of their identity – their social identity – from the groups to which they belong (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019: 129) and highlights how ‘othering’ is used to create inter and intra groups as part of this process (Burnap & Williams, 2016). According to Rieger et al, ‘Extremist propaganda directly capitalizes on [...] social identity calling for a defence of ‘our people’ against ‘the enemy’ (2019: 281). Using network theory, Sageman, from the perspective of radicalisation has placed emphasis on the importance of those we surround ourselves with, our relationships with them, and the social circles in which we move in reinforcing extremist ideology (Al Raffie, 2013: 74). Through identifying with a social group, we self-categorise ourselves, and through the cognitive process of self-categorisation ‘individuals strengthen their social identity by emphasising intra-group similarities and intergroup differences (ibid: 77). By highlighting the differences between the in-group and the ‘other’ a stronger relationship is built between intra-group members, which furthers the divide between the group and the wider mainstream society causing further disenfranchisement.

In the next chapter, the differences between Islam as a religion and Islamism as a political ideology are discussed, in conjunction with processes of radicalisation and the use of the Internet to that end.

Chapter 3 Extremist Interpretations of Islam

The subject of this thesis is what is known as ‘Islamist’ radicalisation, or ‘Islamism’ (Mozaffari, 2007). Islam as a religion is recognised globally as a monotheistic religion in which Allah is the only God and Muhammad is His Messenger. It is believed that the Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad by Allah, and for this reason the Qur’an is acknowledged by Muslims as the text of greatest importance. Other religious texts also exist in Islam, including the hadith which contains the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, as relayed by those who knew him.

When speaking about terrorism that has been influenced by Islam, a distinction may be drawn between Islam and Islamism. In this thesis, as is common in the literature, the term Islam is used to refer to Islam as a religion. Islamism, on the other hand, is used to refer to ideologies and ideology inspired political movements that espouse a strict interpretation of Islam and whose ultimate object is the universal implementation of shari’ah law (Hekmatpour, 2018; Mozaffari, 2007). Shari’ah is the term given to the Islamic legal system, which is derived from sacred scriptures in Islam. Some Muslims who follow a strict interpretation of Islam, including those who subscribe to Islamism, believe that shari’ah law is the only law Muslims ought to follow. Islamism is described as ‘a transnational movement that religionizes politics’ (Tibi, 2012). As well as drawing this distinction, a further distinction is made between those who follow Islam, who are identified as Muslims, and those who advocate Islamism, who are identified as Islamists or even Salafi-jihadists⁶ (Comerford & Bryson, 2017; Hatina, 2014; Perry, 2020).

Although I draw the distinction here between Islam as a religion and Islamism as a politicised version of Islam, it is important to note that there is a sense in which religion and politics are inextricably linked – a relationship which has evolved over time, shaped by factors which include historical events and social and cultural norms.

⁶ Salafi-jihadism is a branch of Sunni Islam that advocates both militant jihadism and a return to the traditions of the first three generations of Muslims, the first of which is that of the Prophet Muhammed, believing that Islam at this time was at its most true and pure form. Militant jihadism is a term used to describe militant Islamic movements that have political roots and has been typically used to refer to movements that have been viewed as a threat to the West.

3.1 Religion and Politics

In many countries, religion has been a key instrument in building political systems by providing moral frameworks for the basis of laws and regulations. The religion used to form the basis of law varies, from the use of Christian principles in the UK and USA, to an Islamic basis in Pakistan and Bangladesh. While this is a case of religion and politics working in tandem, the relationship between religion and politics has often led to conflict and numerous religious wars over the course of history. In many cases, religion has been manipulated by leaders and rulers for their political interests. Theologian, William T. Cavanaugh

directs us to recognise that the wars of religion were not fought by ‘pastors and peasants, but kings and nobles with a stake in the outcome of the movement towards the centralised and hegemonic state’ (May et al., 2014: 333).

In Western nation states, secularism is often treated as the antidote for religious violence. The modern nation-state ‘conceives itself as a secular political unit, where the power is distributed through the people within an independent state, controlled by the mechanism of citizenship’ (Ivanescu, 2010: 310). Religion is seen as being in opposition to reason and rationality and is viewed as being a private affair which is to be kept separate from the social and political sphere. However, if the political sphere itself is built upon religious teachings and principles, how far can the two be kept separate? This move away from religion towards secularisation is viewed as a step towards modernity.

The main presupposition of modernisation theory is that a distinction can be drawn between modern societies and ones which are still in the process of development. Those societies viewed as being more modern may be characterised by greater levels of ‘industrialization, the degree to which advanced technology is used, indicators of overall economic development, literacy, scope of the education system, urban density, [and] the administrative capacities of the state’ (Wuthnow, 1991: 2). While in the past, religion has played an integral role in the formation and regulation of societies, this move towards modernity means the authority of religious leaders and institutions are diminished by political leaders.

According to modernisation theory (Black, 1966), high levels of economic development in a society should mean a negative correlation in its level of religious commitment – this, however, is not always the case. The United States, for example, has been a front runner in the race towards modernisation over the past century and yet, among industrialised countries, it retains one of the highest levels of religious commitment with the religiously orthodox becoming more politically active (Wuthnow, 1991: 5).

The reason why one society seems to move towards modernity with greater speed usually involves its relations with other societies. This is posited by world-systems theory which emphasises the importance of the social, economic, and political relations that connect societies through history; the world-system theory is a direct attack on the universalist assumptions of modernisation. It is a theoretical approach to understanding the historical rise of Western societies while other societies have experienced sustained underdevelopment. For instance, the power and influence of the British Empire during the industrial revolution meant a wholesale leap towards modernity for the UK and countries with which it traded, while it weakened the economic and political capabilities of countries such as India which it exploited. The UK did not proceed alone through the stages which led to its development and industrialisation.

It proceeded only with the aid of the surplus it extorted from the societies it exploited. What is today called the Third World reached its present state by being systematically underdeveloped; it did not remain stuck in a stage similar to the West's feudal point, or somehow remain even more primitive during the centuries in which it was exposed to, and colonized by Western Europe (Chiot & Hall, 1982: 83).

According to world-systems theorists, these economic, political, and social relations between different societies began to develop in the 16th century, primarily as a result of the development of international trade and diplomacy, and gradually became the driving force for modern capitalism (Wuthnow, 1991: 6). While this break away from religion in the West was also viewed as a step towards secularisation, modernity, and capitalism, religion and secularisation cannot be separated completely as religious traditions are part of civil society.

What was once a concrete set of rules, practices, and attitudes authorized by a specific tradition of biblical interpretations came to be abstracted and universalized just as European practices of statecraft and natural philosophy were becoming increasing routinized, ambitious, and globalized (Asad, 1992: 5).

Many of the religious movements that have emerged can be seen as protests against modernisation. Movements such as variants of feminism and environmentalism as well as Christian and/or Islamic fundamentalism can be viewed as such protests, which may have their roots in people ‘becoming aware of the threats that confront their quality of life, our sense of ourselves, and our natural environment’ (Wuthnow, 1991: 10).

Islamic fundamentalism has often been likened to a protest against modernisation, with Salafi-jihadis fighting for a return to the way of the Prophet Muhammad and the first caliphs, while also criticising and punishing individuals for bid’ah – which can be understood to mean innovations in religion. Islam, to remain in its purest form, must remain unchanged. The early 2000s in Saudi Arabia, for example, were characterised by an unprecedented number of terror attacks carried out by Islamic fundamentalists in protest against the perceived modernisation and secularisation of the country (further discussion can be found in section 3 of this chapter).

In many non-Western societies, the divide between religion and politics is non-existent, with the political sphere being driven by religious principles and legal systems. Salafi-jihadi groups, in their goal of implementing shari’ah law to bring societies closer to the perceived will of Allah, do not draw a distinction between religion and politics. There is no difference between Islam as a religion and Islam as a political system, for the true follower of Islam as a religion also accepts Islamic legal principles. This attitude is evident in the many issues of magazines and other propaganda materials produced in which IS writers argue the importance for citizens in non-Muslim countries to abstain from partaking in politics as this is viewed as an acceptance of an authority other than Allah.

While the relationship between religion and politics is often blurred, many draw a distinction between Islam as a religion and Islamism as a politicised version of Islam which finds its roots in

Islamic fundamentalism. It is important to draw a distinction between those who practise the religion through their acceptance of Allah as the only god, observing the five pillars of Islam, abstaining from consuming haram products etc. and those who perpetrate violence and call for the wholesale fight against and killing of non-Muslims. To conflate both under the same umbrella term of 'Islam' perpetuates Islamophobic narratives whereby Muslims are equated with terrorists.

3.2 Islamism and Pan-Islamism

Islamism has been the focus and interest of many, including academics, think tanks, governments, news agencies etc. over the last fifty years – having seen a revival in the 1970s – but can be traced back to the 1920s with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The MB is a transnational organisation that was founded by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928. In its early years, its focus was primarily on social issues, such as making education accessible for those who struggled financially, and building schools, hospitals, mosques, and other public properties. It quickly advanced into a political arena with the aim of bringing the monarchic rule of Egypt to an end, and later to rid Egypt of British colonial rule and to cleanse it of Western influence. In doing so, the MB hoped to establish a state ruled according to an Islamic jurisdiction. Al-Banna famously said 'God is our purpose, the Prophet our leader, the Koran our constitution, Jihad our way and dying for God's cause our supreme objective' (Gupta, 2008: 110).

There is a distinction between two types of jihad in Islam: the lesser jihad and the greater jihad. The lesser jihad refers to the physical struggle and warfare against individuals or groups who are perceived as seeking to oppress Islam and its adherents, while the greater jihad is the struggle within the self to be a good Muslim and, as a consequence, a good person (Picken, 2015). The lesser jihad is called 'lesser' because it is limited – it is confined to specific fights and battles and is over when the battle ends. The greater jihad, however, which is the one within the self, is an endless internal struggle for self-improvement (Hatina, 2014: 59).

Although al-Banna failed in his aim to overthrow the authoritarian regime in Egypt and was assassinated in 1949, his legacy continued, particularly in the adoption of lesser jihad as a means of spreading Islam. A slogan which the MB came to be recognised by is 'Islam is the solution' (Stilt, 2020). While maintaining a strong presence in Egypt – which is acknowledged as being

home to one of its largest organisations – the MB also spread globally, setting up smaller organisations across all continents.

Al-Banna argued that jihad in modern times ought to be considered a defensive jihad because of the widespread attacks Muslims had suffered globally at the hands of the ‘non-believers.’ For al-Banna, jihad was the duty of all Muslims. In his essay, *Risalat al-Jihad*, he wrote that

there is no escape from death, which occurs only once. If you dedicate it [your death] to God, you will earn the blessings of this world and be rewarded in the hereafter, and you will experience no evil except that which is decreed by God (Hatina, 2014: 61).

This is a teaching that is widely accepted and propagated by proponents of Islamism today, who hold the belief that if one dies in the way of Allah, victory in the afterlife will follow. Another key teaching of al-Banna’s is one which refers to self-sacrifice as the ‘profession of death’⁷ (*sina’at al-mawt*).

Strength, as I use the word here, means to excel in the profession of death. The nation which does not excel in the profession of death with iron and fire will be forced to die under the hooves of the horses and under the boots of a foreign soldier. If to live is just, then killing in self-defence is also just (Hatina, 2014: 62).

In the modern-day conception of Salafi-jihadism as propagated by Al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb is another important figure. Qutb was a disciple of al-Banna (Gupta, 2008: 110) and a leading member of the MB in the 1950s and 1960s, and is considered to be the father of Salafi-jihadism with his philosophies used to provide the religio-political foundation from which Islamist ideology stems. Qutb was convicted and imprisoned in 1966 for plotting the assassination of the then Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and was executed by hanging that same year. Upon receiving the death penalty, Qutb reportedly said ‘Alhamdullilah (all praise is for Allah) I performed Jihad for fifteen years until I earned this Shahadah (Martyrdom)’ (Al-Mehri, 2006), and

⁷ The term ‘profession of death’ was first coined by Sami Shawkat in the 1930s. As fascism grew in Iraq in the 1930s, Shawkat – who was a pan-Arab nationalist was appointed the director-general of education (R. S. Simon, 1986).

in doing so emphasised to others that death through fighting for the cause of Islam and Allah is a reward which should be welcomed.

Qutb's book *Milestones* has had significant impact on jihadist groups and has played a part in influencing two generations of radical jihadis. The key arguments, as presented in *Milestones* are that

1. The only Muslims who are worthy of emulation are the first generation of Muslims, these being the Prophet Muhammad and his early disciples. This first generation of Muslims were the most pure in mind and spirit, and Islam too was at its purest form.
2. Following in the way of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims ought to be creating tribes and communities (an ummah) in the name of Allah. The point is made that the Prophet Muhammad could have made his own tribes if he so wished, however he chose to do this in the name and cause of Allah. Similarly, it is important that individuals swear allegiance to Allah and his Prophet when joining the Islamic community.
3. True and pure social justice can come to a society 'only after all affairs have been submitted to the laws of God and society as a whole is willing to accept the just division of wealth prescribed to him.'

(From T. Ali, 2003: 110)

Key members of the MB as well as Egyptian politics and organisations played significant roles in the development of global jihad. Al-Azhar⁸ university in Cairo has attracted many Salafi-jihadis over the years, some of whom joined jihads⁹ abroad, including the war in Afghanistan against the Soviets in 1979. Given the status of the university in Egypt and the Islamic world,

⁸ Al-Azhar university is Egypt's oldest degree granting university and is the second oldest university in the world, founded in the year 972 AD. It is renowned for being the most prestigious place for Sunni Islamic studies, and because of this has been a popular place of study for Muslims globally.

⁹ For the purposes of this thesis, the word jihad will be used to refer to the lesser jihad only unless otherwise specified.

The Egyptian government has transferred significant administrative duties to Al-Azhar in order to demonstrate its Islamic credentials. For its part, the ancient Muslim institution of higher learning has used these powers to push its own agenda and lever for an even greater role in decision making. Al-Azhar has emerged as a power in its own right, delicately placed between the government and the Islamist opposition (Barraclough, 1998: 236).

Al-Azhar continues to be an exceptionally popular place for those seeking to gain an education on Islam, the Qur'an, hadiths, sunnah, and Islamic jurisdiction including many Islamists. A notable attendee of Al-Azhar is Abdullah Azzam, of the Jordanian branch of the MB, a theologian and scholar of Sunni Islam who went on to teach and mentor Osama bin Laden and played a key role in influencing bin Laden's backing of the mujahideen fighters in Afghanistan.

Bin Laden and Azzam together founded the Afghan Services Bureau (Maktab al-Khidamat), which was an organisation that was created for the purpose of attracting foreign fighters to the Afghan cause and managing and handling those joining. The Soviet-Afghan war saw the largest mobilisation for a jihad, with 'tens of thousands of volunteers joining the fight and millions flowed to fund the jihad in Afghanistan during the peak of the mobilization' (Hassan, 2013: 10). Following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, Azzam went on to promote the need for Muslims to continue to join jihads globally, and thus he became known as the father of global jihad.

Some scholars differentiate between what they call 'classical jihadism' and 'global jihadism.' Hegghammer argues that the underlying doctrine in classical jihadism is closer to orthodox conceptions of jihad than any other militant ideology, and was first articulated by Azzam (Hegghammer, 2010). Global jihadism only came into existence in the mid 1990s with bin Laden pushing forward Azzam's ideas and teachings. However, while Azzam's conceptions of jihad advocated guerrilla warfare within specific parameters and against those in uniform, bin Laden called for the indiscriminate deaths of the masses.

At the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the MB had already established relationships with many Afghan Islamists who had previously studied at Al-Azhar and an envoy

of Egyptian MB members were sent to assess the situation from Pakistan and consider the different ways the MB could get involved. Involvement in such a war was not only offered militarily but through the delivery of aid, arms, medical assistance, and financial aid.

The Afghan war saw pan-Islamism adopt military dimensions and attract individuals from all over the world, with the first involvement coming from members of the MB in Saudi Arabia as well as the Muslim World League (MWL). The MWL is an NGO¹⁰ (non-governmental organisation) based in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, that focuses on providing and promoting moderate readings and interpretations, and actions based on Islamic scriptural writings. The MWL works as a charity that provides aid to Muslims through building public spaces such as mosques, distributing religious materials, and providing aid for Muslims affected by natural disasters etc. Involvement from the two groups (the MB and the MWL) came in different forms. The MB, already promoting pan-Islamism, were encouraging, and emphasising the importance for men to travel from their home countries to Afghanistan to join the fight alongside their fellow ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ in the ummah.¹¹ The MWL, on the other hand, provided aid workers from the Saudi Red Crescent and the Saudi Relief Committee.

Despite the efforts of the MB, the number of individuals who travelled to Afghanistan in 1980 to join the jihad was exceptionally small, comprising of handfuls of men from Saudi Arabia. In 1984, groups of Arab men were permitted to visit the Salman al-Farisi training camp situated on the Afghan-Pakistani border – this became the beginning of mobilisation to Afghanistan and Pakistan for the purposes of training for jihad. It was reported by Indian intelligence officials that at the time of September 11 2001, there were approximately 120 training camps of this nature in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Bindra, 2001) with the camps being described as ‘factories churning out terrorists’ (Rohde & Chivers, 2002). Throughout the 1980s, Azzam’s recruitment for Afghanistan grew in popularity; one reason for this is the high levels of attention that it attracted from the media in Peshawar, Pakistan, as well as in jihadi literature produced in Saudi Arabia, such as books and magazines. Some of this media coverage was sponsored by the MWL where emphasis was placed

¹⁰ Despite being an NGO, the Muslim World League are still funded by the Saudi government. As a result, some are sceptical of the organisation and view it as an echo chamber for government officials and policy.

¹¹ The ummah is the Muslim community as a whole. It does not necessarily mean a physical community but rather a spiritual one which all Muslims are a part of. Many Islamist organisations place great emphasis on the existence of the ummah and the actions one is expected to partake in as part of the greater ummah.

on the participation of men from Saudi Arabia in the jihad, hoping to inspire others, this included coverage in *Al-Rabita*, which published biographies of those who had been martyred in the jihad. By 1987, jihad and pan-Islamist efforts were thriving and, in some ways, had become a social movement. Azzam 'insisted that jihad in Afghanistan was an individual duty for all Muslims regardless of their nationality' and through such preaching he 'set the stage for the globalization of the jihad cause' (Hatina, 2014: 139).

In 1967, the Saudi King Faisal launched various domestic initiatives for the Palestinian cause, including the establishing of the 'Popular Committee for Aiding Martyrs' Families, Prisoners and Mujahidin of Palestine' (Hegghammer, 2010: 20) which sought to provide aid to the Palestinian people in numerous ways. Saudi support for the Palestinian people had been consistent, making reference to religious teachings and fatwas.¹² In 1968, the Popular Committee asked the Great Mufti Muhammad bin Ibrahim whether or not alms, donations, zakat and other forms of money collected in Saudi Arabia could be used to provide funds for the Palestinian struggle, to which the Great Mufti authorised a fatwa stating that 'the use of part of the zakah, on the condition that it is the Government which supervises its expenditure,... to purchase weapons for the fida'in who are fighting the Jewish enemies of God' (ibid) was permissible. It was this ruling that largely changed the way charity and private financial support for violent struggles and jihads overseas were viewed.

Some have argued that the terms 'Islamism' and 'Islamist' should be abandoned because of the close associations that they draw with Islam. While the terms are used in public discourse, for many the distinction between Islam and Islamism are unclear, which may result in the conflating of the two, drawing no significant distinction between the religion and the political ideology that finds its roots in Islam. When terms such as 'Islamism' and 'Islamist' are consumed by an audience who do not understand how to distinguish between Islam and Islamism, it may result in negative sentiments and attention being directed towards Islam and Muslims in response to actions carried out by Islamists. When a terror attack is carried out by an Islamist, there is often a significant increase in hate crimes reported by the Muslim community (see section 2.5). It follows that the

¹² A fatwa is an Islamic ruling that has been decreed by a person of authority. In the West, due to media reporting and other distortions, a fatwa has come to be identified as a bounty on a person's life. Writer of the *Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie, was accused in 1989 of blasphemy by Ayatollah Khomeini and a fatwa was issued ordering Muslims to kill him, which was backed by the Iranian government. This fatwa was later overturned by the succeeding government of President Mohammad Khatami in 1998.

number of hate crime incidences might be lessened if a clearer distinction were to be drawn between mainstream Muslims and those who rely on fundamentalist and radical understandings of Islam as a basis for their beliefs.

It is my conviction that the terms Islamism and Islamist ought to be replaced with words which are a more accurate description of individuals' actions and beliefs. This might make a difference in the way Muslims are viewed in society by non-Muslims and to how Muslims believe themselves to be viewed by others. It may be more accurate, for example, to refer to an individual who carries out a terror attack as a jihadi, or an individual who believes in the political ideology that the rule of shari'ah should be widely imposed as an Islamic fundamentalist, or someone who advocates for a military jihad with the intention of developing and growing a caliphate as a Salafi-jihadi. These terms better portray the motivations of such individuals than the misnomers 'Islamist' and 'Islamism' which, in themselves, are easy to conflate with Islam. In the remainder of this thesis, therefore, I have refrained from using the terms 'Islamist' and 'Islamism' and instead have attempted to demonstrate how words which are more accurate and pertinent can be adopted and utilised. Where the terms 'Islamism' and 'Islamist' have explicitly been used, such as in legislation or in some official manner, I have retained the terms too so as to present the intended usage and intention accurately.

3.3 The Fourth Wave of Terrorism – Modern Jihads

The Islamic world, which includes all of the Middle East and large parts of South and East Asia, has witnessed significant ruptures and disturbances since 1945, of which perhaps the most destabilising of these was the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, which led to the displacement of the Palestinian people and the geographical erasure of Palestine. A Special Committee for Palestine (UNSCOP) was established in 1947 at the recommendation of the UK that the United Nations (UN) decide the future of Palestine. When the UN called for the establishment of Israel, it not only angered Arab peoples but confirmed their suspicions that the West was Zionist as well as biased in their decision making (Bell & Gilbert, 2017; H. L. Schulz, 1999).

These sentiments predate the division of Palestine and can be identified at several points in the early 1900s. The Peel Commission, which was a group of individuals headed by Lord Robert Peel,

was appointed to determine the causes of unrest among the Jews and Arabs in Palestine. The Commission was formed in 1936 by the British government, at a time when Britain still retained its colonial position, and in their 1937 report, the Commission published that the visions of the Jewish and Arab people in Palestine were conflicting, and thus the solution proposed was to divide Palestine into three territories: a Jewish state, an Arab state, and a neutral region which contained holy spaces. British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, said in the Peel Commission Inquiry of 1937

I do not agree that the dog in the manger has the final right to the manger, even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit, for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America, or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher grade race, a more worldly-wise race, to put it that way, has come in and taken their place (T. Ali, 2003: 92).

The actions of the Western powers' offensive against the Palestinians were justified on the grounds of the racial superiority of the Jewish people. This division of Palestine has had repercussions ever since, leading to regional political instability, dictatorship, inter-religious strife and war, most recently (in addition to conflict in Palestine itself) in Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Sudan, Yemen and Syria. (A discussion on the Palestinian issue and how it is presented in Salafi-jihadi literature can be found in Chapter 7, section 7.2.)

Rapoport (2004) argues that since the 1880s there have been four waves of terrorism, with each wave spanning forty years – or a generation (as individuals are most active between the ages of twenty and sixty). This fourth wave is the 'Holy Terror' (Hoffman, 1993) and the first to have religious motivations. Rapoport identifies a number of events in the late 1970s that triggered this current wave. Three particularly significant events occurred in 1978-9 which altered the shape of the Islamic world, these being the Iranian Revolution (1978-9), the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Saudi Arabia (1979) by local insurgents and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979). In the period of early 1978 to February 1979, Iran underwent a series of changes under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, including the replacement of the monarchy with the Islamic Republic which

ruled according to the laws of Islam. This changed the very core of the country affecting not only the politics within Iran and its relation(s) to other countries but also affected the lives of all, socially and culturally. In an effort to purge Iran of Western influence many changes were made under Khomeini's ruling, particularly the merging of politics and religion, which fundamentalist Muslims believe belong together, and their separation was viewed, prior to 1979, as a Western imperialist attempt at weakening Muslim countries (Chehabi, 1991: 76). Under Khomeini's jurisdiction, political parties were attacked and closed, universities and newspapers deemed as being too liberal and un-Islamic were closed, women were compelled to wear the veil, and divorce laws were disbanded (T. Ali, 2003: 135). Following this, in November 1979, a group of Iranian college students took control of the US embassy in Iran holding 52 members of staff hostage for a period of 444 days, which caused further tension between Iran and the West (L. Ali, 2018; Wolf, 2006). Khomeini, throughout his leadership, placed heavy emphasis on two principles: the removal of Western influence in Iran in order to create an Islamic Republic, and also to spread the Islamic Revolution throughout the Muslim world and join Islamic nations together as one ummah (Khomeini, 1979: 2). In hoping to form one ummah, Khomeini was challenging Saudi Arabia for leadership of the Muslim world. This political ideology that promotes the unity of Muslim countries as one caliphate is often identified as pan-Islamism (Hegghammer, 2010).

The second significant event in 1979 was the seizure of the Grand Mosque, Masjid al-Haram, in Saudi Arabia by local insurgents who hoped to overthrow the House of Saud. Many of the insurgents belonged to a Sunni extremist group called al-Jamā'ah al-Islāmīyah who were dedicated to overthrowing the Egyptian government and replacing it with an Islamic state, as well as being devoted to the Islamification of other countries. The attack lasted a total of two weeks starting from the 20th of November – a date which was significant for the insurgents as this marked the turning of the new century – the year 1400 in the Islamic calendar – which was in keeping with the tradition of the mujaddid. The mujaddid is an individual who arrives at the turn of every century to cleanse and purify Islam and return it to its original uncontaminated state. This is similar to a Mahdi, however while a mujaddid arrives at the turn of every century, the Mahdi only arrives once and this will be a few years prior to the end of time. The Mahdi, in the Islamic tradition, will be a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, and will rid the world of injustice and evil. The Mahdi will appear in the world a few years prior to the Prophet Īsā, who will return at the end of time.

The seizure of Masjid al-Haram was led by Juhayman al-Otaybi, a member of the Otaibah family,¹³ who believed that his brother-in-law Mohammad bin Abdullah al-Qahtani was the Mahdi and had come to save Muslims and mankind before the end of time. In the early hours of the 20th of November, hundreds of insurgents entered the mosque during Fajr¹⁴ prayer, at a time when nearly 50,000 worshippers were in attendance and gained control through armed force. It is common practice for families of a deceased man or woman to place closed coffins in the Grand Mosque's yard for the deceased to receive prayers from worshippers; during the time of the morning prayers, multiple coffins loaded with handguns and rifles had been placed around the yard – arms which were distributed quickly between the insurgents when the siege began. The insurgents quickly spread across the mosque and climbed the minarets with snipers in hand ready to shoot those fighting back or attempting to flee. The seizure of the mosque lasted two weeks, killing over one hundred people and injuring more than four hundred others.

Following the hostage taking at the Grand Mosque and other jihadi attacks in Saudi Arabia throughout the 1980s, the Saudi King Khalid, in an attempt to appease the Islamic fundamentalists, placed greater importance on Islamic laws and appointed religious figures and religious police (who regulate un-Islamic behaviour such as the mixing of genders in public places) in positions of political power (Pascal, 2016; Sheline, 2017: 2). Just as in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, Saudi Arabia introduced Islamic reforms. These included the implementation of shari'ah law and the requirement that women wear the veil. Women were also removed from the television and entertainment sectors and forbidden from driving. Genders were segregated and cinemas shuttered to prevent mixing (ibid: 2). These Islamic reformations as well as a multitude of others resulted in deep divisions and disaffection amongst moderate followers of the Islamic faith and within Muslim diasporic communities around the world, particularly in the US, the UK, and Europe more widely.

The Iranian Revolution and the seizure of the Grand Mosque, and later the resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan provided cause for jihad. A troubled Middle East set the scene for the globalisation of 'militant Islamism' (Baxter, 2007). It highlighted what is perceived by some as the

¹³ The Otaibah family are an influential family in Ndj and are one of the largest Arab tribes originating in the Arabian Peninsula and are openly and vehemently anti-monarchy.

¹⁴ Fajr is the first of the five prayers in Islam and is practised between dawn and sunrise.

duty of Muslims to partake in jihad, or holy war, against the kafir¹⁵ (or infidels), the oppressors and enemies of Islam. Through the mobilisation of Muslims to join jihad in Afghanistan, a thanatophile ideology was adopted by which death was glorified (Gruber, 2012), and for some it became the primary goal. A belief was adopted and shared advising that if a person was killed through partaking in jihad, they would die a martyr and be accepted into heaven; this was becoming the norm for a growing group of people in the Middle East.

Although the jihad in Afghanistan attracted few men at first, a turning point came in 1985, when

Azzam reached an agreement with Abd-i-Rab Rasoul Sayyaf, the chairman of the indigenous fundamentalist guerrilla coalition known as the Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahideen. Sayyaf agreed to allow the use of the Salman Al-Farisi training camp (bordering the Kunar province of Afghanistan) to specifically train Arab recruits (Kohlmann, 2004: 7).

Azzam's aim was not only to train recruits militarily but to indoctrinate them religiously, which set the blueprint for Islamic radicalisers today. Azzam viewed Afghanistan as a melting pot where Arabs, Yemenis, Egyptians, Saudis, and other Muslim men would all come to join the jihad against the Soviet Union. As well as this, through his teachings, he hoped these men, or jihadis would all leave as holy warriors in the plight for Islam. It is from this brotherhood that the strongest (in faith) and best men would be chosen to join the new terrorist organisation.

The popularity of the Afghan-Soviet jihad for those Muslim men who were seeking a cause to dedicate themselves to grew quickly over the years and soon there were thousands of Arab recruits arriving regularly to Pakistani north-western towns hoping to gain training at the camps. It was during this time, in 1989, that Azzam publicly announced the founding of al Qaeda. Throughout Azzam's final years of life (in the 1980s), prior to his assassination,¹⁶ complete victory in

¹⁵ In Islam, a kafir is an individual who denounces Islam and Allah and denies what is viewed as the 'truth.'

¹⁶ On the 24th of November 1989 in Peshawar, Pakistan, Abdullah Azzam was travelling to the 'Arab mosque' where he was due to give a sermon – in the car were himself and his two sons, Muhammad and Ibrahim. During the short drive, a roadside bomb exploded killing his two sons instantly, and Azzam later died on the way to the hospital. It is clear that he was the intended target of the bombing as several other cars had driven by with no disturbance. It is not known who carried out the assassination or why, however previous attempts had also been made on his life, including an incident where a mine had been placed under the podium from which Azzam was to deliver a lecture at a local mosque – a bomb which was large and powerful enough to kill 100 people. His death brought him greater visibility

Afghanistan remained the most important goal in Azzam's life. It was important to Azzam that Afghanistan be won and secured before attempting to 'export the revolution' elsewhere (Kohlmann, 2004: 9).

A younger Osama bin Laden had different views and approaches. Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, a wave of new recruits were arriving in Afghanistan and Pakistan who were not only seeking to join the jihad but hoping to overthrow governments and regimes they believed had lost sight of Islam – including Saudi Arabia. Talk of overthrowing hated regimes through waves of terror attacks resonated deeply with radical Muslims. Following the assassination of Abdullah Azzam, these men turned to their new leader, bin Laden, for guidance.

It is useful to draw a distinction here between classical and global jihad. Classical jihad is a term that was first articulated by Abdullah Azzam in the 1980s, in the context of jihad in Afghanistan. The underlying doctrine in classical jihad is much closer to that of the orthodox conceptions of jihad as opposed to more militant ideologies. Classical jihad understands jihad as being a struggle to protect Islam and Muslims against an oppressor. This is why Arabs fighting for Afghanistan in the 1980s or Bosnia in the 1990s, who were classical jihadis, did not partake in international terror attacks – their regions of operation were localised. However, while Azzam advocated guerrilla warfare within defined conflict zones and against those in uniform, bin Laden called for 'indiscriminate mass-casualty out-of-area attacks' (Hegghammer, 2010: 7). The jihad bin Laden advocated is one that has come to be known as global jihadism.

The difference between classical jihad and global jihad is particularly important in the context of Saudi Arabia in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The two communities – the classical jihadis and the global jihadis – held opposing views on whether to fight within Saudi Arabia, fight against the monarchy and the political regime put in place there, or whether to join or start a jihad elsewhere in an attempt to unify all Muslims as one country or state (otherwise known as pan-Islamism or macro-nationalism). The early 2000s saw an unprecedented number of terror attacks in Saudi Arabia, including the 2003 violence which was 'a historical anomaly, undertaken by an extreme offshoot of the Saudi Jihadist movement which had radicalised in Afghan training camps'

and turned him into somewhat of a legend, being revered by many including al Qaeda, IS, and the Muslim Brotherhood; it also accelerated the radicalisation of jihadi movements (Lea-Henry, 2018).

(Hegghammer, 2010: 1). On the 12th of May 2003, a series of car bombs were detonated in Riyadh, killing 39 people, and injuring a further 160 – this marked the beginning of violence in Saudi Arabia and over the following few years, al Qaeda claimed the lives of hundreds of individuals and injured thousands more. It is believed that such attacks were part of a campaign against the westernisation of Saudi Arabia and were triggered initially by the stationing of Western troops in Saudi Arabia during the 1991 Gulf War with Iraq.

In 1992 and 1993, when the Bosnian war was beginning to erupt, the Pakistani government – concerned with the number of training camps and jihadi groups and volunteers, as well as hoping to put the Afghan jihad in the past – ‘ordered the closure of Arab mujahideen offices in the country and threatened any illegal foreign fighters who attempted to remain in Pakistan with official deportation’ (ibid: 10). Similarly, following the attacks in Saudi Arabia, there was a crackdown on Saudi veterans who had once fought in Afghanistan (and later Bosnia), who were held without trial and some of whom were tortured severely. These men who were once praised as the heroes had now become the enemy, creating greater hostility between the people and the Saudi regime. ‘The 1996 and 1998 crackdowns traumatised a generation of jihadists and contributed strongly to the radicalisation of the Saudi jihadist movement’ (ibid: 75).

These men, who became displaced from the crackdown in Pakistan, faced a serious problem – the bases in which they lived and worked had all been closed down and they now faced deportation, and return to their countries of origin would entail almost certain imprisonment, torture and, likely, death (Hafez M., 2009). A Saudi spokesman for the Afghan-Arabs in Jeddah reported to the media that

the Algerians cannot go to Algeria, the Syrians cannot go to Syria or the Iraqis to Iraq. Some will opt to go to Bosnia, the others will have to go into Afghanistan permanently (Evans, 1993).

The prediction proved true, as many of the mujahideen opted to stay in Afghanistan and build lives and grow families, while others travelled to Bosnia to join a new ‘Islamic’ cause. In the Autumn of 1992, bin Laden sent a group of key al Qaeda members to Croatia to assess the situation and how best to proceed. It is reported that bin Laden’s interest in Bosnia ran deeper than simply wanting to defend his fellow Muslims and Islam but, through winning the Bosnian war, ‘al Qaeda

was seeking to establish training camps in Bosnia, forge relations with relief agencies in Bosnia and establish businesses to support al Qaeda economically' (Kohlmann, 2004: 19). In this way, many were eager to transform not just Bosnia, but the Bosnian cause, into the next Afghanistan. 'At the forefront of the movement of Arab volunteer soldiers to Bosnia were the mujahideen veterans of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, which had served as 'an institute for the teaching of jihad' and was the birthplace of Al-Qaeda' (ibid: 16).

Training for the jihadis who joined the Bosnian war was similar to the training received by those who joined the Afghan war in a number of ways, including the reading of religious texts and observing of religious practices, as well as exhaustive physical training, and intensive training in weapons and explosives handling. Throughout the 1990s, the training that was provided at camps such as al-Faruq only grew in intensity and worked as a key facility for those wanting to train for the Bosnian war.

News of the Bosnian war and the Muslim cause present there spread quickly globally, aided by the reporting of the media and moving scenes of death and torture. In the 1980s and 90s, it was common for people to travel to join a jihad alongside a friend or brother; joining a jihad was not something secretive, negative, radical, or fundamentalist, but something that was considered heroic. In the current day, this is more uncommon, and when friends or brothers opt to leave together for jihad it is usually something that their wider network of family and friends are unaware of. In the past, those joining a jihad would bid farewell to their loved ones before leaving, and today it is all conducted in secret, demonstrating a shift in how jihad is perceived and understood. During the Bosnian war, fundamentalist Muslim imams and clerics were eager and quick to join the jihad and preached to others in an attempt to recruit for the cause – something that proved widely successful. The Muslim clerics would claim that you were not a true Muslim and were among the kuffār and disbelievers if you did not choose to join the jihad. The graphic details in news reporting and images circulating, such as the horrors of the Srebrenica massacre in 1995,¹⁷ contributed significantly to gaining empathy from the Muslim community and rousing hatred in young Muslim men.

¹⁷ This is also known as the Srebrenica genocide, which was the genocidal killing of over 8,000 Bosniak Muslim men and boys, who had been separated from the women and girls in and around the town of Srebrenica. Many of the women and girls who had been taken also suffered torture, rape, and some had been killed.

Evan F. Kohlmann, FBI consultant, reports that during an interview with Abu Hamza in 2002, Hamza explained the mindset of those who travelled to Bosnia during the start of the war as being because

people are dedicated to the [religion]... They went to Afghanistan to defend their brothers and sisters. So, they find Afghanistan now, the destruction of war and Muslims fighting against each other [as a result] they want to [struggle against] something indisputable, which is non-Muslims raping, killing, and maiming Muslims (Kohlmann, 2004: 27).

The process of joining the Afghan and Bosnian jihads were primarily motivated by social issues and the want to aid and protect fellow Muslim brothers and sisters, and not an ideological incentive. However, once recruits had reached the al Qaeda training camps which were leading the fights, the men were indoctrinated and radicalised into global jihadists (Hegghammer, 2010). While this was the case during the Afghan and Bosnian wars, it is no longer the case when looking at disillusioned men and groups leaving their home countries to join a jihad in Syria, for example. Those who leave Western countries to join a jihad tend to have been radicalised already, rather than becoming radicalised once they have reached their destination. Those who carry out attacks in various parts of the world too are already radicalised, usually through online mediums such as Telegram and the dissemination of extremist materials, such as literature and videos, and not as a result of the training camp they have become a member of.

3.4 Radicalisation and the Use of the Internet

Over the course of the last fifty years, our utilisation of the media has changed in various ways including an expansion in the types of media that are available, which have evolved – particularly in the last twenty years (Weimann, 2014). With the evolvement of technology and especially the Internet, our ability to acquire and spread information has grown exponentially, meaning the types of media available have evolved and grown in turn. In the present day, we are able to access large volumes of information quickly with a simple Internet search. Media is no longer limited to print and broadcast news, but can be found online and includes social media too – all of which have been utilised in various ways for radicalisation purposes.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the use of the media in recruitment efforts diversified. What started out as the publishing of obituaries and biographies of those who had been ‘martyred’ suddenly had a wider range of opportunities, afforded by growing technology, this included newspapers, televised news, websites, fliers, and magazines – all of which were utilised by extremist groups at the time in two ways. The first was through the creation of their own media industry which included magazines such as Dabiq (which is an online magazine that is available in a number of languages including Arabic, English and French), extremist news channels available in Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, and websites which were used to spread the message of jihad and influence others to join. The second way was by capturing the attention of the mainstream media, so giving their cause and their activities greater exposure. Al Qaeda stated that the Internet is ‘a great medium for spreading the call of Jihad and following the news of the mujahideen’ (Rudner, 2017: 10).

In 2001, when the September 11th terror attacks were carried out, it captured the attention of the world, and was one of the most reported events in history. This reporting, coupled with the way that it was reported – with an emphasis on and inflation of the complexities in the hierarchical structure, membership, and power of al Qaeda – served to attract many others to join the group. In an academic study of terrorist attacks between 2006 and 2015 in the US found that there was a 357% increase in the media attention when the perpetrator was identified as a Muslim (Kearns et al., 2019). Through such mainstreaming of negative attention given to Muslims, it provides a wider platform for and coverage of proscribed groups such as al Qaeda (Hanif, 2020: 25; Titley, 2013: 217). Similarly, the bombing of the United States embassy in Nairobi, Kenya,¹⁸ in 1998 brought Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda to the attention of the US and made bin Laden an almost overnight celebrity.

Today, with technology becoming ever more sophisticated and the Internet available on personal devices that one often has on their possession at all times, the media has evolved to include ‘social media.’ While the aim of the media is to distribute information to its readers, the aim of social

¹⁸ In 1998, al Qaeda carried out a bombing of the United States embassy in Nairobi in which over 200 people were killed and over 4000 people injured. This was one of the deadliest terror attacks at the time and propelled bin Laden into infamy. The extensive media coverage gave al Qaeda the spotlight and attention that they needed to attract new recruits and expand the organisation.

media is to allow people to communicate with one another. Extremists utilise social media websites such as Twitter (Hanif, 2020) to communicate with others in an attempt to radicalise them, and continue to do so. Notorious and infamous al Qaeda preacher, Anwar al-Awlaki, advocated that his followers become ‘Internet mujahideen’ (Rudner, 2017: 11). Communication in the form of online magazines produced by such groups as well as social media reveal particular subjects of interest, some of these being the life that can be attained by joining the Salafi-jihadi group known as the Islamic State (IS),¹⁹ the West being ‘the enemy’ of Islam, biographies of recent martyrs, accounts of religious teachings, and the successes of extremist groups. Such reporting that glorify joining IS and other similar groups continue to dominate extremist literature despite their waning popularity, as shown in issues three to six of Dabiq which highlight the successes of IS in their agenda, and call on foreign fighters to join their militant group (Ingram, 2018) – issues which were published during a time in which IS faced many defeats. As such, the use of the Internet and its utilisation in the radicalisation of others continues to be a growing problem.

In a jihadi forum calling for ‘Facebook invasion,’ a member posted saying

Facebook is a great idea, and better than the forums. Instead of waiting for people to [come to you so you can] inform them, you go to them and teach them!... [I] mean, if you have a group of 5,000 people, with the press of a button you [can] send them a standardized message. I entreat you, by God, to begin registering for Facebook as soon as you [finish] reading this post. Familiarize yourselves with it. This post is a seed and a beginning, to be followed by serious efforts to optimize our Facebook usage. Let’s start distributing Islamic jihadi publications, posts, articles, and pictures. Let’s anticipate a reward from the Lord of the Heavens, dedicate our purpose to God, and help our colleagues (Weimann, 2014: 5).

The coordinated attacks of September 11th 2001 marked a change in recent history – whether it’s the tightening of airport security, security in general, or the monitoring of people’s searches on the Internet etc. – it sent ripples that can be felt far and wide. 9/11 saw attacks launched by al Qaeda on the Twin Towers in New York, the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, and the fourth target was a federal government building in Washington D.C. In all four attacks, launched separately on the

¹⁹ Also commonly referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). They are a militant Salafi-jihadi group who came into formation in 1999 but only rose to prominence in 2014.

morning of September 11th by four groups of men, totalling nineteen individuals, the perpetrators hijacked commercial planes and intended to fly them directly into the targeted buildings to cause mass casualty and destroy a prominent American building. All but one attack succeeded, where the passengers of the plane intended to attack Washington were able to overpower the hijackers resulting in its crashing just outside Shanksville, Pennsylvania (Demir & Guler, 2021). Following the 9/11 attacks, a number of religious leaders in Muslim communities, particularly in (but not exclusive to) the West, came to be identified as holding extremist views – in part, due to their responses to the 9/11 attacks and their perpetrators. In the UK, for example, it emerged that in places such as London, Bradford, and Birmingham, where there were significant Muslim communities, some self-styled clerics and other highly religious individuals were using places of worship such as mosques to present and disseminate radical interpretations of the Qur'an, which not only dismissed non-Muslims as unbelievers or kafir, but actively encouraged acts of terror against them, and against the secularism of the West. Of particular interest were Western states, such as the US and the UK, which were considered to be at the forefront of supporting anti-Arab or anti-Islamic regimes in the Middle East. The realisation that there were Salafi-jihadi extremists in the UK who sought to cause harm to the West seemingly validated popular right-wing political and media narratives of there being an Islamist 'fifth column' in the UK which sought to overthrow 'British values' and impose shari'ah law. The disproportionate reporting of terror attacks and acts of violence in which the perpetrator was Muslim had the effect of instilling fear in the non-Muslim UK community, while also alienating the Muslim population. Irrespective of how small a population of Muslims may hold extremist views, there is often a call on the part of politicians and conservative media outlets for the Muslim community and their representatives to denounce extremism and acts of terror. For postcolonial migrants and ethnic minorities who are already experiencing struggles with their identity and feeling disenfranchised, the incessant singling out of their race, religion, and culture may only exacerbate feelings of disenfranchisement and alienation, while also pushing some towards extremism.

Extremism in the UK has been identified by the former Conservative UK government as an active or vocal opposition to 'fundamental British values,' including individual liberty, democracy, and the rule of law (GOV.UK, 2020). 'British values' so determined have been used as a political measure to assess and judge diverse cultures and religions in the UK. Those cultures and religions which are viewed as being able to assimilate into British culture and adopt 'British values,' and by

virtue of which are viewed as being acceptable or “ameliorable”, are not viewed or treated with the same prejudice and suspicion as those which are not. In Conservative -circles and amongst the right wing media, the Muslim religion has long been considered as being unworkable. UK ethnic minorities more broadly have been the target of anti-Islamic hate owing to racial prejudice and ignorance. In the case of Axel Rudakubana (discussed in Chapter 2), for example, it was the violent nature of his actions that led people to assume he was Muslim. Following the 9/11 terror attacks, there was a significant spike in racial attacks against Sikh men because those responsible viewed the turban as being an Islamic marker (Ahluwalia & Pellettieri, 2010).

Self-proclaimed Islamic religious leaders holding extremist views have included the preachers Abu Hamza al-Masri and Omar Bakri Muhammad, popularly known as Abu Hamza and Omar Bakri, originating from Syria and Egypt respectively, Hamza and Bakri settled in the UK as adults, and in the early 2000s both became known as active exponents of radical Islam. Hamza had a position as an imam²⁰ at the Finsbury Park Mosque²¹ in London, and Bakri was the self-styled spiritual leader of the UK-based movement Al-Muhajiroun.²² They became notorious in the UK media for their outspoken views on Islam and the West. They had also both been affiliated to the international ‘pan-Islamist’ movement Hizb ut-Tahrir.²³ Bakri had played a leading role in the UK arm of the organisation in the 1980s and 1990s until he clashed with the leadership over tactics and policy and departed for Al-Muhajiroun in 1998. Both organisations argued in favour of the re-establishment of an Islamic caliphate in North Africa and the Middle East, governed under Qur’anic shari’ah law as had existed in the past for approximately three hundred years following the death of the Prophet Muhammad (570-632AD). They were also vocal proponents of Islamic proselytising and regularly spoke at public gatherings where they participated in the active

²⁰ An imam in the general sense is someone who leads worshippers in prayer at the mosque. It is also used as a term for leaders and the heads of Muslim communities. It is used as such in the Qur’an on many occasions, referring to leaders and Ibrahim alike.

²¹ Abu Hamza became imam at Finsbury Park mosque in 1997, which led to it gaining national attention. He would preach at the mosque and gain many followers. It quickly became a hub for extremist Muslims, many of whom would go on to join the fight in Afghanistan and al Qaeda. The mosque has since been associated with extremist and radical thinking.

²² Al-Muhajiroun is a Salafi-jihadist network established in the UK, who became infamous for praising the hijackers in the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers.

²³ Hizb ut-Tahrir is the extremist movement that aims to re-establish the Islamic caliphate. Omar Bakri played a central part in the formation of Hizb ut-Tahrir in the UK, before leaving to found Al-Muhajiroun.

recruitment of UK converts to Islam, as well as seeking to persuade already practicing Muslims to join their cause. Many believed Hamza and Bakri played significant roles in the radicalisation of some individuals in the UK (Birt & Hamid, 2014).

Radicalisation and the means of radicalisation have changed drastically over the course of the last twenty years, of which online magazines and their circulation have played a key role. Extremist literature such as Dabiq are used to not only immortalise those who have carried out terror attacks and suicide bombings through obituaries of ‘martyrs’ and persuading individuals to join their cause, but also contain detailed instructions for and tips on how to carry out attacks using what is available to you, for example on how to make bombs at home. The use of the Internet in this way means that individuals are no longer dependent on joining larger groups such as IS or al Qaeda to carry out coordinated attacks – automatically removing many barriers to entry – but are able to carry them out from home individually as lone actors. ‘Online propaganda, amplified by social media and Peer-2-Peer (P2P) communication, is now a key weapon in ISIS’ arsenal’ (ISIS Online: Countering Terrorist Radicalization and Recruitment on the Internet and Social Media, 2016: 2)

On the 14th of July 2016, in Nice, France, Tunisian-born Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel drove a 19-tonne truck into a crowd of people who were celebrating Bastille Day at the Promenade des Anglais, killing 86 people, and wounding a further 430 others (Byman, 2017). Although this attack was not the first of its kind, it triggered a wave of copycat attacks in cities worldwide including London, Berlin, Vienna, New York, Paris and Barcelona. All of these attacks were perpetrated by ISIS activists or by perpetrators who had pledged their allegiance to the Islamic State (Arce, 2018).

In October 2010, al Qaeda’s Inspire magazine contained a propaganda piece encouraging attacks using vehicles. In this feature, vehicles are referred to as ‘the ultimate mowing machine’ (Bergema & Kearney, 2020).

America is a terrorist state and Americans are complicit in some of the worst forms of terrorism our Muslim nation has been subjected to. Millions of Muslim lives have been lost to American brutality. It is about time Muslims wake up and payback America what is due to it. [...] Here is one idea of how an individual Muslim may do so. It is a simple idea and there is not much in its preparation. All what is needed is the willingness to give one’s life for Allah (Inspire 2, 2010: 53).

The reader is told to ‘go for the most crowded location’ and ‘pick up as much speed as you can’ to ‘mow down the enemies of Allah’ and ‘strike as many people as possible’ (ibid: 53). Such attacks are difficult to detect and protect the general public from as the obstacles to perpetrating them are low. This provides would be attackers who otherwise have limited access to explosives or weapons the ability to carry out attacks that are capable of causing significant loss of life and damage. Throughout the 2010s, particularly in the latter end of the decade, the use of vehicles for perpetrating terror attacks reached a peak. In addition to vehicle attacks, home-constructed bomb attacks were also encouraged. For example, in issue 8 of Inspire, which was titled Targeting Dar al-Harb Populations, it was stated that the ‘importance of knowing how to remotely detonate a bomb in nearly all environments is vital to individual jihad’ (Inspire 8, 2012: 2). The issue also included an eight-page step-by-step guide on how to build a homemade remote control detonated bomb.

Over the course of the last decade or so, there has been an increasing trend towards a democratisation of violence and terrorism in which attacks are carried out by individuals working alone. As Bergema and Kearney have noted, recent ‘attacks on the West are reported to have had less direct operational links back to IS or AQ, as there has been a move towards attacks led by individuals in relative isolation, with limited resources, and inspired through other means’ (2020: 3). These other means include online extremist propaganda outlets including Inspire and Dabiq.

Propaganda disseminated by groups such as IS are readily available online and can be accessed on various platforms. With advancements in technology and the Internet, it has meant that extremists too have changed their approach to radicalisation, as they now have greater access to people – who carry electronic devices with messaging services available – who maintain open lines of communication at all times. According to UK government data, radicalisation in mosques and related Islamic religious institutes is small in comparison to radicalisation in the privacy of one’s home. Following 7/7, Charles Farr (then Director-General of the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism at the Home Office) stated that in the UK radicalisation in religious institutions was ‘certainly no more than 1% or 2%’ (Home Affairs Committee, 2012). Prior to the Internet becoming popularised, individuals holding extremist views and members of organisations promoting such views had the ability to utilise public space to express them, this included

preaching in mosques, in the street and at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, London.²⁴ They also held stalls in Leicester Square and other popular locations where they communicated with the public and distributed literature and other relevant materials.

The 1986 Public Order Act had been invoked to place limits on harmful views that could be spread, and placed restrictions on particular liberties, including the incitement of 'racial hatred,' and states that activism which can be viewed as having the intention of inciting hatred towards any group(s) may be viewed as having the intention to incite intolerance or social disorder (GOV.UK, 2020). The Public Order Act as well as other government initiatives have forced extremist groups that would otherwise operate openly in the public space to seek other methods of recruitment, which is where the Internet serves their purposes better. With a growing online presence for extremist groups and the use of technology evolving and advancing, whole communities are able to form online who share ideas into an echo chamber where self-governance can become much more difficult.

Some academics and journalists argue that 'lone wolf attacks' are rarer an occurrence than we may think because 'terrorists are no longer as isolated as they used to be. Thanks to internet radicalisation, lone wolves have found a pack' (Tait, 2017). Although an individual may perpetrate an attack on their own, the likelihood of their having had no contact with other individuals online is slim. The role of the Internet and the wealth of material available fills a middle ground, whereby an individual can receive the words and messages of others without necessarily having to come into contact with them, and thus can be radicalised online. Online radicalisation is defined as a process whereby individuals through 'their online interactions and exposure to various types of Internet content, come to view violence as a legitimate means of solving social and political conflicts' (Bermingham et al., 2009). It is my intention, therefore, to conduct research into processes of online radicalisation and the dissemination of Salafi-jihadi ideologies through the medium of propaganda material which are circulated through the Internet.

Terror attacks today are no longer actions that can only be carried out by high-ranking members of extremist groups, rather, 'it is a phenomenon that is attainable to the everyday individual. It has been democratised through the ease of access to information, technology, and communication, as

²⁴ A public place that became popular for speeches and debates.

well as the ability to transform everyday items into weapons of mass destruction' (Bergema & Kearney, 2020: 7).

For many, including governments and scholars, the process through which an individual is radicalised has been of significant interest, with the aim of understanding the many factors that contribute to the radicalisation of an individual and their willingness to participate in acts of terror (Perry, 2020). As society has increasingly embraced the Internet, opportunities have increased for those wishing to use it with the intention of distributing extremist propaganda, with the aim of radicalising people, and encouraging and facilitating acts of terror. The Internet offers those engaged in fomenting terrorism and extremism the capability to communicate, collaborate and convince people (Behr et al., 2013).

Kenyon et al. (2021) found in a study that in the period between 2005 and 2017, in England and Wales, there was a significant increase in the number of extremist offenders whose radicalisation was (to some degree) online. In the period of 2005-09, 35% of offenders had been radicalised with an online aspect, in the period of 2010-14, there was an increase to 64%, and an increase, again, in 2015-17 to 83%. When looking at the same period of time and analysing the number of offenders who had been radicalised face-to-face, a reduction can be seen over the years. In the period between 2005-09, 65% of offenders had been radicalised through face-to-face interactions, 36% in the period 2010-14, and a further reduction of 17% in 2015-17. 'This reflects the increase in online activity by society generally, where self-reported internet usage among adults has increased from 12.1 hours per week in 2007 to 24 hours per week in 2017' (Kenyon et al., 2021: 10). A similar trend can be seen in the use of social media accounts. In 2007, 22% of adult Internet users reported having and using a social media account of some sort, which saw a heavy increase in 2021 to 88% of Internet users (Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report, 2022).

An individual's use of the Internet is based on their personal motivations and needs, thus there is not one singular role that the Internet plays in terrorism and radicalisation; instead, it is often an echo chamber. Research has shown that the Internet facilitates and quickens attitude polarisation and enforces exposure to a particular ideology with engagement with counter narratives at a minimum (Gunton, 2022), these being dependent on the individual as a case-by-case basis. Often it can be difficult to draw a distinction between online and offline radicalisation as there is no easy

dichotomy between the two. Most people who use the Internet are exposed to a variety of attitudes and content online, however the Internet also provides the ability to narrow one's search to particular and specific content, creating a distorted sense of reality in which individuals also engage with those who are like-minded. In such bubbles, communities are built much quicker, with individuals experiencing a sense of togetherness and belonging. Through such online communities, ideological developments may be accelerated in comparison to such communities existing 'offline' where individuals are more likely to be exposed to various narratives and ideologies which oppose their own.

Many who are radicalised online have relations or communicate with extremists in the real world, as well as those who are radicalised in person engaging with extremist material online. The online and offline are complimentary to one another, rather than being a dichotomy (Corner et al., 2017). For example, research has shown that 32% of those who have carried out terror attacks had prepared for their attacks by using online resources. Another 29% of perpetrators had also communicated with other like-minded people online prior to their attacks, and 14% were inspired to engage in violence after witnessing something online (ibid: 107-108). On May 14th 2010, Roshanara Choudhry stabbed Stephen Timms, a member of the Labour Party, causing serious bodily harm. During Choudhry's police interview, she referenced a YouTube video of Sheikh Abdullah Azzam which, she said, brought the obligation on women to fight to her attention (ibid: 108) As well as the influence that the Internet has on individuals, it also provides extremists with the opportunity to frame their own narratives and be perceived in a way that is favourable and deliberate; in this way, the Internet is an enabler and facilitator of extremism.

Hammad Munshi, the youngest person in Britain to be convicted on terrorism charges at the age of sixteen, used the Internet to spread information to others. Following his arrest in June 2006, searches were conducted at his family home where his wallet was recovered containing handwritten dimensions of a submachine gun, which had been recorded from a book titled *Expedient Homemade Firearms*. Munshi, at the time, also registered and managed his own website where he sold knives and shared extremist materiel, including how to make napalm and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (Bayer et al., 2014; Staniforth, 2013: 330). It is believed that Munshi was recruited by a terror cell at the age of fifteen and was plotting against the Royal Family. Munshi

was radicalised by Aabid Hussain Khan and Sultan Muhammad, both 23, with Khan believed to be the ringleader of the cell as a committed and active al Qaeda supporter. Both Khan and Muhammad were found to possess a large collection of jihadi propaganda, articles and information on how to make poisons, weapons, and suicide vests. It is reported that Khan preyed on young and vulnerable individuals who he met and groomed online in chat rooms, as well as arranging for those he recruited to travel to Pakistan for training.

While some people are still radicalised ‘offline’ this trend appears to be changing for younger generations. Those radicalised ‘offline’ were more likely to join and/or strike in groups, while those radicalised online are mostly lone actors, which is a type of terror attack that is currently on the rise. In studies conducted of extremist groups, it is noted that many terrorists ‘learn their hatred and are groomed for their deadly tasks via the internet’ (Gable & Jackson, 2011: 23).

The largest group of radicalised individuals however, report to having partaken in a mixture of both online and offline activities. Whilst it is important to continue to identify individuals who use the Internet as a means of radicalisation and who access and propagate extremist content, it is also important to consider the Internet as a setting and backdrop against which extremist socialisation takes place. The Internet provides ample opportunity for many to not only access content and share it with others, but also to build relationships that can move to the offline world and create a physical community of people. ‘The emergence of what some have called the “digitalized ummah” which contributes to a homogenisation of political attitudes and religious sentiments is shaped by a relentless flow of identical of messages and images across cyberspace’ (Rudner, 2017:11).

3.5 Understandings of Jihad

Despite jihad being rooted deeply in history and religion, the understandings and use of the word vary greatly between groups and individuals. In Islam, there are two types of jihad – the lesser and the greater jihad. However, how they are understood differ enormously, particularly the lesser jihad which is the physical struggle against an oppressor to defend one’s faith and self. The parameters of lesser jihad raise questions of what constitutes a jihad as opposed to a war or any other kind of physical or military struggle, is there an obligation to join a jihad and, if so, is an individual

expected to join the jihad if it is in the country in which one resides, or if one is obliged to travel to join a jihad irrespective of the country in which it is occurring.

For the purposes of Islamic law, the world is divided into ‘houses’ including Dar al-Islam, which is the land of Islam, and Dar al-Harb – land of war. Such notions are not found in the Qur’an or hadith but are found in texts which deal with Islamic jurisdiction. The houses the Qur’an refers to are that of the earthly life, and the Hereafter, the latter of which is clearly defined as being greater than the former. Some also use the term Dar al-Kufr to denote the land of unbelief (which is land that does not follow shari’ah law or Islamic jurisprudence and may, for example, be a Christian country).

Dar al-Islam is commonly defined by jihadists as any land that is under Muslim control and implements the divine laws of shari’ah. Dar al-kufr and Dar al-Harb are often used interchangeably by extremists (Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2018). In a common-sense way, Dar al-Harb was used to refer to actual war zones during a time of conflict, however in modern times the usage of the word has varied. Since the Bosnian War, members of al-Qaeda and other extremist groups have widened the meaning of ‘lands of war’ to include the home countries of individuals fighting abroad in Dar al-Islam. As a consequence, atrocities such as 9/11 and 7/7 are justified in the minds of the perpetrators and other extremists through the use of distorted definitions. In 1998, in a speech given by Osama bin Laden, he stated a fatwa that there is no such thing as an innocent civilian, they are all soldiers of the land of war (Hatina, 2014). With extremists using Dar al-Harb and Dar al-Kufr interchangeably, they equate any land that does not follow the strict principles of shari’ah and identify as an Islamic country with being Dar al-Harb or land of war.

The Islamically holy land of Saudi Arabia and Mecca are not immune to being considered Dar al-Harb or Dar al-Kufr either, as might be expected from their holy status in the Islamic world; it is evident that any term can be flexibly interpreted and appropriated. This is clear in two instances: the attacks in Saudi Arabia in the early 2000s, and the Grand Mosque seizure in 1979. The attacks in the early 2000s were in protest against the westernisation of Saudi Arabia and the leadership of the monarchy present at the time, the choices they made, and the running of the country. All of these factors contributed to Saudi Arabia being considered a Dar al-Harb or Dar al-Kufr, as a true

Muslim leader would not allow westerners, non-Muslims, or kuffār, to be stationed in the holy country.

There was some disagreement about whether or not ‘fighting the foreign invader should take precedence over fighting apostate rulers’ (Stenersen, 2017: 168). Abdullah Azzam was a proponent of the view that fighting foreign invaders was of greater importance than fighting against one’s own (otherwise known as classical jihadism). When Osama bin Laden was leading al-Qaeda, in order to align his own beliefs with those of Azzam’s, he framed Americans as being “foreign occupiers” in reference to the American military personnel who were stationed in Saudi Arabia. However, ‘this also meant that he had to declare the Saudi regime as apostates, because it was the Saudi regime that had invited US troops into the country’ (ibid).

The second example is that of the seizure of the Grand Mosque, or Masjid al-Haram, in Mecca. Masjid al-Haram is considered to be the holiest mosque in Islam, and in the November and December of 1979 it was seized by extremist insurgents who were hoping to overthrow the monarchy at the time, or House of Saud. Despite the Qur’an strictly forbidding fighting and violence in places of worship, particularly in mosques, Masjid al-Haram was chosen as the setting for a deadly attack that caught global attention, particularly from Muslims who were outraged by such actions in a renowned holy site.

The intentions behind the attacks were to highlight the westernisation of Saudi Arabia in the recent years. This included not just the stationing of western troops in Saudi Arabia but what the perpetrators viewed as the degeneration of values in Saudi Arabia – which ought to be Islamic in both religious and social aspects of life. Having benefited from oil sales, Saudi Arabia was beginning to move more towards urbanisation and industrialisation, with a consumerist culture beginning to form, the use of electronic items was on the rise, and social boundaries were breaking down, for example, men and women were beginning to mix in public places.

As a nation, Saudi Arabia conforms to the teachings of Wahhabism, which calls for a return to the ways of the first three generations of Muslims, and advocates that Muslims continue to practice Islam in the way that these first three generations did, as it was Islam practiced in the purest form.

Wahhabism was founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab who began a reform movement to rid Islam of what was viewed as *bid'ah*,²⁵ and encourage Muslims to follow Islam in the way it was intended. In 1744, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab formed an alliance with Muhammad bin Saud, who was a local leader, which led to the formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, and which is still present today. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings have been promoted as the official and true form of Islam in Saudi Arabia and has been accepted by many Sunni Muslims worldwide. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's form of Islam (or Wahabbism), which is in tune with that of the first three generations of Muslims, is vastly different to the prospering Saudi Arabia, which was going through the motions of modernisation. Salafi-jihadis globally take offence to modernisation, which they view as being in opposition to Islam and the Islamic values one ought to hold – which imitate the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

Bin Laden used similar rationale to justify offensive jihad, arguing that once the Prophet Muhammad became a Muslim, his first action was to wage jihad to spread Islam and the word of Allah. For bin Laden and other extremists 'jihad was a more important duty than everything else in Islam including prayer, fasting, alms [giving], and pilgrimage' (Stenersen, 2017: 174). Bin Laden claimed that in doing this and prioritising jihad, he was returning to the way of the Prophet and was following the example that had been set, however, in actuality he was ignoring key tenets of Islam to wage an international war.

The Arabic term 'shahid' appears in the Qur'an primarily meaning 'witness' in the context of Muslims being living testimony for the rest of the world and mankind, it was in later exegetical literature where the meaning was broadened to mean 'martyr' (Cook, 2007). The importance of death in Islam emanates from teachings on life and the hereafter – predominantly that one's conduct in this life determines their status in the afterlife (Hatina, 2014). It is commonly accepted

²⁵ *Bid'ah* translates as 'innovation' and is often divided into two categories by scholars, these being innovations in worldly matters and innovations in religious matters. The former refers to such advancements as technology, while the latter refers to those religious teachings which have been reappropriated or justified in a way that was not intended in the Qur'an, such as the consumption of alcohol. The production and consumption of new intoxicants that had not yet been discovered or invented at the time of Muhammad and the writing of the Qur'an are also considered an 'evil' religious *bid'ah*. For some ultra-orthodox Muslims, the use of cutlery is considered a *bid'ah* which lies between religious and worldly *bid'ah*, as the Prophet Muhammad ate with his hands and they advocate a return to the ways of the Prophet (Al-Ghazali, 2019).

in Islam that the ‘martyr’ shall receive the highest reward in the afterlife, however what qualifies as a ‘martyr’ varies in interpretation and understanding. Hatina states that ‘martyrdom (shahada) was directly associated with wartime jihad, with its parameters defined in the context of war guided by a religious imperative’ (Hatina, 2014: 37). Such a definition and understanding would not qualify those who lose their lives through carrying out indiscriminate terror attacks on members of the public as ‘martyrs’. Thus, the definition of martyrdom that is adopted becomes important in how discourse and society interact.

There is debate and divide on whether ‘suicide attacks’²⁶ are permitted in Islam. Suicide is strictly prohibited in Islam; it is believed that Allah alone has the right to decide when a person is born and when they are to die. Surah 2:195 in the Qur’an states that individuals should ‘spend of your substance in the cause of Allah, and make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction,’ although this does not explicitly address suicide, it is used by Islamic clerics to condemn harming oneself not only through acts of terror but generally as a principle of life (Burki, 2011: 587; Rosenthal, 2015). Surah 4:29-30 of the Qur’an forbids suicide, explicitly stating

O ye who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves in vanities: but let there be amongst you traffic and trade by mutual goodwill: nor kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily Allah hath been to you most Merciful!

If any do that in rancour and injustice – soon shall We cast them into the Fire: and easy it is for Allah.

It is stated that suicide is an act through which, in Islam, an individual condemns themselves to Hell (Gearing & Lizardi, 2009: 336) and is forced to continuously experience the method used to commit suicide once in Hell, as stated in the hadiths that ‘whoever commits suicide with a piece of iron will be punished with the same piece of iron in the Hell fire’ (Burki, 2011: 587). Suicide has become a criminal offence in some Islamic countries that have adopted shari’ah law as part of their legal system as a further deterrent. As a result of the combination of religiosity and law, studies indicate that suicide rates are lower in countries that are predominantly Islamic as well as

²⁶ ‘Suicide attacks’ are attacks where the perpetrator accepts his or her death as a result of the attack.

among the global Muslim community when compared to the suicide rate among followers of other religions, despite studies showing that Islamic countries have a higher incidence of psychological disorders when compared to Western countries, which would typically indicate a correspondingly higher rate of suicide (Gearing & Lizardi, 2009: 335-336).

Jihadis who perform ‘suicide attacks’ often do not view this as a ‘suicide’ (Burki, 2011). Hanafi²⁷ scholar Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani (Munir, 2008) has explained that from an extremist perspective it is permissible under some circumstances to carry out attacks as acts of jihad, for example out of feelings of oppression and the need to resist. This is not to say that, for the extremist, attacks would be permissible in all circumstances (Hatina, 2014: 47). For example, according to Hatina, personal grudges or sleights would not be deemed sufficient for an attack. Attacks (if permissible) from such a perspective must be for the purposes of protecting communities of people, including (but not limited to) defending one’s territory or religion. It is not required that the perceived aggression being responded to be physical, i.e. involving coordinated military operations. Acts such as mocking or belittling the Prophet may also be viewed as aggressions and be deemed as requiring a response. In such circumstances, if an individual loses their life as a result of responding to what has been perceived as an aggression against Islam, this is not considered to be suicide, but martyrdom.

The primary motivation in carrying out a ‘suicide’ attack is to cause harm to an enemy of Islam and so it is legitimated. In jihadi circles, particularly since 9/11, the enemy is often viewed as the West, as well as Western culture and traditions. Deaths that result from martyrdom have become sanctified in extremist literature as being according to Islamic precepts and legitimated on that basis. If a jihadi were to execute an attack resulting in their death but in that act did not succeed in causing harm to an enemy, for some groups this would be likened to suicide and not constitute martyrdom. This is because, in their interpretation, the act would not be in accordance with Islamic precepts at these have been interpreted by them (Hatina, 2014: 47) However, there are Islamic

²⁷ The Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence is the most widely accepted of four, with over a third of Muslims worldwide following it in countries such as the Indian subcontinent, parts of the Middle East including Afghanistan and Iran, Egypt, Turkey and many more. The three other schools of Islamic jurisprudence are the Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafi’i.

groups for whom any life lost in an attempt at harming an ‘enemy’ of Islam is seen as an act of martyrdom, evidence of which is taken from Surah 33:23, which reads

Among the Believers are men who have been true to their Covenant with Allah: of them some have completed their vow (to the extreme) and some (still) wait: but they have never changed (their determination) in the least.

In the interpretation of this verse which reads it as justification for the loss of life in the way of Allah, those who have ‘completed their vow (to the extreme)’ are individuals who have been martyred through jihad, including suicide attacks. Those who ‘wait’ are those who are yet to sacrifice their life for the cause of Allah, and those who have not ‘completed their vow’ or ‘wait’ (to complete their vow) are not true ‘Believers,’ evidence of which may be found in verse which follows (Surah 33:24) which refers to them as ‘hypocrites.’ While this is a highly decontextualised verse from the Qur’an, taken as a whole it references the loyalty of the believer shown to God and the covenant entered into through identifying as a Muslim, which requires specific practises and behaviours including salat (prayer), not showing one’s back to non-believers, and joining jihad when necessary (Assami et al., 1997). While some do interpret Surah 33:23 in this way, believing that it references honouring your pledge to God ‘by death’ (or dying for the cause of Islam and martyrdom), the dominant and more moderate interpretation and translation accepted by Islamic scholars is that some believers have honoured their pledge ‘to the death’ and not ‘by death’ (ibid). The alternative and more popular reading indicates that the believer remained true to their covenant with God until the end of their life and not that they died for Islam. This high selectivity of the interpretations of verses of the Qur’an and hadiths is indicative of the manipulation of meaning by extremists.

Some Muslim scholars draw a distinction between dying in the way of Allah and suicide attacks; in the former, an individual dies as a consequence of attacking others and aiming to harm them (death is not the primary objective), while in the latter the individual dies and harms others as a result of his death. Hanafi scholar Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani explains that it is possible that while carrying out a suicide attack the perpetrator only harms himself and does not achieve anything more; in such a scenario, the death is closer to a suicide than it is to a suicide attack

(Hatina, 2014: 47). The various associations made by diverse members of a language community extends to members of the Muslim community and affects several controversial concepts and issues, such as ‘suicide bombings.’ These have been an increasingly popular method of terror attack since the 1970s (Rapoport, 2004), and an understanding of this in Islam is contingent upon one’s interpretation of the terms ‘jihad’ and ‘suicide’.

The three popular Qur’anic verses which are used to justify suicide attacks and prove that they are God-given commands are taken from Surah 33:23, Surah 9:111, and Surah 4:74, of which Surah 33:23 has been mentioned above. Surah 9:111 reads ‘Allah hath purchased of the Believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain.’ Surah 4:74 reads ‘Let those fight in the cause of Allah who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter. To him who fighteth in the cause of Allah – whether he is slain or gets victory – soon shall We give him a reward of great (value).’ The three verses, however, do not state explicitly that one ought to seek death, but rather indicate that death for an Islamic cause is promoted by Allah. The understanding of such verses in more mainstream Islam is such that one ought to be willing to die fighting during a jihad if it is required and ought not to shy away from the front line, but not necessarily that one ought to actively pursue death.

The qualifiers for what constitutes a suicide attack and if it is permitted are many and differ depending on the ulama (Islamic scholarship groupings) that are involved.²⁸ Some ulama argue that in carrying out an attack in the name of lesser jihad, an attacker is not allowed to harm any non-combatants (although religious teaching on this remains unclear in scripture), while others further argue that attacking and harming Muslims goes against religious teaching. It is well known that extremist organisations such as al Qaeda kill many more Muslims than they do non-Muslims, for example in present and past conflict zones such as Syria, Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq. To justify their killing of Muslims despite Islamic teachings stating its prohibition

the theological concepts most frequently deployed by al Qaeda spokesmen and ideologues to support such violence is “Hukm al-Tatarrus” (Barclay, 2010: 6).

²⁸ An ulama is a group of Islamic scholars or religious leaders who have the responsibility of interpreting religious knowledge, teachings, and Islamic jurisprudence.

Al-Tatarrus is a doctrine found in Islamic jurisprudence which ‘describes circumstances in which the obligation to fight Islam’s enemies [...] outweighs the threat to those Muslim civilians unfortunate enough to be caught between the two sides’ (Barclay, 2010: 7). When read out of context, the implication is that Islamic fighters are permitted to carry out attacks that may lead to the harm of Muslims if, through doing this, they are also inflicting damage to their non-Muslim enemies.

When read within its context, however, we see that this passage and its apparent justification for killing Muslims appears in a teaching on how to behave when Muslims and those who are from the Muslim side in a (religious) conflict have been captured by the enemy. In such a scenario, Muslim fighters are allowed to carry out attacks against the enemy even though it may lead to fellow Muslims being harmed. The al-Tatarrus doctrine also describes a scenario in which Muslims who have been captured and used by the enemy as human shields may be construed as constituting a justifiable instance in which it is permissible to harm fellow Muslims. The fundamental teaching of al-Tatarrus is that it is permissible to harm Muslims when there is no other option, such as in the setting of a war. Islamic extremists, however, have reappropriated this teaching so as to excuse the incidental killing of Muslims in the midst of acts of terror.

Two Qur’anic verses which are popular among Muslims who wish to demonstrate that the Qur’an does not permit such attacks against civilians and outside of a war are the following from Surah al-Baqarah, which read: ‘Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors’ (2:190), and ‘And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression’ (2:193). These verses are often ignored by Salafi-jihadis, who perpetuate the opposite narrative, this being that attacks against non-believers are permitted wherever and whenever one may find them. References to the Qur’an are made to illustrate this point, such as a verse also from Surah al-Baqarah which reads ‘And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out’ (2:191). This scriptural quotation sits between the two above and as a whole reads:

Verse	Qur'anic scripture
2:190	Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors.
2:191	And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith.
2:192	But if they cease, Allah is Oft-Forgiving. Most Merciful.
2:193	And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.

The meaning and interpretation of part of Surah 2:191 ('And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out') when presented out of context can lead one to believe that Islam encourages the fight against non-Muslims. For this reason, it is often quoted by extremists in a decontextualised way to encourage the 'jihad' against the 'crusader'.

Studies conducting research on literature produced by Salafi-jihadi groups include that of O'Halloran (2016) and Ingram (2018), the latter of which focuses on four collections of magazines, these being Dabiq, Rumiya²⁹, Islamic State News (ISN), and Islamic State Report (ISR)³⁰. Through analysis of the written text and the rhetorical devices employed, Ingram identified a number of techniques used to manipulate the reader to create sympathy for IS and to persuade the reader to adopt a 'pan-Islamist' ideology. This included offering a historical perspective in the framing of the messages delivered to legitimate political and military decisions and actions, as well as being inundated via the text with excerpts from the Qur'an and hadiths (Ingram, 2018: 33). What requires further investigation, in order to be able to understand how religious teachings are manipulated to radicalise individuals, is the way excerpts from scripture are framed and

²⁹ Rumiya is an online magazine produced by IS with the hopes of spreading propaganda and influencing new recruits. It is one of few violent extremist magazines that are available in a number of languages other than Arabic, and can be found written in English, German, French, and Russian as well as languages.

³⁰ ISN and ISR were short-lived English language newspapers. The majority of these issues were produced in June 2014 and were later combined into Dabiq in July 2014 (Bunker & Bunker, 2018: 54).

recontextualised to fit the political and military narratives of extremists. This is the basis of my research.

In a study conducted by Comerford and Bryson (2017), from analysing a sample of over 3,000 mainstream, Islamist, and Salafi-jihadi texts, found that 3,800 separate verses of the Qur'an (out of a total of 6,236, excluding Bismillah) were referenced a total of 37,750 times. In this study, the 'mainstream' content consisted of religious scholarship, classical texts from Islamically renowned institutions such as Egypt's al-Azhar University, and significant texts in Islamic jurisprudence (Comerford & Bryson, 2017: 8). Through cross referencing the 50 most quoted Qur'anic verses in each content type it was found that 'only eight per cent of the 50 most quoted Quranic verses in Salafi-jihadi Islamist material were prevalent in mainstream texts' (ibid: 8) as well as a significant difference in the most referenced concepts in these three content types, indicating that the content is highly selective. The concepts in order of popularity in mainstream, Islamist, and Salafi-jihadi texts were found to be as follows:

Most referenced concepts in Mainstream, Islamist, and Salafi-Jihadi texts

Popularity	Mainstream Text	Islamist Text	Salafi-Jihadi Text
1	Prayer	Jihad	Jihad
2	Islamic duty	Worship	Mujahideen
3	Islamic finance	Sharia law	Islamic state
4	Fasting	Islamic state	Caliphate
5	Preaching	Caliphate	Non-Muslims
6	Non-Muslims	Temporal world	Polytheism
7	Ummah	Tawhid	Martyrdom
8	Praying	Polytheism	Companions of the Prophet
9	Believers	Non-Believers	Performing deeds for the sake of Allah
10	Temporal world	Proselytisation	Islamic pledge to allegiance

Figure 2. Concepts Contained in Mainstream, Islamist, and Salafi-Jihadi Texts (Comerford & Bryson, 2017)

Comparative studies such as this are necessary as investigating Salafi-jihadi texts alone only offers one perspective. Fairclough notes that when researching the dissemination and recontextualisation of texts it is essential to compare ‘texts in different social fields and at different social scales’ so that we may be able to analyse ‘how, when these discourses are recontextualised, they are articulated with discourses which already exist within these new contexts’ (Fairclough, 2001: 12). For this reason, I will be analysing English language Salafi-jihadi extremist literature circulated in the West, as well as analysing the teachings in mainstream Islamic texts, such as tafsirs,³¹ to enable comparative studies of the differences in discourse between the two.

IS produced literature disseminated online in 2020 focused on Western issues where the solution was framed as being an Islamic one. In June 2020, an issue of *One Ummah* was published by al-Qaeda in English with a variety of identifiable target audiences, particularly Black Americans. In this issue, it is claimed that the five factors that will determine America’s fate are: Covid-19, racism, internal division, a broken economy, and attacks by the mujahideen (Wicks, 2020). This was published at a time of great unrest in the US following the death of George Floyd as a result of police brutality, which resulted in demonstrations and riots that grew to become a global movement centred on police brutality and racism towards Black people, particularly systemic racism, which George Floyd became a symbol of. This subject was recontextualised to become an Islamic issue, with *One Ummah* stating that

The only way forward for you to liberate yourself from this misery is to follow the advice of the martyr, Malcolm X, by embracing Islam and living up to these brilliant words of his: ‘the price of freedom is death.’ If your ancestors had taken this advice seriously, you would have been free today. So do not do injustice to your grandchildren by choosing slavery over freedom (ibid).

³¹ A tafsir is a commentary on another work. Qur’anic tafsirs attempt to provide contextual interpretation and explanation for Qur’anic verses with the hopes of offering better understanding and clarity.

3.6 Scriptural Support in al Qaeda's Training

Al Qaeda were known to operate a number of training camps though the total is disputed, with various sources identifying different numbers. This is partly due to the number of diverse militant groups in and around Afghanistan and Pakistan at the time, and their use of various facilities for training purposes. The main training led by al Qaeda took place at the al Faruq camp, which was situated near Kandahar, however this was closed in late 1992 to early 1993, at which point bin Laden was in Sudan. It was following his exile from Sudan and subsequent relocation in Afghanistan that the training recommenced. During these years, al Qaeda had a close relationship with the Taliban who were ruling Afghanistan at the time.

Following a ten-year war between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, the native Afghan mujahideen (who were the Muslim men fighting against the Soviet invasion) could not agree on a government who would be best suited for ruling Afghanistan in this post war world. There existed a number of groups and parties fighting for power which ultimately resulted in a civil war in 1992, which followed over a decade of bloodshed and disarray. Various groups occupied a number of regions, but none were successful in occupying a significant portion of Afghanistan. It was during this chaos that the Taliban emerged. Mullah Muhammad Omar Mujahid (commonly referred to as Mullah Omar) was an Afghan cleric and Salafi-jihadi fighter who started his own seminary in the early 90s where he taught Wahhabism and a hard-line interpretation of Islam. Under Mullah Omar's guidance, those under his tutelage were organised into a fighting force who called themselves the Taliban,³² which comprised also of Afghan mujahideen. The Taliban 'gained an initial territorial foothold in the southern city of Kandahar, and over the next two years expanded their influence through a mixture of force, negotiation, and payoffs. In 1996, the Taliban captured the capital Kabul and took control of the national government' (Bajoria & Laub, 2011: 2).

Alongside the civil disarray, the Taliban had significant support from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). According to US intelligence, the ISI supplied the Taliban forces with munitions, fuel, and food which it funnelled into Afghanistan and to the Taliban using a private transportation

³² The word 'taliban' means student in Pashto; Pashto is one of two official languages in Afghanistan.

company (Kleiner, 2013). This backing from the ISI gave the Taliban a considerable advantage in comparison to the other groups fighting for power, and aided its speedy success (Bazai et al., 2019).

Initially, the people of Afghanistan welcomed the Taliban; they had proven to be effective in bringing order and protecting the Afghan people. The Taliban ensured that the streets were safe from those causing terror and brandishing guns and other weapons in public. At this point in time, the Taliban were an appealing option when compared to other groups fighting for power over Afghanistan and, for the most part, the Taliban aided in rebuilding Afghan society from the ashes of a long-endured war. It was not long, however, before the Taliban themselves came to be associated with terror.

As the Taliban grew in power, strength, and number, and spread throughout Afghanistan, it became crucial that they had systems in place. These systems would be rules and laws that would be abided, and which would determine the governance of the country. While it was easy in the early days to protect members of the community and take a position of authority, this was no longer the case with their duties of care from a position of authority growing. They now had the responsibility of settling legal and personal disputes and grievances (including those over land and divorces). In order to be able to pass judgement on such matters and come to a settlement, it was essential that a person or people be elected to be a judge in such situations. With no real political aims and a hard-line Islamic background, in 1996 the Taliban went from protecting individuals to introducing new rigid Islamic laws quickly, including the closing down of cinemas and segregation of the sexes in public places, including in the workplace, ultimately leading to the prohibition of women being allowed to work altogether. The hardline Islamic law of the Taliban was characterised of 'requiring women to wear head-to-toe veils, banning television, and jailing men whose beards were deemed too short' (Bajoria & Laub, 2011: 2) amongst many other rulings.

The Taliban stayed in power in Afghanistan, ruling with shari'ah law until the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Al Qaeda and the Taliban have had a close relationship since the 1990s, when they were first bound by bay'ah (allegiance) by Osama bin Laden to Mullah Omar in 1998. 'According to the Sharia law reneging on bay'ah is a serious offence. This pledge under bay'ah was one of the most important considerations that prevents Mullah Omar to hand over Osama bin

Laden to the US or to send him somewhere else' (Ul-Hassan, 2022: 2). The protection al Qaeda received from the Taliban has been the cause of much speculation, particularly at a time when Arab fighters were being deported from other South Asian and Middle Eastern countries. When Taliban leaders were pressed publicly on their relationship with al Qaeda, they did not comment on the situation, however responded in an off-the-record conversation that they viewed 'Jihadist fighters as Muslim dissents who deserve their support' (Mir, 2021). The Afghanistan that the Taliban were building in the late 1990s and the type of Islam that they were promoting was much akin to the Islam that was forced upon the Saudi population following the siege of the Grand Mosque.

During and after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, registration forms were found for a number of al Qaeda training camps, which revealed that from August 2000 to August 2001, at least four hundred individuals from outside of Afghanistan had registered for training courses in Kabul and Kandahar (Stenersen, 2017: 103). The training that was provided was much more comprehensive, skilled, and longer in duration than the training that had previously been provided in al Qaeda camps in the early 1990s.

The training was divided into three parts. The first part comprised of military training at a basic and advanced level. In the early 1990s, basic training consisted of four weeks of small arms training, handling of weapons and explosives, and map reading, followed by two weeks of artillery training (which constituted the 'advanced' training), running for a duration of six weeks in total. Parts two and three of the training courses consisted of specialised training to enable the recruit to carry out international terror attacks, and cadre development programmes designed to strengthen al Qaeda, respectively (Stenersen, 2017)

Training in the late 1990s and early 2000s became much more regimented and structured, beginning with fifteen days of physical tests – which were used to identify an individual's endurance and fitness. Once an individual passed this, they would then partake in 45 days of 'basic training' where they would be taught how to use arms, explosives, read maps, build bombs etc. The tactics, and artillery courses were the advanced level training courses offered and trainees were able to decide if they wished to partake in one or both courses. In successfully completing the advanced level training, recruits were expected to fight on the Taliban frontline for two months.

For al Qaeda, this would determine the motivation, resilience, and sincerity of the trainees. Finally, for those who had completed the previous stages of training as well as fighting on the front line, the ‘cadre development’ training scheme was offered to develop their position in the group and aid the building of resilience in the group’s existence.

In a comprehensive twelve page booklet found in Afghanistan titled ‘Fundamental Qualifying Courses to Prepare the Cadre of al-Qaida’ (Stenersen, 2017), there were five key components listed as part of the cadre education programme, these were the following:

1. Islamic studies, where trainees were required to learn the fundamentals of Islam and partake in religious classes;
2. military training, where advanced military training was provided for those partaking, including the creation and use of explosives;
3. security studies, which taught trainees how to code and decode information, the importance of being untraceable and how to identify threats;
4. management, which focused on all aspects of managerial positions, with the aim of aiding trainees in developing their skills to grow through the ranks and become leaders as and when necessary; and
5. political courses to help develop the individual’s understandings of the social and political context against which they were working.

The Islamic studies component of the cadre training, again, was further divided into the following three levels:

3 rd level	Al-Sira al-nabawiyya Kitab al-fawa'id by Ibn al-Qayyim Explanation of surat al-baqara from the mukhtasir or Ibn Kathir, Explanation of surat al Imran Explanation of surat al-an'am.
2 nd level	Jurisprudence and rules of jihad, Rules of prayer, Explanation of surat al-bara'a,

	The second twenty Hadith of al-Nawawi, with memorizing.
1 st level	Simple beliefs, including al-wala wal-bara, Explanation of surat al-anfal, Evolverment of the stages of jihad, The first twenty Hadith from the forty Hadith of al-Nawawi, with memorizing, Rules of recitation and intonation.

Figure 3. Components in al Qaeda's Cadre Training (Stenersen, 2017: 110)

Such a rigid training programme is part of al Qaeda's success. For many years following 9/11, Western intelligence services were perplexed by al Qaeda's continued existence despite leaders and senior members of al Qaeda having been arrested or killed in attacks carried out by the West. The number of 'cadre' courses run from 1999 is not known as only one has been documented, however, it is thought to have been many. The cadre courses also indicate that longevity and resilience as an organisation were fundamental to al Qaeda's strategy at this point in time (Stenersen, 2017: 114).

There is a heavy emphasis placed on religious education in the cadre courses, including learning to understand and interpret surahs in the Qur'an that are deemed to be particularly important for the group. For the reason that interpretation is a critical matter for radicalisation, it is important to give consideration to processes of interpretation and meaning-making in texts. This is discussed in the next section.

3.7 Meaning-Making and Interpretation

Christian Bourguet³³ in a conversation with President Bill Clinton where Clinton spoke of the innocence of the Americans who were being held hostage at the US embassy in Tehran during the November 1979 hostage taking, responded to the president that

³³ Christian Bourguet was a lawyer who represented the Iranian government following the revolution in 1979 and who was present in the negotiations during the Tehran US embassy hostage taking (J. D. Simon, 2001).

I believe you have to understand that for the Iranians they aren't innocent. Even if personally none of them had committed an act, they are not innocent because they are diplomats who represent a country that has done a number of things in Iran. You must understand that it is not against their person that the action is being taken. Of course, you can see that. They have not been harmed. They have not been hurt. No attempt has been made to kill them. You must understand that it is a symbol, that it is on the plane of symbols that we have to think about this matter (Said, 1997: xv).

This is a crucial point. Language is the medium through which we make sense of things, and by which meaning is produced and exchanged (Hall, 1997). 'Meanings' of things or concepts can only be shared by a collective agreement of which words refer to which entities and a common access to language, thus language is the foundation to meaning-making and, in turn, of culture. Sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues that it is language which allows us to build a culture of shared understandings and meanings, and in doing so provides us with some kind of identity – it becomes easier for the individual to identify with others with whom they share common meaning and understanding. It is especially important, then, how an individual identifies and understands particular concepts and ideas.

There is more to the 'meaning' of a text than what is received and processed by the reader; what is read and understood may differ from the intention of the writer and what they hoped to convey (Eco, 1992: 19; Kress, 1991). Through the practice of reading and interpreting the text, the reader plays an active role in shaping its meaning, without which a text would be incomprehensible. Whether consciously or unconsciously, in experiencing the linguistic features and literary effects of the discourse embodied in a text, the individual forms their own interpretation and, consequently, their own reality in relation to the text (Gorski, 2013; Sarfo & Krampa, 2013; Widdowson, 2000). When analysing texts produced by Salafi-jihadi groups in particular, it has been observed that they 'choose some symbols, texts and narratives while they downplay or entirely ignore others that may contravene their strategic aims' (Hafez M., 2007: 20).

Halliday's theory of systemic functional linguistics posits that language, images and other signs are semiotic resources that produce meaning (Halliday & Webster, 2009; Tan et al., 2011) through

which language shapes, and is shaped by, the contexts in which it is used, providing its producers and consumers an array of options for construing meaning (Schlepppegrell, 2014). This draws a relationship between language and images which together form a system of meaning and allow analysis of how the use of particular images and language choices contribute to creating specific meaning(s) in multimodal texts (O'Halloran, 2016: 11). O'Halloran has conducted research into interpreting the multimodality of texts produced by IS to identify the various ways text and image are manipulated to 'promote extremist views, incite violence, and recruit jihadists' (ibid: 5). O'Halloran's literature of choice was Dabiq due to it being one of few series produced by IS directly that is in the English language. The primary message (across the multiple issues of Dabiq) is identified as being one that emphasises the 'crisis' that Muslims are faced with, which is tied to the 'enemy' (the West) while framing IS as the only hope of overcoming this struggle and thriving.



Figure 4. Cover of issue 7, Dabiq

The cover of issue seven of Dabiq is titled From Hypocrisy to Apostasy and contains a large image of Islamic leaders holding 'JE SUIS CHARLIE' signs, following the shooting at the Charlie Hebdo magazine offices in Paris in which twelve people were killed by two gunmen who identified themselves as belonging to al Qaeda. The perpetrators viewed the attacks as a justified retaliation for the magazine printing satirical cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad.³⁴ The phrase 'je suis

³⁴ Islam condemns the drawing of religious figures, which is believed to be a form of blasphemy. Conservative Muslims refrain from drawing all people.

Charlie' was adopted to symbolise support for France and condemn terrorism. The title of this issue, coupled with the image of Islamic leaders, condemns the Muslim reader from showing allegiance to the West, likening the support for France to hypocrisy as a Muslim. The narrative is increasingly focused on transnational issues, particularly those relating to Western Muslims (Ingram, 2018). Issue seven of Dabiq also contains articles that warn of the 'new breed of crusader' that seeks to 'anger the Muslims by mocking and ridiculing' the Prophet Muhammad (ibid: 14). In developing a narrative that frames the relationship between Muslims and the West as 'us' versus 'them' and creating in and out groups, it increasingly highlights IS as true Sunni³⁵ Muslim champions (El-Nashar & Nayef, 2019).

In literature produced by Salafi-jihadis, words and terms are defined and used in ways that are not common for Muslims (Cook, 2015). While people may have a common understanding of what lesser jihad and greater jihad refer to, they can have varying interpretations of what that means and what constitutes a state of war, its implications etc. It is not made clear in scripture what kinds of actions these two subdivisions encompass, which has been a source of contention. Accepting lesser jihad as a fight against an oppressor, it is not clear if an individual is to subscribe to this if their territory or place of residence is under attack or if they are permitted or obliged under Islamic law to travel to partake in a jihad against an oppressor in any country or state. Is the call to jihad applicable on a transnational scale affecting all in the Muslim community (or ummah) at all times? The Islamic principle of irredentism, as understood by many (but not all Muslims), states that once a territory is under Islamic law, this cannot be reverted (Perry, 2020); with this in mind, it would deem events such as the creation of Israel and the occupation of the West Bank, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as impermissible. Does this entail however that Muslims in the UK (for example) are obliged to join in lesser jihad to resist the perceived transgression against Islam in these regions?

Such variations in interpretation are not confined to religious terms but affect other more commonly used words also. For example, when speaking of 'terrorism,' the understanding and interpretation of it may differ. At present, there is no universally accepted definition of the word

³⁵ IS's ideology represents a conservative and puritanical form of Sunni Islam, while also being vehemently anti-Shi'ism.

‘terrorism’ as people and states have different criteria for what constitutes an act of ‘terror,’ which is reflected in the legal systems of different nations (Ganor, 2010: 300; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2014). How we interpret a word or concept is not only the acquiring of a definition and idea, but it ‘also plays a role in shaping the attitudes of individuals. Hence, individuals speaking different languages must have different world views’ (Hussein, 2012; Kroskrity, 2000). Equally, when individuals within a shared language community use the same words to designate different meanings, they too unknowingly speak a different language which, in turn, will affect their world view.

It is essential, then, to understand the way extremist groups – which are communities of people with their own shared system of language – use language and the ways in which they interpret words. Through this, and an analysis of the way scripture is interpreted, it will enable us to understand the steps taken in utilising religious teachings and scriptural references in the production of extremist materials. It will allow greater understanding of the specific ways in which scripture is decontextualised and reappropriated to deliver the messaging of extremist groups such as the Islamic State.

In the next chapter, I have looked at the UK’s de-radicalisation programme, and their current role in countering extremism. I have offered an outline to the UK’s counter-terrorism strategy *CONTEST*, with its four primary components (Prevent, Pursue, Protect, and Prepare), as well as some of the controversies and implications of the strategy.

Chapter 4 The UK's Counter-Terrorism Strategy

CONTEST is the UK's counter-terrorism strategy and was first developed by Sir David Omand and the Home Office in early 2003 as a response to 9/11, but remained classified until 2006 when a revised edition was published a year after the 7/7 attacks in London. The UK government state that the aim of the strategy is 'to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence' (Home Office, UK, 2009). From the time of its introduction to the present day, there have been a number of modifications and revisions made, beginning with the first revision in 2006 which was its public debut, followed by further revisions in 2009, 2011, and 2018. In 2022, the UK Home Office released a statement to say that the 'government will carry out a wholesale refresh of the UK's counter-terrorism strategy' (Home Office, UK, 2022) so as to appropriately counter newly emerging and persistent threats. At present, CONTEST is divided into four streams that work on distinct strategies towards countering terrorism, these are Prevent, Pursue, Protect, and Prepare (GOV.UK, 2018a). Prevent has been in the spotlight with varying degrees of controversy, and in 2023 a review of Prevent was published, which has been discussed in section 4.7.

In this chapter, I highlight the pivotal role the 9/11 terror attacks played in shaping the UK's counter-terrorism strategy before outlining CONTEST and its various elements and discussing its reception and controversies.

4.1 Counter-Terrorism and the Politics of Radicalisation Post-9/11

The coordinated suicide attacks of September 11th 2001 were unlike any terror attack previously seen. Its significance is due to its 'ambitious scope and dimensions; impressive coordination and synchronization; and the unswerving dedication and determination of the 19 aircraft hijackers who willingly and wantonly killed themselves' (Hoffman, 2002: 304). Between 1968 – a year which is credited as marking the advent of international terrorism – to 9/11, terror attacks were largely unsophisticated and uncoordinated with simultaneous attacks being relatively uncommon. One thing that remained a constant over this period of time was the US and its overseas interests being targeted for terror attacks, some more lethal than others. Until 9/11

a total of no more than perhaps 1,000 Americans had been killed by terrorists either overseas or even within the United States itself. In less than 90 minutes that day, nearly three times that number were killed. [...] [U]ntil the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, no single terrorist operation had ever killed more than 500 persons at one time (Hoffman, 2002: 304).

In the aftermath of 9/11, the US and UK sought to improve their counter-terrorism strategies as they both found themselves facing a similar transnational terrorist threat – this being al Qaeda's labelling of both states as targets for future attacks. In 2006, when the CONTEST strategy was revised and made public, the US under the Bush Administration also released a counter-terror strategy of its own called The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism. While the US and UK shared this similarity in both finding themselves as targets, the fabric of the social, political and economic foundations of the two societies differed greatly. For the UK, 'the threat was considered to be one that originates both domestically and internationally, whereas for the United States it is seen as one that originates, wholly, internationally' (Tembo, 2014: 3). This difference in the identification of the threat and where it originates led to differing approaches to understanding and tackling the perceived threat.

The terrorist threat to the US is identified as being one external to the United States itself, which puts the US in a position where it feels able to confront the threat physically, and has led since 2001 to a number of US-led invasions and wars throughout the Middle East. While the UK has provided troops and logistical support in the US-led wars following 9/11, the primary concern has been its internal terrorist threat, which the UK government, security, and policing services have focused on in a number of ways. In the UK, this identification of an internal threat has led to an arguable preoccupation with viewing Muslims as a 'fifth column' which not only plants seeds of distrust and suspicion in the non-Muslim UK population, but also serves to further feelings of alienation and unbelonging among the wider Muslim population by causing Muslims to be negatively positioned as a non-integrated outsider community in the UK. It was discovered that the UK government's Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) has focused on commissioning research on Muslim communities.

Between 2007 and 2010, for example, RICU concentrated on research projects relating to how ‘young British Muslims felt about their identity and sense of belonging’, ‘how young British Muslims use the internet’, ‘media consumption among British Muslims’, ‘how Government messages are perceived by Muslim communities’, ‘Islamic Blogs’, [and] ‘the language of Terrorism’ (Miller & Sabir, 2012: 25).

The research that is conducted on the Muslim community is not research that has been commissioned on other religious or ethnic communities, highlighting an institutional bias against and suspicion of Muslims, particularly post-colonial Muslims.

Following 9/11, the al Qaeda leadership, who sought refuge in Afghanistan under the regime of the Taliban, welcomed the US-led invasion in the belief that the anti-Taliban coalition forces would suffer the same fate as the Soviets just two decades previously. Al Qaeda were not expecting the rapid collapse of the Taliban regime at the end of 2001. The Taliban lost considerable support from the Afghan people ‘by the time of the invasion because of their draconian implementation of fundamentalist Islamic law and their harsh crackdown on poppy cultivation, the mainstay of the Afghan economy’ (Riedel, 2007: 25). Riedel has argued that the most significant factor for the collapse of the Taliban regime in late 2001 was the defection of Pakistan.

[U]p to 60,000 Pakistani volunteers had served in the Taliban militia before 9/11, alongside dozens of active-duty Pakistani army advisers and even small Pakistani army commando units. When these experts left, the Taliban lost their conventional military capability and political patronage, and al Qaeda lost a safe haven for its operational planning, training, and propaganda efforts (ibid: 25-26).

This forced senior al Qaeda and Taliban members to seek refuge in the badlands along the Afghan-Pakistan border – many of whom disappeared underground along with fighters. The focus for the organisations over the period of the next two years was on surviving, restabilising and growing. Afghanistan had proven to be a successful breeding ground for al Qaeda with some estimating that the group had trained up to 60,000 jihadis (ibid: 25). The goal was to set up a new operations base where training and recruitment could continue, for which the Baluchistan region of Pakistan would

serve their purpose as well as provide al Qaeda with new opportunities. While al Qaeda had already demonstrated their ability to expand into and influence the Middle East and Europe, this relocation provided them with the ability to expand into the West – particularly focusing on the UK.

As a result of its colonial ties, the UK has a significant South-Asian population, many of whom have connections to Pakistan as well as Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan). This connection allows ‘visitors from Pakistan [to] have relatively easy access to the Pakistani community in the United Kingdom, and Pakistani-born Britons can readily travel to Pakistan and back – facilitating recruitment, training, and communications for jihadists’ (Riedel, 2007: 30). This ease of contact, and an increasingly hostile security environment in the US, meant that the UK became a primary focus of al Qaeda’s operations in the West. With increased Al Qaeda activity in the UK a disproportionately high number of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims have found themselves caught up in counter-terrorism operations and charged with terrorism and terrorism related offences, in comparison with other minority groups. The issue has become twofold: there is the targeting of the Muslim community for fear of a growing international terrorist risk so increasing the sense of alienation this community feels, which in turn then has the potential consequence of pushing disaffected and vulnerable Muslims in the direction of radicalisation. It is a strained symbiotic relationship.

The UK’s counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, is divided into four streams, these being Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare, of which Prevent and Pursue have faced significant and intense criticism, most of which has been directed at Prevent for its unashamed preoccupation with Islamic extremism and the surveillance of the Muslim community. Notable examples of such criticism include

exceptional legislative measures being created specifically to target Islamic terrorism, extended pre-charge detention periods, intrusive surveillance programmes, newer and broader terrorism offences, securitised community projects and policies that legitimate the use of deadly force such as ‘Operation Kratos’ that, in certain circumstances, authorises the use of a ‘head shot’ – otherwise known as a policy of shoot-to-kill (Miller & Sabir, 2012: 13).

As a strand of CONTEST, Prevent can be traced back to 2003, though its existence only became known to the public in 2006. In the next section, I outline the purposes of the four streams of CONTEST beginning with Prevent, before discussing the reception and controversies associated with it.

4.2 Prevent

The objective of the Prevent strategy is to identify those who show support for terrorism or who have an inclination towards radicalisation and to counter this before an individual has the opportunity to act on any such motives. It also ‘extends to supporting the rehabilitation and disengagement of those already involved in terrorism’ (GOV.UK, 2018: 31), and in this way mirrors other programmes designed to safeguard people from sexual, physical, and drug abuse. The UK’s counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, offers a de-radicalisation programme, known as Channel, to those identified as being particularly vulnerable to or inclined towards terrorist activity, including referrals made by the Prevent strategy (further discussion on Channel can be found in section 6 of this chapter). This programme is led by a combination of scholars of religion, academics and researchers, youth workers, and the police (as well as others) and aims to offer narratives and explanations that oppose those held by radicals.

Basic training in how to identify and report individuals who show an inclination towards radical thought under the Prevent strategy has been required of employees in UK public services, such as the National Health Service (NHS), the higher education sector and schools. Prevent works closely with health workers and social care staff, ensuring that they have been provided with the information and training required to identify and refer individuals. ‘While no links have been established between mental disorder and group-based terrorism, terrorists who act alone may be more likely to have a background that includes mental ill health’ (GOV.UK, 2018: 36). Prevent, however, makes no explicit suggestion that persons who suffer from mental ill health are more likely to carry out terror related offences or that those who do carry out such offences will most likely suffer from mental ill health issues, although it is strongly implied that mental illness can be a factor. As well as working with health care professionals, Prevent wishes to emphasise the importance of ensuring the safeguarding of individuals, including (but not limited to) those in

education, further and higher education, which is to be delivered by teachers and academics, but not necessarily by Prevent themselves. The Department for Education in conjunction with the Home Office has developed a website called Educate Against Hate which aims to provide teachers and parents with guidance and training on how to protect and support young people from radicalisation and extremism, as well as other safeguarding guidance. Training is also provided to police officers, youth workers, and other members in the community who hold safeguarding responsibilities.

The application of the Prevent strategy principles in schools has been the subject of much controversy due to the discriminatory outcomes it has been perceived to cause. There have, for example, been several instances where children as young as five have been reported to Prevent for expressing potentially radical views, when what they had said was in fact fairly innocuous, such as that they had been given a toy gun as a gift (Addley & Topping, 2017). The local council in which this specific incident occurred determined that this was a case of racial discrimination. This incident and others like it have been held up as an example of how Prevent has been responsible for perpetuating discrimination against Muslims in the UK as well as heightening their feelings of cultural alienation (Fenwick, 2019). It is feared that some young Muslim men might view Prevent as another example of officially sanctioned stigmatisation and discrimination against Muslims so exacerbating existing feelings of antipathy and discontent (Mattsson et al., 2016: 253). In such cases, it has been argued that Prevent causes more harm by increasing social division, particularly amongst those who may already feel marginalised and socially excluded, and who as a result may be more vulnerable to radicalisation (see also section 4.7).

While the discussion around the good and/or harm that is caused by Prevent is rife and there is much to be said about whether or not it should be abandoned in its entirety, I believe that it is necessary to have a referral system for flagging those who may be vulnerable to radicalisation, in order to be able to provide the care and attention that they require. This is not to say that I agree with the current way in which Prevent works or the consequences it has led to. Prevent is in need of change, both in the ways in which it identifies vulnerable individuals as well as the placing of its focus – which is criticised for being too centred on Islamic fundamentalism and radicalisation. The current strategic advisor to the Counter Extremism Project (CEP), Mr Liam Duffy, has noted

that terms such as ‘Islamism’ and ‘Islamist’ are euphemisms for greater issues, which have not had sufficient explanation in the public domain. Duffy states that the anger and backlash that comes from the public who view its use as a criticism of Muslims or the overt association of terrorism to Islam is a reflection of the failing of practitioners in explaining that Islamism is a political ideology that is based upon but distinct from Islam (Duffy, 2023).

Similarly, Wasiq (2023) argues that Prevent has a preoccupation with Islamist and right wing extremism, but the threats are evolving and Prevent must stay alert to this. Wasiq contends that although there is not a universally accepted definition of terrorism, there are tangible parameters to work with, e.g. involving incitement to or participation in causing mass casualty or damage etc. however, there is not a working definition of ‘extremism’ in the same way. Wasiq argues that more rigid parameters such as better working definitions are what is needed in the first stages of Prevent changing its focus and direction. This is a sentiment I can agree with, and I believe that although Prevent in its current state requires change, a form of Prevent or a referral system to replace it is much needed.

4.3 Pursue

The Pursue strategy is the second dimension in the government’s approach to countering terrorism. The government detail that the objectives of Pursue are to:

- Detect and understand terrorist activity.
- Investigate terrorist activity.
- Disrupt terrorist activity, including through prosecutions. (GOV.UK, 2018: 43)

The Pursue strategy is built of Counter-Terrorism Policing, and the security and intelligence agencies, as well as the Armed Forces, who work together in a range of technical activities to thwart any planned attacks. At the core of Pursue, the primary objective is to understand, discover, and identify terrorist threats. There is also a key role that the general public play in preventing terror attacks through identifying and reporting any suspicious behaviour to the police. ‘Counter-Terrorism Policing’s ACT (Action Counters Terrorism) public communications campaign seeks to encourage citizens to look out for suspicious activity and behaviour and report it to the police’

(GOV.UK, 2018: 46). An example provided by Assistant Commissioner of Counter-Terror Police UK, Matt Twist, was that of Operation London Bridge – the state funeral of Queen Elizabeth II, held on the 19th of September 2022.

In the days leading up to the funeral procession, tailored advertising was placed around the city of London, particularly in the areas the funeral procession was due to pass through, to try to encourage the public to remain vigilant and report anything they found suspicious. This advertising proved successful, with a significant increase in the number of people reporting to the police, with the equivalent of one month's average reporting having been made in ten days (Twist, 2022). This shows the effectiveness of Pursue's ability to engage with the public and influence their behaviour in such a way that the public are made more diligent. While it can be argued that this causes increased paranoia in the public, it can also be seen as a necessary evil, as it is crucial that individuals remain aware of their surroundings and company.

4.4 Protect

The purpose of Protect in this framework is to deal with issues such as border security, screening individuals, working with the transport system (which has been the target of many terror attacks), identifying public places that may be attractive for a terror attack (due to the popularity of a place) and mitigating the risk. The key objectives of Protect are to

- Detect and deal with suspected terrorists and harmful materials at the border.
- Reduce the risk to and improve the resilience of global aviation, other transport sectors and critical national infrastructure most at risk to terror attacks.
- Reduce the vulnerability of crowded places, specific vulnerable groups, and high profile individuals.
- Detect and Prevent terrorist access to and use of materials of concern, knowledge and information that could be used to conduct attacks. (GOV.UK, 2018: 53)

An example of mitigation was the erecting of bollards between the pavement and road on London Bridge following an attack there in 2017, when a van was deliberately driven off the road and into pedestrians walking on the pavement, killing eleven people (including the perpetrators) and

injuring a further forty-eight. Counter-Terrorism Police highlight that, on the whole, low sophistication attacks are still the most likely.

4.5 Prepare

Prepare is the final stream of CONTEST. If an attack cannot be avoided, it is the role of Prepare to minimise the damage and increase the UK's ability to deal with future occurrences, including ensuring a rapid response to any attack being carried out and minimising the impact that it may have on local communities. Prepare works with emergency services as well as security and intelligence personnel to ensure the UK is well equipped in case of a terror attack.

The emergency services have specialists who are trained to deal with a range of terrorist incidents, including armed officers, and specialist fire and ambulance teams who are skilled and equipped for dealing with any attack using a chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) device (GOV.UK, 2018: 63). This was seen in action during the March 2018 Salisbury attack, in which Sergei Skripal, a former Russian military officer and double agent for the British intelligence agencies, and his daughter Yulia Skripal were poisoned with a suspected chemical weapon (A-234) in Salisbury, England.

The current advice given to the general public by the government and Counter-Terror Policing for what to do in the event of a terror attack is to 'run' (if possible), 'hide' (if one cannot run) and 'tell' (by phoning the police on 999) (National Counter Terrorism Security Office, 2017).

4.6 Channel, and the Desistance and Disengagement Programme

If individuals are assessed as being vulnerable to radicalisation (including through the Prevent duty), they may be referred to Channel, which is a safeguarding agency for England and Wales which aims to address all forms of extremism.

When a referral is made to Channel where the police have assessed that an individual shows vulnerability and/or inclination towards radicalisation and extremism, a Channel panel (consisting of representatives from various safeguarding agencies including education and health etc.) meet to discuss and determine each individual case. In their discussion, they consider the potential extent

of vulnerability and the forms of support which would be most relevant, efficient, and applicable, according to individual needs. If it is deemed that an individual referred does not require any help, then the referral is closed.

Participation in Channel is voluntary and individuals referred to Channel are not obliged to partake in specific schemes or programmes. If they do wish to partake, they are also able to withdraw participation at any time. For individuals who do not accept assistance through Channel but are still deemed to be a risk, alternative forms of support are offered including help with employment and health support. In the event that a genuine terror risk is identified this becomes the responsibility of the police.

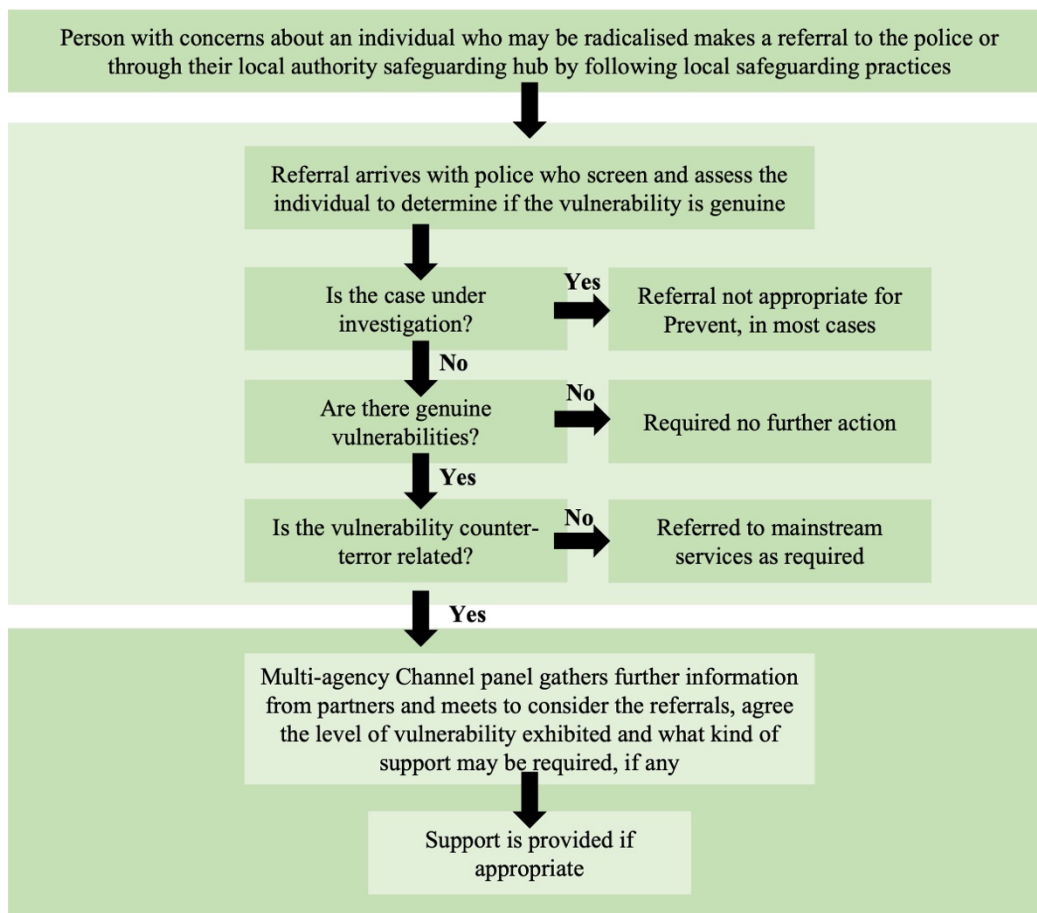


Figure 5. CONTEST, Referrals Made to Channel (GOV.UK, 2018: 38)

The Desistance and Disengagement Programme (DDP) is an element of Prevent that was introduced in 2017, focusing on those who have previously been involved in terrorism or terror related activities, including those on probation, and those who have returned from conflict zones such as Syria and Iraq. It aims to reduce the risk such individuals pose to the public by ‘providing one-to-one rehabilitative support using specialist intervention providers’ (GOV.UK, 2023). The DDP, unlike Channel, is not a voluntary programme and refusal to participate and comply with it could result in charges or being re-imprisoned on account of breaching parole regulations.

Between 2014 and 2017, the UK faced a number of low sophistication terror attacks carried out by disaffected British Muslims who associated themselves with Islamic State (IS). While IS had many successes in their garnering of supporters and seizing of territory in regions of Syria and Iraq in the early 2010s, this began to dwindle quickly as they suffered territorial losses as a result of Western coalition air raids. This forced IS to change their modus operandi, focusing on a new strategy which ‘rejects the long processes of coordination and action-planning, replacing them with the ‘lone wolves’ recruitment, who act independently, do not have any connection with any of the groups and do not demonstrate their beliefs’ (Gac, 2020: 12). These ‘lone wolf’ actors carried out many attacks in the UK as well as across Europe in the years 2014 to 2017, including knife attacks and vehicle ramming. It was during this period of time when jihadi attacks were at their peak in the UK that the DDP was developed.

The DDP reflects the collaborative efforts of Prevent and Pursue, and provides a range of tailored support ‘designed to tackle the drivers of radicalisation around universal needs for identity, self-esteem, meaning and purpose; as well as to address personal grievances that the extremist narrative has exacerbated’ (GOV.UK, 2018: 40). There is little known at present about the DDP. However, it does raise concerns of how Prevent and Pursue as two particularly different aspects of the Channel Programme work together as one.

Prevent seeks to work with communities and individuals in the ‘pre-criminal space’ to prevent them from crossing over to terrorism or supporting terrorism. [...] In contrast to Prevent’s pre-criminal work, programmes such as DDP operate in the post-criminal space and target individuals with a previous involvement in terrorism. These programmes are

designed to ensure that individuals who previously contributed to terrorism do not return to such activities and are therefore reactive, not preventive. (Elshimi, 2020: 225).

This raises further questions about the nature of the Prevent strategy and the direction in which Prevent may continue in future and if, rather than focusing solely on preventative measures in the pre-criminal sphere of counter violent extremist (CVE), Prevent will move into a more post-criminal world of counter-terrorism (CT), as with Pursue.

There have been recommendations made for how the DDP can be strengthened, along with other elements of CONTEST, which I discuss in the next section of this chapter. It is my hope, with the research that I have conducted and the dissection of Salafi-jihadi literature, that the DDP as a strategy for de-radicalisation can be hardened. While counter-narratives and re-education are already being delivered to those undergoing the DDP including in prisons, I believe they can be delivered in a more appropriate and effective way if the narratives being disseminated by Salafi-jihadis are taken into consideration.

4.7 Concerns with and Recommendations Made for CONTEST

The current CONTEST strategy has attracted much criticism, for example, for fear of being reported and having action taken against them, some young people no longer feel they have the freedom to discuss what may be viewed as ‘controversial’ topics in public settings such as classrooms, resulting in more cautious dialogue between students and teachers. What could have once been open discussion that could have tackled extremist thought and ideologies to offer new ways of thinking may have been replaced with silence and the internalisation of such thoughts, making it difficult to create safe spaces for discussion and for helping those who may be struggling with conflicting views. For those who may be struggling with the internalisation of ‘controversial’ thoughts, the environment in which they feel comfortable enough to share their views may become something of an echo chamber, as they are more likely to divulge their honest thoughts and opinions with likeminded people, thus entrenching a certain rhetoric and point of view.

Many Muslim students have reported that they have been silenced by fear of the Prevent counter-terrorism strategy and the potential repercussions of their expressions of views around what may

be perceived as extremist thought (Faure-Walker, 2019). The secrecy which surrounded the first three years of Prevent's existence coupled with the surveillance it is perceived as carrying out builds mistrust and fear, and has had a silencing effect, particularly on vulnerable individuals. The need to identify and provide aid to individuals who are vulnerable to radicalisation is of great interest to the UK government as demonstrated in strategies such as CONTEST. However, some argue that Prevent as an approach and in its current state may be hindering rather than assisting this process (Committee on Human Rights, 2018; Faure Walker, 2019b).

Channel as a programme of de-radicalisation has been criticised for its ineffectiveness. A case that demonstrates this is that of Ahmed Hassan who, in 2017, left a homemade explosive on a Transport for London (TfL) train, which detonated at Parsons Green train station. Hassan had previously been referred to Prevent and had, at the time, been undergoing the Channel de-radicalisation programme for over a year. This raises questions of both the effectiveness and efficiency of the Channel programme as a means of promoting de-radicalisation; from this, it raises the further question of whether it is possible that there is a more effective means of promoting de-radicalisation?

A similar and more infamous case is that of Usman Khan (also known as Abu Saif) who was one of nine men arrested in 2010 accused of terror related offences. Khan was convicted for plotting a terror attack in 2012, along with his co-conspirators who were all charged along with him – all of whom pleaded guilty to al Qaeda inspired terror offences. Khan received an indeterminate prison sentence which required him to remain in prison for as long as it was deemed that Khan was a danger to others, with a minimum term of eight years. However, upon appeal in 2013, Khan's indeterminate sentence was changed to a sixteen-year sentence, with a requirement that he serve eight years. In December 2018, Khan was permitted to leave prison on temporary release license (which allowed prisoners to be released early on parole), having been judged as no longer being a threat to the public. Throughout his imprisonment, Khan had completed intervention programmes including the DDP and was viewed as a success story for de-radicalisation and rehabilitation programmes. It became known during the inquest that psychologists had communicated that Khan was a danger and threat to the safety of the public, however this was ignored by prison officials as well as those working with Khan in rehabilitation programmes (GOV.UK, 2021). Khan and others

including Ali Harbi Ali, who carried out the fatal stabbing of MP Sir David Amess on the 15th of October 2021, falsely demonstrated compliance with de-radicalisation programmes. There is a tendency to view compliance as a sign of success because the subject of the de-radicalisation programme shows agreement and demonstrates a change in attitude and belief. Compliance, however, cannot be taken as evidence of an individual's willingness to conform to standards and ideals set out by de-radicalisation programmes, as this may be false. Disguised compliance (in this context) is the pushing or repeating of a narrative, based on what the individual believes is expected of them, irrespective of if the individual in question actually agrees with the sentiment (Acheson, 2022).

With disguised compliance, the individual conceals their extremist beliefs and deceives those around them professionally and personally so as to allow themselves the ability to carry out further extremist acts. Acheson (2022) has documented how many convicted individuals admit to putting on a false front when in the company of others and adjusting their interactions with law enforcement officials to give an impression of compliance. Some even claim that they were able to deceive others because it was ordained by God (Acheson, 2022). Acheson has suggested that a blended and more holistic therapy approach ought to be adopted to replace the current generic de-radicalisation programme in such a way that it is more individualised and able to determine the motivations of radicalised individuals properly. As the paths to radicalisation are multi-faceted, including one's mental health, socio-economic background, political standings etc. it is important that the programmes offered reflect these differences.

Similarly, Kenyon et al. (2021) suggest that greater importance be given to the specific social and wellbeing needs of those identified as at risk by Prevent, as opposed to solely fixating on de-radicalisation. Many of the individuals who have been referred to Prevent suffer from mental health issues and would benefit greatly from having this addressed. This would not only be beneficial for the individual but would make de-radicalisation programmes such as Channel more effective, as budgets could be divided better. The budgets of de-radicalisation programmes and strategies are not infinite and would be better spent if the sole focus was de-radicalisation itself, referring individuals with other needs – such as those with poor mental health – to those more suited to offering aid. It has been shown that 'those who are primarily radicalised online tended to

be socially isolated offline with higher rates of mental illness and personality disorder’ (Kenyon et al., 2021: 22); as such it is important to ensure that their greater health needs are given attention to successfully prevent their mind-set from becoming increasingly more extreme (Bhui, 2018).

In the most recent Independent Review of Prevent, Sir William Shawcross stressed that

Prevent is carrying the weight for mental health services. Vulnerable people who do not necessarily pose a terrorism risk are being referred to Prevent to access other types of much-needed support. This is a serious misallocation of resources and risks diverting attention from the threat itself (Shawcross, 2023: 8).

Shawcross states that Prevent must return to its original and overarching objective, which is to stop individuals from becoming terrorists and/or supporting terrorism. Prevent is a crucial pillar of the UK’s counter-terrorism strategy, however, it often gets equated with safeguarding, for example, an emphasis is often placed ‘on protecting those referred into Prevent from harm and addressing their personal vulnerabilities’ (ibid: 6).

In the 2023 Independent Review of Prevent the point is raised that the approaches are different in the way Prevent deals with the Extreme Right-Wing and (what Prevent label) Islamism, arguing that there is a double standard. The Review details that Prevent takes an expansive approach to the Extreme Right-Wing, ‘capturing a variety of influences that, at times, has been so broad it has included mildly controversial or provocative forms of mainstream, right-wing leaning commentary that have no meaningful connection to terrorism or radicalisation’ (ibid: 7). The approach taken with Islamism, however, is much narrower and focuses on ‘proscribed organisations, ignoring the contribution of non-violent Islamist narratives and networks to terrorism’ (ibid: 7). By having this approach to extremism motivated by radical interpretations of Islam, the Review argues that domestic extremists who fall below the ‘terrorism’ threshold and who have the capacity and ability to create an environment conducive to terrorism are missed.

Recommendation 10 in the 2023 Independent Review states that the government must

Ensure Prevent disruptions take action to limit the influence of ‘chronic’ radicalisers and networks which sit below the terrorism threshold. These actors promote narratives legitimising terrorism and terrorists without breaking the law. Low level but influential groups must have appropriate weighting in prioritisation and risk models (Shawcross, 2023: 159).

What constitutes the radical or extreme behaviour that lies below the terrorism threshold is influenced and dependent on socio-economic and political issues at the time. Following the Israeli offensive in Gaza as a response to the October 7th terror attack on Israel carried out by Hamas (further discussion of which can be found in section 7.2 of Chapter 7), many across the UK partook in marches and demonstrations to pressure the government to call for a ceasefire. The marches and demonstrations came as a reaction to the videos readily available and consumed by millions on social media which depicted the senseless brutality and dehumanising ways the Israeli forces treated Palestinian civilians. This included footage showing members of the Israeli army raping captured Palestinian civilian men, tying Palestinian men to the bonnets of cars to use them as human shields, and dropping Palestinian civilians from the tops of buildings, as well as other forms of torture. This has also including the limiting (and prohibition) of food, water and medical aid to Gaza. Many pushed the narrative that such marches, rather than being against the brutality of the Israeli forces, were in fact pro-Hamas marches. Similarly, in November 2023 and March 2024, I ran a couple of fundraising initiatives to raise money for charities to deliver much needed medical equipment to Gaza. In both cases, the local community were exceptionally supportive and generous and we were able to donate more than we had anticipated. However my actions did not escape criticism. I received hostile messages through social media, with users accusing me of being a supporter of Hamas. At the time, it seemed strange to me that what was an altruistic act was portrayed as something hateful. While there are, undoubtedly, some members of the public who sympathise with Hamas, it would be a gross generalisation to assume that all those who have demonstrated against the Israeli action are allies of Hamas.

In the months that have followed October 7th, there has been a governmental clampdown on pro-Palestine speech and activists, with some equating the waving of the Palestinian flag with support for Hamas (an organisation which has a separate and distinct flag). There is a danger in the

subjective nature of identifying what constitutes as support for terrorism. The then Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, wrote in a letter to chief police constables in England and Wales that

It is not just explicit pro-Hamas symbols and chants that are cause for concern. I would encourage police to consider whether chants such as: ‘From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free’ should be understood as an expression of a violent desire to see Israel erased from the world, and whether its use in certain contexts may amount to a racially aggravated section 5 public order offence.

I would encourage police to give similar considerations to the presence of symbols such as swastikas at anti-Israel demonstrations. Context is crucial. Behaviours that are legitimate in some circumstances, for example the waving of a Palestinian flag, may not be legitimate such as when intended to glorify acts of terrorism (Syal & Allegretti, 2023).

The visibly partial nature of Braverman’s letter calling for people in positions of power to judge what may or may not be glorifying terrorism based on the context endangers the public’s right and ability to use freedom of speech, when the speech itself may be misconstrued and criminalised ad hoc. At the time, and in the context of a Prevent strategy that had caused wide mistrust, it was objected that Braverman’s letter would ‘deeply concern freedom of speech advocates and members of the Muslim community’ (ibid). What constitutes terrorism, as well as behaviour that lies beneath the terrorism threshold but demonstrates support for and incitement of violence and terrorism, must be made abundantly and explicitly clear, without subjectivity and personal judgement.

In the then government’s Response to the Independent Review of Prevent (2023) the recommendation to take actions which lie beneath the terrorism threshold into account was accepted, and the government stated that they were committed ‘to accelerating and strengthening’ work to ‘disrupt chronic radicalisers who seek to radicalise others into terrorism but operate, often intentionally, below legal thresholds’ (House of Commons, 2023: 15). The government, in the response to the Independent Review, specified that this would be done in two ways, the first being an introduction of a new partnership which would involve ‘local, regional and national partners,

law enforcement agencies, DLUHC³⁶ [...] the CCE,³⁷ other government departments, and wider counter-extremism experts' (House of Commons, 2023: 15) in an attempt to improve information sharing and collaboration. The second way was by providing specialist training to local authorities, Prevent practitioners and civil society organisations on the harmful narratives disseminated by such radicalisers and the activities that they engage in. With this specialist training, it was hoped that they would be able to identify issues better and be sufficiently equipped to confront such activity locally.

In the recommendations made in the Independent Review of Prevent, it is highlighted that the approaches taken towards Islamism and the Extreme Right-Wing must be consistent. This is not to argue necessarily that the net should be widened unreservedly for Islamism, or that it should be narrowed for the Extreme Right-Wing in the same way that it has been for Islamism, but that Prevent must ensure that they are consistent in their approach, and that the approach is evidence-based at all times. The evidence is what should dictate the threshold and criteria for Prevent's approach to different types of extremism, and the threshold must also take into account those who fall below the 'terrorism' threshold.

If an expansive approach is taken to Islamism in the same way that the Review states Prevent treats the Extreme Right-Wing such that it captures a variety of influences including 'mildly controversial or provocative [...] commentary,' there is the risk that Prevent will be criticised further by the public for their targeting of Muslims and having Islamophobic tendencies. This has been a criticism that Prevent has faced many times in the past and one which they are aware is often the public perception. To counter this, Shawcross highlights the need for the Home Office to create a 'rapid response unit' to rebut misinformation about Prevent, their aim, and the work that they do. Shawcross highlights that there does not seem to be support for local Prevent practitioners and partners on how to engage with and respond to criticism. In the 2018-2019 review by the Mayor of London's office on countering extremism in London it concluded that where

³⁶ This is the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities which supports communities throughout the UK and is the lead for freedom of faith and belief.

³⁷ The Commission for Countering Extremism provides the government with impartial expert advice on the policies and approaches needed to tackle extremism, and scrutinises its current application.

‘misinformation exists, it should be incumbent on the authorities to very quickly, clearly and transparently counter this misinformation’ (Mayor of London, 2018: 77). The recommendation made in relation to this issue is that

The Government and the National Counter Terrorism Policing HQ (NCTPHQ) should be stronger, speedier, louder and more transparent in countering any inaccurate allegations, media stories or case studies peddled by individuals and organisations that are looking to sow discontent around Prevent delivery (ibid: 77).

Taking an expansive approach to Islamism while also attempting to squash misinformation and counter narratives that criticise Prevent may further entrench the belief that it is an Islamophobic strategy, which seeks to undermine any claims of its Islamophobia. While it is a risk that public perception for some may be tainted in this way, it is important that Prevent also focuses on its primary objective, which is ‘to tackle the causes of radicalisation and respond to the ideological challenges of terrorism’ (Shawcross, 2023: 6). Prevent has proven itself to be effective in many cases where it has helped tackle the causes of radicalisation and aided individuals to disengage from extremism, and I do not believe that it should be disbanded due to public sentiment. Due to the nature of such a strategy, we are unlikely to hear about Prevent or CONTEST unless there is something to criticise. If terrorist plots are thwarted or intercepted, the public are largely unaware of the work happening or any successes. It is only when something goes wrong, as with the case of Usman Khan, that CONTEST and its many elements are brought to the fore.

As a core arm of the government’s counter-terror strategy, Prevent is not without fault. The reviews carried out and the government responses to the reviews show ongoing and impartial critical analysis of the different elements of Prevent, how it currently operates, the way it is perceived, and how it can be improved etc. It is unlikely that any strategy will be without fault, and there is continuous work being delivered to ensure that it is as effective and well received as it can be. Some anti-Prevent lobbyists argue for the dissolution of Prevent altogether, however I do not believe a plausible substitute has been offered for an organisation or strategy which seeks to identify vulnerable individuals and draw them away from extremism before they engage in or support terrorist activity.

The Independent Review(s) of Prevent and the government Response(s) take into consideration all forms of extremism and offer recommendations, including on the Extreme Right-Wing as well as anti-Semitic hate. However, due to the nature of my research and thesis being centred around narratives contained in Salafi-jihadi literature, this is not something that I have mentioned in the above discussion. The Review does not solely focus on the issue of jihadism or Islamic fundamentalism.

While there is much to be said about Prevent and the many aspects of CONTEST, it is important to acknowledge the work of the DDP and ways this can also be strengthened. Many question the effectivity of disengagement, de-radicalisation, and rehabilitation programmes such as the DDP, questioning if they are able to bring about real change in individuals who have been radicalised. Critics such as this often reference Usman Khan who carried out the attacks at Fishmongers' Hall in 2017, and who had participated in several rehabilitation programmes. While it is difficult to judge and measure how effective and successful such programmes are, there is evidence of individuals who have received the necessary care from the DDP and changed their lives in a positive way.

There is a concern raised in the 2023 Independent Review of Prevent which emphasises the DDP's current reliance on an academic advisory board, with a recommendation made for its 'diversification to increase understanding and experience of ideologically-driven offenders' (Shawcross, 2023: 67). It is argued that any external consultants 'must be able to demonstrate prior work on the ideological motivations of terrorism (worldviews, narratives and groups) or have operational expertise of working with extremists' (ibid: 67).

The imams who are currently working in the DDP and delivering the programme to those who hold Islamic fundamentalist views in prisons are currently well equipped to deal with information and narratives that centre around Islam, hoping to re-educate such individuals with interpretations that are widely accepted in the broader Islamic community as being more accurate. While teaching these counter-narratives is crucial, it is important that the imams delivering such programmes possess, not only knowledge of Islam but also, knowledge of terrorism, group formations,

ideological motivations etc. This is something that is lacking at present with the DDP. While teaching and the delivery of that information is important, it is equally, if not more, important to understand the individuals to whom the programme is being delivered, the way they work, their paradigm, and how they are likely to be made susceptible to such re-education, etc.

I believe that by introducing specialists who have knowledge of not only Islam, but extremist ideologies which are driven by radical interpretations of Islamic law and scripture, extremism in general and terrorism too, to deliver the programmes, the effectivity will be increased. To do this, the individuals must possess knowledge of the narratives that are being learned in the first instance, and the radicalising effects these have. By understanding this, the programmes can be tailored to and framed in such a way that the narratives are refuted directly, as opposed to offering a general anaesthetic to the cause. Shawcross highlights that the utilisation of specialists (who hold knowledge in a variety of terrorism related fields) should be applied across Prevent. ‘Any outputs (training products, assessment frameworks, programmes of work) used to identify or mitigate risk by those who have ideological motivations must be examined by specialists’ (ibid: 67). The need for specialists such as this in the delivery of disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes is crucial, and something I believe will strengthen CONTEST overall. It is also important that the individuals who deliver the DDP and partake in other de-radicalisation efforts are aware of institutional racism and systemic Islamophobia to avoid perpetuating the same issues. To achieve this, alongside training into understanding terrorism and radicalisation, an ‘educational’ programme may be necessary to pick apart and assess the effects of Islamophobia. With the research that I have conducted which looks at the radicalising effect of scriptural manipulation, I hope to be able to shed some insight into the power of discourse in Salafi-jihadi materials to better aid not only the re-education of individuals undergoing the DDP, but the training of DDP practitioners as well.

4.8 Developments in Countering Extremism Online

Prevent acknowledges the power of the Internet, which allows extremists to ‘radicalise, groom, and recruit vulnerable individuals, and to invite and enable terrorist attacks’ (Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2018). The response of Prevent to the use of the Internet as a means of radicalisation is twofold: Prevent is designed to work with groups in civil society (such as youth

groups) to ensure they have the ability to counter terrorist narratives online, as well as preventing the dissemination of extremist content online. The police's Counter-Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU) was set up to monitor the use of the Internet and the content being uploaded and shared. The CTIRU has removed over 300,000 pieces of extremist designated content from the Internet.

The March 2017 Westminster attack was one in which Khalid Masood, a 52-year-old Briton, drove a car into pedestrians on the pavement of Westminster Bridge. Six people were killed in the attack, including the perpetrator, and a further forty-eight people were injured, before Masood crashed the car into the perimeter fence around the palace gardens. This attack raised questions about if more could be done to counter extremist narratives being circulated on the Internet, which led to a meeting held between major industry giants including Facebook, Twitter, Google, and Microsoft. This led to the formation of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), which is an international forum comprising more than a dozen major platforms (Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2018).

The GIFCT has two main lines of identification, these being through 'hash sharing' and 'link sharing'. A hash is an ID – often referred to as a 'digital fingerprint' – that is given to an image or text when it is uploaded to the Internet. Each item has a unique hash and any copies of it are identified with the same ID. This means that if a copy of a photo is uploaded which was previously identified by an authority as being harmful or illegal, the copy will also be classified as such and removed from the Internet. Hashing is also able to identify any minor and subtle changes that may have been made to an image when it is reuploaded, such as any text overlayed or cropping of the image and allows for its identification as an image that has previously been tagged. Major social network platforms such as Facebook and Twitter share hashes with one another to allow them to work together internationally. The GIFCT also have a link sharing consortium which focuses on checking if content leads to another site or other source which also contains harmful material. Initiatives such as this have proven successful and have been able to remove content across multiple platforms globally quickly.

There are two types of approaches currently applied to counter-terrorism online, these are the supply side and the demand side. The demand side focuses on the searches that the individual is carrying out online and the type of information and content they are seeking. Google Jigsaw is a redirect project which aims to crackdown on echo chambers and stop any celebrations online of extremist attacks by diverting individuals who may have such a motive. Jigsaw tries to redirect the individual to other pages; the page to which they are redirected will differ and vary depending on the case and the search terms and key words used. The combination of search terms and the pages that they lead to are determined by the social media company. The redirect project aims to send individuals to pages that might offer counter narratives or to civil society pages that address the extremist issues or vulnerabilities their search terms indicate.

The supply side focuses on the detection and removal of content from online platforms, which reduces the visibility of extremist content and in some cases involves de-platforming people, for uploading and distributing offensive material. Both human and automated identification (as well as a combination of both) are used to match and classify content. Platforms have specific systems of identification, including the Trusted Flagger Program, which later morphed into YouTube Heroes in 2016 which rewards users for flagging content, and Facebook's dedicated staff who review and act on reports of extremism. For programmes which are less platform specific, the EUROPOL Internet Referral Unit is used by all, as well as the UK's iReportIt app, which was developed by City University in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police.

There is evidence that since 2007, the use of encrypted applications such as Telegram has increased, which Scrivens and Conway argue coincided with the major disruption caused to pro-IS online accounts by the formation of GIFCT and the coming together of major social media platforms (Scrivens & Conway, 2019).

In the next chapter, I discuss the methodological approach adopted for my research and the texts selected, beginning with an introduction to Islamic State (IS) and their affiliate and offshoot the Islamic State in Khurasan Province (ISKP), and their radicalisation efforts and tactics.

Chapter 5 Methodological Approach and Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the theoretical and methodological frameworks for this study are set out. These are derived from elements of Roy Bhaskar's critical realism and Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, which are built upon using John O'Regan's (2006) procedural framework of critical discourse analysis which he calls the Text as a Critical Object (TACO). Following this, in Chapter 6, I begin to apply the methodological and theoretical frameworks, beginning by offering a description of the texts.

5.1 Positionality

The study that I have conducted is qualitative in nature and has been influenced by post-structuralist perspectives, providing in depth analysis and discussion on the data that have been collected. The data that have been analysed for this study are the Qur'anic references that are found in Salafi-jihadi literature. The process of data organisation and analysis are discussed in section 5.10 of this chapter.

While quantitative research is often associated with positivist and post-positivist orientations to knowledge, utilising objectivist and realist epistemological and ontological positions, qualitative research is often associated with interpretive humanistic orientations and a non-objectivist epistemology (Duff, 2010). This is not to say that qualitative research is atheoretical or without rigour; the onus falls on the researcher to demonstrate the validity and credibility of their research methods and findings but from a more reflexive position than is the case in positivism and post-positivism.

I have not adopted a positivist or post-positivist position in this study and instead adopted – at least initially – a more interpretive post-structuralist position. I selected post-structuralism as an opening epistemological lens for this study due to its emphasis on interpretation rather than explanation. Structuralism is a theory and methodological approach which proposes that human culture must be understood through the underlying structures that form the paradigms behind perception, action, and interaction (Kultgen, 1975). Viewing society in such a way can imply a

rigid and concrete reality which can be fully comprehended, whereas post-structuralism recognises that there exist many ways of understanding and interpreting reality.

The Salafi-jihadi texts that have been analysed – particularly focusing on magazine articles – and their contents are soft data. This is content where there are ‘no external phenomena with which to compare, calibrate, and confirm these data. These data are interpretive because participants report them; the researcher does not experience or see the event firsthand’ (Morse, 2018: 808). Many qualitative research studies handle soft data, adding an element of subjectivity to such projects as they become interpretive, requiring the researcher to decipher meaning in the dataset.

The field of semiotics emphasises that the meanings of things and images ‘are completely context dependent and generated through interactions of multiple elements within social and cultural structures. Meaning should not be looked upon as an inherent characteristic because it can never be owned, only created’ (Margolis & Zunjarwad, 2018: 618). Further discussion on meaning-making can be found in section 3.7 of Chapter 3.

Accepting that there is no pure or objective interpretation, this study nevertheless attempts to offer an explanation for why one interpretation may be preferred to another. The thesis itself does contain a subjectivity, such that each person’s interpretation is (or could be) different. While I acknowledge that there is no absolute ground on which I can claim that a particular interpretation is a correct or true interpretation, I do argue that some interpretations are more valid than others, on the basis that they are more consistent with the overall intent of the text and do not fall into contradiction in regard to that intent. As Derrida says, there is a principle of reason and deontology involved in the reading of texts; ‘[o]therwise’, he writes, ‘one could indeed just say anything at all and I have never accepted saying, or encouraging others to say, just anything at all’ (Derrida, 1988: 144).

Due to the nature of the research being interpretation based it also means that I, as the researcher, cannot wholly stand apart from the research and thus I as the researcher and interpreter of the texts am part of the research itself. I have been cognisant of the impact my Bangladeshi heritage can have on the way that I interpret the data that I am analysing for my research. There is a sense in

which faith, religion, and culture become intertwined – particularly in societies which base their rules of governance on religious precepts or one in which the people predominantly follow one religion. Bangladesh as a country has a majority Sunni Muslim population. As an Islamic nation, religion ‘has an ingrained and overwhelming influence on the values, norms and lifestyle of people in Bangladesh. In fact, most of the social forces operating within the country contribute, in some way or another, to the entrenchment of values whose origins may be traced to the tenets of Islam’ (Huque & Akhter, 1987: 208). Due to the mainstreaming of some Islamic precepts and merging with cultural and societal norms, certain interpretations of scripture may be more commonly accepted within the Bangladeshi community and, indeed, my own thinking.

While acknowledging the subjectivity of my own positioning, I have tried to read the texts I have selected for my data with a level of deontic care that keeps meaning open and not closed down, while also accepting that the reading I have preferred is also an interpretation (O’Regan, 2006). To this end, I have selected three types of texts and juxtaposed them: a popularly read Qur’anic translation (as opposed to a niche translation), a commonly read tafsir that provides contextualisation and interpretations of the scriptural verses, and hadiths that recount stories of the Prophet Muhammad and his ethical prescriptions. The use of three different kinds of texts allows me, as the researcher, to cross-reference the verses to ensure that there is consistency between my interpretation and commonly accepted interpretations of the verses. By carefully selecting texts which are widely circulated and adding a triangulation such as this, I have sought to steer a path is not wholly based on my own intentions. While I have done this, I acknowledge that there remains no neutral space from which I can fully adjudicate the intention of the text.

Eco (1992) discusses texts as having three intentions: the intention of the author in what they hoped to convey, the intention of the text and how it wishes to be read, and the intention of the interpreter and the active role they play in reading and understanding the text (Eco, 1992). Eco argues that the ‘meaning’ of a text is more nuanced than what is received and processed by the reader; what is read and understood may differ from the writers’ intention (Eco, 1992; Kress, 1991). Through the practice of reading and interpreting a text, the reader shapes the text’s meaning. Whether consciously or unconsciously, in experiencing the linguistic features and literary effects of the discourse embodied in a text, the individual forms an interpretation and, consequently, their own

reality in relation to the text (Gorski, 2013; Sarfo & Krampa, 2013; Widdowson, 2000). It has been important, while conducting this study, to be aware of my own reality and its relation to the texts being studied.

The focus of my thesis, while analysing the materials that are produced and disseminated by Salafi-jihadi groups with the aim of radicalisation, is to use my findings to provide insight to deradicalisation programmes of how fundamentalist and radical Muslims are able to employ religion in this way. The UK's use of counter-terrorism programmes such as Prevent have faced much opposition particularly over claims of Islamophobia and the disproportionate fixation on the South Asian community. While I acknowledge that there have been cases of Islamophobic reporting, I believe this to be a byproduct of the strategy rather than the strategy itself being Islamophobic. It is the lack of thorough and consistent training provided to the people implementing such strategies that serve as the basis for fault. Many argue that the Islamophobia that arises is reason enough to disband such strategies altogether. However, it is my contention – despite being a South Asian Muslim, who many would argue is the demographic which is the primary target of such strategies – that Prevent and other such programmes are still needed. Without anything in their place, the social closure that 'Islamist' extremism represents and the real world problems that issue from it could not be addressed. In the real world, how deradicalisation programmes can be made meaningful and help to build trust between local communities and government authorities requires necessary work. While I have suggested some interventions that might be made in this direction, this matter is largely beyond the scope of this thesis – whose focus is on the interpretation of the religious elements of Qur'anic material that is being put to a deliberately radicalising use.

When analysing the scriptural references utilised by Salafi-jihadi groups, I do not support the claim that there is one unique reading of any verse but instead accept that interpretation will be fluid and differ somewhat between readers. I do not, however, accept that all readings are equally valid for the reasons I have outlined concerning the principle of reason and deontology in the reading of texts. One cannot say anything at all, and this brings in the possibility of judgement and the exercise of one's judgemental rationality in adjudicating between interpretations. What I hope to convey is the importance of critically tracking the intention of the text through its treatment as a

critical object (O'Regan, 2006). I discuss the treatment of the text as a critical object further in section 7 of the present chapter. It is from this juncture that I move from a post-structuralist position towards the formulation of a theoretical framework and methodological approach that is based on the intertwining of critical realism and critical discourse analysis.

5.2 Critical Realism

In order to understand a text, object, concept, or thing, we must be able to perceive it in some way through our senses, which enables us to form judgement (which can take the form of everything from spatial distance to the validity of a statement) and, in turn, informed interpretation. The process of interpretation in this model looks like the following (Hawke, 2017):

SENSE → JUDGE → INTERPRET

It is argued that through this process one can understand the world in a meaningful way. However, it is also this model which supports the notion that the world and what is knowable of it is dependent on the individual, leading to the conclusion that reality is created and not something that is external and intransitive. This is the position held by David Hume (1711-1776) who argued that this is how we know the world, and our knowledge of the world is dependent solely on our interpretation of it (Bhaskar, 2016).

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) suggested that there are two realms: the realm of phenomena and the realm of noumenon; the realm of phenomena is the reality we create, which has its foundations in the interpretations we derive from our senses and judgements, while the realm of noumenon is the dimension in which objects (or thing-in-themselves) exist independently of our minds. Although Kant acknowledges a world which exists independently of the mind, he argues that the realm of noumenon – because it is beyond the mind – is unknowable and therefore the referent (or thing-in-itself which our sensory data refers to) is removed from the process of interpretation (Bhaskar, 2016).

Postmodernism, as a philosophical position, rejects concepts of objectivity and universal truth, arguing primarily that human experience, interpretation, and perspectives are diverse. In doing so

and eliminating the referent when we begin to think about the world, postmodernists leave nothing but interpretation. With no objective truth or accepting that knowledge exists independently of the mind, all interpretations are relative, and it follows from this that all interpretations are equally valid. To be able to judge interpretations and explore Kant's noumenon, the referent must become a part of the process, as the following:

REFERENT → SENSE → JUDGE → INTERPRET

In this model, which includes the referent, it begins from the foundation that before the sensing of words, we refer to things that generate the possibility of these words (Hawke, 2017). For example, we refer to a thing-in-itself (the referent), such as an apple, before we sense the word 'A P P L E,' and we understand when we read 'A P P L E' that it refers to the object apple. The referent creates the possibility of the words, which allows us to form meaningful statements, and provides the possibility of the thing-in-itself to exist in reality independently. The thing-in-itself is not contingent on the sensing or interpretation of it and exists irrespective of our knowing it. This is critical realism (CR); it is the proposal that there are Real universal generative mechanisms, which exist independently of us and our knowing or sensing them. These mechanisms create the possibility for Actual events, which allow us to interpret Empirical data.

Critical realism argues that to understand science, we must view the world as having two constituent dimensions: the ontological and the epistemological. The ontological intransitive dimension exists independently of our minds and knowledge and is made up of the real (or objects-in-themselves), while the epistemological transitive dimension of the world is dependent on the individual, and their understanding and interpretation of it. For the critical realist, everything that has a causal effect is real e.g. materiality is real, mathematics is real, language is real etc. (Bhaskar, 1998; Bhaskar et al., 1998).

Ferdinand de Saussure is recognised as one of the fathers of 20th century linguistics and influenced the work of many including Noam Chomsky and Jacques Derrida, whose respective theories on language and communication were in many ways reactions to the work of Saussure. Saussure imagines the words that we use in speech as signs consisting of a relationship between a concept

in the mind (the signified) and the sound pattern or visual image (the signifier) that we use to refer to it (Saussure, 1986).

Inasmuch as there is no necessary relationship between the signifier and the signified, for Saussure the sign is arbitrary (Saussure, 1986: 76). It is when people come to associate specific meanings and representations (signifiers) with concepts (signifieds) in a regular or routine way that social communities and groups are developed which are based on convention, because without such conventions, human interaction and social bonding would be stunted. As Hall (1997: 19) has noted, ‘people who belong to the same culture must share a broadly similar conceptual map, so they must also share the same way of interpreting the signs of a language, for only in this way can meanings be effectively exchanged between people’ (Gee, 2005; Shibarshina, 2014; Whorf, 1940). Hall argues that if the relationship between a signifier and its signified is the result of social conventions, which are historically and culturally specific, then all meaning is produced within history and culture also, and must be understood and interpreted in this context (Hall, 1997: 32). The relationship between the referent, signifier, and signified is interpreted (largely) in the same way in a given language community, in the sense that individuals who understand and ascribe the same meaning to certain words share the same language.

A critique of Saussurean and post-Saussurean semiotics is that, typically, the referent is removed, leaving only the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Without the referent, it is not possible for us to meaningfully understand or interpret the world, which is the critical realist position.

Critical realism is committed to three philosophical stances: ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgemental rationalism. This is often known as the ‘holy trinity’ in critical realism. Ontological realism argues that there exists a world which consists of structures and generative mechanisms, which is independent of the mind and individual – this is to say that there is an intransitive world containing referents (objects which are things-in-themselves). Epistemological relativism is the position that knowledge is itself socially produced and is affected by political, historical, economic, cultural forces, among many others. It is a transitive dimension; our knowledge of things constantly changes and evolves, and it is possible also that things exist of

which we have no knowledge at all. Judgemental rationality argues that although our knowledge is fallible, socially constructed, and prone to change, there can be grounds for preferring one interpretation or belief to a competing one. Judgemental rationality is an important foundation of critical realism as it moves away from arguments which presuppose that all judgements and interpretations are equal, and towards a more critical evaluation and understanding of interpretations. In this way, 'critical realism is able to sustain the realist intuitions of positivistic modernisms without succumbing to their foundationalism; while also acknowledging the social relativity of all our beliefs without resorting to their judgemental irrationalism' (Bhaskar, 2016: 26). It is important to move beyond questions of what exists and what the correct ways are of interpreting them as meaning is primarily ascribed socially by the reader(s) and/or communities. By viewing texts as things-in-themselves, it becomes possible to examine what texts do as they circulate in society to understand the consequences of our interaction with them.

In the move towards judgemental rationality, it is important to acknowledge that all discourse is either implicitly or explicitly critical or has a critical element. For example, to say that the Earth is round is to make a value judgement and rejection of the notion that the Earth is flat. While I accept that it is difficult, if not impossible, to say one reading of scripture is correct while another is incorrect, by looking at preferred readings and exercising judgemental rationality, I hope I have offered an explanation of the scripture drawn upon by Salafi-jihadis and how the interpretation of it differs from the common Islamic understanding of it.

As someone who was raised in a Sunni Muslim family and who identifies as a Sunni Muslim, I have tried to remain mindful of my own biases in the reading of texts in the conducting of this research. Of the global Muslim population, the overwhelming majority identify as Sunni Muslim; by extension, this means that the majority of extremist groups who are driven by Islamic fundamentalism identify as Sunni Muslims too. Given my background knowledge and comprehension of Sunni Islam, teachings and understandings of concepts, religious anecdotes and scriptural readings, I have tried to remain cognisant of the role I, as the researcher, play in the research. While my knowledge of concepts and teachings were useful for understanding the religious doctrines and narratives circulated by extremists, a level of removal has been necessary to ensure a level of critical reading of the selected texts.

5.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is concerned with ‘the analysis of value-impregnated and ideologically saturated discourse, relating such discourse back to its conditions of production in such a way as to bring out the practical implications and presuppositions of the discourse’ (Bhaskar, 2016: 102), which has been adopted in the analysis of my data. Discourse has many meanings ranging from the relatively neutral everyday usage meaning ‘talk’ or ‘speech’ to more scholarly meanings such as a ‘system of meaning-formation characteristic of a particular social practice,’ and ‘language as social practice in general’ (Määttä, 2014: 65). For Foucault, ‘discourse’ was adopted to represent a social system which produces knowledge and meaning (Foucault, 1969); this is the interpretation of the word that I have adopted. Meaning, Foucault argued, is specific to a historical context and period, and ‘in each period, discourse produced forms of knowledge, objects, subjects, and practices of knowledge, which differed radically from period to period, with no necessary continuity between them’ (Hall, 1997: 46). Like discourse, ideology too has a more commonly used and accepted understanding which denotes the opinions, beliefs and worldview of a particular person or group. In Marx and Engels’ discussion of the concept of ‘ideology,’ the political element at the core of ideology became the primary concern, ‘signifying practices, ideas, or discourse related to the access to power or to its maintenance’ (Woolard, 1998). The distinction I draw between discourse and ideology is such that discourse refers to the creation of social meaning and, ideology, although itself discursive, is oriented to a particular position or stance, which is predominantly political. In essence, ideology is the use of discourse for positional or political ends. Language and discourse when used in such a positional way, i.e. ideologically, have the capacity to influence ideas. In this sense, it also plays a role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of the individual (Hussein, 2012: 642).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to discourse analysis that focuses on identifying and examining ideologies and power relations and has been used to examine many forms of discourse including political speeches and reporting by the media to identify the ways audiences may be manipulated through discourse. The primary concern of CDA is to understand the power relations between users of language beyond the words, utterances, and sentences, and to uncover the opaque dynamics and assumptions that underlie the utterances. CDA

differs from linguistic discourse analysis as it is not limited to purely studying written or spoken text but draws on the socio-political context of discourse, often with a particular focus on ideology. The emphasis in the discursive approach is on the historical context against which languages and meanings are deployed. 'It points us towards greater historical specificity – the way representational practices operate in concrete historical situations, in actual practice (Hall, 1997: 6). CDA has its roots in the critical theory of language, which views language as much more than just words and grammar, but instead understands language to be a form of social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

In the common day to day use of the word 'critical,' it usually means to take a stance or position on a particular subject, which involves evaluation and the expression of positive or negative judgement. 'Critical' in CDA is a focus on social critique and aims to understand relations between ideology (and power) and language use, through an understanding of language (whether oral use or in text) and the cultural and socio-political context.

According to van Dijk (1993), there are three levels of interpretation involved in examining a text through CDA: the micro, meso and macro levels. At the micro level, the analyst considers the various aspects of the production of the text in its written form including the syntax, grammar, rhetorical devices etc. Meso-level analysis involves considerations of production and consumption of discourses, including for example giving attention to the producer of the material as an individual entity or institution etc., and identifying who the target audience may be and why. At the macro-level, the analyst is concerned with the wider context against which the text was produced including the socio-political background at the time of production and how this may affect its interpretation and understanding. For the purposes of my research, I have conducted meso and macro level analyses of my data to develop an understanding of what techniques are used in Salafi-jihadi texts to manipulate others into adopting specific ideologies. For meso level analysis, I have only taken into consideration the production of the text (this being the scriptural references) and not the consumption.

To avoid interpreting and analysing my own understanding of the scripture, I have added a method of triangulation in the analysis of the texts. As a Bangladeshi woman who was brought up as a

Muslim and has spent many years attending extracurricular Arabic and Qur'anic classes held by religious figures, I am acutely aware of my biases in carrying out a study such as this in which I am only consulting texts. While Bangladesh is a relatively new country having gained its independence in 1971, its population of Indo-Aryan people, their culture, and history can be traced back thousands of years. As a new Islamic country with a rich Hindu-Indian history, I have always been intrigued by the way history affects the cultural practises of a people, while showing an awareness to the murkiness between the boundaries of what constitutes a cultural and/or religious practise. With this frame of mind, I have tried to remain objective in my questioning of practises and teachings, including the interpretation of scripture, for which I have tried to use a form of triangulation to refrain from allowing my own subjectivities in interpreting the texts. At the same time, I have found my upbringing as a Sunni Muslim beneficial as it has provided me with crucial background knowledge to conduct the study. In sections 5.8 and 5.9 of this chapter, I discuss the primary texts selected for this research followed by a detailing of the secondary texts selected for the study in section 5.11. For the scriptural data that I have collected, I have tried to provide historical context to the verses where relevant as well as cross referencing Qur'anic exegesis with a number of religious texts.

To be able to conduct the research and report on the consumption of the text and how the scripture is interpreted by members of proscribed terrorist organisations, it would require conducting interviews, which would be potentially dangerous. The consumption of the text and how individuals interpret scripture is not of great significance for the study – which is concerned primarily with the way scripture is manipulated and disseminated in extremist propaganda, and the consequences of its circulation. The macro and meso level analysis carried out focuses on the way religious scripture has been politicised to support and justify the expansionist aims of IS and ISKP. Organisations such as IS 'that strive for power will try to influence the ideology of a society to become closer to what they want it to be' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 8) and an effective means of achieving this is through the manipulation of discourse. The primary focus of my research is the use of scriptural references in propaganda materials produced and disseminated by IS and ISKP, to justify their military and political aims. 'Islamism' as an ideology and terrorism as a phenomenon cannot be understood without consideration of context, language, and culture (Bartolucci & Gallo, 2015: 15), which requires further strong consideration of the producer,

consumer, and context of texts and discourses, but not necessarily of micro-level analysis involving investigation into the syntax and grammar of the materials produced.

A leading proponent of critical discourse analysis that is compatible with critical realism is Norman Fairclough, who's CDA is concerned with semiosis and hermeneutics – the study of meaning-making and the interpretation of texts, respectively – both of which have been a focus in the analysis of my data. Fairclough draws a distinction between three stages of critical discourse analysis: the description of the text itself, an interpretation of the relationship between the (production and interpretive) processes and the text, and an explanation of the relationship between discursive processes (such as the production, role, intended effect and force of the text) and the social context (Bhaskar, 2016: 105; Fairclough, 1989: 109). In the sections that follow, I have outlined Fairclough's 1989 model which forms the skeleton of my own methodological framework, and which have been built upon with John O'Regan's treatment of The Text as a Critical Object (TACO). I begin by laying out Fairclough's 1989 model before expanding on this framework using O'Regan to demonstrate why I have adopted TACO over Fairclough's model for the basis of my framework.

5.4 Description

Fairclough outlines a guide for conducting critical discourse analysis, which he specifies is not to be taken as a blueprint. In the first stage of Fairclough's guide which focuses on the description of the text, it is centred around ten main questions which he offers as a way to help the individual begin to think about the text, and which can be used to create a framework for carrying out critical discourse analysis in practise. The ten questions posed by Fairclough in the description stage are divided into three overarching categories: vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures. For this study, questions from Fairclough's description stage which relate to vocabulary are of particular interest – questions which have also been considered in TACO. These questions are laid out in the following manner:

A. Vocabulary

1. What experiential values do words have?

- What classification schemes are drawn on?

- Are there words which are ideologically contested?
- Is there rewording or overwording?
- What ideologically significant meaning relations are there between words?

2. What relational values do words have?

- Are there any euphemistic impressions?
- Are there markedly formal or informal words?

3. What expressive values do words have?

4. What metaphors are used?

For questions relating to vocabulary, Fairclough is concerned not only with describing the features contained within a text, but also with the significance of the features in the text in question. O'Regan, in his critique of Fairclough's description stage of CDA, claims that there are two kinds of interpretation happening at the description stage these being 'interpretation of the significance of the linguistic (and rhetorical) features of the text, and the interpretation as a function of human choice and selection' (O'Regan, 2006: 145). O'Regan argues that Fairclough, in his treatment of the text in the description stage, has tended to go directly into interpretation thus leaving out an account of what it is that is being analysed, and the textual extent of it – i.e. what textual data is being included in the analysis. (This is discussed further in section 5.7 of this chapter.)

In the description stage of Fairclough's CDA model, he provides some guidance on how to think about the individual questions. For question 1. Fairclough is concerned with ideational meanings, asking 'What experiential values do words have?' Here he is interested in 'how ideological differences between texts in their representations of the world are coded in their vocabulary' (Fairclough, 1989: 113). Fairclough highlights that it is useful and important to alternate one's focus between the text itself and the type(s) of discourse it draws upon, which will allow better understanding of meaning relations between words, to identify the ideology being embedded in or creatively generated in texts. Question 2. asks 'What relational values do words have?' and focuses on interpersonal meanings, asking 'how a text's choice of wordings depends on, and helps create, social relationships between participants' (ibid: 116). Fairclough suggests that words will have

relational values simultaneously to other more social values, such as racism and sexism. Word choices can, and do, put forward a representation of a particular person, group, or thing. In Salafi-jihadi literature, for example, the West and Westerners as a collective are often referred to as ‘kuffar,’ wilfully ignorant, and bloodthirsty, among many other traits. Question 3. is also concerned with interpersonal meanings, asking ‘What expressive values do words have?’ ‘[i]t is not so much the mobilization of expressive values for particular persuasive ends that is of interest here, as the fact that these expressive values can be referred to ideologically contrastive classification schemes’ (Fairclough, 1989: 119). Producers of texts express evaluations through their language choices in how things are portrayed, for example if something is portrayed positively or negatively. Differences of this sort in text are ideologically significant. Finally, in question 4. ‘What metaphors are used?’ the focus is on how one aspect of experience is represented in terms of another (ibid: 119). This is something which is common throughout the literature analysed, where social problems are framed and explained in terms of religious teachings and stories found in scripture. An example Fairclough provides is of social issues being depicted as diseases and viruses, which are portrayed as being ‘vague, subhuman, and [an] unthinkable force’ (ibid: 20). This is a technique that has been used by many, and most notoriously in propaganda produced in Nazi Germany, which described ‘the Jewish people as infections to Germany’s metaphorical body, intended to motivate German citizens to purge their country of perceived health threats’ (Brown et al., 2019). The use of metaphors is a common device employed by groups such as al Qaeda who have used, for example, Covid-19 to argue that the virus was sent by God, referring to it metaphorically as a ‘Soldier of Allah.’ In a statement released by al Qaeda, the writer states that

Allah, the Creator, has revealed the brittleness and vulnerability of your material strength. [...] It is now clear for all to see that it was but a deception that could not stand the test of the smallest soldier of God on the face of the Earth (Hunter, 2020).

In al Qaeda’s magazine *One Ummah*, the writers emphasised their hope for a major economic crisis to disrupt the American economy, and view Covid-19 as being the answer to their prayers. Bunker and Bunker (2020) write that

In a blessed twist of fate from a Salafist-jihadi eschatological perspective, God has recently intervened on behalf of the Ummah. The current Covid-19 pandemic is viewed by al-Qaeda as a “punishment from the Lord of the Worlds for the injustice and oppression committed against Muslims” directed at elected governments and the usury based economies underlying them.

Similarly, the Islamic State (IS) in their magazine *Voice of Hind*, which is directed towards the Indian subcontinent and is meant for IS members and affinity audiences, Covid-19 is viewed as ‘divine punishment, and urges attacks on online and military forces deployed in virus related missions’ (Bunker & Bunker, 2020). As a ‘Soldier of Allah’ status, Covid-19 was viewed by such groups ‘as an invisible assassin sent by God to silently hunt down the kuffar’ (Hunter, 2020).

These four questions were of most relevance for providing descriptions of the texts in my dataset and have been taken into consideration, along with John O’Regan’s TACO (O’Regan, 2006). Fairclough’s questions do not constitute a core part of my methodology and have not been answered systematically, as the primary focus of my research is on stages two and three of Fairclough’s model, which are centred around the interpretation and relationship between text and context. Questions five to ten from Fairclough’s model on description were not of importance for the purposes of my research as a micro-level analysis was not necessary for the study that I have conducted. A micro-level analysis requires dissection and analysis of the minutia in the production of the text, including the syntax and grammar. The research I have conducted is concerned less so with the grammar and textual structure than with the overarching context in which the text was produced, the messages that are delivered, and the persuasive devices employed to achieve this. As a result, questions relating to grammar and textual structure have not been adopted.

Stages two and three of Fairclough’s model have been of particular interest for the purposes of my research because of the orientation towards discussions of interpretation and the cultural contexts in which the texts are produced and consumed; these are stages O’Regan discusses in his consideration of the Text as a Critical Object. The second stage of the procedure for CDA for Fairclough is interpretation which, he says, is concerned with ‘discourse processes, and their dependence on background assumptions’ (Fairclough, 1989: 140), against which the texts are

produced and interpreted. The third and final stage is explanation, which attempts to understand '[t]he relationship of discourses to processes of struggle and to power relations' (Fairclough, 1989: 141) through the ideologies incorporated in discourse. These are explained in the following sections.

5.5 Interpretation

In the interpretation stage, Fairclough is concerned with both the interpretation of the text by the consumer, as well as the production of the text by the participant. In my research, I analyse the production of texts which utilise Qur'anic verses, looking at the context in which the verses were revealed as well as the way the verses have been employed in extremist literature. I have not, however, analysed how the Qur'anic verses are interpreted (the consumption) by those producing the extremist literature, or the way the magazines and videos are interpreted by those who consume the propaganda materials. To do this would require interviewing potentially dangerous individuals, because of which I have decided not to pursue interviews in my research.

The interpretation that one has of a text is generated through a combination of what is 'in' the text itself in terms of formal cues that the text contains, as well as what is 'in' the interpreter, the latter of which is what Fairclough refers to as the 'members resources (MR)' (ibid: 141), which are the background common-sense assumptions and values one holds which affect their views and perspectives. An interpretation of a text is the result of a dialectical interplay between the cues found in the text and MR. To illustrate, the dispositional MR a person holds may be one where they believe that all people are equal; a text in which there are hints towards inequality, whether this is sexist or racist etc., will affect the interpretation that the reader has of the text and the evaluations that they make, while a person who holds racist views themselves will engage with the text in a different way.

Fairclough lists six major domains of interpretation, which he identifies as being the: situational context, intertextual context, surface of utterance, meaning of utterance, local coherence, and text structure and 'point' (ibid: 142). My research has only analysed the interpretation of the text at the levels of situational context and intertextual context, focusing predominantly on the latter, which O'Regan combines and calls 'representative interpretation,' which is discussed further in section

5.7 of this chapter. The other domains of interpretation, as named by Fairclough, are a micro-level analysis which were not necessary for my research, which looks at the interpretation of the text on a broader scale.

For situational context, Fairclough asks questions of the text relating to the contexts (what is happening in the text), subjects (who is involved), relations (in what relations), and connection (what is the role of language in what is happening). '[C]onnections includes both ways in which texts are tied to the situational contexts in which they occur and ways in which connections are made between parts of a text' (Fairclough 1989: 149). The intertextual context, on the other hand, focuses on the histories and connections between discourses and texts, and what can be presupposed. It is not simply the analysis of the text in itself without reference to anything other than itself and its formal properties and relations but looks at the histories of the text(s) diachronically, asking questions of its historical perspective and context. It is possible that in interpreting a text individuals come to the same interpretation, or different interpretations. In the latter instance where participants hold differing, or even opposing, interpretations, the question of power arises. The 'interpretation of the more powerful participant may be imposed upon others. So having power may mean being able to determine presuppositions' (ibid: 152).

Fairclough argues that presuppositions can be manipulative and ideological, providing an example of the use of the term 'Soviet threat' in newspaper reports, which cumulatively made the natural state of being in society one of concern of the impending threat posed by Soviet Russia. Similar can be found in literature produced by IS, who focus on the Western 'enemy' and the military operations carried out by them in the Middle East and Central Asia. The framing of presuppositions and the intertextual relations have been of great importance in my research.

5.6 Explanation

In the procedure of interpretation, aspects of the MR are drawn upon in both the production of text (the ideologies, power and social constitution exhibited in the discourse) as well as the interpretations of them (how discourse is received and processed based on one's MR), resulting in a reproduction of the MR itself, which is a side-effect of interpretation.

The objective of the stage of explanation is to portray a discourse as part of a social process, as a social practice, showing how it is determined by social structures, and what reproductive effects discourses can cumulatively have on those structures, sustaining them or changing them (Fairclough, 1989: 163).

Fairclough argues that the structures which exist in society have an impact on the MR one possesses, which in turn shape discourse. Equally, it is discourse which helps to either sustain or change the MR one possesses, which then also sustain or change the social structures.

In my research, I have paid attention to the potential MR that is possessed by those who have produced the Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan series, based on the situational context, the discourses that they engage in as a result of this, and the intertextual contexts of the propaganda materials that are produced by them. In designing a methodological approach that is applicable to my dataset and the research conducted, I have used O'Regan's TACO to build upon this, which I have discussed and detailed below.

5.7 The Text as a Critical Object

O'Regan's treatment of the Text as a Critical Object (TACO) begins from the position that a text is part of a wider social context that should be treated as a 'product' in the sense that it has been produced by an individual or group of individuals, which will be interpreted by those who interact with it. TACO is built upon Fairclough's CDA, which theorises the dialectic between the text and the context of the text, through which human beings make their world meaningful and comprehensible (O'Regan, 2006: 182). O'Regan is particularly concerned with reformulating 'the procedural paradigm of description, interpretation, and explanation which is associated with Fairclough's three-dimensional view of discourse' (ibid: 180).

O'Regan argues that Fairclough's 1989 procedure for conducting CDA bypasses the initial and the preferred reading of the text and begins instead with a more detailed reading and analysis, which he hopes to address by taking a position which views the text as an object in itself, asking how the text in the view of the reader seems to wish to be received (ibid: 193). Fairclough's 'description' stage consists of two types of interpretation: an interpretation of the linguistic features of the text,

and the interpretation of the linguistic choices made. ‘Description,’ which is the first stage of Fairclough’s CDA, does not encourage or support the reader to consider the overall perception and initial reading of the text prior to developing a more critical reading and understanding of it. In response, O’Regan proposes in TACO an initial reading which considers the preferred reading of the text and the initial observations from a preliminary reading which considers the subject and aims of the text. The ‘descriptive interpretation’ element in TACO precedes the ‘description’ of Fairclough’s CDA, which I have illustrated in figure 6. A second difference between Fairclough and O’Regan is the introduction of a fourth element in the latter, which is what O’Regan calls ‘deconstructive interpretation.’ Deconstructive interpretation looks for inconsistencies and contradictions in the text that might undermine other aspects of the text. I will be analysing the text in a similar way to uncover possible ‘disturbances’ in the text which run contrary to the preferred reading, and thus potentially undermine it, so demonstrating that the text as constructed is not adequate to its preferred reading.

Taking a more or less post-structuralist position at that time – a position which he now eschews in favour of Critical Realism (O’Regan, 2021) – O’Regan argues that all of language use and understanding is based on interpretation. For this reason, O’Regan does not have an ‘Explanation’ component as in Fairclough’s model of CDA. This is because ‘Explanation’ seems to imply an insight or ‘truth’ that is not available to others. That is why O’Regan’s framework foregrounds interpretation. O’Regan’s TACO proposes four components, which are descriptive interpretation, representative interpretation, social interpretation, and deconstructive interpretation. I discuss these in turn along with some of the questions he suggests are taken into consideration when applying this framework.

1. Descriptive interpretation takes into consideration the framing of the text, including who the audience of the text is, the preferred reading, the subject of the text, and the organisation of the text (e.g. if there are images used, how they are displayed etc.)
 - What is the frame of the text and how does the text look?
 - What is the topic?
 - What is the preferred reading (the main message of the text; the reading which accords with the way the text seems to want to be read; the reading of minimal consensus)?
 - Who might be the ideal reader of this text?

2. Representative interpretation is concerned with the interpretation of the text, including any images presented and the language use, paying attention to the vocabulary and grammar
 - What social values can be attached to the discourse features of the text (image/vocabulary/grammar/genre)?
 - Image
 - How is the text organised visually?
 - Does the text use words and pictures?
 - What are the effects of these choices on the text?
 - Vocabulary
 - What kind of vocabulary is used in the text?
 - What semantic fields do vocabulary choices belong to?
 - Grammar
 - What tenses are used in the text?
 - Does the text use 'we,' 'you,' or 'I'?
 - In the text as a whole which information is put first? What is thematised?
 - What are the effects of these choices on the text?
 - Genre
 - To what genre does the text belong?
 - If there is mixing of genres, what are the effects of these choices on the text?
3. Social interpretation pays attention to the social context(s) the texts are a part of and the role they play (e.g. contexts of gender, race, sex, politics etc.)
 - What social frameworks is the text a part of?
 - What typical kinds of social knowledge do these frameworks suggest?
4. Deconstructive interpretation looks at the former three elements of interpretation to determine if any aspects contradict or undermine what is assumed to be the preferred reading.
 - Does any aspect of the text's structure (descriptive, representative, social) appear to contradict or undermine the text's preferred reading?

O'Regan highlights the differences between Fairclough's CDA and his own TACO in the following table:

Fairclough's CDA and O'Regan's TACO

Fairclough's CDA	O'Regan's TACO
	Descriptive interpretation: the frame of the text, the visual organisation of the text, the topic, the preferred reading, and the ideal reader
Description and interpretation of the formal linguistic properties of the text; e.g., experiential, relational, expressive/identity, and connective values of the vocabulary and grammar dimensions of the text	Representative interpretation: description and interpretation of the immanent features of the text – image, grammar, vocabulary and genre
Interpretation of the relationship between (productive and interpretative) discursive processes and the text	
Explanation of the relationship between discursive processes and social processes	Social interpretation: the social context(s) which the text seems to be a part of; e.g. contexts of gender, race, disability, economy, politics, family, class, income, age, sex, property, geography, etc.
	Deconstructive interpretation: aspects of the descriptive, representative and social dimensions of the text which appear to contradict or undermine the preferred reading.

Figure 6. TACO (O'Regan, 2006: 148)

The terminology I have adopted in my data analysis chapters are those from TACO: descriptive interpretation, representative interpretation, social interpretation, and deconstructive interpretation. While I have not systematically answered questions posed by either Fairclough or O'Regan, I have taken into consideration questions from both theoretical frameworks that are relevant to my research questions and aims and have used them to guide the discussion of the

datasets and the research conducted, using TACO's structure to organise the data chapters. The questions that I have used to guide the research and discussion are set out below.

Descriptive Interpretation

- How is the text organised?
- Who is the target audience?
- What topics are discussed, and are there themes which are discussed more often than others?
- What is the preferred reading of the text?

Representative Interpretation

- Are there images used and, if so, what effect does this have on the text and the reading of the text?
- What vocabulary is used in the text?
- Are there word choices or associations which are particularly important?
- Does the language used make direct references to 'you,' 'we,' or 'I'?
- What social values can be attached to the discourse features of the text?
- What effects seem to be intended by the linguistic choices of the text?

Social Interpretation

- What kinds of social knowledge does the text suggest or draw upon?
- Are there social issues that are brought into consideration through argumentation in the text?
- How are social contexts portrayed and what effect does this have on the text?

Deconstructive Interpretation

- Are there aspects of the description, representative, and social interpretation which contradict or undermine the preferred reading of the text?
- How might the preferred reading of the text differ between readers?

I have organised the discussion chapters by beginning with descriptive interpretation in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, I have discussed both representative interpretation as well as the social interpretation, which forms the core of my data analysis. I found it to be beneficial to discuss the linguistic and visual choices made in production (representative interpretation) alongside the context in which the scripture was produced and its recontextualisation (social interpretation) simultaneously, as it provided a clearer understanding of the radicalising effect and influential power of the materials. Following this, in Chapter 8 I have discussed the deconstructive interpretation of the text looking at any inconsistencies which might contradict or undermine the texts' preferred reading. In the remainder of this chapter, I have discussed the primary and secondary materials selected for the research before discussing my methodological approach in the collection and analysis of my data.

The primary data collected and analysed for my research consist of the Islamic State's online magazine series Dabiq and their affiliate, the Islamic State in Khurasan Province's magazine series Voice of Khurasan. I have collected data from the broader Salafi-jihadi corpus, including videos produced by IS, other magazine series' such as Inspire, Islamic State News, Rumiya etc. which have been used to provide broader context where necessary, though they are not the primary source materials for this study. A comprehensive list of the magazine issues in the Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan series can be found in the appendix.

5.8 The Islamic State's Publication Dabiq

The Islamic State (IS), also commonly known as ISIS, ISIL, and Daesh was founded in 2004 by Abu Musab al Zarqawi from the remnants of al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), an offshoot of al Qaeda, from which was formed the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). The group has had many designations throughout its existence which have been a reflection of the territory it has occupied, the spheres of influence over which it has had control, and its political aims. The group saw slow growth up until 2007 when a surge of US troops into Iraq saw IS fade away almost entirely (Wilson Center, 2019). In 2011, the group began to resurface in Iraq and Syria, and redoubled its efforts at claiming power, taking advantage of the growing instability in both regions. Numerous attacks were carried out.

On June 29th 2014, the first day of Ramadan, IS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi announced the group's change of name from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to simply the Islamic State

(IS), and formally declared the formation of a caliphate stretching from Aleppo in Syria to Diyala in Iraq. In his declaration, Al Baghdadi rejected and abolished the notion of a citizenship that divided people up by politically defined borders and identified, instead, the ‘camp’ of the Muslims and that of the non-Muslims. Al Baghdadi said ‘Rush O Muslims to your state. Yes, it is your state. Rush, because Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis’ (Weiss & Hassan, 2015: 1). This was intended to highlight the nature of the Islamic State in which the Muslim is not identified by their country of residence, but by the religion to which they belong, calling on the ummah to unite as one. At its height in 2014, IS held approximately a third of Syrian and 40% of Iraqi territory within its self-declared Islamic State (Wilson Center, 2019).

On the 7th of August 2014, a US-led coalition began airstrikes against IS in Iraq, and also in Syria the following month – in a campaign which the US military named ‘Operation Inherent Resolve’. To halt IS expansion, coalition aircrafts ‘launched 10,884 strikes, which resulted in 41,718 weapons being released during the first 20 months of the operation’ (Wasser et al., 2021: 81).

By December 2017, IS had lost almost 95% of the territory it occupied and, on the 9th of December, the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi announced victory over IS in Iraq. The fight against IS in Syria, however, remained strong throughout 2018, headed by a US backed coalition of Kurdish and Arab forces known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The SDF launched their final offensive in February 2019 on Baghouz – IS’s last holdout in Syria – which fell on March 23rd 2019, formally ending the caliphate that al Baghdadi had proclaimed (Wilson Center, 2019).

Despite the collapse in territorial control and of the proclaimed caliphate with it, IS continued to inspire others globally. On the 14th of July 2014, IS published the first issue of their online magazine Dabiq (the final issue of which was published on the 31st of July 2016) – a series which was originally available for purchase on Amazon and has since been circulated primarily through social media apps (Winkler et al., 2019: 225). In this series of online magazines, IS editors include ‘photo reports, current events, and informative articles on matters related to the Islamic State’ (Dabiq 1, 2014: 3), with a focus on attracting others to join their fight in extending the caliphate. In the first issue of Dabiq, it is reported that

As for the name of the magazine, then it is taken from the area named Dabiq in the northern countryside of Halab (Aleppo) in Sham. This place was mentioned in a hadith describing some of the events of the Malahim (what is sometimes referred to as Armageddon in English). One of the greatest battles between the Muslims and the crusaders will take place near Dabiq (Dabiq 1, 2014: 4).

In 2015, IS expanded into a network of affiliated offshoots in at least eight countries, supporters of which carried out attacks including the Egyptian IS offshoot's bombing of Metrojet Flight 9268, which was a passenger flight operated by the Russian airline Kogalymavia flying from Sharm El Sheikh International Airport in Egypt to Pulkovo Airport in St Petersburg, Russia. The flight exploded above the Sinai Peninsula, killing all 224 passengers and crew members on board, with Russian investigators concluding that the cause of the explosion and crash was most likely an explosive device onboard the aircraft. In issue twelve of Dabiq (titled Just Terror), IS claimed responsibility for the attack saying

On Saturday, the 17th of Muharram, the soldiers of the Khilāfah succeeded in downing a Russian airliner above Wilāyat Saynā' with more than 220 Russian crusaders onboard, all of whom were killed, walhamdulillāh. This was to show the Russians and whoever allies with them that they will have no safety in the lands and airspace of the Muslims, that their daily killing of dozens in Shām through their airstrikes will only bring them calamities, and that just as they kill, they will be killed, by Allah's permission (Dabiq 12, 2015: 27)

The most infamous attack was carried out by an IS splinter cell in Paris on November 13th 2015, in which an IS cell killed dozens of people at the Bataclan Theatre as well as taking hostages. They also simultaneously carried out a suicide bombing outside the Stade de France while a football game was in play and where the French President Francois Hollande was present. Indiscriminate shootings were also carried out in the busy streets of Paris at the same time. In the issue of Dabiq released five days after the attacks, IS claimed responsibility for them saying

On Friday, the 1st of Safar, 8 soldiers of the Khilāfah carried out an operation in the heart of the French crusader territory. The operation involved multiple simultaneous attacks with

explosive belts and assault rifles on various targets including the Stade de France stadium, where the crusader president Francois Hollande was attending a soccer match, and the Bataclan theatre for exhibitions, where hundreds of French mushrikīn had gathered for a music concert. The attacks, which included other targets around Paris and succeeded in killing hundreds of crusaders and wounding even more, shook the world and reminded the nations of kufr that the Islamic State will continue to stand firm in the face of their transgressions and retaliate with fire and bloodshed (Dabiq 12, 2015: 28).

Although IS no longer holds any territory and has diminished in size significantly, its adherents still continue to pose a threat and the organisation's offshoot affiliates continue to carry out attacks globally (Humud, 2022: 1). The sustained and evolving threat from IS affiliates is illustrated by the fact that

ISIS affiliates outside Iraq and Syria caused more fatalities during 2020 than in any previous year. [...] In South and Southeast Asia, ISIS radicalized individuals to violence, inspiring them to conduct attacks. In Africa, ISIS-affiliated groups increased the volume and lethality of their attacks across West Africa, the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, and northern Mozambique (Bureau of Counterterrorism, 2021: 2).

The role IS affiliates play in radicalising people globally to attack their perceived enemies is a growing concern, particularly to the West, and one which this study pays attention to in the conducting of the research, focusing on IS and the Islamic State in Khurasan Province (ISKP) due to their extensive use of social media and the publishing of radicalising content such as online magazines. Other affiliates (such as those in parts of Africa) do not use magazines as a means of propaganda in the same way – some of whom opt, instead, to disseminate content in video format.

The individuals or nations identified as targets in materials produced by Salafi-jihadi groups is dependent on many factors including the politics of the producer of the text or material, the regional and global politics of the country in which the materials are produced, current affairs and policy changes in a given country etc. The reasons why the US and UK have been largely identified as targets of Salafi-jihadi terror attacks have been multifaceted, including (but not limited to)

Western customs being viewed as a threat to Islamic traditions, the US and UK's involvement and leading of wars in multiple countries, including Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. In the analysis of my data, I discuss these reasons in more detail.

5.9 Islamic State in Khurasan Province's Publication Voice of Khurasan

The Islamic State in Khurasan Province (ISKP) is a branch of IS based in Afghanistan, and is a UN designated transnational terrorist organisation which was created in 2014 with Hafiz Khan Saeed as the initial leader of the group. In the few years that followed, ISKP grew in number and strength, perpetrating many deadly attacks, including attacks on mosques, hospitals, and schools, and predominantly targeting civilians in Central Asia. In 2018, ISKP was at its peak with its highest membership to date and had carried out a large number of high-profile fatal attacks, including the July 2018 bombing in Mastung, Pakistan, in which 149 people were killed.

In August 2021, following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan³⁸ and while the country was struggling to deal with the immigration and governance issues that resulted from this, ISKP carried out their most deadly attack since the July 2018 bombing in Mastung. At least 183 people were killed by a suicide bombing at the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, of which 170 people were civilians and 13 were US military personnel. According to a statement made by Deborah Lyons, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ISKP became 'increasingly active, stepping up attacks from 60 in 2020 to 334 in 2021, and gained ground across all provinces' (European Asylum Support Office, 2022).

ISKP's focus since the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2021 has been on undermining the Taliban's legitimacy as a governing body. As a political rival of the Taliban, ISKP have redoubled their efforts in recruiting, hoping to gain enough power to overthrow the Taliban. This includes making extensive use of the Internet and other media platforms, which saw the

³⁸ The War in Afghanistan was a US led armed conflict which began in 2001 and ended in 2021. Following the 9/11 attacks, the then US president George W. Bush demanded that Osama bin Laden – the mastermind behind the attacks – be extradited to the United States from Afghanistan. However, the Taliban, who were ruling Afghanistan at the time, refused and instead offered asylum to bin Laden. This resulted in the declaration of Operation Enduring Freedom, which saw the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, as part of the earlier United States' declared War on Terror. In 2021, the last of the US military withdrew from Afghanistan, which consequently saw a revival in Taliban rule.

establishment of their media branch al-Azaim Foundation for Media Production, founded in Afghanistan, and their magazine Voice of Khurasan, which I have analysed and used as a source of data for my research. Issues of Voice of Khurasan are released regularly, with 19 issues released in 2022 alone – the first year of its production – with issues demonstrating great awareness of current affairs globally, which are referenced throughout the series.

Voice of Khurasan includes material that has been translated from the original Pashto and is available in English as well as Malayalam. This indicates that Voice of Khurasan is ‘a predominantly outward-facing media project intended to transcend regional cultural and linguistic barriers’ (Webber, 2022). The issues of Voice of Khurasan include original content as well as translations of past and present IS leadership statements. They make references to and contain extracts from past IS publications in Dabiq.

Malayalam is a language that is spoken by millions of people, particularly in Kerala, India, where ISKP have proven popular, having gained supporters and recruited fighters from the region previously. The second issue of Voice of Khurasan (titled Here is the Islamic Khilafah – Where are the Rest of the Jihadi Claimants?), includes a four-page biographical profile (titled Among the Believers are Men) of suicide bomber Najeeb Al Hindi, who travelled from Kerala, India to Khurasan. The biographical account describes Al Hindi’s ‘hijrah’ to Khurasan and his willingness to go to battle on the day of his wedding, despite the reassurance of others that this was not expected of him. This sacrifice is highlighted in their writing:

Brothers and sisters see how Najeeb Al-Hindi sacrificed his life for Islam? How many of us can leave the enjoyment of this world and its comforts and do Hijrah? How many of us can leave the enjoyment with ones newly wedded bride for the cause of Allah? We do not belong in the dunyah [temporal and material world], we need to accept that!’ (Voice of Khurasan 2, 2022: 15-16).

Much like in Dabiq, great emphasis is placed on the necessity of Muslims to leave their countries of residence to join the fight against the perceived oppressor, which for ISKP is the Taliban in Afghanistan. Because of this, many of the articles in the series are focused on a need to overthrow

the Taliban who they view as being unworthy of calling themselves Muslims or running an Islamic state. Across the magazine series, focus is also placed on other issues and threats faced by Muslims, including the treatment of Muslims in India, China, and Palestine. Each issue is used to incite the reader to act by joining their fight in spreading (their form of) Islam and opposing perceived enemies.

At its height, IS called for the unification of Muslims against a perceived threat or aggressor; the ‘enemy’ or ‘other’ was clear in propaganda materials like *Dabiq*: the non-Muslims and non-Muslim states, particularly the West. While IS call for the unification of all Muslims under one caliphate, they do not admit that all those who identify as Muslims are ‘true Muslims,’ but differentiate between true and false Muslims. In this way, a distinction is drawn between different sects of Islam; IS as a Sunni extremist group do not identify followers of Shia or Sufi Islam as Muslims, and instead view them as apostates too. In a similar way, in *Voice of Khurasan*, the editors draw a distinction between IS and ‘false jihadi claimants,’ which is used to refer to the Taliban. ISKP identify the Taliban as *murtadeen* (apostates), therefore declaring that Afghanistan remains under un-Islamic governance, which they claim is the reason for their current fight for control.

In the eighth issue of *Voice of Khurasan*, ISKP identify ‘Nullifiers of Islam applicable on Taliban’ in which they list ‘pillars’ that the Muslim must uphold against the *kuffar*, which includes believing that the faith of the disbeliever is false, not having any relations with the *kuffar* – which includes not showing them sympathy, and hating the *kuffar*, which ‘must be from the heart.’ It is argued in this issue of *Voice of Khurasan* that the Taliban have disobeyed all of these pillars and therefore are not true Muslims (*Voice of Khurasan* 8, August 2022: 14).

ISKP appeal to Islamic religious narratives to attract followers against the Taliban, despite the political ‘other’ having shifted from un-Islamic states and people to an Islamic group whose policies they do not agree with. In the first issue of *Voice of Khurasan*, the special feature article titled ‘Who are the Taliban?’ contains examples of un-Islamic behaviour carried out by the Taliban. Examples of which state that

They ruled the people by their own whims and not by the shariah. [...] Drug abusers and dealers were openly given support and protection. Homosexuality was common and practiced with the members and so called ulamas. (Voice of Khurasan 1, 2022: 8-9).

Seeking to gain popularity and control of the Central and South Asian region, ISKP have been heavily targeting these regions by disseminating materials in local and regional languages, and manipulating domestic and international political hostilities to their advantage. An example of this is their targeting of Muslims in India. Aware of the state-sponsored marginalisation that Muslims face in India, ISKP have criticised the rise of Hindu nationalism and promote themselves (or their local branch in India) as a solution for the minority Muslim population (D. Schulz, 2022).

ISKP have proven successful in their objective of manipulating others, not only in the radicalisation of individuals and influencing their migration to Afghanistan to join their jihad, but also in their ability to produce reactions from the Taliban. Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, the Taliban have acted harshly towards the Afghan Salafi community – which has been useful for ISKP recruitment – due to suspected ties they may have with ISKP. Some analysts report that ISKP have been intentionally behaving in ways that might provoke the Taliban to ‘pursue indiscriminate security policies towards the Afghan Salafi communities to gain from this in the long run. This has allegedly already resulted in ill-conceived policies of the Taliban, including collective punishment of Salafis suspected of ties to ISKP’ (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2023: 61). It is reported that whole Salafist communities in Nangarhar and Kunar (provinces in which ISKP are known to operate) have been ‘subjected to night raids, disappearances, summary executions, and detentions of men and sometimes boys, even if they had no relation to ISKP’ (ibid: 61).

As a small organisation, ISKP ‘lack the capability, coordination or local support to control significant territory, [however] they retain the ability to launch individual attacks, such as the August 26 attack in Hamid Karzai International Airport’ (Doxsee et al., 2021). Their use of the Internet, particularly the dissemination of their online magazine, Voice of Khurasan, on a regular basis and their growing efforts in gaining power and influence over the people of Afghanistan and Central Asia to steer them away from support for the Taliban means ISKP produced literature

contains a potential wealth of knowledge of how scripture is manipulated and utilised to radicalise people. Through an analysis of Voice of Khurasan it is possible to see how ISKP attempt to radicalise Muslims against perceived ‘non-Muslims,’ which is the Taliban in this case, despite the Taliban identifying as Muslims themselves. This differs from Dabiq, produced by IS, which highlights the Western world as the primary enemy.

For the contrast in their perceived adversaries, one being the West and the other being a rival group in Afghanistan who identify as Muslims, literature produced by IS and ISKP have been selected as the primary data for this study. In the next chapter, I provide further explanation of the texts selected, as well as the methodological approach adopted for my research.

5.10 Methodology

The data collected have been divided into two main categories and these in turn have been divided into a further two subcategories. The two overarching categories are those of Salafi-jihadi literature and traditionalist or mainstream Islamic literature. Critical discourse analysis has been applied to determine which excerpts from scripture are used (if any) to justify the claims being made in the discourse of the text, and how (if in any way) the claims differ between extremist literature and mainstream literature.

For this study, I begin by examining the traditional Islamic corpus and Islamic jurisprudence. Tafsirs are an exegesis, used to explain the meanings of verses in the Qur’an, and are usually produced by Islamic bodies or scholars. The tafsirs may contain differing views on the meanings behind specific verses, and this will depend on the Islamic school the writer belongs to. The tafsirs are used to develop a contextual understanding of the teachings of Islam as a religion and the interpretations accepted by the mainstream Muslim.

It is difficult to determine which interpretations are accepted by an individual, or the mainstream Muslims in this context, without an interview setting where the participant can be read an excerpt of scripture and asked to offer their interpretation and understanding of it. For some who follow strict interpretations of Islam, they do not socialise with members of the opposite sex who are not

considered their *mahram*.³⁹ There are many practises and beliefs that are dependent on if one is in the company of their mahram, for example in stricter Islamic countries such as Afghanistan where it is prohibited for women to leave the house, they must be escorted by a mahram. For women who wear the hijab, it is also not necessary to wear the hijab around your mahram. As a woman, irrespective of if I am a Muslim or not, it is unlikely that individuals who are deemed to be extremists or radicalised based on their very strict interpretations of Islamic literature will be willing and open to interviews. This coupled with the knowledge that it will be near impossible to know which answers given are true to their beliefs and which are given as false compliance to soften interpretations of Islam, I have chosen not to conduct interviews. I would not be able to determine with any certainty whether the interpretation that the interviewee has communicated of a particular scriptural quote or reference is indeed true to their belief. Due to organisations such as Prevent, there have been instances where Muslims have self-censored their speech for fear of judgement or repercussion (Fenwick, 2019). This would make it difficult to judge the validity and credibility of any answers given in an interview setting. Conducting interviews in which I pose questions to extremists could also potentially be dangerous, particularly as a woman and a researcher who wishes to challenge their interpretation of Islam. There have been instances where academics have found themselves on IS hitlists for the fact that they have opposed their rationale and dissected them to prove them to be false. I therefore concluded that interviews with persons who may identify as Salafi-jihadis were not feasible for undertaking this research and would possibly, in the best case make it challenging for me to differentiate between what are honest answers and what are not, and in the worst case be a threat to my safety. For these reasons, I have chosen to conduct the study purely by consulting the text itself and attempting to understand the intentions of the producers of the text through this. Tafsirs have also been used in place of conducting interviews to provide a broader setting against which Qur'anic references can be situated.

The tafsirs offer authoritative and, for the most part, widely accepted Islamic explanations and interpretations of the Qur'an and its associated hadiths – the hadiths are collections of the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad which are based on his sayings and actions. For many Muslims, the

³⁹ A mahram is a member of one's family with whom it would be deemed unlawful, or haram, for an individual to marry, such as one's siblings, parents, uncles etc.

hadiths serve as a guide for how one ought to conduct oneself, particularly for those who subscribe to Salafism, who try to emulate the lives of the first three generations of Muslims, believing that Islam was at its purest form at this time. Among the many tafsirs that exist, there are ones that are more widely accepted and have greater resonance among Muslims. The widespread acceptance of a tafsir is based on the perceived credibility of the scholar producing the work, the knowledge demonstrated, its alignment with other translations and interpretations, and the accessibility of its contents, among other criteria. One who authors a tafsir is called a mufasssir. According to Islamic scholars, to become a mufasssir a candidate is required to master fifteen fields from a range of disciplines including theology, linguistics, and philology. The Arabic writing system was still in development at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and therefore consisted of consonants only. In the modern day, the Arabic language features diacritical markers that denote vowels – these were added many years after the final Qur’anic revelation and the death of the Prophet Muhammad. An issue that arises in interpreting Arabic text is that the use of diacritical markers can radically change the meaning of a word depending on how it is used, as illustrated in the table below.

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Translation
بنت	bint	A girl
بيت	bayt	A house
نبت	nabat	Grew or germinated
بثت	bathat	She broadcasts
يبث	yabth	He broadcasts

Figure 7. Changes in Diacritical Markers

The example provided illustrates the importance of the diacritical markers in translating any given word correctly. The difference in meaning in all five instances is provided by the differential use and placement of diacritical markers above and below the same Arabic character. A mastering of the philosophy of Arabic is required of the mufasssir as they must have extensive knowledge of the Arabic language and its configuration.

5.11 Secondary Texts – Tafsirs and Hadith

The majority of Salafi-jihadis tend to follow the Sunni Muslim tradition; this is mainly a reflection of the fact that as much as 90% of the global Muslim population are followers of Sunni Islam (World Population Review, 2022). Because of this, though tafsirs exist for all schools of Islam, I have chosen to only consult tafsirs from the Sunni tradition.

Regarding Sunni tafsirs, there exist classical and contemporary tafsirs, with their various characteristics and traditions, which reflect the respective schools and doctrines to which they belong. The classical tafsirs were compiled during the formative years of Islam around 1000 years ago and place an emphasis on the scholarly interpretation and explanation of scripture, whereas contemporary tafsirs are commonly abridged translations of classical tafsirs in which the priority is making the scholarly interpretations accessible to a wider audience and readership. For the purposes of my research, I have consulted two tafsirs: tafsir Ibn Taymiyyah – which is seen as a bridge between classical and contemporary, and thus is identified as being a post-classical exegesis, and tafsir Ibn Kathir – which is a contemporary tafsir that is one of the most popularly read and referenced tafsirs due to its accessibility and consideration of interpretations. The classical tafsirs are predominantly published in Arabic and due to the mammoth task of translating such texts to English, very little of this can be found in the English language. It is for this reason that I have chosen the post-classical, and contemporary tafsirs as reference points for my data.

The first tafsir selected for this study is that of Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) who was a Sunni scholar, political figure, and proto-Salafist theologian, whose work went on to influence many modern-day Salafi-jihadis. Due to his outspoken political and religious views, Ibn Taymiyyah was divisive during his time and over the centuries has grown in popularity to become one of the most prominent writers, thinkers, and revolutionaries in Islam. Ibn Taymiyyah's influence was so great that Syrian Salafi theologian Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935) considered Ibn Taymiyyah to be the mujaddid of the Islamic 7th century. In the Islamic tradition, the mujaddid is an individual who comes at the turn of the century in the Islamic calendar to cleanse the religion and restore it to its purest state. It was the tradition of the mujaddid that led to the hostage taking at the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979. As a Salafi, Ibn Taymiyyah believed that the purest form of Islam

existed during the first three generations of the Muslim peoples and he was an advocate of a return to the ways of the Salaf.⁴⁰ In *Sahih Bukhari*, which is a collection of hadith compiled by Imam Muhammad al Bukhari, it is noted that the Prophet Muhammad said that

The best of my community are my generation, then those who come after them, and then those who follow them (Haykel, 2009: 34).

This statement forms the basis of much Salafi-jihadi thought. Ibn Taymiyyah was noted for his particular emphasis on the theoretical division of land into *dar al-harb*, *dar al-kufr*, and *dar al-Islam*⁴¹ to designate whether a land or country was a land of war, land of disbelief or land of Islam respectively – this was one of his main arguments (Hatina, 2014). A second argument that he is revered for by many in extremist groups is his concept of making a declaration of *takfir* (apostasy) against those Muslims who do not obey Islam but are only Muslim by name; such Muslims might, for instance, consume things which are prohibited such as pork or alcohol, or they may not partake with any regularity in daily prayers etc. This is something that the Islamic State emphasise in the tenth issue of their English language magazine *Dabiq*, where they quote Ibn Taymiyyah's teachings extensively. When speaking about the Druze,⁴² Ibn Taymiyyah says that

They do not recognise the obligation of the five daily prayers, nor the obligation of the *Ramadhān* fast, nor the obligation of *hajj*, nor the prohibition of what Allah and His Messenger have prohibited of dead animals, alcohol and so on. And if they manifest the two testimonies of faith [there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger] alongside these tenets of creed, then they are *kuffār* according to the agreement of the Muslims (*Dabiq* 10, 2015: 8).

⁴⁰ A Salaf is a predecessor in Islam, and one who is from the first three generations of Muslims.

⁴¹ Ibn Taymiyyah did also include a fourth category, which he called *dar al-'ahd*; this however was only designated to the city of Mardin in Turkey, when the Mongols (who Ibn Taymiyyah considered to be unbelievers) took control of the city, which had a significant Muslim population. However, as the city was not ruled by Islamic jurisdiction, Ibn Taymiyyah could not consider it *dar al-Islam*, nor could he consider it *dar al-kufr* or *dar al-harb*. He, therefore, designated it *dar al-'ahd* (or land of truce).

⁴² The Druze are a small, Arabic speaking, Middle Eastern ethnoreligious group. Although they do not identify as Muslims themselves, their religious beliefs stem from Shia Islam, particularly Isma'ilism. Adherents of Isma'ilism are of the belief that the true spiritual leader is Imam Isma'il ibn Jafar.

Another concept that is attributed to Ibn Taymiyyah is the duty of Muslims to oppose and kill Muslim rulers who do not implement the laws of shari'ah of Allah. This belief has influenced many revolutionaries over the centuries, particularly in the 20th century, which saw the ideologies of revolutionaries such as Sayyid Qutb and Osama bin Laden, who drew on the teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah to justify the use of jihad against both non-Muslim and Muslim nation states. This teaching played a key role and was an instigator in the attacks that were carried out by the mujahideen who took part in the Afghan-Soviet war against Saudi Arabia themselves in the early 2000s, believing that the Saudi government and monarchy were behaving un-Islamically.

Particularly important are Ibn Taymiyyah's understandings and teachings on jihad and martyrdom, where he was of the belief, and preached, that jihad grants eternal rewards and blessings. He wrote that

It is in jihad that one can live and die in ultimate unhappiness, both in this world and in the Hereafter. Abandoning it means losing entirely or partially both kinds of happiness (Perry M., & Negrin H., 2008: 22).

Providing a broad definition of what constitutes legitimate grounds for waging jihad against a person or people, he said that

It is allowed to fight people for (not observing) unambiguous and generally recognized obligations and prohibitions, until they undertake to perform the explicitly prescribed prayers, to pay zakat, to fast during the month of Ramadan, to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and to avoid what is prohibited [...] But if they first attack the Muslims, then fighting them is even more urgent (Delong-Bas, 2004).

This is perhaps evidence of Ibn Taymiyyah's stance on not only jihad but Muslims too. A distinction is drawn between those who identify as Muslim and those who are Muslim through their accepting and practising of Islam. Ibn Taymiyyah is referenced throughout Salafi-jihadi literature and is often considered the 'forefather' of Salafi-jihadism. In issue 10 of Dabiq, for

example, Ibn Taymiyyah is quoted as saying

It becomes clear to you that the mere adherence to Islam coupled with the resistance to some of its laws does not save them from war and that they are to be fought because of their kufr and apostasy from Islam (Dabiq 10, 2015: 56).

The second tafsir that I have used as a reference point for my data is that of Ibn Kathir. Ibn Kathir was an influential Arab scholar and historian from Syria, renowned for his understanding and teaching of Qur'anic exegesis and jurisprudence. Ibn Kathir's methodology is influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah, who was his teacher and follows a more contemporary tradition in comparison to the classical tafsirs, such as that of al Tabari.⁴³ Ibn Kathir's tafsir is recognised for its critical approach and is especially popular among Western Muslims and those who adhere to the Wahhabi tradition – a tradition which is popularly followed by Salafi-jihadis.

Ibn Kathir's tafsir is popularly referenced in extremist literature to add scholarly credibility, and features in several issues of various magazine series including Dabiq, al Risalah, and Rumiyyah. In the seventh issue of Rumiyyah, titled Establishing the Islamic State: Between the Prophetic Methodology and the Paths of the Deviants, Ibn Kathir's tafsir is used to explain verse 9:25-26, which discusses the victory that is awarded to the believers. The writers of IS quote Ibn Kathir, in his explanation of the verse, as saying

Allah told the Muslims of His assistance and His generosity in His giving them victory in many arenas of battle alongside His Messenger. And He mentioned to them that it is thanks to Him, His approval of them, and His appreciation of them, and not thanks to their numbers or their equipment. He warned them that victory comes from him, whether the

⁴³ Tafsir al Tabari was originally written by the Persian scholar Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (838-923AD) and was completed in 883AD. Tabari's tafsir was widely accepted and held in high regard – a position which it continues to hold today. Part of its success and longevity is due to Tabari's consideration of multiple interpretations of (some) Qur'anic references and his acknowledgement that one or more reading may be correct; through his argumentation throughout the tafsir, he offers his opinion on the various interpretations of particular scriptural readings and, between them, which he thinks may be the more correct reading and the justification for it. Al Tabari's tafsir is the earliest major exegesis of the Qur'an to have survived in its original form, however due to its length, an English translation of the work is yet to be completed, which played a role in why I have chosen not to refer to it in my data analysis.

force has large or small numbers (Rumiyah 7, 2017: 13).

In one instance where Ibn Kathir's tafsir is referenced in the Dabiq series, the IS writers reference Ibn Kathir to explain verse 9:123, which they quote as reading 'O you who have believed, fight those adjacent to you of the disbelievers' (Dabiq 3, 2014: 11) The explanation that is provided in Dabiq of this verse, which comes from Ibn Kathir's tafsir, reads

Allah ta'ālā has commanded the believers to fight the disbelievers one after another beginning with those who are closest with the lands of Islam, then the most closest, and so on (ibid: 11).

Due to the popularity of Ibn Kathir's tafsirs in Muslim communities as well as its wide use in literature produced by IS, I have chosen this series of tafsirs to be one of my secondary sources of data. I have also chosen Ibn Taymiyyah as a secondary source as a result of the importance that is awarded him and his great influence on 'Islamism' and Salafi-jihadism, particularly since the 20th century.

Where it has been relevant and I have found it beneficial to provide broader context or understanding of texts, hadith have also been consulted. A combination of hadith and tafsirs has allowed greater comprehension of the narratives that exist in the wider Islamic corpus and how these compare to what is circulated through the medium of extremist propaganda materials. For the hadith, I have predominantly consulted the Sahih Muslim hadith and the Sahih al-Bukhari, both of which are held in high esteem in Sunni Islam. The two hadiths are considered to be some of the most valued books and greatest works after the Qur'an.

5.12 Data Collection

For the collection of my data, I selected the magazines Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan, both of which are available in a range of languages including Arabic, Hindi, and English, of which I have only studied the English translations. Both magazines are published online and usually circulated through social media applications such as Telegram. The Dabiq magazine consists of fifteen issues which were published between 2014 and 2016, the first of which is titled The Return of the

Khilafah, which was published on the 5th of July 2014, and the final issue titled Break the Cross was published on the 31st of July 2016. Dabiq placed particular emphasis on a Western audience, aiming to attract foreigners to join their fight by either travelling to Syria and neighbouring countries to join IS in their fight, both, to establish an Islamic state that is ruled by shari'ah law and against the Western powers that oppose them, or by carrying out attacks in their countries of residency. Because of this, the Dabiq magazines are published in a variety of languages, and my focus will be the English language translations. Voice of Khurasan is produced by the Islamic State in Khurasan Province (ISKP), which is an offshoot of IS, based in Afghanistan. Voice of Khurasan is also published in a number of languages, however the primary target audience of this issue are those in Central and South Asia. The first issue of Voice of Khurasan which was titled Who are the Taliban? was published in late January 2022 and, at the time of writing, new issues continue to be published.

Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, IS has had a dwarfing impact on other jihadi groups in the Middle East, such as al Qaeda, who at one point were seen as the biggest threat not just in the region but in the world. IS's focus on online radicalisation and the production and distribution of propaganda for the incitement of violence and acts of terror makes them a valuable source of knowledge for understanding the way that scripture is used to this end. There is significant reason to believe that IS poses a greater threat than al Qaeda in their incitement of violence, and radicalisation and recruitment efforts (Munir & Muhammad, 2016).

Since the US evacuated its troops from Afghanistan in 2021 and the Taliban have taken control of government, ISKP have been recruiting and redoubling their efforts to gain control and oppose the Taliban. The ISKP magazine Voice of Khurasan focuses on recruitment efforts, inciting violence, and emphasises anti-Taliban narratives – which is evident from the title of their first publication: Who are the Taliban? Both Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan contain significant reference to religious scripture that is used to justify the military and political aims of the groups, incite violence in others, provide a religious narrative that could potentially radicalise their audience, and illustrate the validity of their claims through God's authority. While examining and reading the magazines, references made to Qur'anic scripture were extracted and organised into a table form. The following is an example:

Qur'anic quotation	Scriptural reference	Location in text	Co-text	Context & Interpretation
<i>So whoever has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you.</i>	2:194	P7	The writer is attempting to justify the burning of the Jordanian pilot. They make the point that some will use the teaching 'none should punish with fire except Allah' which is taken from Sahīh al-Bukhāri, but call such arguments 'ignorant' and an example of 'dishonesty in conveying the truth.'	Providing justification and are countering arguments that their opponents may make as criticism of their actions.

Figure 8. Example of Data Analysis from Dabiq 7 – From Hypocrisy to Apostasy

Any quotes from the Qur'an made in the magazine are inserted into the 'Qur'anic quotation' column, with the corresponding Qur'anic location inserted into the 'Scriptural reference' column. The 'Location in text' refers to where in the magazine the reference was made. The 'Context' column provides an explanation of the context in which the piece of scripture was used e.g. what were the points being made, or what was the subject matter where the quote was being referenced, while the 'Interpretation' provides broader explication of what the quote is saying and its use, and the interpretation or understanding that the writer may have been communicating. (Part of the extraction tables can be found in the appendix.)

The columns for 'Scriptural references' from each magazine analysed were then sorted into a database which identified the number of times each piece of Qur'anic scripture was quoted based on the Qur'anic scriptural reference. This gave a clear indication of which verses of the Qur'an, as well as subject matter, were most popular in extremist literature.

These verses and the context in which they were used have then been compared to the same verses in the Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathir tafsirs to see if the context differed and what the interpretations provided in the tafsirs were. Through the application of the situational context in critical discourse analysis' interpretation, I have provided some of the cultural circumstances from when the various texts were produced and disseminated. This provides an understanding of the potential meanings that are embedded in the texts analysed and the persuasive force that they possess. Once this triangulation has been completed, a clearer picture can be provided of the teachings from the classical period as compared to the post-classical period, and both of these compared again the texts produced by IS and ISKP. CDA's interpretation and explanation provide better understanding of some of the discursive strategies used, for example the framing and manipulation of knowledge and ideologies.

Through such comparative research and with the application of O'Regan's TACO, I believe that greater comprehension may be gained of the differences between mainstream Islamic and Salafi-jihadi literature. It is by gaining an understanding of Islamic teachings themselves and their potential manipulations that informed counternarratives can be offered which can be utilised by de-radicalisation programmes, such as Channel's DDP in the UK.

At present, the counternarratives provided by de-radicalisation programmes in the UK and elsewhere do not take into account the particular references made to scripture to legitimise and give authority to the literature produced by Salafi-jihadis. By looking at these instances, the framing, and the representation, it is an argument of this study that this can offer a greater religious perspective for such programmes and initiatives and could potentially offer a new angle for de-radicalisation programmes.

Chapter 6 Descriptive Interpretation

In this chapter, I discuss the preliminary observations from reading the text and endeavour to describe its content, the overarching ideological meanings that are present in the text, the narratives, the target audience and how this is evident from the choice in messaging, as well as popular language choices and imagery. Following this, in Chapter 7, I discuss the data collected in depth, looking at the scriptural justification provided for the narratives and arguments made. I provide the social context for the production of the text, where I discuss the historical context in which the scriptural references were produced as well as the context in which Salafi-jihadi groups have produced their propaganda materials, while examining the dominant or preferred readings of the texts.

The online magazine series⁴⁴ that I analysed for my research are Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan – both English language publications, produced by Islamic State (IS) and its offshoot the Islamic State in Khurasan Province (ISKP) respectively (see also section 6.3 of this chapter). While the publication of Dabiq ceased in 2016, issues of Voice of Khurasan (henceforth VoK) continue to be released.

6.1 The Islamic States' Shirking of Responsibility

The Dabiq series was produced between 2014 and 2016, during a time when IS were at their strongest in both membership and the amount of territory they occupied and held under their control. During this period, the world witnessed large numbers of people travelling from their respective home countries to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State, as well as individuals carrying out indiscriminate 'lone wolf' attacks in their home countries. Of those who left the UK to join IS, two included Shamima Begum who left the UK in February 2015 along with two female school friends to travel to Syria and become 'jihadi brides,'⁴⁴ and Mohammed Emwazi (also dubbed

⁴⁴ 'Jihadi bride' is a term that was colloquially adopted by the tabloid newspapers in the UK and USA to refer to women who left their home countries to join the Islamic State. The term has been criticised for oversimplifying what is a complicated debate about how much agency such women had, their involvement in IS's operations and to what extent they should be held accountable. This is an ongoing debate in the case of Shamima Begum. Iranian-American

‘Jihadi John’) who was a computer programmer in London before he travelled to Syria to join IS in 2013. Emwazi became infamously known for appearing in videos in which Western hostages including James Foley and Steven Sotloff were beheaded; incidents which were reported in issues three and four of Dabiq respectively.

Shamima Begum is a British born woman who, at the time when she left the UK to join IS, was fifteen years old. Ten days after arriving in Syria, Begum married a fellow IS member with whom she had three children, all of whom died at a young age. It is reported by those who knew her in Syria that Begum had established a reputation as a firm enforcer in IS’s “morality police” upholding their strict rule in relation to behaviour, as well as attempting to recruit other young women to join. Following the capture and imprisonment of her husband, Dutch-born Yago Riedijk who was twenty-one years old when he travelled to Syria to join IS in the October of 2014, Begum was found at al-Hawl refugee camp in Northern Syria, where she told The Times reporter, Anthony Loyd, that she wished to return to the UK to raise the child with whom she was pregnant at the time. Begum had further communication with other reporters including an interview with the BBC’s Quentin Sommerville, in which she asked the UK’s forgiveness and the consideration of her return. This became a controversial topic in the UK with the UK Home Secretary Sajid Javid announcing that Begum would be stripped of her British citizenship, severing ties and any duties of responsibility the UK may have towards her. Many thought this unjust and made a case for her return, arguing that she was a child at the time of her offence and therefore should have diminished accountability on the grounds that she had been groomed and indoctrinated. While Begum is British born, her parents are of Bangladeshi origin because of which, despite the depriving of her British citizenship, she is still a citizen of Bangladesh through her parents. The Bangladeshi Foreign Minister, Abdul Momen, has stated however that should Begum enter Bangladesh then

writer Azadeh Moaveni argues that at the heart of the problem is female militancy and the ‘historical and near-universal aversion across so many societies to viewing young women as being capable of dreadful violence’ as well as the motives of governments in their portrayal of female militancy, whether this is their downplaying or amplifying of it. Moaveni argues that by adopting the term ‘jihadi bride,’ we begin from a position of accepting that the woman ‘holds no valid political grievances, is indoctrinated into accepting grotesque violence as legitimate, and as “just” a wife’ who plays a minimal role in the workings of the military group and is not operationally affiliated with them (Moaveni, 2019).

she would face the death penalty – a punishment which is the result of Bangladesh’s “zero tolerance” attitude towards those who participate in terrorist activities.

Mohammed Emwazi, who also left the UK to join IS, was born in Kuwait in 1988 and moved to the UK at the age of six. He was killed on the 12th of November 2015 by a drone strike in Raqqa, Syria. Emwazi grew up in London, before leaving to join IS. He was given the nickname Jihadi John because he formed a terrorist cell of four individuals who spoke with a British accent – and who became known as ‘the Beatles.’ He featured in a number of videos produced by Al Hayat Media Centre (a media production outlet run by IS) in which he carried out the beheadings of many Western hostages, including James Foley.

James Foley was an American journalist and video reporter who was kidnapped on the 22nd of November 2012 in Syria, along with a fellow war correspondent from the UK, John Cantlie, while he worked as a freelance war correspondent. On the cover of issue three of Dabiq, which is titled A Call to Hijrah, it lists a special feature article, titled ‘Foley’s Blood on Obama’s Hands,’ which is pictured below.

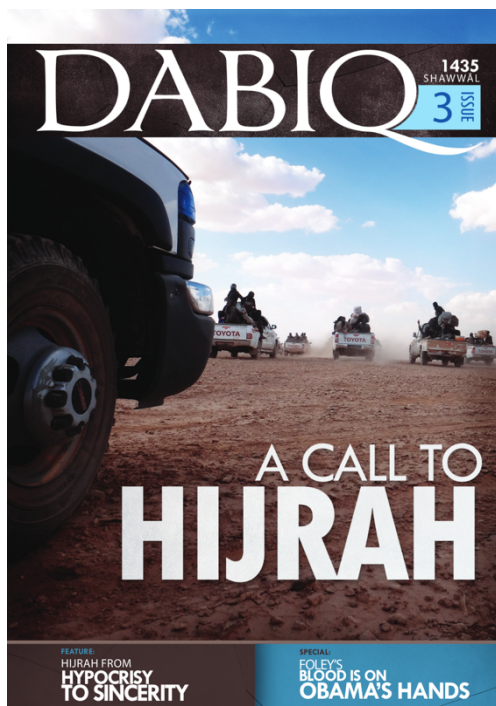


Figure 9. Front Cover of Dabiq, Issue 3

In this article, the IS writer seeks to absolve the group of responsibility for the beheading of Foley arguing instead that his death was a decision made by the then president of the United States, Barack Obama. The IS author writes ‘From this point up until James’ execution, there were many attempts by the Islamic State to reach a solution concerning the fate of James Wright Foley, but the arrogant, foolish, and defeated US government turned away from their citizen with apathy’ (Dabiq 3, 2014: 37-38). Pages 39 to 40 contain a two-page spread which is titled The Complete Message From James Foley and includes a letter which IS claim is written by Foley himself. The authenticity of this letter and its origins are questionable with many arguing that it was either not written by Foley at all or was written by Foley under the strict instructions of his captors. The letter, much like the article which preceded it, lays blame for Foley’s death squarely with US foreign policy at the hands of Obama, as is indicated on the cover of issue 3. The letter closes with the following words: ‘Now all I can say is that I wish I were from some other country whose government actually cares about its citizens. I guess all in all, I just wish I wasn’t American’ (ibid: 40). Many questioned the credibility of this as it seemed unlikely that the final words of Foley would rest solely with placing blame on the US with no mention of his loved ones.

The family of James Foley later released a letter which they said were the true final words of Foley. During his capture, Foley was unable to write letters home and asked a fellow hostage (who is unnamed) to memorise a letter which Foley would dictate to him. Following Foley’s beheading, the fellow hostage was released, and delivered the letter to Foley’s family, which was noticeably different in its message. The new letter delivered recounted memories and stories from his childhood and life, closing with a message to his grandmother who he urged to take her ‘medicine, take walks and keep dancing,’ and to ‘stay strong’ (Glenza, 2014).

Similarly, in the next issue of Dabiq (issue 4) IS published a letter which the writers claimed to have been written by Steven Sotloff. Sotloff was an American-Israeli journalist, who was kidnapped in Syria in August 2013 and held hostage until his execution in September 2014. Pages 47-51 of this issue contain an article titled ‘A Message from Sotloff to His Mother Days Before His Execution.’ In the opening paragraph of this article, IS place the responsibility of Sotloff’s killing on the US stating that

Again, his killing was the consequence of US arrogance and transgression which all US citizens are responsible for as they are represented by the government they have elected, approved of, and supported, through votes, polls, and taxes (Dabiq 4, 2014: 47).

A letter which IS claim is written by Sotloff is published on page 48 of this issue of Dabiq, but there is great doubt over its credibility. In a similar vein to that of Foley's letter published in the previous issue, in Sotloff's letter, he pleads with his mother to urge Obama and the US government to stop their agenda against the Islamic State. Part of the letter reads

Mom, please don't let Obama kill me. Do not let him get away with murder again. What doesn't our government understand? Don't get involved in the Islamic State's internal and external affairs. Leave them to fight their own war (ibid: 48).

In the two features of James Foley and Steven Sotloff in issues three and four of Dabiq, the messages being sent by IS to the US are clear. In issue three, IS writers published that the Obama administration was made aware of the capture of Foley as early as November 2013 along with a 'simple solution for his release [...] All Obama had to do was release our brothers and sisters from their prisons' (Dabiq 3, 2014: 37)

This is a common theme found in literature that is produced by such extremist groups; there is often a diminishing of responsibility in their actions through arguments that their 'enemies' (often Western countries or allied forces) were to be held accountable as IS, for example, were simply retaliating or were left with no other option, having already made attempts at peaceful reconciliation. This is something that has been illustrated in this chapter, paying close attention to the way the narrative is portrayed and the arguments made to diminish IS and ISKP of responsibility.

During this period of time when IS were carrying out multiple beheadings of Western hostages as well as IS cells carrying out attacks in Western countries, IS were particularly active on social media platforms – especially Twitter – and produced many videos and magazines as propaganda, which they used their social media platforms to circulate, in an attempt to attract different

demographics to their cause. The various target audiences of Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan are the subject of the next section.

6.2 Target Audiences for Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan

The articles written for the Dabiq magazine series were predominantly focused on individuals in Western countries – who were their target audience – and attempted to influence them to not only migrate to regions under IS control, such as Raqqa, Syria, but also to carry out attacks in their home countries using easily accessible means and methods. Throughout the pages of the magazines, IS offered advice on how this could be achieved including (but not limited to) listing household and daily objects that could be weaponised such as knives and vehicles, as well as providing manuals for building home-made explosive devices. There is significant evidence to suggest that targeted messaging in Salafi-jihadi propaganda materials is successful in influencing individuals, which has been evident in the correlations that exist between messages distributed by Salafi-jihadi extremist groups and trends in terrorist activity. An example of this is al-Qaeda's call for people to use vehicles as 'ultimate mowing machines' in a 2010 issue of their magazine Inspire (Inspire 2, 2010), as well as IS's releasing of videos and posters encouraging the same in 2017. Following such messaging, there was a spike in the number of terror attacks carried out in the West by jihadis using vehicles, as well as household objects. Similarly, in the seventh issue of Dabiq titled From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Grayzone, which was released on the 12th of February 2015, IS writers call for Muslims to carry out attacks that require low levels of sophistication. In this issue, IS quote Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, who was a senior leader and official spokesman for IS, as saying

We will argue, before Allah, against any Muslim who has the ability to shed a single drop of crusader blood but does not do so, whether with an explosive device, a bullet, a knife, a car, a rock, or even a boot or a fist. Indeed, you saw what a single Muslim did with Canada and its parliament of shirk, and what our brothers in France, Australia, and Belgium did – may Allah have mercy upon them all and reward them with good on behalf of Islam. And there were many others who killed, ran others over, threatened, frightened, and terrorized people (Dabiq 7, 2015: 7).

During this period of time, when IS were at their strongest in number and territory, they did not confine their messaging to Dabiq alone, but delivered it through multiple streams, including their magazine Rumiya. Although my research focuses on Dabiq and VoK, to understand the influence of extremist groups properly, it is important to look at the consistent messages delivered through various means to determine if there are identifiable patterns. In the second issue of IS's magazine Rumiya published on the 4th of October 2016, the IS writers call for Muslims to use knives available to them to carry out attacks. This is found on pages 12-13 in an article titled 'Just Terror Tactics,' in which the writers argue that 'one need not be a military expert or a martial arts master, or even own a gun or rifle' to be able to carry out a terror attack; they state that all one requires are a 'hardened resolve, some basic planning, and reliance on Allah for success' (Rumiya 2, 2016: 12).⁴⁵ Focusing this article on carrying out knife attacks and why this is a good weapon of choice for Muslims, the IS writers state that this is because knives

are widely available in every land and thus readily accessible. They are extremely easy to conceal and highly lethal, especially in the hands of someone who knows how to use them effectively. Also, due to their accessibility, were a person to conduct a campaign of knife attacks, he could dispose of his weapon after each use, finding no difficulty in acquiring another one (ibid: 12-13).

Continuing, tips are provided for how one ought to select the perfect knife, where the writers state that one should 'focus firstly on sharpness,' then 'consider the strength of the blade and handle,' and seek something which shows practicality for the job at hand. IS warn that the knife 'should not be too large, nor lacking a strong grip lest it be easily disarmed. Serrated or partially-serrated blades make for good combat knives' (ibid: 13). They specify that it is important that one does not

⁴⁵ This follows an article which runs from pages 8-11 titled 'The Shuhada Of the Gulshan Attack,' which discusses a terror attack which occurred in Dhaka, Bangladesh on the 1st of July 2016, in which five militants from an IS splinter cell in Bangladesh took hostages and opened fire at the Holey Artisan Bakery. During this attack, the militants asked hostages questions they believed all Muslims should know the answers to – this was done to 'distinguish and separate the Muslims from the kuffar (Crusaders, pagans, and apostates)' (Rumiya 2: 10, 2016). The questions asked were religious in nature, and those who failed to answer them were killed. In an issue of Rumiya published three months after the attack, IS write that those 'who proved their Islam were treated with respect and mercy and those who manifested their kufr were treated with harshness and severity' (ibid: 10).

use a kitchen knife as ‘their basic structure is not designed to handle the kind of vigorous application used for assassinations and slaughter (Rumiyah 2, 2016: 13).

While it cannot be known with any certainty whether such recommendations resulted in the attacks carried out, there is a correlation between the messages delivered and the substantial increase in low sophistication ‘lone wolf’ attacks suffered in Europe, including (but not limited to) the attack carried out by Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel. Lahouaiej-Bouhlel drove a 19-ton truck into a crowd of people celebrating Bastille Day in Nice on the 16th of July 2016, killing 86 people and injuring a further 430 others, which was the most deadly attack using a vehicle. Low sophistication attacks such as those including vehicles, knives, and other easily accessible and potentially lethal implements, carried out by jihadis continued into 2017 and 2018. It seems likely that these types of attacks received encouragement from magazines like Dabiq and VoK and their equivalents.

When looking at incidences and trends in terror attacks carried out by jihadis in the European Union (EU), a sharp increase is found in 2015, which saw a leap from two attacks in 2014 to 17 attacks in 2015, 13 in 2016, and a peak of 33 attacks in 2017. This decreased in 2018 to 24 attacks, and saw a decline in the years that followed with 21 attacks in 2019, 14 in 2020, and 11 in 2021 (Council of the European Union, 2023).⁴⁶ Of arrests made relating to terror offences between the years 2010 and 2021 in the EU categorised by type of attack (e.g. jihadist, right wing, anarchist etc.), there is a significant increase in the number of arrests made of jihadists between the years 2015 and 2017, which is illustrated in figure 11. The years 2015-17 were also years in which IS were particularly active in their online radicalisation and recruitment efforts, and years in which Dabiq was produced and published.

⁴⁶ In the reporting of attacks carried out in the European Union (EU), the UK has been included up to the year 2019. The number reflects not only attacks carried out in the EU but also those that failed or were foiled.

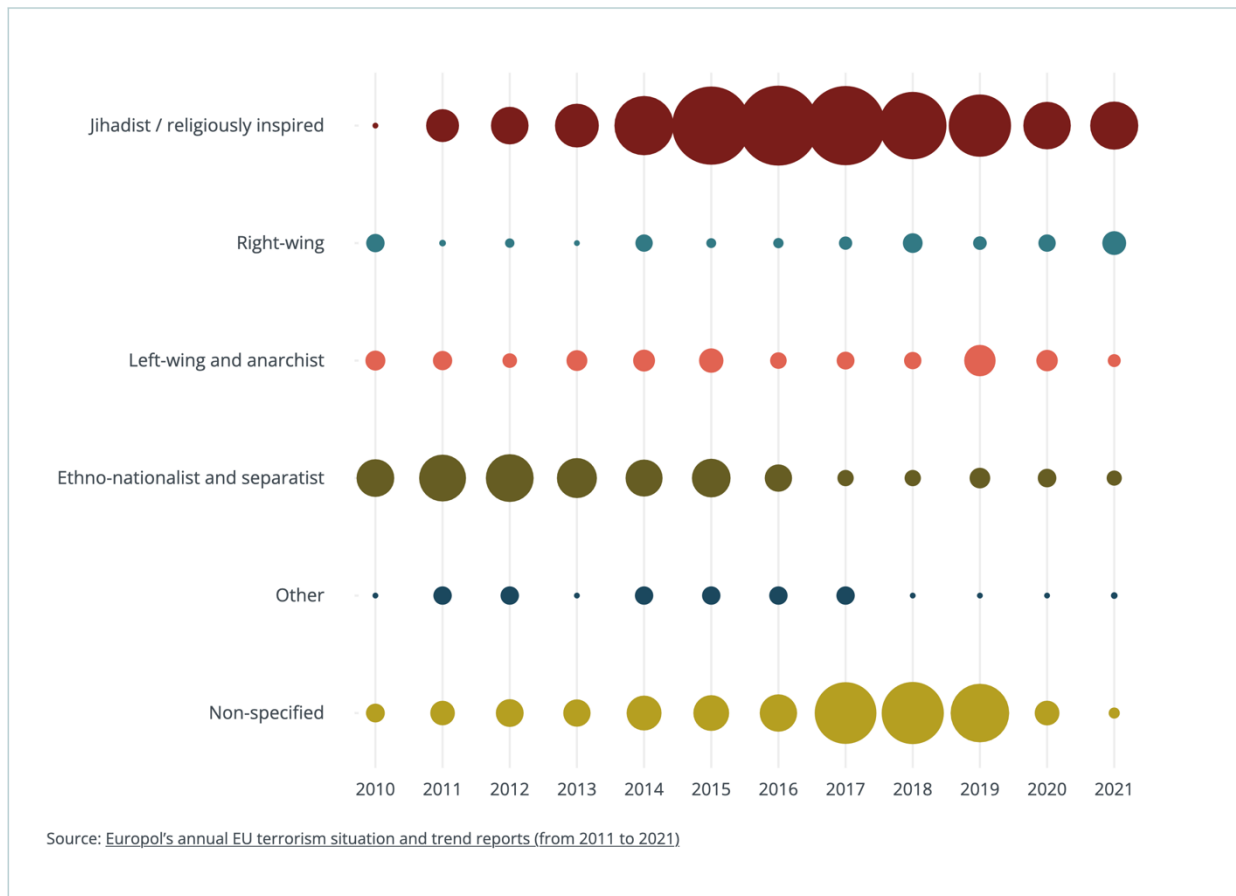


Figure 10. Terror Trends in the European Union (Council of the European Union, 2023)

VoK released their first issue in late January 2022, and is published by ISKP's official Al-Azaim Foundation for Media Production. ISKP is an insurgency group that is based in Afghanistan and who place their focus on rivaling the Taliban, and use VoK as their mouthpiece for criticising the Taliban and calling for others to join the fight against them. Since the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, and the Taliban's regaining of power as the governing body in Afghanistan, ISKP have been placing great importance and emphasis on the way in which the Taliban are choosing to govern the country, arguing in doing so that Afghanistan is currently being run in an un-Islamic way.

The target audience of VoK is markedly different from that of Dabiq and focuses predominantly on Central and South Asian countries, calling for individuals to leave their respective countries of

residence to join ISKP in Afghanistan and aid in rebuilding the caliphate – something which, in their view, the Taliban are failing to do.

The first issue of VoK is titled Who Are the Taliban? and contains a six-page feature which details the founding and background of the Taliban to the modern day, claiming that ‘the group was initially created in Pakistan by their intelligence services, ISI by the close monitoring of the CIA’ (Voice of Khurasan 1, 2022: 6). This first issue of VoK sets the tone for the issues to follow, highlighting the perceived faults and weaknesses of the Taliban, where ISKP writers say of the Taliban that

They ruled the people by their own whims and not by the shariah. [...] Robbers were caught and faces blackened and paraded. Drug abusers and dealers were openly given support and protection. Homosexuality was common and practised with the members and so called ulamas. The issue of extreme nationalism and tribalism, which has nothing to do with the Islamic System is ever present within the group. Love and hate depend on the tribe rather than being a Muslim. [...] It’s one of this groups main priority that it would suppress and eradicate the scholars of truth and whoever opposes Shirk and superstitions (ibid: 8-9).

For the Taliban, this is a grave issue – Afghanistan should be led by shari’ah rule and shari’ah rule alone. The Taliban, in claiming to be an Islamic group who seek to rule the country according to Islamic jurisdiction, must comply with the rules of shari’ah – which ISKP think they fail to do. As the issues of VoK develop, there is evidence to suggest that there is a change in ISKP’s target audience, which is demonstrated by the political and social issues ISKP draw attention to in their discussions. In issues 20 and 21 of VoK, ISKP highlight and discuss the treatment of Muslims in China and India respectively. In ISKP’s criticism of the Taliban with respect to their relationship with China, the writers argue that China have been making ‘secret deals with the murtadd Taliban leadership, promising to fill the pockets of these murtaddin with wealth stolen from the Muslims’ (Voice of Khurasan 20, 2023: 13). They write that

Of all the enemies of Islam that the Taliban have sought to work with, China is surely one of the worst. For their crimes are literally beyond any limit, now as we write, millions of

our brothers and sisters are imprisoned, tortured and killed in East Turkestan (Voice of Khurasan 20, 2023: 17).

ISKP state that the Taliban argue that they are unaware of the situation and the specifics of the suffering of Muslims in China. The Taliban claim that once they have details of any injustices or suffering that the Muslims face at the hands of the Chinese government, they will address this with the Chinese authority. In ISKP's accusations of the Taliban choosing not to acknowledge the suffering of the Muslims for the Taliban's own political and economic gain, ISKP ask in issue 20 of VoK

How can they be unaware of the problems of the Uyghur Muslims!? The world and the entire Ummah are aware of the atrocities and persecution of the Muslims in China. And if for some reason they live with their heads buried and ears closed, the list of crimes is spelled out for them in this article. So, this is due to [the] fact that they have abandoned their religion and the Ummah. They would prefer submitting Muslims to persecution and watching the religion of Allah be violated to leaving their comfortable palaces *ibid*: 16-17).

While the focus of this article is to highlight the complacency of the Taliban towards the treatment of Muslims in China more than it is on the necessity for the Muslims in China to fight back against the Chinese regime, the same is not found in their arguments relating to the treatment of Muslims in India. In articles in the 21st and 23rd issues of VoK, ISKP directly target Indian Muslims in two ways – they encourage the Muslims in India to fight against the Indians and Hindus, as well as asking them to ‘abandon dar al-kufr’ (Voice of Khurasan 23, 2023: 6). In an article in issue 23 of VoK titled ‘A Message to the Inhabitants in the Land Occupied by Cow and Mice Worshipping Filths,’ ISKP detail the injustices suffered by Muslims at the hands of the Hindu government. They begin by stating that the Hindus in India ‘enslaved and raped’ the Muslim women, ‘killed’ Muslim children, and used their ‘filthy tongues to transgress against Allah Almighty, His Prophet Muhammad, and His deen’ (*ibid*: 4). Following this, ISKP write a warning to the Hindus in India, which reads

Your peace will turn into chaos, your security into fear, your happiness into sorrow, and by the will of Allah there will be no security or peace to any disbeliever until you worship Allah alone. By Allah we will turn your streets [into] pools of blood. You would not be able to even dream about peace and security. We will slaughter your males and sell your women and children as slaves in our markets. If we are not able to do it, then our coming generations will do it (Voice of Khurasan 23, 2023: 4-5).

This is the first part of their message ostensibly delivered not only to the Hindus in India, but to Muslims in India too, who are exhorted to carry out violent attacks against both Indians and Hindus. In the second part of their message to Indian Muslims, ISKP call on them to ‘abandon dar al-kufr’ and join ISKP in Afghanistan. They call on Indian Muslims to ‘Perform hijrah. Come to your lands. Do not be among those who stay behind and wrong themselves’ (ibid: 6-7). In support of this view, a Qur’anic quotation is used which is taken from surah 4 (an-Nisa, The Women) which reads

Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves – [the angels] will say, “In what [condition] were you?” They will say, “We were oppressed in the land.” The angels will say, “Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?” For those, their refuge is Hell – and evil it is as a destination (ibid: 7).

In this verse, the Muslims who face persecution and choose to remain in the land in which they are persecuted are criticised for the choice they made. They are asked by the angels why they opted to stay rather than to leave and join an Islamic nation in which they would be accepted and would not face persecution, asking whether the Earth, created by Allah, was too small for them. For those who face persecution and remain, they face a greater punishment of being condemned to Hell. This reference is used to encourage the Muslims of India (as well as other lands in which they face persecution, such as China) to abandon their home countries and join the Islamic State in Khurasan, Afghanistan.

6.3 Arguments Made for Performing Hijrah and Joining Jihad

This verse from surah an-Nisa (4:97) which appears above in VoK is among one of the most quoted Qur’anic verses in the Dabiq series, mentioned in issues 8, 9, 10, 11, and 15. Particularly interesting is its use in issue 10 of Dabiq which is titled ‘The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men,’ in which an article is featured called ‘They Are Not Lawful Spouses for One Another.’ This article is written by a female IS associate, by the name of Umm Sumayyah al-Muhājirah, for a female audience. It is rare in IS literature for articles to be written by, credited to, or targeted at women.

In this article, the writer, al-Muhājirah – who is a female member of IS, discusses the Islamic teaching which states that Muslim women are forbidden from marrying anyone other than a Muslim man. The only verse in the Qur’an which speaks explicitly of marriage is in verse 2:221, which contains rulings for Muslim men and women relating to marriage. This states,

Do not marry unbelieving women (idolators), until they believe: a slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she is alluring to you. Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe: a man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though he appeals to you. Unbelievers do (but) beckon you to the Fire. But Allah beckons by His Grace to the Garden (of Bliss) and forgiveness, and makes His Signs clear to mankind: that they may celebrate His praise. (Verse 2:221).

There is some dispute regarding this teaching between Muslims. Some question who the teaching refers to and if Allah is prohibiting Muslims from marrying a non-Muslim or from marrying polytheists – which are two distinct groups. For those who believe that the prohibition is against the marrying of polytheists, it leaves room to question whether or not Allah allows marriage between Muslims and non-Muslim ‘people of the book,’ who are monotheists. For this case, some argue that the use of the words ‘unbelieving women’ (translated as ‘muskrikin’) in the scriptural reference refers only to idol worshippers and other forms of polytheism but not necessarily to those who follow a monotheistic religion, i.e. Christianity and Judaism. Others however argue that the teaching is such that all Muslims should refrain from marrying outside of one’s religion. The line in the verse which reads ‘They invite you to the Fire while Allah invites you to Paradise and

forgiveness by His grace,’ is said to illustrate that while you may identify as a Muslim and practise Islam, by marrying a non-Muslim, you may be turned away from your religion and faith. Through such close association with a non-Muslim, it is likely that your faith and Islamic practises will be affected and wane, and so your non-Muslim spouse will be attracting you to the (Hell) Fire. Some also adopt a more liberal interpretation which argues that Muslim women are forbidden to marry non-Muslim men, however, Muslim men are permitted to marry non-Muslim women as long as the woman is a ‘person of the Book’ who is chaste. It is preferable that a Muslim man marries a Muslim woman, but it is permitted that he marry outside of Islam under the above conditions. The teaching used to support this view is taken from verse 5:5, which reads

(Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time – when ye give them their due dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues (verse 5:5).

In this article written by IS members, the writers adopt the interpretation which prohibits all Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims and detail, in doing so, what it means to be a Muslim. The argument that is put forward is one which states that for a man to be a truly Muslim man in practise and not just by name, he must be willing to make hijrah to live among his fellow Muslim brothers and sisters and to join jihad when the opportunity presents itself. If he shies away from this, he is not a true Muslim but is instead a hypocrite: a person who is Muslim only by name but not by nature. The writer, Al-Muhājirah, argues that if we accept this premise of what it means to be a true Muslim man, then if a woman finds herself in a situation in which her husband is unwilling to make hijrah or join jihad, then she has married a non-Muslim man. For this the punishment of Allah will be severe. She writes that if a woman wishes to save herself from such harsh punishment, she should

know that there are two options before you, with no third. You advise your husband and make him fear Allah and remind him of Him. If he desists and repents, then that is the grace of Allah, which He bestows upon whom He wills. If, however, he shows arrogance and his pride in his sin takes hold of him, then it’s upon you to abandon him in the dunyā so that

you may succeed in the Hereafter. And here I call on you to make hijrah to us here in the lands of the blessed Islamic State! (Dabiq 10, 2015: 47).

The two choices that are presented to the Muslim woman who finds herself in this predicament where her husband makes it clear that he is a ‘hypocrite’ and not a true Muslim are said to be the following: to encourage one’s husband to follow the true path of Allah by making hijrah or joining the jihad, or to abandon one’s husband and make the hijrah herself. There is ‘no third’ option, writes Al-Muhajirah. For the women who are unwilling to make hijrah on their own or who feel uncomfortable doing so when they do not know others who have done the same, Al-Muhajirah advises them to ‘not wait for other women from amongst the wives of Sahwah soldiers to make hijrah before you. Rather, be a model and an example for them all, and what a great honor it would be to be the first’ (ibid: 48).

Hijrah is encouraged throughout IS produced propaganda materials, including in issue fifteen of Dabiq. In this issue, there is an interview conducted by IS of an IS soldier in Trinidad who they call Abu Sa’ad at-Trinidad, to whom the interviewer poses the question ‘What message would you like to direct to the Muslims of Trinidad?’ (Dabiq 15, 2016: 69). The response of at-Trinidad is two-fold: the first is to hold firmly to one’s faith in Islam, and the second is to travel to join the jihad. In the former point, at-Trinidad says that it is important that Muslims do ‘not become deluded’ or allow themselves ‘to follow these evil leaders’ who preach against the Islamic State (ibid: 15). The second point made is directed at those who have already accepted Islam but have not travelled to join the jihad. The verse from surah 4:97 is used again to demonstrate that those who did not travel to join jihad will be questioned on why they chose to refrain from joining their fellow Muslims in an Islamic land. At-Trinidad states that those who do not travel to join the jihad have become

Deceived and deluded by the devil. Years have gone by and you still haven’t performed hijrah to the land of Islam, your land, the place that we used to speak about and dream of. It has become a reality, and yet you’ve become from amongst those who remained behind. You wanted your children to live in a land where Allah’s law is the highest, yet you now

remain in a place where you have no honor and are forced to live in humiliation, subjugated by the disbelievers (Dabiq 15, 2016: 15).

In the broader question posed by terrorist groups such as IS and ISKP of what Muslim men and women are doing to aid their fellow Muslim brothers and sisters against the persecution they face such as in India and China, they call on individuals to join the jihad against the oppressor, make hijrah to live amongst their Muslim brethren, and to carry out domestic attacks. Verse 4:75 is popularly used in this vein and is among one of the most popular verses in the VoK series, which appears six times in the first twenty-five issues, and can be found in issues 1, 9, 18, 22, 24, and 25. In the first issue of the series, titled *Who Are the Taliban?*, verse 4:75 features in an article called ‘Wakeup O Muslims’ which calls on Muslims to remain alert and protect Islam and Muslims from its attackers. The reference to verse 4:75 is contained in this excerpt.

And what is the matter with you that you do not fight in the way of Allah, and for the ones who are weak among the men and the women and the children who say, ‘Our lord take us out of this town whose people are oppressors and appoint for us from yourself a protector and a helper’ (Voice of Khurasan 1, 2022: 24).

In this verse, Allah encourages the believers to not only join the jihad to fight in the way of Islam but to protect and fight on behalf of those Muslims who cannot join the fight themselves – to fight for the women and children who are forced to remain in a land in which they are oppressed and unable to leave. In this issue of VoK, ISKP ask

Where are those who are true to what they promised to Allah? Where are the youth of Islam? Where are those who will avenge their religion, honor, brothers and their Ummah? Our religion is being fought, our lord the almighty Allah and our Prophet has been cursed, our homes were taken from us while we remain careless, heedless and busy! Our wealth was taken but we remain distracted! Our scholars and the best of us were killed and still, we remain silent! (ibid: 23).

This verse is used to call upon Muslims to fight in the way of Allah and protect those who are persecuted. In the example above taken from issue one of VoK, ISKP question where the true Muslims are who will defend Islam and the Muslims who cannot fight for themselves. In issue nine of the same series, the verse is used in reference to the treatment of Muslims at the hands of the Hindus, of which ISKP write that ‘the path to deter Hindus from their brutality is in the path of jihad and fighting against them’ (Voice of Khurasan 9, 2022: 5). The perceived issue of those who identify as Muslim but neglect their fellow Muslims in the global Islamic ummah who face persecution is one that is repeated in issue 24 of VoK in an article titled ‘They Have Commercialised Allah’s Ayat in Hind.’ In this article, ISKP question why Muslims remain silent when there is such injustice and shirk happening in the world and why they do not stand up for the Muslims in need. Verse 4:75 is used to call on the Muslims to rise up against the oppression that is being suffered at the hands of non-Muslim aggressors globally, with ISKP asking how Muslims ‘can be at peace’ with themselves while watching ‘the cow worshippers desecrate Allah’s House with their endless shirk? Does your faithful zeal not exhort you for retribution?’ (Voice of Khurasan 24, 2023: 11). The appeal for Muslims to join the jihad against this kind of oppression continues with ‘Place your trust in Allah, and carry out strikes in their kingdoms of kufr and shirk that will tear out the hearts of the aggressors and make them lose their minds in hallucinations and concussions!!!’ (ibid: 11). The call for Muslims living in various parts of the world to perform hijrah and join the jihad is one that is common in IS and ISKP produced literature, and the Prophet Muhammad’s willingness to partake in jihad and to be killed for Islamic causes is mentioned throughout this as well as in mainstream literature.

It is narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari by Abu Huraira that the Prophet Muhammad, in speaking about the wish for martyrdom, said

I would certainly never remain behind any Sariya’ (army-unit) setting out in Allah’s cause. By Him in Whose Hands my life is! I would love to be martyred in Allah’s Cause and then resurrected and then get martyred, and then get resurrected again and then get martyred and then get resurrected again and then get martyred (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2011b).

6.4 Just War

There is great importance and emphasis placed on not only fighting those who fight the Muslims, but also fighting them in a way that is equal in severity. Pages 5-8 of issue 7 of Dabiq contains an article titled 'Burning of the Murtadd Pilot,' which discusses the execution of the Jordanian pilot, Muath al-Kasasbeh. Kasasbeh was a Royal Jordanian Air Force pilot who was captured by IS in December 2014 when his F-16 fighter aircraft crashed near Raqqa, Syria. There is dispute over what caused the crash of the aircraft, with IS claiming responsibility stating that one of their heat seeking missiles had brought down the aircraft, while Jordan and the US argue that there were mechanical problems which resulted in the crash. Kasasbeh was held captive by IS for just over a week before he was killed. During his captivity, there were negotiations taking place between the Japanese and Jordanian governments with the Islamic State. IS asked for the release of Sajida al-Rishawi⁴⁷ who had been imprisoned and sentenced to death in Jordan for the possession of explosives and an attempted suicide bombing in the 2005 Amman terror attacks. IS claimed they would release a Japanese hostage, Kenji Goto,⁴⁸ who was captured by IS in October of the same

⁴⁷ Sajida al-Rishawi was arrested and convicted of partaking in the Amman bombings on the 9th of November 2005, which were a series of coordinated suicide bombings carried out in three hotel lobbies in Amman, Jordan. The attacks began at 20:50 (local time) at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, and continued with the Radisson SAS Hotel, and the Days Inn. These three hotels were chosen as targets due to their popularity with foreign diplomats who visited frequently. The three attacks killed a total of 57 people and injured a further 115. Al-Rishawi took part in the bombing of the Radisson SAS, where a wedding celebration was underway with around nine hundred guests, along with her husband Ali Hussein Ali al-Shamari, who was an Iraqi militant. Al-Rishawi was unable to detonate her vest and is said to have been instructed by her husband to vacate the room, so she was not killed in the explosion. Following Al-Rishawi's capture by the Jordanian police, she made a full confession, which was televised, and admitted that she and her husband had arrived from Iraq just five days prior with the aim of carrying out the attack. She later withdrew her confession but was found guilty of all charges. It is reported that Al-Rishawi's family were linked to the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq at the time, al Zarqawi, who was killed in 2006 in a US airstrike.

⁴⁸ Kenji Goto was a Japanese freelance video journalist who focused on war and conflict, refugees, and AIDs, among many other subjects. On the 24th of October 2014, Goto entered Syria via Turkey, despite warnings from the Japanese government not to do so, in an attempt to rescue Haruna Yukawa, a Japanese hostage who had been captured by IS in August of the same year. Goto appeared three times in IS produced media, the first of which was on the 20th of January 2015, where he appeared in a video in which IS demanded \$200 million from the Japanese government for the safe return of both Goto and Yukawa. He appeared again in a photo which was released on the 24th of January 2015, in which he was shown holding a photo of a decapitated Haruna Yukawa. This photo was released along with an audio

year when he entered Syria to aid in the rescue of another hostage – Haruna Yukawa,⁴⁹ if the Jordanian government released al-Rishawi. The Jordanian government insisted that along with Goto, Kasasbeh also be released and that IS provide proof of Kasasbeh being alive and well before the release of al-Rishawi. Following this demand by the Jordanian government, IS released a video of Kasasbeh being burned to death in a cage. This video was released on the 3rd of February 2015 and circulated the Internet quickly before it was taken down by authorities. Following the release of this video, the Jordanian government responded by executing two Iraqi jihadi prisoners who had been given the death sentence – including al-Rishawi – and began Operation Martyr Muath, which was a series of airstrikes carried out over the course of three days which targeted and killed numerous IS members.

By IS's recollection of the events which led to the death of Kasasbeh, they claim that following the capture of Kasasbeh, they asked for the release of al-Rishawi in exchange for Kenji Goto, but they had no intention of releasing Kasasbeh as 'there were other plans for the murtadd pilot' (Dabiq 7, 2015: 4). IS writers state that the 'Jordanian regime recklessly complicated the process for the Japanese' and as a result of this Goto and Kasasbeh 'were executed due to the negligence of both regimes in heeding the warnings of the Islamic State' (ibid: 4).

recording in which Goto, speaking in English, blamed the Japanese government for the death of his fellow hostage, Yukawa. It was also said in this message that IS were willing to release Goto in exchange for al-Rishawi. A video was released a week later on the 31st of January 2015, which showed Kenji Goto being beheaded by Emwazi (Jihadi John). It was reported that on the 29th of January, Goto was taken to the town of Tal Abyad which was near the Syrian border with Turkey in preparation for an exchange of Goto for al-Rishawi, however when it became apparent that no such exchange would take place, Goto was taken back to a location near Raqqa, Syria, where he was beheaded on the 30th of January 2015.

⁴⁹ Haruna Yukawa travelled to Syria as a self-pronounced security consultant who hoped to help Japanese companies that were in operation in Syria and its surrounding regions. This came after the In Amenas, Algeria, hostage crisis which began on the 16th of January 2013 and ended on the 18th of the same month when the terrorist group detonated a bomb at the Central Processing Facility, killing some of the hostages taken, following which the military stormed the facility, ending the siege. In the early hours of the day, a terrorist cell associated with al Qaeda entered the gas facility near In Amenas looking for expatriate workers who they took hostage. At least 39 foreign hostages were killed during the siege, of which at least ten were Japanese. Yukawa hoped to aid in the prevention of such an attack occurring again against expat workers in Muslim countries.

On the first page of the article ‘The Burning of the Murtadd Pilot,’ there are two photos: one is a photo of Kasasbeh’s face from inside the cage in which he would later be burned, and the second is an aerial shot of Kasasbeh engulfed in flames, standing with his head in his hands. The Jordanian Prime Minister at the time, Abdullah Ensour, who is only referred to as the ‘tāghūt of Jordan,’ (Dabiq 7, 2015: 5) is criticised for his killing of al-Rishawi and Ziyad al-Karbuli⁵⁰ in response to Kasasbeh’s execution. The deaths of the two jihadis imprisoned in Jordan were described as being ‘an incomparable honor which they had both desired, eagerly pursued, and supplicated their Lord for’ (ibid: 5). Al-Rishawi and al-Karbuli, because of their attempts at carrying out terror attacks against non-Muslims and their affiliation with the Islamic State, are viewed by IS as being allies of Islam. A quote is provided from a Sahih al-Bukhari hadith, in which the Prophet Muhammad says ‘Whoever harms an ally of Mine, then I have declared war against them’ (ibid: 6). Al-Rishawi and al-Karbuli’s deaths are used as justification for further attacks against Jordan.

On the second page of this article on the execution of Kasasbeh, IS include two photos of children who have been burned. The caption reads ‘The murtadd pilot was killed in retaliation for airstrikes against Muslims such as those pictured above’ (ibid: 6). It becomes clear on page two of this article that the focus is not on the execution of Kasasbeh but on the Islamic justification for it and invalidating those who condemn IS’s actions as being un-Islamic.

Abu Sayyaf Muhammad ash-Shalabi⁵¹ criticised the actions of IS in their burning of Kasasbeh and is quoted in Dabiq as saying

⁵⁰ Karbuli was an Iraqi Islamist who was arrested in May 2006 and was accused of being an assistant of al-Zarqawi, which he denied. Later in the same month, Karbuli admitted to abducting and killing citizens of both Jordan and Iraq, as well as having abducted two Moroccans in the October of the previous year. He and al-Rishawi were both executed in retaliation for the death of Kasasbeh.

⁵¹ Muhammad ash-Shalabi, who is better known as Abu Sayyaf, is the head of the Jordanian Jihadi Salafist Movement. It was thought that Ash-Shalabi had links to both the Muslim Brotherhood and al Qaeda. Ash-Shalabi was arrested in 2004 and sentenced to death in 2006, however in 2007 a special pardon was given which reduced his sentence to fifteen years of imprisonment with hard labour. In June 2011, however, this too was pardoned, which allowed him to be released having served just four years of a fifteen-year sentence. Following his release, Ash-Shalabi remained influential in the Jordanian Salafi movement, however he now associates with less radical Salafi groups in order to

The manner in which he was executed and the subsequent production of a video displaying his execution is a matter that opposes the teachings of the pure religion. Jihād was legislated to make the people enter the religion, not to make them turn away from the religion or to distort its image (Dabiq 7, 2015: 6).

There is widespread acceptance in the Islamic tradition that it is haram for anyone but Allah to punish with fire – this is an action that only Allah has the right to perform. A primary example of this is taken from Sahih al-Bukhari (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2011a), in which the hadith narrates that the Prophet Muhammad said that ‘None should punish with fire except Allah’ which is narrated by IS on the next page of this article (ibid: 7). It is narrated in this hadith by ‘Ikrima that

Some Zanadiqa (atheists) were brought to ‘Ali and he burnt them. The news of this event, reached Ibn ‘Abbas who said, “If I had been in his place, I would not have burnt them, as Allah’s Messenger forbade it, saying, ‘Do not punish anybody with Allah’s punishment (fire)’” (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2011a).

However, throughout the article, IS provide evidence for what they believe is permission otherwise. Verses 16:126 and 2:194 are used to demonstrate their reasoning which read as the following, respectively ‘And if you punish [an enemy], punish with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed,’ and ‘So whoever has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you’ (Dabiq 7, 2015: 7).

In adopting the view that one is permitted to carry out attacks which mirror the way(s) in which one is harmed, the writers of IS state that

In burning the crusader pilot alive and burying him under a pile of debris, the Islamic State carried out a just form of retaliation for his involvement in the crusader bombing campaign

award himself a more mainstream political role. Ash-Shalabi is criticised by IS for what they view as his hypocrisy in choosing to side with the kuffar despite his background, role and position in the Islamic community.

which continues to result in the killing of countless Muslims who, as a result of these airstrikes, are burned alive and buried under mountains of debris (Dabiq 7, 2015: 6).

The photographs of the two deceased children who have been burned as a result of the airstrikes are used to mirror the burning of Kasasbeh and draw public sympathy for the IS cause. While many criticise IS for behaving in ways that are un-Islamic and renounce their actions, IS continue to use religious teachings to validate their actions and strengthen the support from those who may be doubtful. This portrayal of their actions as being akin to the suffering they and their own have experienced is one which runs throughout not only the magazine issues, but the videos produced, public announcements, and other forms of communication.

On the 8th of September 2021, the trial for the twenty men accused of planning and executing the November 2015 Paris attacks began, led by Jean Pierre Peries, who was the judge; of the twenty accused, six were tried in absentia, while the remaining fourteen were tried in person. Of those who carried out the attack, Salah Abdeslam was the only surviving defendant, and was sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole. The trial ended on the 29th of June 2022, and involved over three hundred testimonies from both witnesses and victims. On the 10th of October 2021, just one month into the trial, An-Nur Media Centre, a French IS associated media group published a message to ‘Mr. Jean Pierre Peries, President of the Court, and to all French people’ (Islamic State, 2021).

The message begins with the sentence ‘Every day for us represents November 13th,’ and continues to detail the attacks carried out by the Western coalition forces in various regions of Syria, including Tabqa and Raqqa. The accounts reported are graphic in nature and include an air attack in Tabqa which killed a two year old girl named Safia and her father, while the account from Raqqa reports of a pregnant woman who lived with her four children on the ground floor of a building hoping this would mean they would be safe from airstrikes; while preparing food for herself and her neighbour – who also had four children – a missile struck the building which killed all the children. IS report seeing ‘their heads strewn around, while a mother’s voice rang out from the ruins. No one could help her.’ Following these examples, as well as others, of deaths that have been caused by the attacks of Western forces, an emphatic paragraph follows, which I have chosen

to include in full to fully grasp the persuasive force of their open communications. The paragraph reads as follows:

This is just a sample of the atrocities perpetrated by the coalition. And you mourn your November 13th... Every day for us was November 13th. It's not a single day that we remember... it's thousands of November 13th... with the bodies of children torn apart, women and men with severed, burned, and charred limbs! November 13th that spared no one. Thousands of November 13th parade through our heads with the image of children crying, their entire heads burned, where not a single hair remains. There is no family that has not suffered the loss of a loved one. One day, ISIS soldiers came to "disturb" you in your carefree life at the stadium, in the cafes, and at the Bataclan concert. You have been able to get a small idea of what is going on in Syria. You speak and cry for a hundred deaths while our deaths number in the thousands... You define yourself as victims, while you have united more than 80 countries to fight us without any distinction between women, children, or men! You put in place a good 9-month schedule for a trial! Tell us, how long must ours last? An eternity, no doubt! You lie deliberately and incessantly, but you will be judged on the Day of Judgment or there will be a lot of regrets, and the truth will be revealed (Islamic State, 2021).

Throughout the messages delivered by IS, one thing that is constant is their viewing of their actions as being acts of retribution. IS portray their actions as being ones that are not only defensive, but also offensive only as a result of being forced to retaliate, and also equal in nature to the suffering they too have experienced at the hands of their 'victims' – who they also perceive as perpetrators of crimes. There is emphasis on fairness and equality in their attacks. This is reflected in their stating that France suffered only on a single November 13th, while 'every day' for the Islamic State and those living in Syria 'was November 13th. It's not a single day that we remember... it's thousands of November 13th.' There are similarities drawn between the attacks of the Western coalition against IS and people of Syria, and those of the attacks carried out by IS against the Western coalition. The likeness is highlighted in the article published in Dabiq of Kasasbeh's execution, and is emphasised in both series of magazines, as well as in this letter. Here they point to the deaths of over a hundred people as a result of the coordinated terror attacks of November

13th, while the deaths carried out against Syria number in the ‘thousands,’ and are described as being indiscriminate, which is used to draw a small parallel with ‘what is going on in Syria.’

These are the prevailing messages that are present in the propaganda produced by IS. In the next section of this chapter, I have provided a description of the text, focusing on the language choices that have been made and how groups of people, subjects, and events are portrayed, and the associations made to them.

6.5 Language Choices and Word Associations

In IS and ISKP’s discussions on the struggles of Muslims, the world is divided into two camps – the Islamic way and the un-Islamic way. This is seen in not only the ways in which non-Muslims are spoken of and referred to, but in their perceived division of land also. There is a distinction drawn between dar al-Islam (land of Islam) and dar al-kufr (land of disbelief), the latter of which is often synonymously referred to as dar al-harb (land of war). Throughout IS and ISKP produced literature, Muslims are criticised for choosing to remain in dar al-kufr when they could equally choose to be amongst their own in an Islamic country, or dar al-Islam. This division of land is used to identify the targets and enemies of Islam.

The perceived enemies vary from being countries which actively partake in the targeting of the Islamic State through the forming of coalitions against it, the carrying out of airstrikes and other military operations, or imposing economic sanctions, among many other forms of intervention. It also includes countries or governing bodies who are thought to be ‘traitors,’ and who would ordinarily be considered as allies; in this case, it is usually countries which are predominantly Muslim or are known to be Islamic countries, such as Afghanistan under Taliban rule, and other Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. These countries, as well as others, have been mentioned in at least one magazine and criticised for their policies, actions, and inactions, which have included alliances and deals made with non-Muslim countries which are perceived as being ‘enemies’ of Islam, not imposing strict shari’ah law, and appeasing the non-Muslims in their respective Islamic nations by making un-Islamic allowances in their jurisdiction.

There are also the more hardline extremists who do not require logic or reason for identifying a country or people as an enemy. For this group, the perceived ‘enemy’ is not based on their relationships with non-Muslim countries, or the policies of the country, but based purely on whether or not they are an Islamic country and/or are followers of Islam. If a person is not a Muslim or does not identify as such, they are viewed as being one who rejects Islam, Muhammad, and Allah, as opposed to being viewed as an individual who follows a different religion or God – identification is viewed through a wholly Islamic lens. This is used as justification for carrying out indiscriminate attacks against non-Muslim people and countries, equating dar al-kufr with dar al-harb.

As well as dividing how land is viewed, non-Muslims are referred to as kufr, murtaddīn, and mushrikīn, amongst other terms. Non-Muslims, particularly the non-Muslim Western coalition forces and the Taliban (who are largely accepted as being followers of the Islamic faith, even if their actions do not always reflect Islamic teachings), are described as being ‘arrogant’ (Dabiq 3, 2014: 37), ‘bloodthirsty’ (Dabiq 15, 2016: 7), and ‘deceiving’ (Voice of Khurasan 20, 2023: 13).

Those who are described as being arrogant are described as being such because they reject the proofs of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad and turn away from Islam despite (what IS say are the) proofs of Islam being the true religion. They are also shown as being arrogant for choosing not to cooperate with IS, who portray themselves as having provided options which could have resulted in consequences that were preferable for the Western countries. This point portrays IS as being compelled to carry out an attack and is one that was used in the case of Kenji Goto, who they said was killed due to a lack of cooperation on the part of the Japanese and Jordanian governments, when IS presented (what they claim was) an easy solution. In this case, the Jordanian government are depicted as being the catalyst in the death of Goto, for their part in the negotiations and their perceived overcomplication of the matter at hand by trying to include Kasasbeh in the exchange. This is also seen in issue three of Dabiq in which IS, in their discussion of James Foley’s execution, describe the US government as being ‘arrogant, foolish, and defeated’ (Dabiq 3, 2014: 37-38), which are used as reasons for why the US government chose to turn ‘away from’ Foley ‘with apathy’ and did not negotiate with IS. The word ‘apathy’ used in this context is referenced later in the letter that was supposedly written by Foley, in which it is reported that Foley wrote that

he wishes he was from a country ‘whose government actually cares about its citizens.’ In both of these instances, as well many others, IS absolve themselves of responsibility by highlighting the opportunities that they presented to various governments which would not have led to the deaths of their people, however the governments opted not to cooperate with IS due to their ‘arrogance’ – a message delivered in various issues of extremist propaganda.

The perceived arrogance shown in the Christian’s rejection of Islam, Allah, and the Prophet Muhammad is not only in this rejection but also in their acceptance of Jesus as being the true saviour. In issue 15 of Dabiq, titled Break the Cross, a reference is provided from surah 3:59, which states

Verily the example of Jesus according to Allah is like that of Adam. He formed him of earth and then said, ‘Be,’ so he became. So whoever disputes with you regarding him, after his knowledge has come to you, then say, ‘Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then humbly pray for Allah’s curse to be upon the liars’ (Dabiq 15, 2016: 63).

In quoting this verse from the Qur’an, IS argue that to believe in Jesus in his true state is to accept him in his position in Islam, which is as a Prophet who preceded Islam, but not as the final Prophet, nor the Son of God, nor the Messenger. IS say that they ‘challenge all of the arrogant Christian disbelievers with the challenge presented by Allah for those who lie against Jesus’ (ibid: 63). This feature is one of the longest articles in any issue of Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan, running from pages 46 to 63. The article focuses on the ‘people of the Book,’ and their belief in Judaism and Christianity, and attempts to provide evidence for Islam being the true religion. The article is divided into many subsections, which are titled the following (in chronological order) ‘Seeking the Truth,’ ‘Breaking the Cross,’ ‘The Name of “God,”’ ‘Textual Authenticity,’ ‘From Its Very First Pages,’ ‘Pagan Trinity Versus Monotheist Unity,’ ‘The Fatherless Jesus,’ ‘Was Jesus Really Crucified,’ ‘Paul the Imposter,’ ‘Moving Forward,’ ‘The Prophet of Deuteronomy,’ ‘The Paraclete, A Final Invitation,’ and ‘Conclusion.’ The article, due to its nature, and the message the IS writers are attempting to deliver, is significant and has Qur’anic references heavily embedded in the

developing argument. Here, however, I have attempted to provide an explanation of the overarching argument made and some of the references' religious roots.

The article begins by explaining that the prophets brought with them messages for the people 'often in the form of a scripture, something for the educated to read and comprehend' and which called for 'monotheistic worship of the Creator' (Dabiq 15, 2016: 47); however the majority of the people rejected this. A scriptural reference from 17:89 is used to illustrate what IS refer to as a 'phenomenon of the majority's rejection of the truth' which reads 'And most of mankind refuse [to follow anything] but disbelief' (ibid: 47). Following this, IS mention the Torah and Bible as scriptures that have been accepted as the complete words of God, and which they go on to criticise in the subsections that follow. The Torah is criticised as having been altered while the Qur'an is praised for remaining unchanged since it was penned in its full form. To illustrate the changes made to the Torah, two scriptural references are made which read 'Of the Jews are those who alter the words, changing their meanings' which is taken from verse 4:46 (ibid: 49) and 'And indeed of them is a group who twist their tongues with the Scripture, that you would consider it from the Scripture, but it is not from the Scripture. And they say it is from Allah, but it is not from Allah. And they knowingly speak lies against Allah' taken from verse 3:78 (ibid: 49-50). In their criticism of Christianity, the Dabiq writers state

As for the earliest Christians, including the apostles of Jesus, others in that time, and their students, then they have no public venue. They maintained no authority. Their lives were wrought with persecution and, thus, obscurity. It is no wonder that there is not a single surviving original manuscript of the Christian scriptures, or even an authentic oral transmission thereof (ibid: 50).

The focus here is shifted to Christianity, particularly on the life and death of Jesus and the role he plays in Islam. In this article, it is claimed by the writers of IS that they are able to provide evidence that Jesus was not crucified and argue that 'even per the biblical account of the crucifixion according to the Synoptic Gospels, it can be deduced that Jesus was not crucified' (ibid: 56). In the Islamic tradition, it is believed that Jesus was not killed and then resurrected, but rather that he was raised by Allah, due to return when Islam is in its worst state to guide people back to the right

path. The position that Jesus holds in Islam is stressed as being the true position, and to believe that Jesus was crucified is shown to be not only false, but ‘un-Christian’ in the sense that the IS writers believe that the true Christian knows and believes that Jesus was not crucified – something the article states is evident in the Synoptic Gospels. The only true teachings and rulings are those which are found within Islam. If an individual chooses to follow the teachings of any religion other than Islam, or any nation’s legal system that is not embedded in shari’ah law, they identify themselves as kuffar.

A common theme which appears in extremist propaganda is one in which, through the highlighting of faults of countries which are not ruled by shari’ah law, countries which are viewed as being ‘enemies’ of IS and ISKP are likened to illnesses. This is not something original or unique to IS, and has been commonly used in political speeches such as those of the Nazis in Germany. Goebbels, who was the chief Nazi propagandist, described the Jewish people as ‘a parasitic race that feeds like a foul fungus on the cultures of healthy but ignorant peoples’ (Finlay, 2007: 333). It is argued that this dehumanisation is ‘often due to the lack of real evidence for the accusations’ (Kohl, 2011: 17). In recent Salafi-jihadi literature, this can be seen in the second issue of *One Ummah*,⁵² which is a series produced by al Qaeda, published in June 2020. In this issue, America is likened to a patient with a weak immune system. In the foreword titled *America Burns*, members of al Qaeda demonstrate their ability to draw on current events to politicise Islam, discussing the events and issues Americans, particularly underprivileged Americans, faced at the time. In this issue of *One Ummah*, al Qaeda writers argue that

Corona, internal divisions, racism, an economy in shambles, and attacks by the Mujahideen. These are the five corners of America’s pentagonal coffin. The Glorious Lord continues to demonstrate His powers in the form of America’s undoing. An invisible soldier is busy devouring America’s rotten body. Like a patient who has weak immunity, the

⁵² *One Ummah* is a magazine series produced by al Qaeda; it was originally published in Arabic, and English language translations have subsequently been released. The first English language issue of *One Ummah* was released on the 9th of September 2019, on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. While the series consists of many issues, only three of these have been translated into English at the time the research for this study was conducted. The magazine issues contain articles of substantial length, and discuss current events, economics, as well as historical and personal accounts.

symptoms of the disease have become apparent immediately and its side effects have started taking their toll on the body of the diseased (One Ummah 2, 2020: 6).

Similarly, in the twelfth issue of Dabiq titled Just Terror, IS writers describe those who rule by anything other than the shari'ah as prescribed by Allah as being a cancer. They write that

When the kuffār gained power in the lands of the Muslims, Islam was shamefully abandoned, and faces turned towards promiscuous Europe, the voices of falsehood rose and with it the voices of those hostile towards the people of religion, and the cancer of those who legislate besides Allah [...] ate away at the Ummah's body (Dabiq 12, 2015: 19).

The article above from issue twelve of Dabiq, similar to the article 'They Are Not Lawful Spouses for One Another' in the tenth issue of Dabiq, was also written by Umm Sumayyah Al-Muhājirah and is also written for a female audience. This article, which is titled 'Two, Three or Four,' discusses the permission granted by Allah for the Muslim man to take (up to) four wives at the same time, if he is able to treat them all with equality and fairness. The Qur'anic verse which is used to illustrate this is taken from verse 4:3, which reads

And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one of those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice] (ibid: 19).

In this article, Al-Muhājirah states that this is the shari'ah of Allah, which has been abandoned by the Muslims across Europe and Western countries, who turn away from this teaching for the secular laws of their land. She writes that the 'poisoned words' of the West 'crept into the hearts of the women from the lands of the Muslims' to the extent that IS could not 'find a single woman that is accepting of this issue, except for those whom Allah protected' (ibid: 19). In the framing of the issue of Muslim men being permitted to take multiple wives and the woman's duty to accept this as a God-given rule, women who are hesitant of this or feel discomfort at the prospect of their

husband taking other wives are penalised as having been ‘poisoned’ and are accused of rejecting that which is mandated by Allah. Al-Muhājirah provides a list of reasons for why the ruling of polygamy is one which contains many wisdoms, which include that a woman may be infertile and, rather than divorcing his wife, the husband has been permitted to ‘marry another woman while keeping his infertile wife honored and supported’ (Dabiq 12, 2015: 20). Another reason provided is because women, by their nature have their ‘lives interrupted by phases in which she is unable to fulfill the rights of her husband’ – phases which include menstruation, childbirth, and postpartum bleeding. Al-Muhājirah writes that while a woman is in the midst of one of these phases ‘he can find in his other wives what should prevent him from falling into forbidden or suspicious matters’ (ibid: 20). A teaching is provided from Qur’anic scripture to emphasise the punishment which awaits those who reject Allah’s rulings, which is taken from verse 2:85, which Al-Muhājirah presents as saying

‘So do you believe in part of the Scripture and disbelieve in part? Then what is the recompense for those who do that among you except disgrace in worldly life; and on the Day of Resurrection they will be sent back to the severest of punishment. And Allah is not unaware of what you do’ (ibid: 21).

In referencing this, Al-Muhājirah highlights that there is a punishment which awaits those who choose to discriminate between the rulings of Allah based on their own preferences, and she urges women to not let their ‘blind jealousy’ lead them to dislike ‘this shar’ī ruling, for it is feared that you would thereby fall into apostasy’ (ibid: 21).

Similar to this issue of Dabiq, the twenty-fourth issue of VoK titled They Have Commercialised Allah’s Ayat in Hind contains an article called ‘Pakistan – A Tumor Cell in the Body of the Islamic Ummah,’ in which ISKP writers warn for the ‘Muslims of Pakistan to stay away from these evil scholars,’ who will ‘ruin your world and the Hereafter.’ They argue that ‘if you accept their words and support the murtaddin of this cancerous state, then you will remorse on the Day of Judgement, and Allah the Almighty will punish you severely’ (Voice of Khurasan 24, 2023: 60). The linguistic choices made of likening states that are not ruled by shari’ah law as being cancerous or having some form of illness or ailment which has poor or low immunity is used to illustrate their point

that such states are a disease to be rooted out or cured. The state which flourishes is one that is ruled according to Islamic jurisdiction, and it should be the aim of the Muslim to spread this across the world until all are ruled under the law of Allah, and not the laws of men.

While these are themes that run continuously throughout the magazines which constitute my dataset, there are similar themes in the scriptural references and quotations that are used as proof and justification for the actions, military aims, and political positions of the groups in question, which have been discussed in the next chapter.

6.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have provided a description of the text, taking into consideration the preliminary reading which considers the preferred reading of the materials, the topics that are discussed, running themes, and some language use and its effect on the consumers' initial reading. I have provided an overview of the data collected before providing analysis of this in the chapter that follows.

In the next chapter, Chapter 7, I discuss my findings of the data collected and analysed, and the research conducted into the scriptural references, their significance, and their utilisation. I discuss the data in accordance with TACO's representative interpretation, looking at the visual and linguistic choices made in the production of the text, and the impression that the text makes on the reader when this is put in conjunction with the scriptural references used to support their arguments.

Chapter 7 Representative Interpretation and Social Interpretation

In this chapter, I discuss the data that I have collected and analysed, using TACO's representative interpretation and social interpretation stages. As part of the representative interpretation, I have paid attention to the linguistic choices made in the production of the text, looking at the vocabulary used, any word associations or semantic fields etc. and the effect these choices have on the reader. For the social interpretation, I have combined Fairclough's situational and intertextual contexts. I have looked at the contexts in which the texts were produced – the situational and historical context, as well as the relationships between the texts and discourses – the intertextual context. I begin by discussing the representative interpretation, looking at the context in which Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan were produced, and the influence that this has had on the issues and articles written, with target audiences in mind. I have discussed some of the language used and the linguistic choices made by the writers, as well as the images chosen and published. Following this, I have provided detailed analysis of the findings from my data analysis, which have been presented in graphs and tables, beginning with a discussion of the most frequently referenced verses of the Qur'an by IS and ISKP. I have provided some explanation of the historical context in which the verses were written, both, in the Qur'an and at the time of the production of the magazines, which I hope will aid the reader in their understanding of the preferred reading and interpretation of the text.

7.1 Representative Interpretation

Between the years 2014 and 2016, when IS produced Dabiq, it was evident that the group had significant power, wealth, and expertise, as was demonstrated in the professionalism of the propaganda materials that were produced and distributed. IS, at the time, was a structured organisation, with a hierarchy consisting of various departments which had their own responsibilities and focus. Of these departments, IS operated a media production agency of highly skilled individuals who produced magazines, posters, videos, and other materials. Their skill and professionalism were evident in the production value of the materials produced, with videos such as one focusing on the Paris attacks of 2015, released on the 12th of January 2016 – two months after the attacks took place. In the opening text of this video, the attacks are referred to as 'Operation: Kill Them Wherever You Find Them,' (Islamic State, 2016) which is also the title of

the video. The title refers to a de-contextualised fragment from the Qur'anic verse 2:191, which I have discussed in greater depth in the findings contained in this chapter, and which can be found in section 7.10.

The video contains photos and fragmentary film footage taken from news reports about the attacks, as well as footage of the attackers, who had prerecorded their final words in preparation for when they would ultimately be 'martyred.' The perpetrators of the attack are found, in this video, speaking into the camera explaining their actions and choices. This video has two primary audiences simultaneously: a global Muslim population who IS urge to join the jihad, and the Western world or 'kuffar' who they threaten with further attacks.

Following a lengthy hiatus from producing videos, on the 26th of July 2020, IS released their first video in eighteen months, titled Incite the Believers. This video runs for a little over four minutes in length and calls on Muslims to carry out attacks against the 'kuffar' in ways that are accessible to them, focusing particularly on arson attacks. The video is heavily edited, containing many transitions and animations, demonstrating that the individuals who are responsible for the production of the video are familiar and proficient with their use of specialist software and equipment. Stills from the video are provided below.

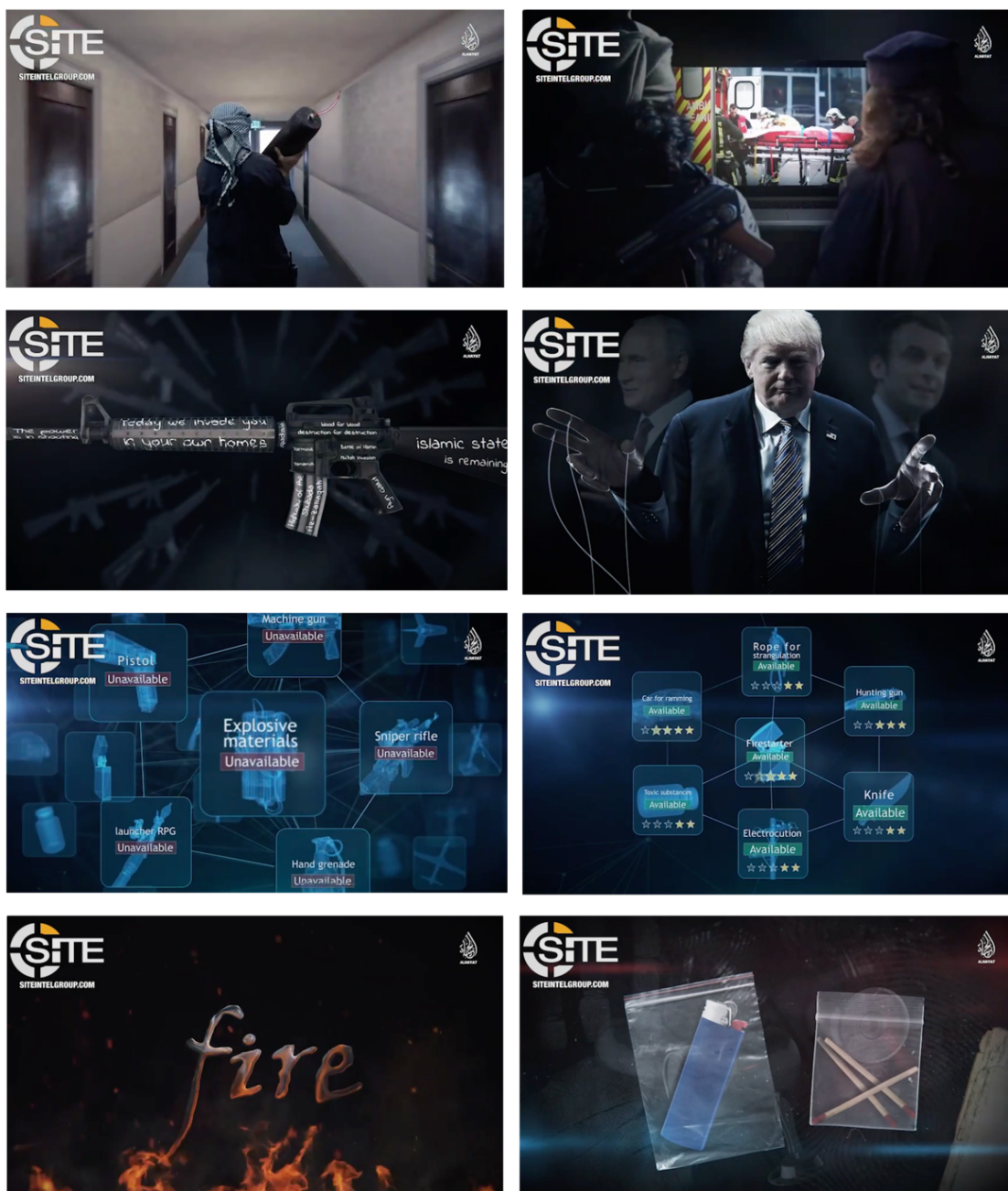


Figure 11. Stills from Incite the Believers (Islamic State, 2020)

The video, *Incite the Believers*, begins with the narrator addressing the viewer and acknowledging the viewers presumed desire to fight the kuffar. The narrator says

My brother, all Muslims in every place under the rule of any sect of kufr and bid'ah, we know that you aspire to avenge for your brothers, who the kuffar and murtaddīn burn with

the fire, and destroyed their cities and villages, and imprisoned them in their jails. You look around yourself and you do not find in your hand a weapon that you can use to subdue the enemy of Allah. We know that you are eager to fulfil what your Lord, the Mighty, the Great Giver, has commanded you: jihad against the mushrikīn and instilling fear in their chests by various methods of terrorism (Islamic State, 2020).

In propaganda produced by jihadists it is common for the writer or speaker to refer to the audience – who they assume is a Muslim ally – as their ‘brother’ or ‘sister,’ drawing an Us and Them divide between the Muslims and non-Muslims. The desire to seek revenge against the perceived enemy of Islam is accepted as the norm for those who engage with IS produced propaganda, examples of which are demonstrated in the above when the speaker says, for example, ‘we know that you aspire to avenge your brothers,’ and ‘We know that you are eager to fulfil what your Lord, the Mighty, the Great Giver, has commanded you: jihad.’ This message is delivered throughout the various forms of propaganda produced by IS and their offshoot ISKP, though there have been marked differences in the delivery of those messages in the production value of the two groups’ work.

Dabiq, published between 2014 and 2016, is a slick and professionally written online magazine available in multiple languages, and demonstrates that those responsible for its production are proficient with using graphic design and photo editing software. During this period, the production value of magazines which were produced by proscribed terrorist groups was high – significantly higher than the production value of the magazine issues produced when the groups were less powerful and influential. Between the years 2014 and 2017, large quantities of propaganda materials were produced by various groups including al Qaeda. In the second issue of their magazine Al Risalah, which was titled Victory Loves Preparation and published on the 25th of October 2015, al Qaeda emphasise the importance of cameras and the documentation of terror attacks. Al Qaeda, as well as other extremist groups, note the importance of reaching a wide audience, saying ‘a gun can stop a heartbeat but a camera can give life to a thousand hearts’ (Al Risalah 2, 2015: 6). The ‘thousand hearts’ the al Qaeda writer mentions here refers to the hearts of the many who can be reached, inspired and influenced through the documentation of attacks. Figure 13 shows a double page spread of pages 5-6 of this issue of Al Risalah. Page 5 is a poster

page which shows the Statue of Liberty drowning, and page 6 shows a camera and its various components arranged to form the shape of a rifle.



Figure 12. Pages 5-6 of Al Risalah, Issue 2 (Al Qaeda, 2015: 5-6)

The high production value of the magazines can be indication of membership being high, and offers some signs of structure within the organisation, with their own media production department and/or company responsible for creating and editing propaganda materials. When an organisation has been small in power and membership, the production value of the materials produced has been lower not only in the quality of photos and editing, but in the length of the issues, as well as the use of language.

Unlike Dabiq, which was produced when IS were at their strongest, ISKP began producing Voice of Khurasan (VoK) when the organisation was at its weakest, with small membership. In the early issues of VoK, it did not demonstrate the same levels of professionalism in the aesthetic or language

use in the text of the magazines. The writer(s) and editor(s) did not show the same skill, ability, or proficiency with using graphic design software, with the issues of the magazine featuring images which were often low in quality and pixelated, with covers which were not as polished as the issues of Dabiq or later issues of VoK.

In the early English language versions of VoK issues, the written text contains many grammatical errors which may indicate that the writer or translator was not proficient in editing in the English language, whereas the textual editing of the articles found in Dabiq were of a significantly higher quality. As the issues of VoK progressed, the quality of the magazine, the images taken and contained, the writing style and language used etc. also increased. Issues 1-8 of the VoK magazine were between 10-35 pages in length, with later issues ranging up to 68 pages in length (in issue 23, of the 25 issues of the magazine analysed).

Below I have provided images of the covers of the first issues of both Dabiq and VoK, as well as a cover from one of the later issues of VoK. Figure 14 shows the first issue of Dabiq, while figures 15 and 16 show the first and twenty-second issue of VoK respectively.

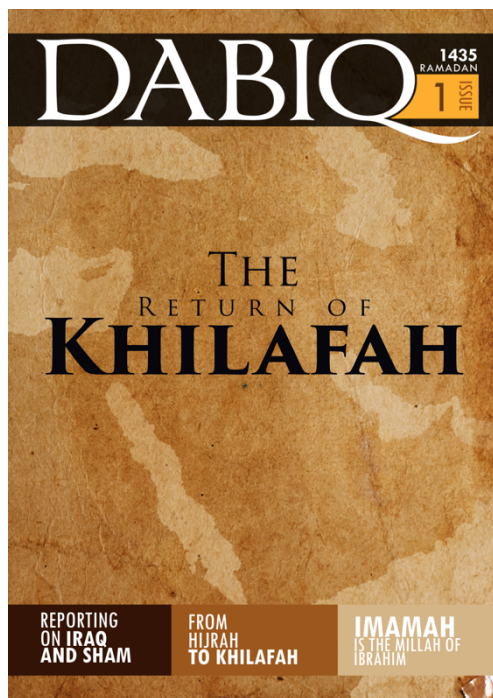


Figure 13. Front Cover of Dabiq, Issue 1



Figure 14. Front Cover of Voice of Khurasan, Issue 1

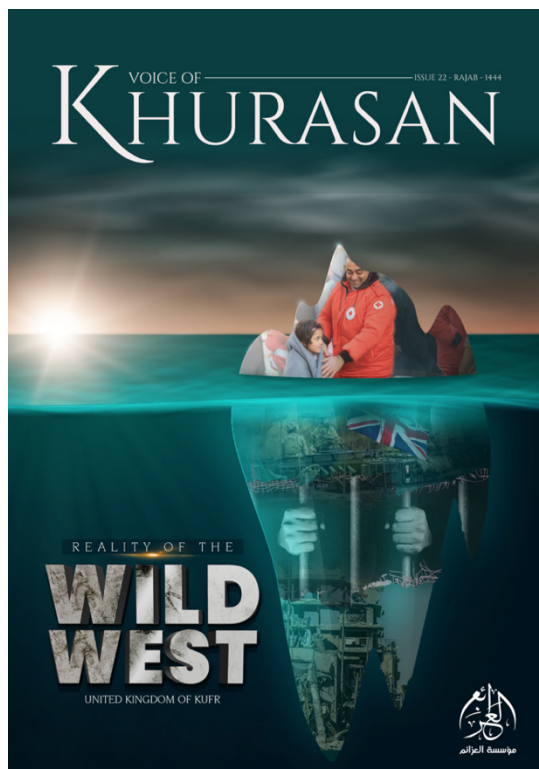


Figure 15. Front Cover of Voice of Khurasan, Issue 22

There are noticeable changes in the writing style and the aesthetic choices made by the editors as the series' progress. The cover of the first issue of VoK is visibly different from the twenty-second issue of the magazine; the former does not demonstrate the same level of skill with editing software that the latter exhibits. The font used in the title and details of publication (e.g. the issue number and the date) in issue 22 of VoK resembles the font that was used in the Dabiq series and is a font that has been used consistently from issue 21 onwards (to the current issue out at the time of writing, which is issue 29). The title of issues 12 to 20 of VoK consistently use a font which reproduces a stencil outline, with all prior issues showing no consistency in their use of font or layout, which change haphazardly.

In the top-left hand corner of the cover of issue 1 of VoK, ISKP's logo is displayed, which depicts the Islamic State's flag being waved over mountains (which one could assume are the mountains of Khurasan province, Afghanistan). Although its placement varies, the logo is displayed on the cover of the first twenty magazine issues. From issue 21, however, along with the significant stylistic changes in the format of the cover and contents of the magazine, as well as the font and aesthetics of the title and publication details, the logo has been abandoned.

7.2 Common Themes and Underlying Messages in Dabiq and VoK

In the first issue of Dabiq, published in July 2014 which is titled The Khilafah, the opening article is called 'Khilafah Declared' which pronounces the formation of the Islamic State and calls on Muslims worldwide to pledge their allegiance. In this issue of Dabiq, the foundations are laid for the issues to follow and the Islamic State's paradigm, on which all their actions and prescriptions rest, is explained and laid bare. In an article titled 'The World Has Divided into Two Camps' IS writers quote Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the first caliph of the Islamic State from 2014 until his death in 2019, as saying

O Ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy – the camp of the muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the jews (Dabiq 1, 2014: 10).

From the first issue of Dabiq, IS recognise the world as having been divided into two ‘camps’ – that of the Muslims and that of the non-Muslims (or the Other⁵³), the latter of which includes all those who associate or ally with non-Muslims. It is stressed that it is the duty of the Muslim to emigrate to join the Islamic State and not remain among the kuffar. The first Qur’anic quote that is referenced in this issue of Dabiq (and the series as a whole) is one that follows the words of al Baghdadi (as quoted above), and reads

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 (Dabiq 1, 2014: 11).

This reference is taken from verse 7:128 and is used to emphasise that making hijrah is obligatory on those who are able, and Allah makes it compulsory upon them to emigrate to join the Islamic nation. In the utilisation of this quote as well as the speech of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, IS further draw a distinction between the two camps calling for the reader to identify themselves as belonging to one or the other, specifying that there is ‘no third camp present.’ This call on identity formation and othering is common in extremist literature with many examples of this scattered throughout the writings of IS and ISKP, as well as other proscribed groups. By deciding which camp one belongs to, the individual determines whether or not they stand with and support IS – if they are allies or enemies of the Islamic State. IS view all those who ally themselves with the West, or with those considered to be ‘kufr,’ as being non-believers themselves and, in turn, enemies of Islam. This is demonstrated in their use of the Qur’anic quote

⁵³ Othering is the act of treating a person or group as though they are not part of an in-group and are different from this in-group in some way. Dimensions of othering include race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc. The boundaries and meanings that result from othering influence people daily in the decisions that they make, including in the workplace such as who they hire, and in their personal life e.g. who they marry. ‘Individual acts of discrimination on the basis of group-based stereotypes harms its victims, but group based categories and meanings are social and collective’ (Powell & Menendian, 2016: 25).

O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are allies of one another and whoever is ally to them among you – then indeed, he is [one] of them (Dabiq 4, 2014: 44).

This Qur’anic verse is taken from 5:51 and is the most frequently referenced verse in both the Dabiq and VoK series (which I have discussed in section 7.4); it highlights the importance of uniting the Muslims together against the Jews and Christians and not befriending them. In IS’s call for Muslims to unite against the enemy, they popularly quote verse 3:103 which says to ‘hold tight to the rope of Allah’ (Dabiq 15, 2016; Voice of Khurasan 21, 2023) – a verse I have discussed in greater depth in section 7.7 of this chapter.

It is apparent from the opening articles of Dabiq that the primary goal of publishing the magazine is to attract others to join IS in Syria and Iraq. This is proven further in the foreword of the second issue of Dabiq in which IS write that

The first priority is to perform hijrah from wherever you are to the Islamic State, from dārul-kufr to dārul-Islām. Rush to perform it as Mūsā (‘alayhis-salām) rushed to his Lord, saying, {And I hastened to You, my Lord, that You be pleased} [Tāhā: 84]. Rush to the shade of the Islamic State with your parents, siblings, spouses, and children. There are homes here for you and your families. You can be a major contributor towards the liberation of Makkah, Madīnah, and al-Quds. Would you not like to reach Judgment Day with these grand deeds in your scales (Dabiq 2, 2014: 3).

The advice given to those who are unable to perform hijrah (such as the elderly, sick, or poor etc.) is that it is possible to support the Islamic State and fulfil one’s duty in other ways, such as organising bay’āt (pledges of allegiance) to the Khalifah Ibrahim⁵⁴ in their respective locations. The writer(s) of Dabiq argue that one ought to ‘Gather people in the masājīd [mosque], Islamic centers, and Islamic organizations, for example, and make public announcements of bay’ah’ (ibid:

⁵⁴ Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al-Badri is the full name of the leader and Caliph of the Islamic State most commonly known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

3). If one considers themselves Muslim and is able, however, it is compulsory that they perform hijrah.

While IS and ISKP (as well as other extremist groups) strive towards their goals in their respective geographical domains – with IS being predominantly focused on Iraq and Syria, and ISKP focused on Afghanistan – they show an awareness for greater geopolitics and the issues that concern Muslims. An example of this is the drawing of attention to the Israel-Palestine conflict, particularly the situation in Gaza. In issue 2 of Dabiq, the writers declare that

As for the massacres taking place in Gaza against the Muslim men, women, and children, then the Islamic State will do everything within its means to continue striking down every apostate who stands as an obstacle on its path towards Palestine (Dabiq 2, 2014: 4).

The drawing of attention to the subject of Israel-Palestine is not something unique to IS and is an issue that has been raised by many globally over several decades – by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Individuals, organisations, and countries have allied with either the Israeli or Palestinian state. While IS have, on many occasions, highlighted the worsening situation(s) in Syria and Iraq, in which wars were being led by the Western coalition forces to eradicate the Islamic State, they have also emphasised the Palestinian right to freedom with Palestine itself being used as incitement for Muslims to join IS. The Palestinian people and their struggle is mentioned in issue 20 of VoK which is titled The Rise of the Far Right Extremists in Palestine and the Silence Before [the] Storm for the Muslims. In an article of the same name, which is the special feature for this issue and runs for nine pages, the writer states that

Palestine is the name of [a] long forgotten obligation for the Islamic Ummah, indulged in comforts and unprecedented heedlessness about the religion. While the Ummah is busy with their comfortable lifestyle, minding their own business, finding pleasure in entertainment, and raising empty chants of the issue of Palestinian Muslims in the general assembly of United Nations (against Islam and Shari'ah of Allah) and football world cup, the cursed Jews – with the new label of “Zionism” – are revising their master plan of uprooting the last traces of Islam and Muslims, not only from Palestine, but also from other parts of the Arab worlds. The rise

of far right Jews in the Israeli democracy is part of that blueprint for driving out the Palestinian Muslims (Voice of Khurasan 20, 2023: 35).

In this article, the writer(s) of ISKP provide a detailed historical account of what ‘led to the establishment of the cancerous state of Israel’ (ibid: 36). In this article, the writer references Human Rights Watch, which is an international NGO that conducts research on human rights violations, which they describe as being ‘a western puppet organization promoting [a] secular image of the infidel west’ and its recognition of human rights violations ‘in Palestine by the Jewish occupier’ (ibid: 41). Human Rights Watch are quoted as saying

Whether it’s a child imprisoned by a military court or shot unjustifiably, or a house demolished for lack of an elusive permit, or checkpoints where only settlers are allowed to pass, few Palestinians have escaped serious rights abuses during this 50-year occupation (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Voice of Khurasan 20, 2023: 41).

The writer asks how it is possible that the ‘western infidels have acknowledged’ the human rights violations suffered by Palestinians while ‘the ignorant Muslims throughout the Muslim lands are literally indifferent to the Palestine issue’ (Voice of Khurasan 20, 2023: 41). In the closing of this article, the writer states that history has shown that oppressed Muslims have ‘never succeeded in changing their fate through peaceful demonstration in front of the infidels or negotiation with them being in an inferior position’ (ibid: 44). The writer argues that ‘the solution to the problem of the Ummah should be sought only in the purely Islamic way, which is jihad in the cause of Allah’ (ibid: 44). This duty is not only one which befalls the oppressed Muslims of Palestine but applies to all Muslims, as there is a duty and obligation in Islam to protect fellow Muslims and Islam itself.

This call for Muslims to emigrate to join a jihad that has its roots in the political and social injustices faced by a Muslim country is reminiscent of both the Bosnian and the Soviet-Afghan wars, which were the first instances of mass migration for a jihad. In both cases, the world witnessed individuals (and groups) who travelled to fight for and with Muslims living in an Islamic country that was under threat by a non-Muslim aggressor.

While the Palestinian conflict and people feature in both Dabiq and VoK, there is a significant difference between the narratives in either series. In Dabiq, while Palestine is mentioned in issue 2 of the series, in which the writer uses the struggles of the Palestinian people to highlight the perceived blind-eye of the Muslims to the unfolding and enduring struggle, in all other cases in this series, Palestine is only mentioned in passing. The persecution of Palestinians is not mentioned again in the series as in the same way that it is in the second issue; instead references made to Palestine recount religious teachings and stories which feature Palestine, without placing particular focus on any political or social issues faced by the Palestinian people.

VoK on the other hand places greater emphasis on, and acknowledges, the issues that Muslims face globally particularly focusing on the persecution of Muslims in various parts of the world, including India, China, and Palestine, as well as any discrimination faced in Western countries, such as France. This difference, with VoK placing heavy emphasis on the injustices Muslims face in various parts of the world – particularly in the Middle East, and South and East Asia – is reflected in the assumed target audience.

Dabiq seems to be focused on a wider Western audience, calling for individuals to not only make hijrah to join IS, but also to carry out attacks from their countries of origin. The writers show an awareness of Western politics and current events, which are taken into consideration when articles are written and when actions are recommended. The West is not only the target audience but the target of IS violence and aggression. VoK, on the other hand, through their focus on the struggles of Muslims in the Middle East to Asia regions, predominantly target readers from these areas, calling for them to make hijrah to join ISKP in Afghanistan. The primary target of ISKP's military and political agenda are the Taliban, as well as those persecuting Muslims in various countries. This can be seen through the social and political issues which are highlighted, the types of articles published, a strong emphasis on the shortcomings of the Taliban (particularly in the first issue of VoK which is titled Who Are the Taliban?), and countries perceived as being complicit in the persecution of Muslims.

On the morning of Saturday the 7th of October 2023, Palestinian militant groups began a coordinated surprise offensive on Israel known as Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, which was organised

and led by Hamas. Hamas is an extremist Sunni political party and military organisation which was founded in 1973 as a result of the First Intifada against the Israeli occupation. In 2006, Hamas was able to win the Palestinian legislative election due to their emphasis on armed resistance against the enduring Israeli occupation – which garnered significant support from the Palestinian population. Following this, in 2007, Hamas took control of the Gaza strip, which it has governed since. The attacks carried out on the 7th of October led by Hamas included the storming of a music festival in Re'im in which 260 people were killed, as well as a bombardment of rockets launched from Gaza into Israel. At least 1400 Israelis were killed as a result of this terror attack, with individuals noting that such a large number of Jewish people had not been killed in any one singular day since the Holocaust. While this was a surprise attack, Hamas justify the offensive as being a direct response to the persecution of Palestinian people by Israelis, the Israeli settlers in Palestine, and their treatment of and violence shown towards Palestinians, particularly those living in Gaza. In response to the attacks, Israel began airstrikes in Gaza, killing 26,257 Palestinians as of the 27th of January 2024, with nearly two million people displaced. In an immediate response to the attacks, Israel cut off the delivery of medical aid, electricity, fuel, food, and water to the region, some of which Israel later permitted the delivery of in small quantities. At the time of writing, there is a humanitarian crisis which grows increasingly dire with millions of Palestinians facing starvation and hypothermia, along with a shortage of medical supplies, aid and hospitals.

The attacks carried out by Hamas and Israel's response to it has been highly debated and drawn much controversy with millions globally calling for a ceasefire, while others argue that Israel is within its rights to retaliate. US President, Joe Biden, speaking to Israelis said that it is important to get justice but 'while you feel that rage, don't be consumed by it. After 9/11, we were enraged in the United States. While we sought justice and got justice, we also made mistakes' (Burke, 2023). Some have equated sympathising with the Palestinian people with showing support for Hamas and being anti-Semitic, while others have equated sympathising with the Israeli people with showing support for the persecution, displacement, and genocide of Palestinian people. There are extreme views on both sides with some journalists, when speaking about those who show inclination towards or support for Hamas, addressing the Prime Minister of the UK, Rishi Sunak, writing

Don't just say you stand against terror – show it. Don't just say you stand beside Israel – show it. Treat these people as we did the supporters of Isis. Take their passports, strip their citizenship, [forcibly] remove them from this country. We neither want nor need them, and nor will the rest of the world. They can take their chances in Gaza. The 'peace rave' is over (Murray, 2023: 15).

Individuals, groups, and nations have called for a ceasefire from Israel, noting that there are war crimes being committed, and that attacks have largely been indiscriminate with civilian casualties growing exponentially with a lack of medical aid, supply, and facilities present to treat them. In early January 2024, South Africa filed a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice at the Hague on the grounds that Israel was committing a genocidal war on Gaza (Democracy Now, 2024). The outcome of the trial is yet to be determined. The actions of the Israeli state in their treatment of Palestinian civilians has seen condemnation from many, including groups such as al Qaeda, who released a series of video messages titled Words in Support of Our Heroic Brothers in Palestine. The Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), which is an extremist propaganda organisation (that has ties to al Qaeda as well as other proscribed groups) published a statement, titled Statement Regarding the Blessed al-Aqsa Flood Battle, showing their support for and allyship with the people of Gaza, while also calling on Muslims to do the same. The writers at GIMF publish that

Today we are seeing destruction, death, and terror in Gaza. This horrific crime is being committed by Israel, in partnership with the Crusader and international Zionist regimes, as well as the Arab regimes in the Islamic world. This horrific matter against our people in Gaza compels to say that the Muslim peoples must know that they must support their brothers. Such events as these are what distinguish the good from the bad (Global Islamic Media Front, 2023).

Other extremist groups have not only shown their support through words, but through suspected actions too. A British couple on holiday in a Ugandan safari park were ambushed by suspected members of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a rebel outfit which has ties to the Islamic State, on the 17th of October 2023 (Cobham, 2023). The couple, who were on their honeymoon, were shot dead along with their guide. In the past, it has been common for jihadists to retaliate by

carrying out attacks against citizens of nations who have supported or allied with a perceived enemy of Islam. It is feared that attacks such as this will likely rise after what has been a lull in terror activity globally for several years.

In December 2023, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula published a video titled Inspire – What America and the West Do Not Expect: Open Source Jihad To Restore Palestine. This video is 45 minutes long and calls for Muslims to avenge those suffering in Palestine by carrying out attacks against the US, and the West at large. The video contains many scenes of the horrors from the war in Gaza, including the suffering and deaths of children and scenes from inside hospitals. The video specifically calls for individuals in the West to carry out suicide bombings on airplanes identifying desired targets such as Delta, American Airlines, British Airways, Easy Jet, and Air France among others; the video features a near 30 minute guide on how to build a bomb at home using easily accessible materials. The narrator, while calling for jihad in support of the Muslims in Palestine says

You must have realised by now that you cannot lift this injustice except through jihad for the sake of Allah. So show your sorrow for the suffering of your Muslim brothers, and avenge them. Teach them that the ummah of Islam is like one body. If one organ suffers in the body, then the entire body responds to it by with sleeplessness and fever (Al-Malahem Media, 2023).

This video contains several clips of Anwar al-Awlaki speaking into the camera and encouraging the viewer to join the jihad against the US. His argument, and the video in its entirety, conclude with al-Awlaki saying

Hence, my advice to you is this – you have two choices: either hijrah or jihad. You either leave or you fight. [...] I specifically invite the youth to either fight in the West or join their brothers in the fronts of jihad (ibid).

Many have published videos and statements in support of Gaza and Palestinians since (what is called) the ‘Israel-Hamas War’ began and which, much like Dabiq and VoK show their support for

Muslims and call on others to support their fellow Muslim brothers and sisters. While Dabiq focuses on the involvement of Western coalition forces in Islamic affairs including wars, it also places heavy emphasis on more social issues including, for example, the depiction of religious figures, or statements and comments made by public figures. IS have a clear aim of spreading Islam and growing the caliphate, which seems to be a secondary concern for ISKP. The primary concern for ISKP is to overthrow the Taliban, despite the Taliban also being a Muslim group. In an article in issue five of VoK titled ‘They Intend to Put Out the Light of Allah With Their Tongues,’ ISKP identify the Taliban as being kuffar. The writer(s) state

By the will of Allah, we will continue to target the nations of kufr, without differentiating amongst them. And our clear message to the murtadd Taliban is that the eyes of the mujahideen are fixed on neighbouring countries, Iran, China, Uzbekistan, and other nations of Kufr. By Allah, we will strike them just as we strike you while you fail miserably to cover our actions to please your masters [the US]. The Islamic State remains and will continue to do so with the permission of Allah (Voice of Khurasan 5, 2022: 12).

There are many reasons provided in the issues of VoK for why ISKP identify the Taliban as kuffar, with the sale of opium being one such example. In issue 13 of Dabiq in an article titled ‘Interview With: The Wālī of Khurāsān,’ which was published six years before the first issue of VoK, the IS interviewer asks the interviewee known as the ‘wālī of Khurāsān’ if the ‘nationalist Taliban movement continue to allow farmers to sell opium? How is the Wilāyah dealing with this serious phenomenon?’ (Dabiq 13, 2014: 51) to which the ‘wālī’ responds

There’s no doubt that the nationalist Taliban movement has permitted farmers and merchants to grow and sell opium. Rather, the matter has reached the point that the movement itself harvests opium, and even worse than that is that the Taliban themselves transport opium and heroin in their personal vehicles, charging a fee to the sellers and the

addicts! They also take a 10% cut as well as taxes from them. Akhtar Mansour⁵⁵ himself is considered as being from the major dealers of these narcotics (Dabiq 13, 2014: 51).

While the above extract is from an issue of Dabiq published in 2016, the Taliban and their relationship with narcotics is an issue that is brought up repeatedly in IS media, including in 2022, in the first issue of VoK. Here, while speaking about the Taliban, the ISKP writer says

[The Taliban] adopted a laissez-faire approach to the drug industry where they deemed the abusing of drugs as Haram and the trading of it as halal. Soon the main income of the group came through the poppy trade and farmers were given full security and support by the Taliban. In order to keep the people happy just to stay in power, they made halal what Allah and His Messenger made Haram and continued in their ignorance (Voice of Khurasan 1, 2022: 7).

This may be taken from a teaching of Ibn Taymiyyah's, which states that whenever a person makes something or considers it halal for himself when Allah has made it haram and vice versa, then that individual is to be considered a non-believer or kuffar (Black et al., 2013). The Taliban is criticised by similar extremist groups for not following the shari'ah as Allah intended, and for their adoption of an Islam that is viewed by IS and ISKP as being more aligned to the perceived Western ideal(s) of the religion. IS's view of the Taliban as being a pawn and bending to the whims of the Western allies is one that recurs between the two series of magazines, as well as other propaganda materials – which is highlighted consistently throughout the VoK series.

In the next section of this chapter, I have discussed the data that I have collected and the results from the analysis conducted. I have outlined how I have collected and identified the data that was necessary for my research, which I have chosen to display in tables and graphs for ease of understanding. I begin by identifying the Qur'anic quotes that were referenced most frequently in

⁵⁵ Akhtar Mansour was the second supreme leader of the Taliban, and succeeded the founder Mullah Omar. Mansour was the supreme leader between July 2015 and May 2016, when he was killed in Pakistan in a US drone strike.

both series, followed by a scoping review of the data collected, before analysing the findings in greater detail according to TACO's representative and social interpretation.

7.3 Preliminary Findings from the Data Collection

The Qur'an consists of 114 surahs (chapters), which contain ayats (verses). The number of verses in each surah are unequal, ranging from 3 in surah al-Kawthar (surah number 108) to 286 verses in surah al-Baqarah (the second surah in the Qur'an), which I have taken into consideration in my data analysis. In the analysis of the data collected, I have identified a total number of 1,348 instances in which the Qur'an was quoted between the fifteen issues of Dabiq and the first twenty-five issues of Voice of Khurasan (VoK). I have chosen not to include any references made to hadith, as these were not always direct quotes but were often narrated in part by the writers of the articles or mentioned fragmentarily. Of the 1,348 quotes identified, 1,004 were unique (having been referenced only once) while 345 of the quotes were repetitions. Of the Qur'anic verses that were referenced more than once in the respective magazine series', I have identified which specific verses were referenced most frequently for each magazine, as well as the surahs that were referenced most frequently both respectively, in Dabiq and VoK, as well as collectively, which are shown in the tables contained in this section. For both the Dabiq and VoK series, I have chosen to present the twenty Qur'anic quotes that are referenced most frequently.

In the tables below (figures 16 and 17), the scriptural references are listed in order of frequency – of how many times they are mentioned in the Dabiq and VoK series respectively. The Qur'anic quotes referenced in the English translation copies of the two online magazine series that I have analysed are translations from Arabic to English. Practically, this means that there are slight variations in the translations of the verses, which differ depending on the translation one consults and the individual who does the translating. The quotes used in the 'Qur'anic quotations' column in figures 16 and 17 are taken verbatim from issues of Dabiq and VoK, with the aim of representing IS and ISKP's intentions as accurately as possible while also minimising my own subjective interpretation in selecting a translation. In the remainder of the chapters which follow, any Qur'anic quotations offered by myself are taken from the Abdullah Yusuf Ali translation of the Holy Qur'an, published by Wordsworth (A. Y. Ali, 2000), unless otherwise stated.

From the quotes that are referenced most frequently, there are themes that can be identified that run throughout the issues. In both Dabiq and VoK, there is clear emphasis on not taking non-Muslims as allies, fighting against kufr, and remaining true to the cause of Allah while striving to be a good Muslim. The Qur'anic quotes are offered to provide justification for the opinions expressed in the text and provide a religious account and reason for the pursuing of IS' various political and economic goals.

While the focus of this thesis is Dabiq and VoK, I have also analysed other magazines in the wider Salafi-jihadi corpus, including but not limited to One Ummah, Al Risalah, and Inspire, which I have mentioned occasionally where appropriate to provide wider context to the analysis.

After identifying the verses referenced in the magazines, which were put into a table with analysis of their interpretation, I transferred the information of the specific scriptural references into an Excel database which I created. Here I created multiple sets of data including a set which displays every verse referenced in each issue of a magazine (categorised by magazine issue), followed by a dataset which shows all verses referenced in a magazine series as a whole, which was then used to identify how many times each verse appeared in a magazine series as a whole. This information was used to create the graphs in figures 20-23.

Beginning with figures 16 and 17, in these tables I have provided my findings of the most frequently referenced verses in Dabiq and VoK respectively.

Most Frequently Referenced Verses in Dabiq

Popularity	Scriptural reference	Number of times referenced	Qur'anic quotation
1	5:51	10	O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are allies of one another and whoever is ally to them among you – then indeed, he is [one] of them (Dabiq 4, 2014).
2	8:39	9	And fight them until there is no fitnah and until the religion, all of it, is for Allah (Dabiq 6, 2014).
3	9:5	9	And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the mushrikīn wherever you find them (Dabiq 7, 2015).
4	59:14	9	They will not all fight you except within fortified cities or from behind walls. Their adversity among themselves is severe. You think they are together but their hearts are diverse. That is because they are a people who do not reason (Dabiq 4, 2014).
5	3:103	8	And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided (Dabiq 5, 2014).
6	4:76	6	Those who fight in the cause of Allah, and those who disbelieve fight in the cause of tāghūt. So fight against the allies of Shaytān. Indeed, the plot of Shaytān has ever been weak (Dabiq 8, 2015).
7	4:97	5	Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves – [the angels] will say, “In what [condition] were you?” They will say, “Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?” For those, their refuge is Hell – and evil it is as a destination (Dabiq 8, 2015).

8	8:73	5	And those who disbelieved are allies to one another. If you do not do the same, there will be fitnah on earth and great corruption (Dabiq 2, 2014).
9	35:43	5	But you will never find in the sunnah of Allah any change, and you will never find in the sunnah of Allah any alteration (Dabiq 12, 2015). But the evil plot does not encompass except its own people (Dabiq 6, 2014).
10	2:217	4	And they will continue to fight you until they turn you back from your religion if they are able. And whoever of you reverts from his religion [to disbelief] and dies while he is a disbeliever – for those, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and those are the companions of the Fire, they will abide therein eternally (Dabiq 7, 2015).
11	4:138-139	4	Inform the hypocrites that theirs is a painful torment; those who take the disbelievers as allies instead of the believers. Do they seek honor with them? For verily all honor belongs to Allah (Dabiq 14, 2016).
12	5:54	4	O you who believe! Whoever of you turns back on his religion, then Allah will bring a people whom He loves and love Him, humble to the believers, mighty against the disbelievers, waging jihad for the cause of Allah, and not fearing the blame of the blamer (Dabiq 15, 2016).
13	7:128	4	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 (Dabiq 8, 2015).
14	9:24	4	Say, “If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your relatives, wealth which you have obtained,

			commerce wherein you fear decline, and dwellings with which you are pleased are more beloved to you than Allah and His Messenger and jihād in His cause, then wait until Allah executes His command. And Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people (Dabiq 10, 2015).
15	12:21	4	Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security (Dabiq 5, 2014).
16	12:40	4	Those whom you worship besides Him are but names which you have named, you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no authority. Legislation is not but for Allah. He has commanded that you worship not except Him. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know (Dabiq 14, 2016).
17	42:13	4	He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Nūh and that which We have revealed to you, and what We enjoined upon Ibrāhīm and ‘Īsā – to establish the religion and not be divided therein (Dabiq 11, 2015).
18	48:29	4	Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those with him are forceful against the kuffār, merciful among themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating, seeking bounty from Allah and [His] pleasure. Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration. That is their description in the Tawrāh. And their description in the Injīl is as a plant which produced its offshoots and strengthens them so they grow firm and

			stand upon their stalks, delighting the sowers – so that Allah may enrage by them the kuffār. Allah has promised those who believe and do righteous deeds among them forgiveness and a great reward (Dabiq 13, 2016).
19	58:22	4	You do not find any people believing in Allah and the Last Day having mutual love for whoever opposed Allah and His Messenger (Dabiq 13, 2016).
20	60:4	4	There has already been for you an excellent example in Ibrahim and those with him, when they said to their people, ‘Indeed, we are disassociated from you and from whatever you worship other than Allah. We have rejected you, and there has arisen, between us and you, enmity and hatred forever until you believe in Allah alone (Dabiq 15, 2016).

Figure 16. Most Frequently Referenced Verses in Dabiq

Most Frequently Referenced Verses in Voice of Khurasan

Popularity	Scriptural reference	Number of times referenced	Qur'anic quotation
1	5:51	10	O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you – then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people (Voice of Khurasan 5, 2022).
2	2:214	6	Or do you think that you will enter Paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by poverty and hardship and were shaken until [even their] messenger and those who believed with him said, “When is the help of Allah?” Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near (Voice of Khurasan 19, 2022).
3	3:103	6	And hold firmly to the rope of Allah and do not be divided. Remember Allah’s favor upon you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts, so you—by His grace—became brothers. And you were at the brink of a fiery pit and He saved you from it. This is how Allah makes His revelations clear to you, so that you may be ‘rightly’ guided (Voice of Khurasan 12, 2022).
4	4:75	6	And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed among men, women, and children who say, “Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Yourself a helper” (Voice of Khurasan 9, 2022).

5	60:4	6	Allah [...] says: There has already been for you an excellent pattern in Ibrahim and those with him, when they said to their people, “Indeed, we are disassociated from you and from whatever you worship other than Allah. We have denied you, and there has appeared between us and you animosity and hatred forever until you believe in Allah alone” – except for the saying of Ibrahim to his father, “I will surely ask forgiveness for you, but I have not [power to do] for you anything against Allah. Our Lord, upon You we have relied, and to You we have returned, and to You is the destination (Voice of Khurasan 6, 2022).
6	6:121	5	If you obey them, you will surely become an idolater (Voice of Khurasan 11, 2022).
7	8:36	5	Verily for those who disbelieve spend their wealth to hinder (men) from the Path of Allâh, and so will they continue to spend it; but in the end it will become an anguish for them. Then they will be overcome. And those who disbelieve will be gathered unto Hell (Voice of Khurasan 3, 2022).
8	9:39	5	If you don’t go forth on the expedition, He will make you endure a grievous suffering and will choose instead of you a people better than you and you will do Him no harm at all. For Allah is Possessor of every power to do all He will (Voice of Khurasan 13, 2022).
9	9:111	5	Surely, Allah has purchased of the believers their lives and their belongings and in return has promised that they shall have Paradise. They fight in the way of Allah, and slay and are slain. Such is the promise He has made incumbent upon Himself in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. Who is more faithful to the

			covenant than Allah? Rejoice, then, in the bargain you have made with Him. That indeed is the mighty triumph (Voice of Khurasan 18, 2022).
10	2:193	4	And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is for Allah. But if they desist then there is no punishment except against the unjust (Voice of Khurasan 13, 2022).
11	2:195	4	And spend in the cause of Allah and do not cast yourself into ruin with your own hand, and do good to others, and verily Allah loves the doers of good to others (Voice of Khurasan 8, 2022).
12	2:216	4	Perhaps you dislike a thing which is good for you, and that you like something which is bad for you. Allah knows while you know not (<u>Voice of Khurasan 1, 2022</u>).
13	5:44	4	And whosoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed, such are the kaafiroon (disbelievers) (Voice of Khurasan 17, 2022).
14	5:72	4	Verily, whosoever sets up partners in worship with Allah, then Allah has forbidden Paradise for him, and the Fire will be his abode. And for the Zalimun (polytheists and wrong-doers) there are no helpers (Voice of Khurasan 5, 2022).
15	7:74	4	And remember when He made you successors after the Aad and settled you in the land, [and] you take for yourselves palaces from its plans and carve, from the mountains, homes. Then remember the favors of Allah and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption (Voice of Khurasan 9, 2022).
16	8:30	4	But they plan, and Allah plans. And Allah is the best of planners (Voice of Khurasan 13, 2022).

17	8:39	4	Fight them until there is no fitnah, and the religion is only for Allah (Voice of Khurasan 25, 2023).
18	9:38	4	But if you ask them, they will say, “We are only gossiping and jesting.” You ask them, “Were you jesting with Allah, His revelations, and His Messengers? Do not make excuse. You turned disbelievers after having come to faith (Voice of Khurasan 17, 2022).
19	16:36	4	And We certainly sent into every nation a messenger, [saying], “Worship Allah and avoid Taghut.” And among them were those whom Allah guided, and among them were those upon whom error was [deservedly] decreed. So proceed through the earth and observe how was the end of the deniers (Voice of Khurasan 20, 2023).
20	18:105	4	Their reward will be Hell, for their disbelief and mockery of My signs and My Messengers (Voice of Khurasan 22, 2023).

Figure 17. Most Frequently Referenced Verses in Voice of Khurasan

When looking at figures 16 and 17, there is some overlap between the most referenced Qur’anic verses in Dabiq and VoK, which have been displayed in the table below – figure 18. In the ‘Verse’ column of figure 18, I have listed the verses that appear most frequently in both Dabiq and VoK and which, in turn, are displayed in figures 16 and 17. The other columns (from left to right) show the number of times the verse is referenced in each series, as well as the verses themselves as they are presented in the magazine issue. For the verses, I have chosen to quote them as they appear in the issues to diminish any influence from my own reading and interpretation.

Verse	Number of references in Dabiq	Number of references in VoK	Qur'anic quotation
5:51	10	10	O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you – then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people (Voice of Khurasan 5, 2022).
8:39	9	4	And fight them until there is no fitnah and until the religion, all of it, is for Allah (Dabiq 6, 2014).
3:103	8	6	And hold firmly to the rope of Allah and do not be divided. Remember Allah's favor upon you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts, so you—by His grace—became brothers. And you were at the brink of a fiery pit and He saved you from it. This is how Allah makes His revelations clear to you, so that you may be 'rightly' guided (Voice of Khurasan 12, 2022).
60:4	4	6	Allah [...] says: There has already been for you an excellent pattern in Ibrahim and those with him, when they said to their people, "Indeed, we are disassociated from you and from whatever you worship other than Allah. We have denied you, and there has appeared between us and you animosity and hatred forever until you believe in Allah alone" – except for the saying of Ibrahim to his father, "I will surely ask forgiveness for you, but I have not [power to do] for you anything against Allah. Our Lord, upon You we have relied, and to You we have returned, and to You is the destination (Voice of Khurasan 6, 2022).

Figure 18. Verses Referenced Most Frequently Between the Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan Series

While there are some similarities between the Qur’anic verses most frequently referenced in Dabiq and VoK, for example that verse 5:51 is referenced the most in both series and can be identified as being the most ‘popular’ in the two series of Salafi-jihadi literature, what is most interesting is the difference between the surahs that are referenced most and least frequently in both series. While the difference between the verses that are referenced the most and least is not substantial, ranging between zero and ten, the difference in the number of times particular surahs are referenced is much greater. Below I have provided graphs which illustrate the surahs referenced in Dabiq, and VoK, as well as how they compare.

SURAHS REFERENCED IN DABIQ

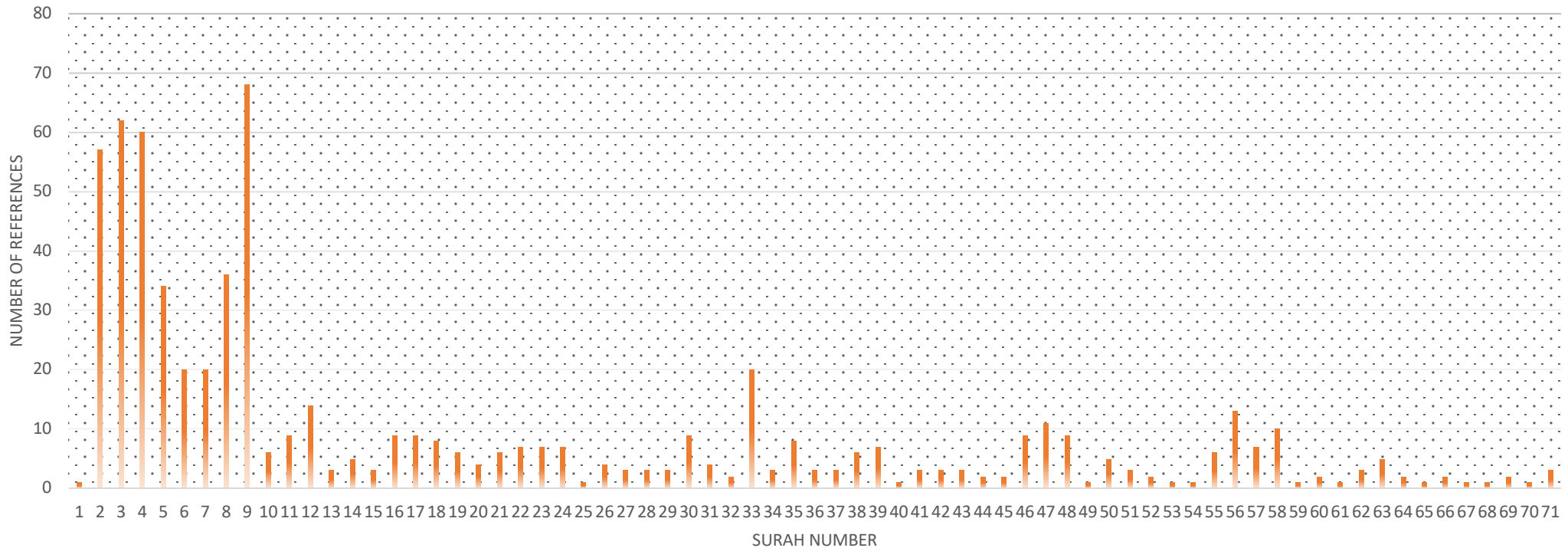


Figure 19. Surahs Referenced in Dabiq

In Dabiq, the surah that is referenced the most is surah nine, which is surah at-Tawbah (The Repentance), followed by surah three, al-Imran (The Family of Imran) and surah four, an-Nisa (The Women).

SURAHS REFERENCED IN VOICE OF KHURASAN

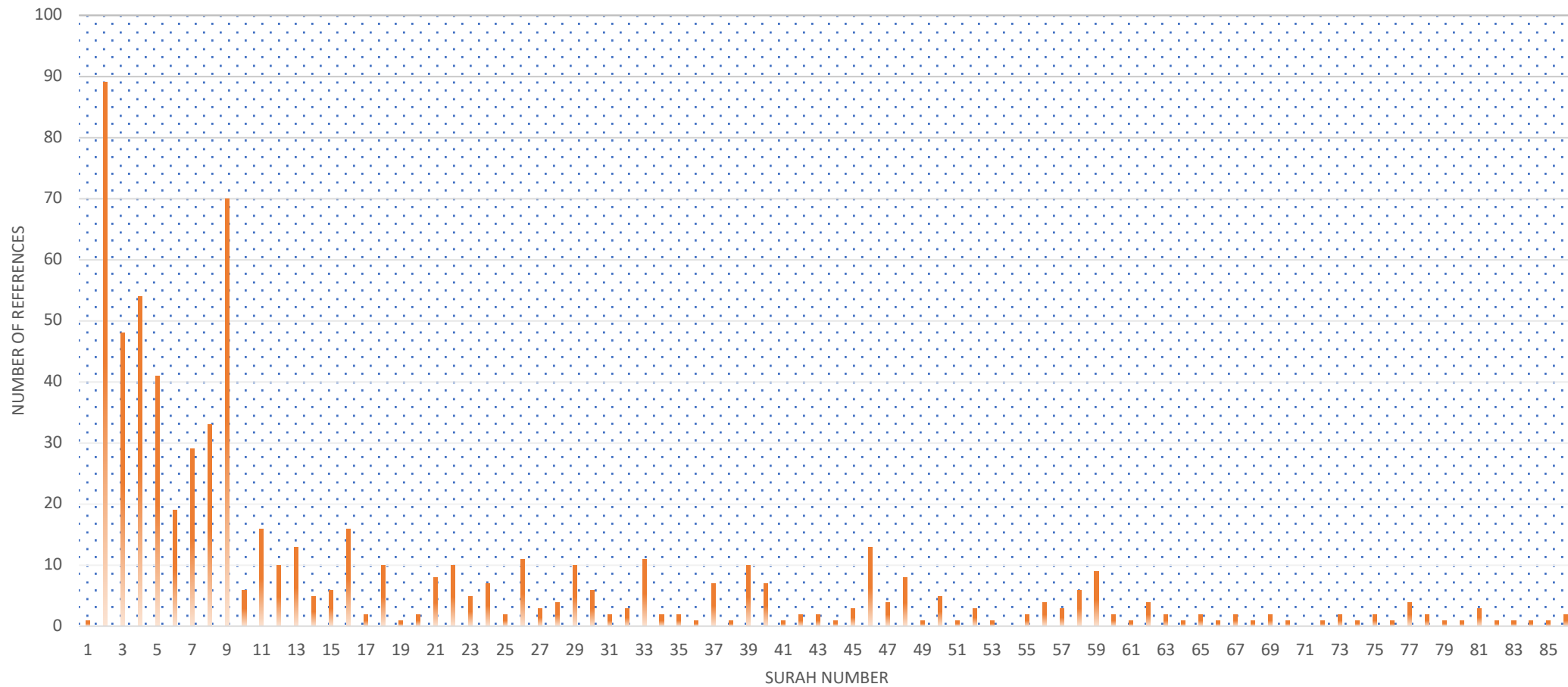


Figure 20. Surahs Referenced in Voice of Khurasan

In Voice of Khurasan the surah that is referenced the most is surah two, which is surah al-Baqarah (The Cow), followed by surah nine, surah at-Tawbah (The Repentance) and surah four, surah an-Nisa (The Women).

COMPARISON OF SURAHS REFERENCED IN DABIQ AND VOICE OF KHURASAN

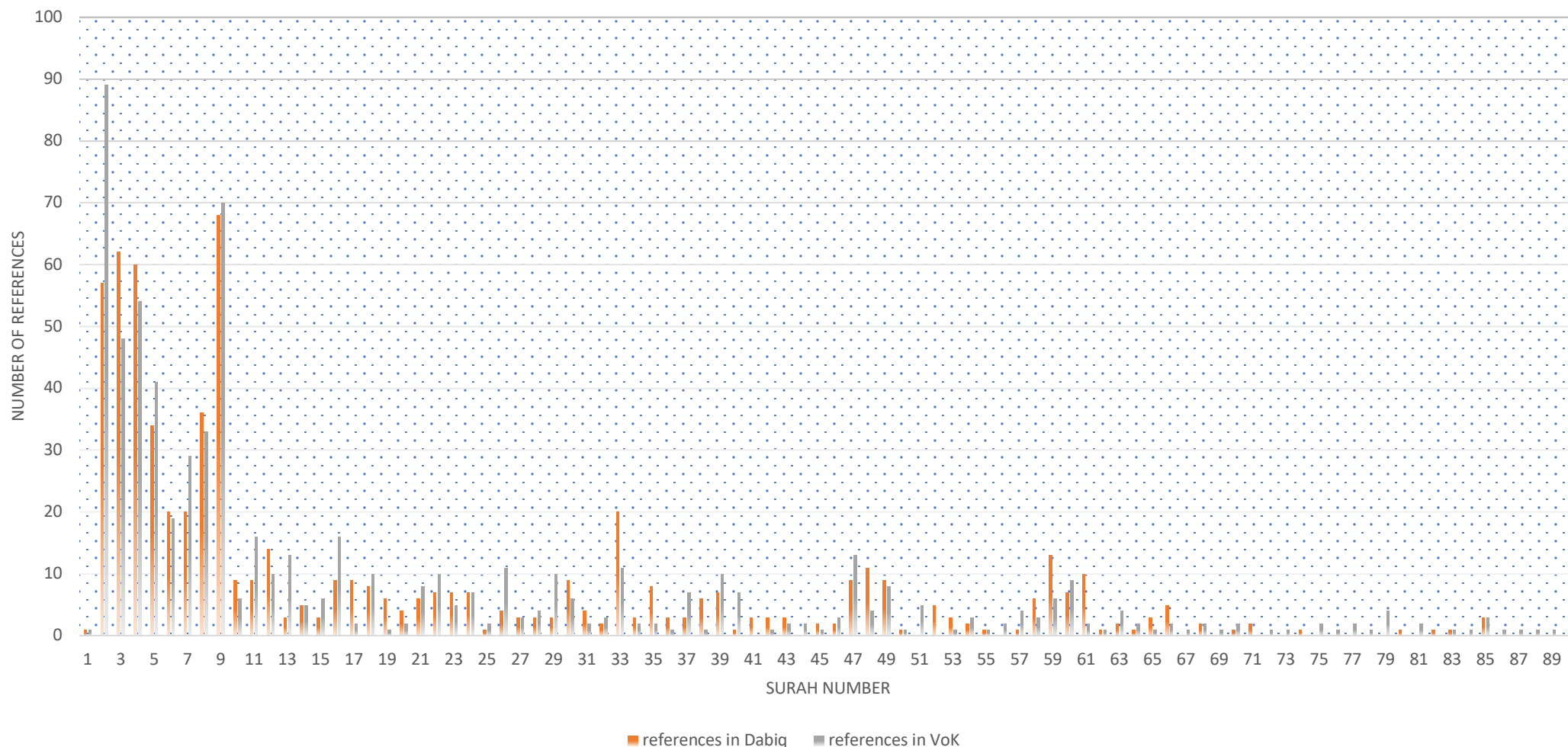


Figure 21. Comparison of Surahs Referenced in Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan

This graph shows the number of times surahs are referenced in both Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan. In most cases, the frequency in the number of surah references for each magazine series is fairly similar, with the exception of surah two (surah al-Baqarah), which appears in the Dabiq series a total of 57 times, and a total of 89 in Voice of Khurasan. Surahs which are not referenced as frequently also show some disparity, such as surahs 13, 16, 26, and 29, among others.

NUMBER OF VERSES PER SURAH / NUMBER OF TIMES SURAH IS REFERENCED

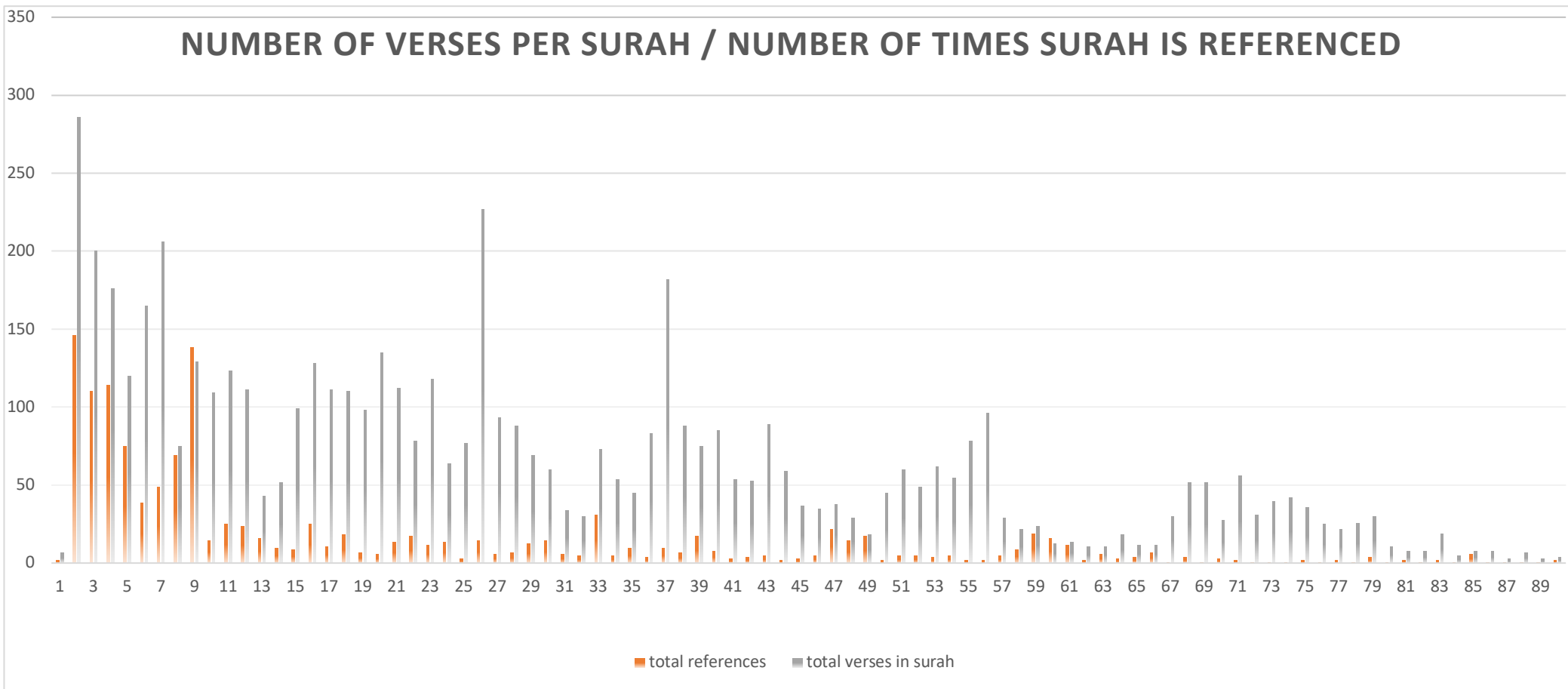


Figure 22. Number of Verses Per Surah / Number of Times Surah is Referenced

In this graph I have shown the number of verses in each surah that appears in Dabiq and VoK, as well as the total number of times each surah has been referenced as a total between both the Dabiq and VoK magazine series. The number of verses contained in the surahs are disproportionate, ranging widely between 3 to 286 verses. This graph illustrates the number of times surahs are referenced in comparison to the number of verses present in the respective surah to provide context of the ‘popularity’ of some surahs among Salafi-jihadi groups.

Surahs 8 and 9 for instance have been referenced a disproportionately high number of times, referenced almost an equal number of times to the number of verses contained in the surahs respectively. This may indicate that the contents of the surahs are attractive to those who produce extremist literature and utilise verses from surahs 8 and 9 in their propaganda materials. This differs from surahs 26 and 37 which, despite being lengthy, are among some of the least frequently referenced surahs in the materials analysed. This disproportionality in the length of the surahs is something I have remained mindful of in the analysis of my data. Surah 2 for example, contains the highest number of verses (286) and has also been referenced the most between both magazine series, with a total of 146 references. Disproportionately, however, surah 26 (ash-Shu'ara – The Poets) has the second highest number of verses (227), but has only been referenced a total of 15 times, with surahs that contain a smaller number of verses having been referenced more frequently.

In the table below I have illustrated the ten surahs with the greatest number of verses and the number of times each surah has been referenced across the data collected.

Number of verses ranking	Surah number and name	Number of verses in surah	Number of times referenced
1	2, The Cow	286	146
2	26, The Poets	227	15
3	7, The Heights	206	49
4	3, The Family of Imran	200	114
5	37, Those Drawn up in Ranks	182	10
6	4, The Women	176	114
7	6, The Cattle	165	39
8	20, Taa-Haa	135	6
9	9, The Repentance	129	138
10	16, The Bee	128	25

Figure 23. Surahs with the Highest Number of Verses / Number of Times Referenced

While the ten surahs with the greatest number of verses displayed in figure 23 range from containing between 128 and 286 verses, the number of times these have been quoted by IS and ISKP across their propaganda magazines are more varied, ranging between 6 and 146. What this indicates is that the appeal of a surah and the number of times verses from it are referenced is not necessarily tied to the number of verses in the surah itself, and indicates instead that the content and subject matter of the surah and verses are of greater significance. Not all surahs are of equal importance. In the following section, I focus on factors that may affect the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses that have been referenced in the magazines, for which I examine the social interpretation. For the social interpretation, I have combined the situational and intertextual context, looking closely at the context in which the Qur'anic quotes were originally written, compared to their recontextualisation, and repurposing in the data analysed.

7.4 Qur'anic History and Interpretation of the Data

Muslims believe that the Qur'an was orally revealed to the final prophet in Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, when he was forty years of age, over a period of twenty-three years. The Islamic tradition states that several of the Prophet Muhammad's companions served as scribes, who memorised and/or wrote down parts of the Qur'an.⁵⁶ Following the death of Muhammad in 632AD, the third caliph Uthman compiled the separate parts into one standard text, because of which the Qur'an is often referred to as Uthman's codex.

The Qur'an consists of 114 surahs which are identified as being either Meccan or Medinan, depending on if the surah was revealed while the Prophet Muhammad was in Mecca or after he migrated to the city of Medina⁵⁷ to escape persecution; this migration is known as the hijrah – something which IS call on the Muslims of today to perform. However, there is a marked difference in the use of the word hijrah. When IS call for Muslims to perform hijrah, they are not prescribing

⁵⁶ An individual who memorises the entirety of the Qur'an is known as a hafiz.

⁵⁷ This is not to say that the entirety of a surah will be Meccan or Medinan. It is possible that a Meccan surah contains verses that are Medinan and vice versa. They are categorised as Meccan or Medinan based on where the overwhelming majority of the verses contained were revealed and the subject matter of the surah.

that people travel to Medina, but instead use the term to call for individuals to sever ties with their current lives and people in it, and to travel to join an Islamic state.

The Meccan surahs are the chronologically earlier surahs and were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad before his hijrah to Medina, and during a time when Islam was still in its infancy. The Meccan surahs are typically shorter than the Medinan surahs and can be found towards the end of the Qur'an, while the Medinan surahs tend to be longest and located predominantly at the beginning and middle of the Qur'an. The Qur'an in its division of the surahs is not necessarily based on the length but on subject matter and key concepts. Concepts which discuss similar subjects have been grouped together in the formation of the Qur'an, such that teachings and prescriptions on war are located predominantly in one section, with another for women, marriage, etc.

In the Islamic tradition, the Medinan surahs are the twenty-eight surahs that were revealed last, following Muhammad's hijrah from Mecca. The Islamic community in Medina was much larger than that in Mecca when the first verses were revealed to Muhammad and had developed significantly, because of which the revelations made in the latter stages of Muhammad's life deal with more practical teachings such as legislation, jurisdiction, morality and ethics, and warfare. Of the Qur'anic quotations that are used in Dabiq and VoK, the references predominantly tend to be Medinan, as IS and ISKP are focused on directing Muslims towards building an Islamic community in line with the teachings of shari'ah – a caliphate. In the table below, I have shown the twenty most referenced surahs (part of which is taken from the data presented in figure 22) from the Qur'anic quotations in both Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan and shown if the surahs are Meccan or Medinan.

Popularity	Surah number and name	Number of Times Referenced in Data	Meccan Surah	Medinan Surah
1	2 – Al Baqarah, The Cow	146		X
2	9 – At Tawbah, The Repentance	138		X
3	4 – An Nisa, The Women	114		X
4	3 – Al Imran, The Family of Imran	110		X
5	5 – Al Maidah, The Table Spread	75		X
6	8 – Al Anfal, The Spoils of War	69		X
7	7 – Al A'raf, The Heights	49	X	
8	6 – Al An'am, The Cattle	39	X	
9	33 – Al Ahzab, The Coalition	31		X
10	16 – An Nahl, The Bee	25	X	
11	11 – Hud, Prophet Hud	25	X	
12	12 – Yusuf, Prophet Yusuf	24	X	
13	47 – Muhammad, Prophet Muhammad	22		X
14	59 – Al Hashr, The Banishment	19		X
15	18 – Al Kahf, The Cave	18	X	
16	22 – Al Hajj, The Pilgrimage	17		X
17	49 – Al Hujurat, The Apartments	17		X
18	60 – Al Mumtahanah, The Woman Who is Examined	16	X	
19	16 – Ar Rad, The Thunder	16	X	
20	26 – Al Shuara, The Poets	15	X	

Figure 24. Meccan or Medinan, in the Twenty Most Referenced Surahs

In figure 24, nine of the surahs listed were revealed in Mecca and eleven were revealed in Medina. While the surahs here are quite evenly split between both Meccan and Medinan, the number of times the Medinan surahs are referenced far outweigh the number of times the Meccan surahs are referenced. For example, the Meccan surahs 7 and 8 are referenced across both Dabiq and VoK a total of 49 and 39 times respectively, whereas the Medinan surahs 2 and 3 are referenced a total of 146 and 114 times respectively. In total, from the table above, the Meccan surahs are referenced in the data collected a total number of 227 times, while the Medinan surahs are referenced a total of 758 times, which is a significant difference. This demonstrates that extremists tend to pay closer attention to the teachings of the Medinan verses.

Surah al Baqarah, the second surah of the Qur'an, and the most frequently quoted in the literature analysed, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the first two years following his hijrah to Medina. Prior to the hijrah, the Muslims who attempted to spread Islam bore the brunt of the persecution from the opponents of Islam. Later in Medina, however, the circumstances had changed such that Muslims from all over parts of Arabia had migrated to form one united Islamic community. In the early days of Muhammad's settlement in Medina, Muslims faced persecution particularly from the Jewish community, which led to much of the focus of surah al Baqarah to be placed on addressing relations with and the treatment of Jewish people. In the Qur'anic revelations that were made during this time, there were teachings which commanded the killing of those who fought against the Muslims, which many understood to mean Jewish and Christian people.

From surah al Baqarah, the verses that are most frequently referenced in Dabiq and VoK are verses 217 and 214 respectively (with references made to verse 216 also proving significant in VoK). Verses 214 to 217 of surah al Baqarah read, in their entirety, as the following

2:214 Or do ye think that ye shall enter the Garden (of Bliss) without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered suffering and adversity, and were so shaken in spirit that even the Messenger and those of faith who were with him cried: 'When (will come) the help of Allah?' Ah! Verily, the help of Allah is (always) near!

- 2:215 They ask thee what they should spend (in charity). Say: Whatever ye spend that is good, is for parents and kindred and orphans and those in want and for wayfarers. And whatever ye do that is good – Allah knoweth it well.
- 2:216 Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not.
- 2:217 They ask thee concerning fighting in the Prohibited Month. Say: ‘Fighting therein is a grave (offence); but graver is it in the sight of Allah to prevent access to the path of Allah, to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and drive out its members.’ Tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter. Nor will they cease fighting you until they turn you back from your faith if they can. And if any of you turn back from their faith and die in unbelief, their works will bear no fruit in this life and in the Hereafter; they will be Companions of the Fire and will abide therein.

Verse 2:215 is not mentioned in either the Dabiq or VoK series. In Dabiq, verse 2:217 is the most frequently referenced of the verses quoted from surah al Baqarah, and verse 2:214 holds the same esteem in VoK. This is some indication of the difference in messaging and target audience in the series of magazines. Verse 2:217 speaks about the goal of the disbeliever being to turn the Muslim away from Islam, stressing that the disbeliever will not stop fighting you ‘until they turn you back from your faith,’ which is a fundamental message relayed in Dabiq. In Dabiq, a core message delivered regularly by IS states that non-Muslims – the West in particular – hate Islam and hope to irradicate it and its followers; it is the duty of the Muslims to fight those who hate Islam and spread the word of Allah, by force if necessary.

Verse 2:214, on the other hand, discusses the suffering of Muslim people at the hands of non-Muslim governments, examples of which may include the Muslims who are persecuted in India and China. It speaks of the persecution that Muslims face globally and calls for them to unite under one Islamic state. In verse 2:214, the Muslims who are being persecuted and fought are not alone but can find refuge and support if they seek it – a message stressed in VoK. While Dabiq seems to focus predominantly on offensive jihad, calling on indiscriminate attacks on the West and other

lands of kufr, VoK highlights defensive jihad, making a case for the Muslims to retaliate against those who persecute them, for oppression is ‘worse than slaughter’ (2:217).

It is commonly accepted in the wider Islamic community that the verses addressing fighting, such as the Medinan surahs, for example surah 2, were written at a time when Muslims faced widespread persecution, however there is a tendency for jihadists to take a literalist reading of this which they treat as being universally binding. What was once a ruling that the Jews and Christians should be fought during a time when Muslims faced severe persecution at their hands has been extrapolated to mean that the Jews and Christians should always be fought, until they too follow the commands of Allah and submit to Islam.

There is also a continued debate of what constitutes ‘oppression.’ The Qur’an often refers to the ‘oppressors’ of Islam without specifying who the oppressors are or what constitutes ‘oppression,’ leaving this open to interpretation. This affords the freedom for individuals to decide what ‘oppression’ means; for some, oppression is the inability to practice one’s faith peacefully, for example the inability to observe prayer and worship or dress according to religious prescriptions, which was the cause of much strife in France following the banning of the niqab.⁵⁸ For others, however, it may be the drawing of the Prophet Muhammad or any other religious figure in Islam – which was the motivation for the Charlie Hebdo attack in 2011. Charlie Hebdo is a satirical magazine that is published weekly in France. It is strongly secularist and left wing, publishing satirical pieces on Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as other groups and news stories. In

⁵⁸ The niqab is a veil that is often worn by Muslim women to conceal their faces. On the 14th of September 2010, the Senate of France passed a law banning the wearing of face coverings in public spaces, including schools and banks. The face coverings that are banned include niqabs, helmets, balaclavas and masks, and also applies to burkas if the burka also conceals the face. It is argued that this is because the concealment of the face prevent clear and accurate identification of individuals. When questions of religion have been brought up, as this law will affect Muslim women who ordinarily opt to conceal their faces, it has been argued that the view that Muslim women ought to cover their faces is sexist, and they should be forced to assimilate to French secularism. This has received much attention and criticism, including from extremists who view the passing of such a law as a direct attack on Islam, as the impact it will have on the Muslim community is far greater than the difference it will make to those who choose to wear helmets and balaclavas in public. It is taken as covert Islamophobia for such individuals, as well as for many mainstream Muslims.

November 2011, the Charlie Hebdo offices were firebombed following the publishing of a satirical cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad on one of its covers. Again in 2012, Muhammad was depicted in cartoon form in a Charlie Hebdo issue, following which France was forced to temporarily close schools and embassies in twenty countries worldwide for fear of an attack as a consequence of this. Although images of Muhammad are not banned explicitly in Qur'anic scripture, it has become the norm in Islamic tradition to view the depiction of the Prophets or Allah as being blasphemous, and which some believe is or should be punishable by death. The question of what constitutes 'oppression' is a debate that many have engaged in – Muslims and non-Muslims alike – and which continues.

In the next parts of this chapter, I have provided interpretations of verses 5:51, 8:39, 3:103, and 60:4. These are the verses presented in figure 19 and are the scriptural references which feature in both figures 17 and 18, which I have identified as the most frequently referenced verses in both Dabiq and VoK respectively. I have chosen to look at these verses in greater detail because of the frequency at which they appear in both series, which may provide an understanding of why such verses appeal to extremist groups such as IS. The different issues of the magazines contain slight variations in the Arabic to English translations which are dependent on the translator and the texts they have consulted – neither of which are referenced by the writer(s). Where relevant, I have mentioned the implications of these differences in translation. For ease of understanding and accessibility, I have chosen to proceed in the remainder of this chapter with the Wordsworth translation, and where I have referenced the words of IS or ISKP directly, these have been taken verbatim and referenced accordingly.

7.5 Surah 5:51

In both Dabiq and VoK, verse 5:51 is the most frequently referenced verse, having been referenced a total of ten times in each series, as shown in figures 17 and 18. The verse itself in its entirety reads as the following

O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: they are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily, Allah guideth not a people unjust (5:51).

This verse is referenced in both Dabiq and VoK to emphasise that those who are not Muslim are the enemies of Islam and, equally, that those Muslims who take the non-Muslims as allies are in turn non-Muslims themselves too. Merely identifying as and calling oneself a Muslim is insufficient as evidence of one's faith or religious identity – the individual must demonstrably be Muslim in their actions, practices, and thoughts. This not only entails the observing of fasts and practicing of prayer – as are mandated by the Five Pillars of Islam, but for IS and ISKP this includes their choosing to partake in the hijrah and joining the fight against the 'kuffar' as well as aiding in the building of a caliphate. In doing this, IS and ISKP draw a distinction between those who are true and those who are false Muslims – a tactic that they commonly adopt to urge those who wish to be identified as 'true Muslims' to make hijrah. In issue four of Dabiq, IS state that the 'biggest form of alliance is support whether by statements, spears, or speech. So those who tread behind Bush in his crusade against the Muslims have disbelieved in Allah' (Dabiq 4, 2014: 44).

In the Islamic tradition, it is believed that verse 5:51 was revealed after Prophet Muhammad had settled in Medina. At this point in time, Muhammad had entered into a treaty with the Jewish and Christian people who lived in the vicinity which stated that neither the Jews nor Christians would harm the Muslims (or aid others in their desire to harm Muslims). As well as this, it stated that the Jewish and Christian people would, instead, help the Muslims to fight against any aggressors. Similarly, the Muslims would not harm the Jews or Christians nor aid anyone wishing them ill but would instead join the fight against any of their aggressors too. This treaty was in place for some time (though a precise duration is not known) before it was discovered that some of the Jewish people of Medina had made a secret deal with the pagans of Mecca conspiring against the Muslims, while simultaneously befriending the Muslims of Medina – thus acting as spies. When the Prophet Muhammad learned of this, he sent a group of mujahideen to confront the Jews on what he had learned, following which the treaty obligations were disbanded and support for any close relations between the Muslims, Jews, and Christians, abandoned. There remained some Muslims who did not wish to sever ties with the Jews or Christians – who at this point in time had come to be viewed as the enemies of Islam. This is because these Muslims were fearful of the consequences of making enemies of the Jews and Christians if they later proved to be successful in their objective of

overthrowing the Muslims, in which case they felt it most beneficial to remain on friendly terms to protect oneself in the future (Ibn Kathir, 2003a).

While verse 5:51 can be read in a wholly binding way such that the Muslims ought not to befriend the Jews or Christians ever, it is clear from the context that it is applicable for the Jews and Christians at the time and is heralded as a warning against trusting them due to the betrayal suffered. Evidence for this can be found in verse 9:4 which makes reference to those with whom there are treaties in place (i.e. the Jews and Christians), stating that treaties made with ‘Pagans [...] who have not subsequently failed you in aught, nor guided anyone against you’ require Muslims to ‘fulfil [their] engagements’ with them.

In the use of verse 5:51 in Dabiq, it is referenced in seven of the fifteen issues, these being issues 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 14. In issue 4 of Dabiq, which is titled The Failed Crusade, verse 5:51 is mentioned in an article called ‘Reflections on the Final Crusade,’ which runs from pages 31-44. This Qur’anic verse is used to demonstrate that Allah has decreed that the Jews and Christians are the enemies of Islam, and anyone who allies with them identifies as an enemy of Islam also. Prior to this quote, two references are made to verses from surah 2, these being verses 2:120 and 2:217, which read, respectively

Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion. Say: ‘The Guidance of Allah – that is the (only) Guidance.’ Wert thou to follow their desires after the knowledge which hath reached thee then wouldst thou find neither Protector nor Helper against Allah’ (2:120).

They ask thee concerning fighting in the Prohibited Month. Say: ‘Fighting therein is a grave (offence); but graver is it in the sight of Allah to prevent access to the path of Allah, to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and drive out its members.’ Tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter. Nor will they cease fighting you until they turn you back from your faith if they can. And if any of you turn back from their faith and die in unbelief, their works will bear no fruit in this life and in the Hereafter; they will be Companions of the Fire and will abide therein (2:217).

Of these quotes, IS write that it ‘is as if they [Muslims] haven’t read the verses of the Qur’ān teaching us that the Jews and the Christians fight the Muslims for their religion and that the more one is fought by them for his religion the closer he is to the path of the Prophet’ (Dabiq 4, 2014: 43). In saying this, IS stress that the frequency and intensity with which one is targeted and persecuted for their faith in Islam, Islamic beliefs, practices, or actions is good indication of how close s/he is to the path of Muhammad. The ‘ordinary’ Muslim who lives a life that does not adhere to the path of the Prophet will not be questioned or affected by the disbelievers because they are one amongst them. IS specify of verse 5:51 that to ally with the disbelievers is not only through the forming of relations and friendships but the ‘biggest form of alliance is support whether by statements, spears, or speech. So those who tread behind Bush in his crusade against the Muslims have disbelieved in Allah’ (ibid: 44).

While the verse itself does not call for violence against the Jews or Christians, it is used to emphasise the importance of all Muslims uniting as one against them and forms an in-group out-group situation in which those who consider themselves Muslim whilst befriending Jewish and Christian people belong to the out-group too. This article in issue four of Dabiq ends with the IS writers calling for acts of violence against the ‘crusader’ which, similar to the use of the word ‘oppressor,’ is left ambiguous and open to interpretation. They prescribe that

Every Muslim should get out of his house, find a crusader, and kill him. It is important that the killing becomes attributed to patrons of the Islamic State who have obeyed its leadership. This can easily be done with anonymity. Otherwise, crusader media makes such attacks appear to be random killings. Secrecy should be followed when planning and executing any attack. The smaller the numbers of those involved and the less the discussion beforehand, the more likely it will be carried out without problems. One should not complicate the attacks by involving other parties, purchasing complex materials, or communicating with weak-hearted individuals. “Rely upon Allah and stab the crusader” should be the battle cry for all Islamic State patrons (ibid: 44).

Verse 5:51 is also mentioned in issue eleven of Dabiq, titled From the Battle of Al-Azhāb to the War of Coalitions, in which IS writers quote Abdul-Wahhab as saying that one of the nullifiers of Islam is ‘backing and aiding the mushrikīn against the Muslims’ (Dabiq 11, 2015: 7) which includes, for example, joining NATO. In IS’s criticism of Islamic countries who have joined NATO, the writer condemns Turkey for being ‘a member of the crusader NATO alliance’ (ibid: 6) and calls on Muslims to not only fight the non-Muslims but also advocates for Muslims not to support countries such as Turkey who are perceived as not following the laws of Allah. IS draw a distinction between those who follow the laws of man and those who follow the laws of Allah, as is the title of issue ten of Dabiq, which is called The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men. The first Qur’anic verse used in this issue of Dabiq is verse 14:40, which reads ‘legislation is not but for Allah’ (Dabiq, 2015: 4) in which the writer argues that the believer is not at liberty to decide what is right or wrong or select which parts of the religion to believe or follow. This is taking Allah’s law and making it man’s – something which is forbidden and is stressed consistently throughout both series of magazines.

Verse 5:51 is mentioned in seven of the first twenty-five issues of VoK, found in issues 5, 13, 16, 17, 20, 21, and 22. In issue thirteen of VoK which is titled Break the Idol of Nationalism, verse 5:51 is used to illustrate the ills of nationalism. A definition of nationalism is provided in this article, which is explained to be ‘the social relationship between people that has been created due to the sharing of homeland, sex, language, and common interests’ (Voice of Khurasan 13, 2022: 4). The ISKP writer argues that nationalism

destroys the unity among the Muslims, separates non-Arabs from Arabs and vice versa, and it denies the religious relationship among the Muslims, which goes against the teaching of Islam, as Islam calls all Muslims to consensus and cooperation with each other in good deeds, and it has strictly prohibited disagreements (ibid: 5).

Nationalism, as explained in this issue of VoK, is something which causes the Muslims to ally with the non-Muslims and obey man-made laws as opposed to God given laws. The writer states that the shari’ah cannot be followed because of manmade laws, even in countries which have a Muslim majority. In countries where there is an overwhelming Muslim majority, such as Bangladesh, ISKP

have criticised the government for their willingness to overlook the need for using shari'ah as the basis of their legal system for the Muslim majority in order to accommodate a non-Muslim minority – something which ISKP say is 'blatant kufr' (Dabiq 8, 2015: 6). ISKP writers call on all Muslims to 'help the religion of Allah, defend the truth, avoid the prejudice of nationalism, break the idol of nationalism, and walk in the footsteps of Ibrahim' (Voice of Khurasan 13, 2015: 9).

Verse 5:51 is also found in issue five of VoK which is titled They Intend to Put Out the Light of Allah With Their Tongues, in which the opening article is titled 'Allies of the Jews and Mushrikin.' This article places its focus on the enemies of Islam, in which quotes from the Qur'an are used to demonstrate that Jewish people and the polytheists are the worst enemies. Surah 5:51 is one among a few Qur'anic quotes that are used to demonstrate this. Other quotes referenced include surah 5:82, which is referenced in two parts reading 'You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity towards the believers [to be] the Jews and those who associate others with Allah,' and 'and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, "We are Christians." That is because among them are the priests and the monks and because they are not arrogant.' The ISKP writer(s) say of these references that

Allah clearly warned us about the enmity of our enemies and from it He ta'ala ranked the Jews and the polytheists at the top because of their arrogance as this is the reason why He ranks Christians to be lower. If we look at the history, the only time Jews and polytheists had an alliance was only to fight the Muslims in Ahzab which saw these two opposite sides with mountains of differences between them with little to no similarities, forming a coalition to besiege the Muslims in Madinah in an attempt to exterminate the Muslims and extinguish the light of Islam (Voice of Khurasan 5, 2022: 4).

This is given as clear indication that the Christians and Jews are friends of one another, but enemies of the Muslims and Islam, because of which verse 5:51 is popularly referenced by both IS and ISKP.

7.6 Surah 8:39

Surah 8 (al Anfal) was revealed after the battle of Badr, which was the first conflict between the Muslims and non-Muslims. Because the surah contains a detailed account of the battle, it is believed that the entire surah was revealed at the same time, as opposed to revelations being staggered over a period of months or years. The battle of Badr took place two years after Muhammad made the hijrah to Medina, during a time in which the small but growing Muslim community was in its infancy. Many Muslims had travelled to Medina to join Muhammad, however, at this time there were no social, political, or economic systems in place from which to build an Islamic state.

The Muslims of Medina had realised the strategic importance of the trade route to and from Medina, which was the main source of income for those living there. A plan was devised in which the Muslims could strike the caravans passing through this region on the route between Yemen and Syria which would be, both, beneficial for the Muslims as well as causing the Medinan economy to suffer – which the Muslims were hoping to replace with their own Islamic governance.

Early in the year of 623AD, a group of Muslim mujahideen descended upon a large trade caravan of the Quraysh, which was returning from a trip to Syria and which was full of goods, with a large convoy of forty guards protecting the imports. As the caravan reached the treacherous zone in which the Muslims lay in wait, the caravan's leader, Abu Sufyan, sent one of the guards to Mecca with an urgent request for help. From Mecca, an army of approximately one thousand men was sent to not only help retrieve the caravan of goods and people with it safely, but also to squash the rising power of the Muslims, which would also help to secure the route for all future trade.

The number of Muslim men who were prepared to go to the battlefield and fight against this large army totaled a little over three hundred, which was small in comparison to the thousand-man Quraysh army. As well as the significant difference in the size of their armies, the members of the Quraysh were well equipped with armour, weapons, horses, and camels, while Muhammed's conservative army was ill-equipped with only two horses, and camels which were shared between multiple men. Upon realising the weak position in which the Muslims found themselves,

Muhammad called upon Allah to send the help which He had promised. It was at this point when Allah revealed the Qur'anic verse 8:9 which reads 'Remember ye implored the assistance of your Lord, and He answered you: 'I will assist you with a thousand of the angels, ranks on ranks.'" This battle was not only difficult because of the militarily weakened position of the Muslim army but also because those who had performed hijrah from Mecca to Medina and were now in arms with Muhammad were now fighting their relatives who remained in Mecca – this included their fathers, sons, brothers etc. It is said in hadiths that the willingness to spill the blood of one's family was taken by Allah as evidence of the army's allegiance to Islam, because of which Allah accepted their prayers and sacrifices and provided help through angels. The Muslims were victorious in the battle of Badr, and the arms and equipment of the Quraysh came into the possession of the Muslim army as 'spoils of war.' This is mentioned in the Sahih Muslim hadith which states that Allah said to Muhammad 'so eat ye the spoils of war, (it is) lawful and pure. So Allah made booty lawful for them' (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2011c). It is in this context, following the battle of Badr, that surah 8:39, which reads 'And fight them until there is no fitnah and until the religion, all of it, is for Allah' (Dabiq 6, 2014: 3) was revealed and which reflects the military campaign of the Muslims at the time.

In this verse, the word fitnah has been used, which comes from the root fa-ta-noon, which means trial or test; however, this trial is not to be understood as being any ordinary or simple trial but one which is intense in nature. What this trial is and how the word fitnah is being used in this context has been disputed, with many arguing that it is to be understood as referencing 'persecution,' while extremists often portray it as meaning 'kufr' or 'disbelief.' The translation one adopts affects the reading and interpretation of this verse. If an individual accepts fitnah as meaning 'persecution,' the verse reads that Muslims ought to fight until there is no persecution and they are able to practise their religion in peace. If, however, the word fitnah is understood to mean 'kufr' then the verse can be read as fighting anyone who is not a Muslim until all either choose to adopt Islam or perish.

Verse 8:39 is mentioned a total of nine times throughout the fifteen issues of Dabiq which can be found in issues 6, 8, 9, 10, and 15, while it only appears four times in the first twenty-five issues of VoK, in issues 4, 7, 12, and 25.

Verse 8:39 begins with the word ‘and’ as it is a continuation of verse 8:38 before it. The two together read

- 8:38 Say to the Unbelievers, if (now) they desist (from Unbelief), their past would be forgiven them; but if they persist, the punishment of those before them is already (a matter of warning for them).
- 8:39 And fight with them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah altogether and everywhere; but if they cease, verily Allah doth see all that they do.

In the Qur’anic translation above provided by Ali (A. Y. Ali, 2000), the words ‘tumult or oppression’ have been used to solve the issue of interpretation and cover both bases. However, in the translation itself, there is still reference to the need for prevailing ‘faith in Allah altogether and everywhere,’ which leaves the issue open of if fighting is prescribed until all non-believers follow Islam.

In issue 6 of Dabiq, which is titled Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan: A Testimony From Within, verse 8:39 is mentioned in the foreword in which the IS writer discusses Man Haron Monis. Monis was an Iranian-born refugee who sought political asylum in Australia, which he was granted in 2001 and where he was later given citizenship. On the 15th of December 2014, Monis took hostages at the Lindt Chocolate Factory Café at Martin Place in Sydney, Australia, which resulted in the deaths of two hostages as well as Monis himself. IS writers praised Monis, and others like him, for carrying out lone attacks without requiring the support and aid in planning by others. Monis was used by IS as an example of an individuals’ capabilities, and to continue their push for Muslims globally to carry out attacks which are easy to execute with low levels of sophistication and barriers to entry. The writer(s) of Dabiq say of Monis that

He did not do so by undertaking the journey to the lands of the Khilāfah and fighting side-by-side with his brothers but rather, by acting alone and striking the kuffār where it would hurt them most – in their own lands and on the very streets that they presumptively walk in safety. It didn’t take much; he got hold of a gun and stormed a café taking everyone

inside hostage. Yet in doing so, he prompted mass panic, brought terror to the entire nation, and triggered an evacuation of parts of Sydney's central business district (Dabiq 6, 2014: 3).

The writer(s) argue that a smear campaign was carried out by the 'international media' when Monis' identity was revealed. They said this was a 'predictable response' in which the media

'immediately began searching for anything negative that they could say against him, and subsequently began reporting numerous allegations made against him in an attempt to smear his character and, by extension, the noble cause that he was fighting for – the cause of Allah' (ibid: 3).

The allegations which were raised against Monis included his participation as an accessory to the murder of his ex-wife as well as the sexual assault of over forty different people. The Dabiq writer(s) argued that the allegations in themselves were irrelevant as an individual's previous indiscretions are forgiven when one chooses to follow the path of Islam, which verse 8:38 is often used to illustrate. The writers state that this is the case with many Sahābah⁵⁹ who 'would be forgiven the moment his blood is first spilled' (ibid: 4). At the time of his death, with an ongoing criminal case, Monis had only recently converted from Shia Islam to Sunni Islam and was known to attend rallies held by Islamic fundamentalists. This conversion to Sunni Islam is accepted by IS and other extremist groups and individuals as sufficient reason to disregard any previous indiscretions carried out or sins committed by Monis – which were actions he carried out prior to discovering the correct path.

Issue 15 of Dabiq which is titled Break the Cross contains a special feature article of the same name. The title of this issue and article refer to the words of Muhammad, who said that Jesus (Īsa) will descend and break the cross and will call on all to follow Allah and Islam. In the referencing of verse 8:39 in this issue of Dabiq, the verse is quoted as reading 'And fight them until there is no temptation and religion is entirely for Allah' (Dabiq 15, 2016: 62). The writer specifies that the

⁵⁹ The Sahabāh are the companions and disciples of the Prophet Muhammad, who saw or met him during his lifetime.

word ‘religion’ in the context of this scriptural reference is not to be taken to mean the personal relationship one has to their faith but is to be understood as the utmost authority in judgement and rule, which is to be dictated by Allah alone. It is written in this issue of Dabiq that the Prophet Muhammad ‘clarified to the world the ultimate truth of the life in this world, that it is only for living by the rule of Allah, convicting to death and damnation those who opposed him’ (Dabiq 6, 2014: 62).

Although this verse is used only four times in the VoK series, compared to a much higher nine in Dabiq, the message that is conveyed remains the same. In issue 4 of VoK in an article titled ‘Our War With the Mushrikin Will Remain,’ ISKP writers argue that the non-believers primary aim is to turn people away from Islam, and write that ‘the eternal divine command for the people of Islam is to engage in war with shirk and its people, waging jihad against them with their hands, tongues and hearts’ (Voice of Khurasan 4, 2022: 8). Similarly, in issue 7 of VoK, ISKP writers specify that it is not required that jihad is defensive, but that Muslims are permitted to

‘fight them so that there is no more shirk and the Deen of Islam is made superior and if they finish fighting they must either embrace Islam or submit to the law of Islam and only then can we stop fighting them’ (Voice of Khurasan 7, 2022: 7).

While many argue that this verse is to be read in the context of its time – during a time when the Muslims were struggling to establish themselves as an Islamic community whilst at war with the non-Muslims – the literalist reading adopted by Salafi-jihadis differs greatly, arguing not only to fight until all obey the command of Allah and Islam, but also that offensive jihad is permitted.

7.7 Surah 3:103

This verse refers to the condition in which the Arabs and Arab nations found themselves during the advent of Islam, and reads

And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves (3:103).

The Arabs were divided into tribes which fought each other often leading to much bloodshed, and which threatened to destroy the entire Arabian nation. This verse was revealed three to four years after the hijrah to Medina when the people of Islam were growing unified as one Muslim body, with this teaching strengthening the message to remain undivided. The people of Medina witnessed tribes who had been enemies of one another come together under the umbrella of Islam and unite as brothers. This verse is used not only to call on Muslims to remain together but also to remain firm in their faith and not lose sight of their religion in the practises of everyday life.

Verse 3:103 is mentioned a total of eight times across six issues of Dabiq, these being issues 5, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15, and appearing a total of six times in the first twenty-five issues of VoK, found in five different issues, these being issues 12, 13, 21, 24, and 25. In issue 5 of Dabiq titled Remaining and Expanding, IS not only call on Muslims to remain united together as one but to remain united under the guidance of al-Baghdadi – who IS identify as the khilāfah – as their ruler, who will build an Islamic state for them. In this article, the writers of IS say that they are

Pledging to selflessly hear and obey, in times of hardship and ease, and in times of delight and dislike. We pledge not to dispute the matter of those in authority except if we see obvious kufr concerning which we have proof from Allah. We call the Muslims everywhere to give bay'ah to the Khilāfah and support him, in obedience to Allah and the actualization of the unheeded obligation of the era (Dabiq 5, 2014: 22).

In calling for Muslims to pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi, the Dabiq writers claim that if all Muslims rally together then this will be even more infuriating for the enemies of Islam – providing further incentive to take action in the pledging of one's allegiance. Similarly, in issue 10 of Dabiq, in an article titled 'A Fatwā for Khurāsān,' a question is asked regarding which amir⁶⁰ to follow when there is more than one present. In this article, the IS writer states that this question was sent to them by their members in Khurasan, Afghanistan, who were unsure of how to respond to a member of the Taliban, who recently pledged allegiance to IS, when he enquired about the ruling

⁶⁰ In the Islamic tradition, the amir is a commander or chief. The word is derived from the root a-m-r, which means to command. In modern times, the word is used analogously to the title "Prince," and is often spelt as 'emir.'

behind this. The writers of IS respond that the first amir is always the one who should be consulted and followed. They say that when Amirul Mu'minin took charge of the khilāfah, he sent delegates to other regions, including one in Shām, over which he had no control or power at the time. 'And no doubt, they fell into the sin of division and disagreement by not allowing their amīr to take control of them and execute his power over them' (Dabiq 10, 2015: 23-24). In the use of verse 3:103 in this issue, the emphasis is not only on uniting all Muslims against the non-Muslim but also on accepting those who have been elected as the khilāfah and uniting as one under their rule and tutelage. This is stressed further in issue 11 of Dabiq in which the writer notes 'the obligation to unite in one body, appoint a single leader, and hear and obey him' (Dabiq 11, 2015: 10).

Ibn Taymiyyah writes that

People cannot secure the good of this world or the next unless they work together, cooperate among themselves and strive together for their cause. Through cooperation and mutual assistance they achieve the good they want and ward off the evil they hate. That is why man is social by nature. When they join hands they secure what is good for all and avoid what is evil for all. For the same purpose they submit together to an authority without which they cannot live (Ibn Taymiyyah & Ansari, 2000).

In issue 13 of VoK which focuses on the ills of nationalism, verse 3:103 is used to illustrate that Allah calls on Muslims to unite and remain together without division; nationalism is identified as a cause of division and therefore should be abandoned. This is similar to the use of verse 5:51 (discussed in section 7.5 of this chapter) to stress the evils of nationalism and its hinderance to the Muslim community. In issue 21 of VoK in an article titled 'The Arab-Muslim Land is Lost, the Islamic Khilafah Will Take It Back Bi'dhnilla,' the focus is placed on the 'kufr' of Saudi Arabia, particularly the hosting of the World Cup in Qatar. The article begins by asking 'Who has opened the door of Islam to let the shirk in? Ask the current Arab (mis)leaders' (Voice of Khurasan 21, 2023: 12), proceeding to argue that the youth of Saudi Arabia are being raised in an un-Islamic way. The ISKP writers state that

The Saudi youth are forgetting to be Muslims, but the fake Shaykhs stay silent at the spread of atheism and nihilistic materialism among them, accompanied by the dissemination of any kind of debauchery. A blatant example are the orgies that take place publicly on a regular basis in Riyadh and Jeddah, where alcohol, drugs, women nudity, homosexuality, are the main characters, against the backdrop of demonic music that has the effect of mesmerizing the hundreds of thousands of young people who willfully join the “mixed-gender dancing” (Voice of Khurasan 21, 2023: 16).

In their criticism of the Saudi government and what they refer to as ‘fake emirs’ the ISKP writers call on Muslims to hold firmly to their faith, which verse 3:103 is used to support, and to beware of not falling into the trap of living the un-Islamic life which they perceive as being promoted in Saudi Arabia at present.

7.8 Surah 60:4

This surah refers to the story of Ibrahim, who followed Islam and accepted Allah as his God despite those closest to him refusing to accept the same and persecuting him for his beliefs. The verse in full can be divided into two parts (for greater comprehension), which I have demonstrated below

60:4 Allah [...] says: There has already been for you an excellent pattern in Ibrahim and those with him, when they said to their people, “Indeed, we are disassociated from you and from whatever you worship other than Allah. We have denied you, and there has appeared between us and you animosity and hatred forever until you believe in Allah alone”

– except for the saying of Ibrahim to his father, “I will surely ask forgiveness for you, but I have not [power to do] for you anything against Allah. Our Lord, upon You we have relied, and to You we have returned, and to You is the destination.

Here there are two examples provided of the Prophet Ibrahim: one which the Muslims are encouraged to follow, and one which Allah prohibits. Ibrahim expressed his disapproval of pagan people and chose to disassociate with them, following which his father – who was a pagan – banished Ibrahim from their family home. During his departure, Ibrahim told his father that he

would pray to Allah to forgive his father for his sins. In this surah, Allah tells Muslims that one ought to denounce their relationships with those who are not Muslim in the same way that Ibrahim has, however they are not to seek forgiveness for the non-Muslim. The Muslim is not allowed to have so much love or sympathy for the non-Muslim that they seek Allah's forgiveness for them or ask Allah's approval on their behalf. While Ibrahim prayed for his father, examples of which are provided in surahs 14:41 and 26:86, once he realised that his father was in fact an enemy of Islam and Allah, Ibrahim ended this relationship and refrained from seeking forgiveness from Allah on his father's behalf.

Ibn Kathir states in the tafsir that some Muslims have sought the forgiveness of Allah on behalf of others, primarily for their parents who died as non-Muslims. The case of Ibrahim seeking forgiveness from Allah for the sins of his father were used by these individuals as justification for their actions. Ibn Kathir notes that while Ibrahim prayed for his father's forgiveness, this was done to observe a promise that he had made. However, when Ibrahim came to realise that his father was an 'enemy' of Islam and, in turn, Allah, his prayers on behalf of his father ceased. One is not permitted to seek forgiveness on behalf of non-believers on the grounds that this was practised by Ibrahim. This act is strictly prohibited in Islam (Ibn Kathir, 2003b).

Of the four most popular verses which appear in both the Dabiq and VoK series, these being verses 5:51, 8:39, 3:103, and 60:4 (found in figure 18), this is the only verse which was revealed in Mecca and not Medina. The major themes of surah 60 include prohibition from befriending those who are the enemies of Islam and Allah, and the Prophet Ibrahim and his companions serve in the surah as examples for the believers.

Verse 60:4 is mentioned a total of four times in the Dabiq series, these being in issues 8, 11, 14 and 15, while it appears a total of six times in the first twenty-five issues of the VoK series, featuring in issues 6, 11, 12, 13, 18 and 22.

In issue six of Dabiq, which is titled Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa, in an article called 'Erasing the Legacy of a Ruined Nation,' the writers provide photos of IS fighters with sledgehammers destroying artefacts and statues in museums which depict pagan idols. They write of this that the

fighters ‘with sledgehammers in hands, revived the Sunnah of their father Ibrāhīm’ (Dabiq 8, 2015: 22), continuing to discuss how the Prophet Ibrahim did not hesitate to destroy the idols of others, just as the IS fighters do not hesitate either. In this article, IS urge Muslims to not take the ‘feelings of the kuffar’ into account when doing the same (ibid: 22).

In issue 11 of Dabiq where the emphasis is placed on Ibrahim’s severing of ties with those who do not follow Islam and Allah, it is argued that for as long as one does not convert to Islam and accept the path of the Muslim, there will remain animosity between IS and the disbeliever. Ibrahim is used as an example in this as he was prepared to disassociate himself from his family members for the sake of Islam, which is used to call on others to only associate themselves with Muslims. The Dabiq writers argue that

If this is the case with one’s own people with whom a common lineage is shared, how much more so in the case of those with whom one shares nothing more than a superficial characteristic such as skin color (Dabiq 11, 2015: 19).

Similarly, a reason for fighting the non-believer is given in issue 15 of Dabiq in an article titled ‘Why We Hate You & Why We Fight You,’ in which the writers provide the reasoning and justification behind their animosity and the motivations for their attacks. The first and primary reason for their hatred of the West is given as being because they reject Islam and Allah, and their alleged propagation of lies about the religion of Allah. Verse 60:4 is used to justify and give credit to their claim that the fight against non-believers is one mandated by Allah. It is stated that

Just as your belief is the primary reason we hate you, your disbelief is the primary reason we fight you, as we have been commanded to fight the disbelievers until they submit to the authority of Islam, either by becoming Muslims, or by paying jizyah – for those afforded this option – and living in humiliation under the rule of the Muslims (Dabiq 15, 2016: 31).

In the Islamic tradition, jizyah is an annual taxation that is applicable to men who are permanent non-Muslim residents in Muslim states. Historically this tax has been understood as a payment made to afford protection provided by the Muslim ruler, exemption from military service, and the

permission to practice a faith that is not Islam, among other things. The jizyah is only applicable to men who are of working age and are sound of mind, and does not apply to women, children, the elderly or unwell, or slaves. Extremists, however, view the jizyah as being a form of humiliation that is used to lord over any non-Muslims under the guardianship and leadership of an Islamic country (Ibn Taymiyyah & Palvin, 2015).

It is narrated in the Sahih Muslim hadith that the Prophet Muhammad would tell those who he appointed as leaders that

When you meet your enemies who are polytheists, invite them to three courses of action. If they respond to any one of these, you also accept it and withhold yourself from doing them any harm. Invite them to (accept) Islam; if they respond to you, accept it from them and desist from fighting against them. [...] If they refuse to accept Islam, demand from them the Jizya. If they agree to pay, accept it from them and hold off your hands. If they refuse to pay the tax, seek Allah's help and fight them (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2011c).

In the article 'Why We Hate You & Why We Fight You' in issue 15 of Dabiq, the Islamic State acknowledge what they refer to as the 'blessed attack on a sodomite, Crusader nightclub' (Dabiq 15, 2016: 30) which was a terror attack carried out by Omar Mateen, an Afghan-American who carried out a mass shooting at a gay bar in Florida, killing 49 people and injuring a further 53. It is written in Dabiq that following the incident, American politicians were quick to denounce the attack, calling it a 'hate crime, an act of terrorism, and an act of senseless violence' (ibid: 30). The IS writers responded to this by saying

A hate crime? Yes. Muslims undoubtedly hate liberalist sodomites, as does anyone else with any shred of their fitrah (inborn human nature) still intact. An act of terrorism? Most definitely. Muslims have been commanded to terrorize the disbelieving enemies of Allah. But an act of senseless violence? One would think that the average Westerner, by now, would have abandoned the tired claim that the actions of the mujahidin – who have repeatedly stated their goals, intentions, and motivations – don't make sense (Dabiq 15, 2016: 30).

In this article, the IS writers list ‘crimes of the West against Islam and the Muslims’ which include ‘insulting the prophet,’ ‘burning the Quran,’ and ‘waging war against the Caliphate’ as being the causes for the attacks that have been perpetrated against the West. Verse 60:4 is used to justify the fighting against the non-Muslims on the grounds that they do not follow Islam and continue to ‘indulge in all manner of devilish practices’ (Dabiq 15, 2016: 31).

While the focus in Dabiq is on the non-Muslim West, ISKP writers in VoK turn towards the Taliban who they argue are ‘guardians of shirk’ (Voice of Khurasan 6, 2022: 18). They argue that the most important obligations that are placed upon the Muslims are to establish Tawhid (to believe in and declare the oneness of Allah) and remove shirk from the land. This verse is used to illustrate that the ‘path of Ibrahim is to break idols, not to protect them, the Path of Ibrahim is to remove Shirk, not to permit it, and the Path of Ibrahim is to establish al Wala wal Bara’ (ibid: 19). While they acknowledge that the Taliban do not perform shirk or kufr themselves, they do protect it and provide protection to those who perform it – which, in the eyes of IS, allies them with the non-believers. ISKP hold this view despite verse 9:6 stating that ‘If one amongst the Pagans asks thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge’ (Ali, 2000: 144). This verse explicitly instructs Muslims to offer their protection to any non-Muslims who seek it on the grounds that they are not an enemy but are simply misguided and do not know the truth. The Taliban in their offering of protection to Muslims and non-Muslims alike would be acting in accordance with this teaching, and ISKP would be better justified in arguing that the Taliban are misguided in their offering of protection to Muslims who do not follow the teachings of the Qur’an. This could be argued on the basis that the Muslims are men who ‘know’ the true path but choose to behave otherwise, while the non-Muslims are ones the Qur’an specifically states protection should be offered to if sought, as they know not.

The primary use of verse 60:4 is to provide Ibrahim as an example for all Muslims to disassociate with non-Muslims and only ally themselves with those who are considered to be ‘true Muslims.’ The same is found in issue 12 of VoK which is titled They Satisfied the International Community! in which ISKP writers say that ‘the best of the best for the sake of Allah is making animosity

towards the kuffar' (Voice of Khurasan 12, 2022: 19). Similar is also found in issue 18 of VoK, in an article titled 'There Will Be Enmity and Hatred between Us and You Until You Believe in Allah,' in which the example of Ibrahim is used to illustrate the hatred that ought to exist from the Muslim towards the non-Muslim.

7.9 Surah 59:14

In sections 7.5 to 7.8, I have discussed the four verses that have appeared in both Dabiq and VoK most frequently. While verse 59:14 does not appear in VoK, I have provided a small discussion on the verse here because of its popularity in Dabiq. It is the second most referenced verse in Dabiq, alongside verses 8:39 and 9:5, which have been discussed in sections 7.6 and 7.10 respectively. Verse 59:14 appears a total of nine times in the Dabiq series, which reads in its entirety as the following

They will not fight you (even) together, except in fortified townships, or from behind walls. Strong is their fighting (spirit) amongst themselves: thou wouldst think they were united, but their hearts are divided: that is because they are a people devoid of wisdom (59:14).

There are two main messages to be relayed in this verse, these being that a) 'they' (being the 'Unbelievers') (Ali, 2000: 476) will not fight the Muslims except from behind their own forts because of their cowardice, and b) the aggressors who oppose the Muslims are also divided between themselves despite giving the illusion that they are a united force. Although the verse is not quoted in its entirety in all cases, the part which is most popularly referenced is one which reads 'They will not fight you all except within fortified cities or from behind walls' (Dabiq 12, 2015: 3).

Surah 59, from which this verse is taken, was revealed after the battle of Banu an-Nadhir. The surah describes the banishment of the Jewish people from Medina after it was discovered that they had been plotting to assassinate the Prophet Muhammed, which led to the battle itself. The first betrayal by the Jews suffered by the Muslims was the breaking of the peace treaty they had both entered, and the second was the secret scheming by the Banu an-Nadhir tribe to assassinate Muhammad. Upon learning of the plot, Muhammad ordered that all the Jews of Medina leave

within ten days, warning that any Jewish people found in Medina following the ten-day period would be killed. While the Jewish people complied at first, Abdullah ibn Ubayy – the chief of the Khazraj – sent a message to the people of Banu an-Nadhir stating that he would help them with the aid of two thousand men, following which the Jewish people stood firm in their resistance to leaving Medina. In response to this, the Prophet Muhammed began the war of Banu an-Nadhir, a few days into which the Jewish people surrendered and left Medina. The quote is used to show the cowardice of the Jewish people who plot the murder of the Prophet Muhammad in secret and fight from behind walls but do not engage in wars openly.

In Ibn Kathir's tafsir, it is explained that Abdullah ibn Ubayy, while being a hypocrite and standing against his Muslim people, did not intend to truly offer support to the Jewish people either. Ibn Kathir notes that 'the hypocrites lied when they issued this promise, because it was just words that they did not intend to fulfill' (Ibn Kathir, 2003b). Allah says of this that

(Their allies deceived them), like Satan, when he says to man, 'Deny Allah': but when (man) denies Allah, (Satan) says, 'I am free of thee: I do fear Allah, the Lord of the Worlds!

The end of both will be that they will go into the Fire, dwelling therein for ever. Such is the reward of the wrongdoers (59:16-17).

Issue 12 of Dabiq, in which this verse appears, was published three days after the terror attacks carried out by an IS splinter cell in Paris on the 15th of November 2015. In this issue, the IS writers reference many attacks that they have carried out and boast of their ability to carry out these attacks on enemy soil. This verse is used to demonstrate the difference between the cowardice of the 'enemies' of Islam while also highlighting the bravery and cunningness of IS stating that the 'divided crusaders of the East and West thought themselves safe in their jets as they cowardly bombarded the Muslims of the Khilāfah' (Dabiq 12, 2015: 3). In this article, which is in the introduction to the issue, the writers mention the bombing of the Russian commercial flight, Metrojet 9268, and say that Allah

decreed that punishment befall the warring crusaders from where they had not expected. Thus, the blessed attacks against the Russians and the French were successfully executed despite the international intelligence war against the Islamic State. Both crusader nations had undoubtedly destroyed their homes with their own hands through their hostilities towards Islam, the Muslims, and the Muslim body of the Khilāfah (Dabiq 12, 2015: 3).

The mentioning of hands is one which features several times throughout the Dabiq and VoK series. Here, in the example above, the IS writers claimed that the attacks were the result of the actions of the ‘crusader nations,’ claiming that they contributed to their demise with their own hands. References are also made to verse 9:14, which reads ‘Fight against them so that Allah will punish them by your hands and disgrace them and give you victory over them and heal the breasts of a believing people,’ which is used by IS to justify their actions as being ones mandated by Allah – they are merely proxies for the will of Allah.

7.10 Interpretations of Just War

When looking at the four verses in figure 19 – which I have discussed in sections 7.5 to 7.8 – and attempting to understand the core message of each verse as delivered by IS and ISKP, it may be argued that they can be reduced to the following core messages:

- 5:51 Do not befriend the Jews and Christians
- 8:39 Fight the non-Muslims
- 3:103 Remain true to your faith and united as one
- 60:4 Do not associate with the non-Muslims

There is a common theme which runs through these verses, which is one that urges the Muslims to not befriend a non-Muslim and to fight those who do not believe in Islam or Allah. While it is indisputable that these are in fact stated in the Qur’an, the context in which the verses were revealed and originally written provides reason for believing that this is not an altogether universally binding teaching. While these are teachings in the Qur’an, there are also other teachings which prescribe less harshness in the treatment of non-believers, if not contradicting the

four verses mentioned above altogether. Such contradictions have been discussed in Chapter 8, where I have looked at deconstructive interpretation in accordance with O'Regan's TACO.

While IS and ISKP call for the indiscriminate and ruthless attacks of non-Muslims as well as on any Muslim who allies with them, the Qur'an is more favourable in the treatment of non-believers, often prescribing kindness or much smaller degrees of harshness than what IS and ISKP argue that it dictates. When verses are read with more intertextual and historical context provided, the interpretation is not as binary as what extremist groups may preach.

Surah 2 is referenced most frequently between both the Dabiq and VoK series, with a total of 146 references; it is also the longest surah in the Qur'an, containing a total of 286 verses. Its popularity in extremist literature is due to the subject matter discussed in the surah – this being matters concerning war, fighting, and relations with non-Muslims. In its teachings on how one ought to conduct oneself when participating in a war, it signals practices of restraint when it comes to the waging of war against non-Muslims. Part of verse 2:191, which reads 'And slay them wherever ye catch them' is often quoted by individuals seeking to portray Islam as a wholly violent and bloodthirsty religion – this is referred to colloquially as the 'Sword Verse.' However, when looking at its co-text, the interpretation is quite different. In its co-text, the verse as a whole reads

- 2:190 Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors.
- 2:191 And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith.
- 2:192 But if they cease, then Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.
- 2:193 And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.

While these verses call for Muslims to fight against the non-believers, they do also make apparent that fighting should be defensive and not offensive. Phrases such as ‘those who fight you,’ ‘if they attack you,’ and ‘if they cease,’ indicate that fighting should only happen if the Muslims are attacked and oppressed first. If the attackers cease, however, then the Muslims are to cease fighting also, as Allah is ‘Most-Forgiving.’

Verse 2:190 was the first verse to be revealed in connection to jihad and calls on Muslims to fight those who fight them, but not to transgress (which is understood to mean that when Muslims retaliate, they are not to exceed the severity with which they are fought). Al-Hasan al-Basri,⁶¹ an early Muslim preacher stated that the use of the word ‘transgress’ in this context includes ‘mutilating the dead, theft (from the captured goods), killing women, children and old people who do not participate in warfare, killing priests and residents of houses of worship, burning down trees and killing animals without real benefit’ (Ibn Kathir, 2003: 528). Groups such as IS are known to partake in many of these transgressions, which include the killing of civilians (who are individuals who are not partaking in any fighting or warfare), theft, and the destroying of property. While the verses as a whole call for Muslims to only engage in fighting that is targeted at those who fight them, what the ‘fighting’ consists of from both the non-Muslim towards the Muslim and vice versa has many interpretations.

A key component in teachings on fighting is on what is just and what is unjust, with verses stating that the Muslims should fight in equal measure to the way in which they are fought. This is the Islamic principle of qisas, which can be understood to mean retributive justice which, in shari’ah law, calls for punishment that is equal in measure to the crime. In ancient societies when the principle of personal responsibility did not exist, the families and tribes that the criminal belonged to faced retributive punishment instead. The origin of this principle was such that the offender (usually for crimes such as murder) would be offered to the family of the victim, who would carry

⁶¹ Abu Sa’id ibn Abi al-Hasan Yasar al-Basri is commonly referred to as Hasan al-Basri (642-728) was an early Islamic preacher, scholar, theologian and judge. He was of the second generation of Muslims, but had close relations with several of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, which strengthened people’s faith in al-Basri and aided in his popularity as a public figure in the Islamic world.

out the execution (or punishment equivalent to the crime). The Qur'anic verse which supports the principle of qisas is verse 2:178, which states

O ye who believe! The law of equality is prescribed to you in cases of murder: the free for the free, the slave for the slave, the woman for the woman. But if any remission is made by the brother of the slain, then grant any reasonable demand and compensate him with handsome gratitude; this is a concession and a Mercy from your Lord. After this whoever exceeds the limits shall be in grave penalty (2:178).

While retributive equality is prescribed, practising forgiveness is recommended above this, and is one of the highest virtues (alongside patience). This is mentioned in verse 5:45, which reads

We ordained therein for them: "Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal." But if anyone remits the retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself. And if any fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) wrongdoers (5:45).

Muslims are not instructed to expel people from their property or land but to expel them from 'where they have turned you out.' Aggression is only to be shown towards the unjust, and therefore only combatants are to be fought. The ideas of equality and justice can be seen in several verses of the Qur'an including verses 2:194, 16:126, and 42:40, which I have provided below.

2:194 The prohibited month for the prohibited month – and so for all things prohibited – there is the law of equality. If then anyone transgresses the prohibition against you, transgress ye likewise against him. But fear Allah, and know that Allah is with those who restrain themselves.

16:126 And if ye do catch them out, catch them out no worse than they catch you out: but if ye show patience, that is indeed the best (course) for those who are patient.

42:40 The recompense for an injury is an injury thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah: for (Allah) loveth not those who do wrong.

While all three verses listed above have the similarity that they prescribe equal severity, they also share one other commonality – this being the advocating of patience, restraint, and forgiveness over retaliation.

Later, surah 9:5 which is commonly colloquially known as the ‘Sword Verse’ was revealed, part of which reads ‘Kill the mushrikun wherever you find them.’ Verse 9:5 is one of the most frequently quoted Qur’anic verses in the Dabiq series, having been referenced a total of nine times over the fifteen issues of the magazine, appearing in issues 4, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, and 15. While the extract from the verse itself seems to be a proponent of violence, it is important to read the verse in its co-text before an understanding of the historical context is provided.

- 9:4 (But the treaties are) not dissolved with those Pagans with whom ye have entered into alliance and who have not subsequently failed you in aught, nor aided anyone against you. So fulfil your engagements with them to the end of their term: for Allah loveth the righteous.
- 9:5 But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war). But if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.
- 9:6 If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the Word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge.

From the references that are made to the ‘treaty’ it becomes apparent that the verses are addressing the breaking of the peace treaty that was formed between the Muslims, Jews, and Christians, offering each other protection and support. The verses authorise the killing of those who broke their oaths after pledging not to persecute the Muslims, but also to offer protection to non-Muslims if and when they seek it. This is evident in verse 12 of the same surah, which reads ‘But if they violate their oaths after their covenant, and taunt you for your Faith – fight ye the chiefs of Unfaith; for their oaths are nothing to them: that thus they may be restrained’ (9:12). Those who use the

religion of Islam to achieve their hegemonic ambitions however, use verse 9:5 to divide the world into two camps: these being dar al-Islam (land of Islam) and dar al-Kufr (land of disbelief) – which is something that is referenced numerous times throughout extremist literature.

The ‘Sword Verse’ is referenced by IS in issue four of Dabiq, which is called The Failed Crusade, in an article titled ‘The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour.’ IS place their focus on the Yazidi people arguing that the continued existence of the Yazidi people is something that ‘Muslims should question as they will be asked about it on the Judgment Day,’ given that the Sword Verse was revealed ‘over 1400 years ago’ (Dabiq 4, 2014: 14). The Yazidi people are described as being pagans who worship Iblis.⁶² According to Qur’anic tradition, Iblis was expelled from heaven after refusing to prostrate himself before the Prophet Adam. The writers in IS state in Dabiq that the Yazidis believe that Iblis will be forgiven by Allah on the day of judgement and because of this, they have ‘made Iblīs – who is the biggest tāghūt – the symbolic head of enlightenment and piety!’ (ibid: 14).

In a similar vein, in issue 7 of Dabiq, titled From Hypocrisy to Apostasy, an article runs across pages 20-24 which is titled ‘Islam is the Religion of the Sword Not Pacifism.’ In this article, the writer states that Ali Ibn Abi Talib,⁶³ who was the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and one of the caliphs who succeeded Muhammad, said that Muhammad ‘was sent with four swords,’ which are described as being ‘a sword for the mushrikīn,’ ‘a sword for Ahlul-kitāb,’ ‘a sword for the munāfiqīn,’ and ‘a sword for the bughāt,’ (Dabiq 7, 2015: 20-21) which I will discuss in turn.

Verse 9:5 is used to argue that Muhammad was given a sword for the mushrikīn, quoting ‘And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the mushrikīn wherever you find them’ (Dabiq 7, 2015: 20). The difference between the kuffar and the mushrikīn is such that the kuffar denies that Allah is the true God and Islam the correct path and rejects both, while the mushrikīn are those

⁶² Iblis is the leader of the devils in Islam.

⁶³ In the Sunni Muslim tradition, Ali was the last caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate, but the rightful successor to Muhammad decided as being Abu Bakr. In Shia Islam however, Ali is considered to be the rightful successor to Muhammad. This is the primary cause of the divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

who worship a being or thing other than Allah, which includes idolators and polytheists. The kuffar may be mushrikīn also and mushrikīn may be kuffar, however, the two are to be understood as two separate entities.

‘Ahlul-kitab’ is an Islamic term referring to religions who follow previous revelations ‘of the Book,’ which includes the Jews and Christians. In the claim that a sword was sent for ahlul-kitab, a Qur’anic reference is made to support this, which is taken from surah 9:29 and is quoted as reading

Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Book – [fight them] until they give the jizyah willingly while they are humbled (Dabiq 7, 2015: 21).

Verse 9:29 was revealed nine years after the hijrah to Medina, and at a time when the pagans had been defeated. Muslims joined in large numbers and the Arabian Peninsula was securely under the control of the Islamic community there. It was during this time that Allah announced for the Muslims to fight the people of ‘Scriptures,’ which led to Muhammad’s preparation of an army to fight the Romans. In this instance the jihad did not go ahead as the Muslims were weak, however the willingness and intention to partake in jihad as a result of Allah’s command was present, something which IS stress the importance of.

In the mentioning of the third sword that was given to Muhammad, it is said to be for the ‘munāfiqīn,’ which can be best described as a ‘hypocrite.’ This is understood to be one who accepts Islam by name and publicly shows themselves to be a Muslim, while also concealing disbelief (kufr), partaking in actions which are prohibited in Islam, seeking to harm Muslims etc. Surah 9:73 is used to justify fighting the munāfiqīn, which reads ‘O Prophet, fight against the kuffār and munāfiqīn’ (ibid: 21).

The final sword is said to be one for the ‘bughāt’ which can be understood to mean those who carry out aggressions or transgress against the Muslims. A Qur’anic reference is taken from verse 49:9

to support this, which reads ‘Then fight against the group that commits baghy (aggression) until it returns to the ordinance of Allah’ (Dabiq 7, 2015: 21). This verse refers to two groups of ‘believers’ (Muslims) who may be fighting one another and reads in its entirety as

If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace between them: but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight ye (all) against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of Allah; but if it complies, then make peace between them with justice, and be fair: for Allah loves those who are fair (and just) (49:9).

It is unclear if, in the use of this extract from verse 49:9 by IS writers, they are calling for Muslims to fight all those who commit transgressions and aggression towards them, including the Jews and Christians, or if they are in fact taking the context of the quote into consideration and are arguing for the fighting of Muslims who transgress against other Muslims. This is not something which is specified in the text and the IS writers quickly turn their attention to the use of ‘the sword’ and verses which indicate how ‘the sword’ should be used. Two references are made to illustrate how Allah intended for Muslims to use ‘the sword,’ these being verses 8:12 and 47:4, which read

8:12 Remember thy Lord inspired the angels (with the message): ‘I am with you: give firmness to the Believers: I will instil terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers: smite ye above their necks and smite all their fingertips off them.

47:4 Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks; at length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: until the war lays down its burdens.

These verses and the arguments made emphasise the point that Islam is not a religion of peace or pacifism but is one which condones violence, particularly against the disbelievers. This is not only something which is stressed in Dabiq and VoK, but also in other propaganda materials such as Voice of Hind. Voice of Hind is an English language magazine which can also be found in Hindi, Bengali, and Arabic, where it is known as Sawt al-Hind. It is produced by the Islamic State’s online media outlet, Al Qitaal Media Center, and is distributed primarily through the encrypted

messaging service, Telegram. Issue ten of Voice of Hind, titled We Are Doomed If We Don't Defend Our Prophet, contains an article called 'Islam Doesn't Mean Peace.' In this article, the IS writer states that the slogan 'Islam is the religion of peace' has been repeated to 'appease the West and their cronies' in an 'effort to water down and change the meaning of Islam' (Voice of Hind, 2020: 11). They continue on to say that

The slogan is repeated under the pretext of pacifism so much so that they allege that Islam calls for permanent peace with the disbelievers. How far is their claim from the truth! Verily, Allah has sent the Messenger Muhammad (PBUH) with the sword' (ibid: 11).

While verses in the Qur'an call on Muslims to take up arms against those who cause them harm and show themselves to be the enemies of Islam, there are also verses which call for Muslims to be forgiving, show patience, and offer protection, a primary example of which can be found in surah 42, with verses reading

- 42:41 But indeed if any do help and defend themselves after a wrong (done) to them, against such there is no cause of blame.
- 42:42 The blame is only upon those who oppress men with wrongdoing and insolently transgress beyond bounds through the land, defying right and justice: for such there will be a Penalty grievous.
- 42:43 But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs.

7.11 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have discussed my findings on the Qur'anic verses that have been referenced by IS and ISKP as justification for their political and military aims. Through providing explanation of the situational and intertextual context of the most frequently referenced verses drawn upon by IS and ISKP, I hope to have demonstrated the way(s) such verses have been recontextualised and disseminated in such a way that the teachings have been extrapolated. While the Qur'an largely calls for retributive justice and defensive jihad, which I have demonstrated above, these teachings

have been portrayed in such a way that IS are justified in their offences, by subjectivising terms which are not wholly clear in the Qur'an, such as 'transgressors,' and 'aggressors.'

In the next chapter, I discuss what O'Regan calls the 'deconstructive interpretation' in TACO, where I have looked at parts of the text produced by IS and ISKP which appear to contradict and/or undermine the preferred readings of the text. This is followed by some recommendations of ways in which governmental de-radicalisation efforts could be enriched, from taking into consideration the teachings that are put forward in materials produced by proscribed terrorist groups such as IS and ISKP and the religious justification they plant their roots in.

Chapter 8 Deconstructive Interpretation

In O'Regan's emphasis on viewing the Text as a Critical Object (TACO), the deconstructive interpretation is offered as a fourth phase in interpreting a text critically. Deconstructive interpretation is concerned with seeming inconsistencies and potential contradictions in the text, which are apparent across the descriptive, representative, and social interpretation stages. In the previous chapter, I have demonstrated the differences between the context in which the Qur'anic scripture was produced and their recontextualisation in extremist literature. In this chapter however, I attempt to show inconsistencies in the messages delivered by the writers of Dabiq and Voice of Khurasan (VoK). TACO's deconstructive interpretation is an engagement with a single text or a body of texts in which it is demonstrated that, despite what is claimed in the text(s), the text(s) is not consistent in keeping with the claim(s) contained, such that even an opposite reading is possible. In my application of deconstructive interpretation however, I have looked at messaging across the data collected, rather than at the specific phrases of text. I have attempted to show that the fundamental and core beliefs that underpin the ideology upon which IS and ISKP's society rests contain many flaws. This includes the call for unity between Muslims while simultaneously highlighting their differences and dividing them into in and out-groups, the call for eradicating free will, as well as the need to disengage with the concepts of nationalism and patriotism. I discuss each of these in turn.

8.1 Division

Verse 3:103 is one of the most frequently referenced Qur'anic verses between Dabiq and VoK, which I have illustrated in figures 17, 18, and 19. In figure 19, I have presented the overlap between figures 17 and 18, showing which verses appear in both sets of magazines in my primary dataset. In figure 19, verse 5:51 is referenced the highest number of times, having been referenced a total of 20 times between the two magazine series, while verse 3:103 is referenced the second highest number of times, with 14 references.

The wording of the verse has some slight variation which is dependent on the translation that is consulted, however the message and interpretation as explained in various exegesis remains the same. Verse 3:103 reads in its entirety as

And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the Pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth Allah make His Signs clear to you: that ye may be guided.

While this is the verse in full, the part that is referenced most frequently is the beginning of the verse (which reads 'And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves'), with infrequent references made to other sections.

Verse 3:103 is predominantly mentioned in two ways: to stress the importance of pledging allegiance to one Islamic leader (bay'ah), and for the Muslim community to not become divided into groups and factions, but to remain united as an ummah. A discussion of the use of verse 3:103 in issues 5 and 10 of Dabiq can be found in section 7.7 of Chapter 7, where I have explained its politicisation in calling for Muslims to pledge bay'ah to leaders in Islam, including to al Baghdadi. Issues 12 and 14 of Dabiq use verse 3:103 in a similar vein whereas issue 11 uses verse 3:103 for a different end; in the latter, rather than calling for Muslims to pledge their allegiance to a particular leader, the writers of Dabiq focus on the need for unification in an article titled 'The Evil of Division and Taqlīd.' While there is emphasis placed in this article on choosing one ruler or imam, the primary concern remains the unity of the ummah. The IS writer states that 'it is undeniably a trait of the people of deviance to remain divided without having a single imam' (Dabiq 11, 2015: 10). The article mentions other verses from the Qur'an which are used as evidence of the prohibition of division within Islam, which can be found on pages 10 and 11 of the issue. The verses mentioned are the following:

- 25:53 But the people divided their religion among them into sects – each faction, in what it has, rejoicing.
- 42:13 He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Nūh and that which We have revealed to you, and what We enjoined upon Ibrāhīm and 'Isā to establish the religion and not be divided therein.

6:159 Indeed, those who have divided their religion and become sects – you have nothing to do with them.

3:103 And do not be like the ones who became divided and differed after the clear proofs had come to them. And those will have a great punishment.

Similarly, page 27 of issue 15 of Dabiq, titled ‘Break the Cross,’ lists verses used to demonstrate Allah’s proscription of division and the cruciality of identifying a single leader. The verses used to support these claims, alongside verse 3:103 are:

21:92 Verily a single nation is your nation, and I am your Lord, so worship Me.

30:32 And do not be of the pagans, those who divided their religion and became sects, each party delighted with itself.

22:78 He has called you Muslims.

4:59 O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those of authority amongst you.

Throughout the issues of Dabiq there is significant emphasis placed on the need for Muslims to remain together and undivided, however, IS have continuously used division as a tactic for radicalisation and recruitment.

I draw a distinction between individuals IS deem to be true Muslims, and false Muslims. There is not a sense that one’s belief in Islam is sufficient for them to be considered a Muslim, however the qualifying factor is the behaviour in which they engage, such as abiding by the Five Pillars of Islam, that which is prescribed in the Qur’an, and making hijrah to join the jihad. For some Salafi-jihadi groups, one’s faithfulness to their religion and one’s piety are measured by the willingness to join jihad, with those who do not being identified as ‘false Muslims.’ This is contrary to what is highlighted numerous times throughout the Dabiq series. The verses of the Qur’an mentioned above can be understood to mean that all those who identify as Muslim, without distinction, ought to unite. To divide the ummah based on one’s perception of the Islamification of an individual seems arbitrary, and contrary to the message portrayed in the verses referenced – a similar inconsistency is found in the issues of VoK.

Verse 3:103 is mentioned for the first time in issue 12 of VoK, in an article titled ‘They Satisfied the International Community!’ in which the writer(s) of ISKP discuss the division of Muslim land by the West (in a perceived attempt to divide the ummah), as well as the evils of patriotism. Referring to the division of land into countries by the West, the ISKP writer(s) state that the

‘division of countries by name or especially the division of an Islamic land into several pieces goes against the social aspects of the Muslims. The underlying purpose of such division is to divide the Muslim Ummah so that the kufri agendas of the west can be implemented throughout their lands’ (Voice of Khurasan 12, 2022: 4).

Patriotism and nationalism are used as evidence against one’s belief in and faith to Islam, with individuals who feel patriotic being labelled ‘kufr.’ When speaking of the ‘evils’ of patriotism, the ISKP writer(s) argue that they

call it kufr because patriotism is a fundamental tenet of secular creed, and accepting it means obeying the kuffar. And it is a form of shirk because it is an idol that people worship besides Allah; that’s [why] they fight for it; based on it, they choose or befriend or hate someone; they give up their lives, children, and possessions for the sake of this nationalism. Anyone who benefits their secular patriotic interest is regarded as their ally, whereas anyone who harms their secular national interest is regarded as [the] enemy. Anyone with a patriotic heart will undoubtedly obey kuffar. Patriotism is more than just words and a few slogans; there are many other corruptions associated with it, one of which is submission to kuffar, while Islam is the complete submission to Allah and His commandments. Because of this nationalism, the kuffar drew international borders and forced Muslims to obey those. If the patriotic principles are accepted by someone, they offer peace and make friendship with them and if someone doesn’t accept these, they become hostile to them (ibid: 6).

There are two fundamental inconsistencies with the sentiments delivered in the above statement in VoK and the use of verse 3:103, which I will discuss in turn. The first is the use of verse 3:103 in this article which emphasises the importance of the solidarity of all Muslims together as one nation,

while also labeling those Muslims who feel patriotic or have nationalistic sentiments as ‘kufr’ or non-believers. The writer identifies anyone who feels patriotic for their country of residence as ‘obeying the kuffar.’ (Further discussion on nationalism can be found in part 8.3 of this chapter.)

The second contradiction is in the writer’s argument that the ‘kuffar’ offers ‘peace’ and ‘friendship’ with those who are patriotic or submit to nationalism, and ‘if someone doesn’t accept these, they become hostile to them.’ In the writer’s own admission, there is hostility shown by ISKP to those who are patriotic or nationalistic. The writer references how the ‘kuffar’ only show an individual ‘friendship’ and ‘peace’ if they abide by their principles – something which, by their own admission, ISKP themselves practice, calling those who do not follow the principles of Islam or ISKP ‘kufr.’ Similarly, in issue 13 of VoK, in the opening article titled ‘Break the Idol of Nationalism,’ the writer says that nationalism

destroys the unity amongst the Muslims, separates non-Arabs from Arabs and vice versa, and it denies the religious relationship among the Muslims, which goes against the teaching of Islam, as Islam calls all Muslims to consensus and cooperation with each other in good deeds, and it has strictly prohibited disagreement (Voice of Khurasan 13, 2022: 5).

On page 8 of this article, the ISKP writer(s) mention the ‘Nationalistic Taliban Emirate,’ in which the Taliban are criticised for possessing ‘many corrupt and dirty beliefs’ including agreeing with ‘all the infidels of the world’ in their ‘belief of nationalism’ (ibid: 8).

On the basis of this belief, it spread its hand of brotherhood to every Afghan apostate and infidel [...] to the extent that they have assured security to all of them, and based on the same belief, whoever is not from their own nation or country, no matter how strong he is in faith, is their enemy. [...] Based on this belief, it suspended the enforcement of Shari’ah rule and has implemented state laws in its place (ibid: 8).

In the passage above which is taken from issue 13 of VoK, the ISKP writer criticises the Taliban for the hand of friendship and security that is offered to the non-Muslims on the grounds of nationalism. Not only are non-Muslims offered security, but Muslims who are not Afghan nationals

are denied the same benefits as Afghan nationals on the principles of ‘nationalism,’ while ISKP believe that simply being a Muslim is sufficient reason to receive equal treatment. While the Taliban is largely accepted as an organisation who base their politics and principles on Islamic foundations, ISKP draw a distinction between the Islam that is practised by the Taliban and what they would view as the ‘true’ form of Islam.

Islam contains three denominations: Sunni, Shia, and Sufi Muslims, with the vast majority of Muslims – between 87-90% identifying as Sunni Muslims. Within the different denominations, it is common for individuals to believe their sect of Islam to be the ‘correct’ path, while others are dismissed as being waylaid or misinterpretations of what Allah intended. This is a belief which is commonly held among mainstream Muslims of all dominations, but which is held deeper and more firmly among extremists. Groups such as IS hold strongly to the belief that Sunni Islam is the only correct form of Islam, and to believe in Shia or Sufi Islam is equivalent to identifying as a non-Muslim – a belief which I have illustrated in figure 25.

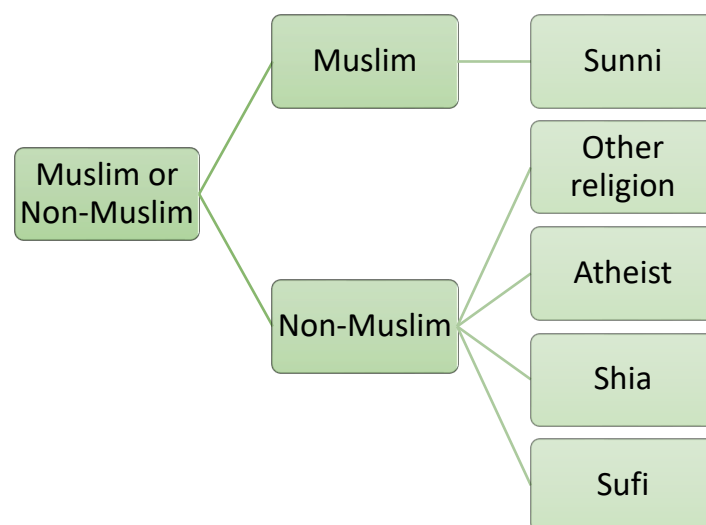


Figure 25. Distinguishing Between Muslims and Non-Muslims for the Islamic State

In issues of both Dabiq and VoK, IS and ISKP differentiate further between who they consider to be ‘true’ Sunni Muslims and ‘kuffar’ – simply identifying as a Sunni Muslim, again, is insufficient just as partaking in Islamic practises such as observing fasts or performing all five prayers a day is also viewed as being insufficient in this context. In both Dabiq and VoK, the Taliban are likened

to being non-Muslims on the grounds that they do not implement shari’ah in its full, their offering of protection to non-Muslims, and the growing and selling of opium, as well as a host of other reasons. I have demonstrated this further distinction in figure 26.

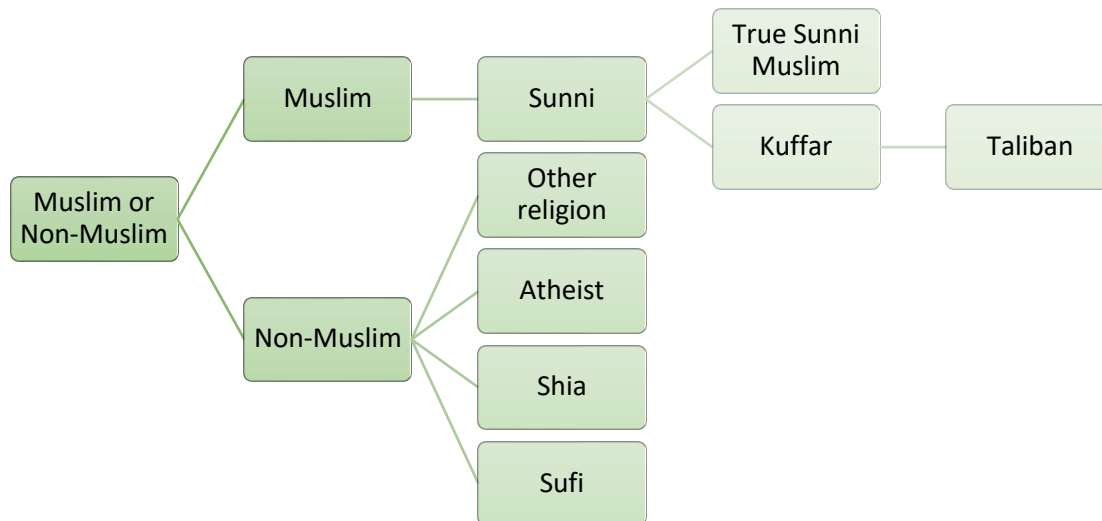


Figure 26. Distinguishing Between True Sunni Muslims and the Taliban

In the VoK series in particular – the primary aim of which is to attract individuals to fight against the rule of the Taliban – there is great emphasis on the un-Islamic ways of the Taliban. Despite verse 3:103 calling for the unity of all Muslims – because division is an evil – the writers distinguish between Muslims based on sect, and further qualifiers based on the way an individual chooses to practise their Islam. This is a common tactic deployed to encourage the reader to partake in identity formation politics while also being used as a strategy of legitimisation, and is contrary to the teachings in the Qur’an.

In issue 21, which is titled Allah’s Hudood and Taliban’s Drama, there is an article which runs from page 11 to 21 called ‘The Arab-Muslim Land is Lost, the Islamic Khilafah Will Take it Back Bi’dhnillah’ in which the ISKP writer states that ‘Religious paths are not all equally valid’ (Voice of Khurasan 21, 2023: 14). This is a statement made in ISKP’s attempt to explain verse 49:13, which the ISKP writer says reads as ‘We... made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another’ (Voice of Khurasan 21, 2023: 14).

Verse 49:13 is also mentioned in the Dabiq series, including in issue 8 which is titled Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa. The verse is often used to emphasise that Allah has called for people from different lands to know one another and extend the hand of friendship to all). The writer(s) of this article discuss the evils of nationalism and patriotism, calling for people to abandon any love they hold for their countries and to come together as one. The verse is used to demonstrate that Allah has called for individuals to know one another irrespective of their place of residence and nationality.

The writer states that while the initial reading of the verse might suggest that the preferred reading calls for pluralism and coexistence, the verse in full, and when contextualised, calls for Muslims to identify the differences between themselves and others as reason for division. The writer states that 'mutual knowledge is required for Muslims to be able to fully understand that what divide them from the kuffar is much greater than the supposed commonalities' (Voice of Khurasan 21, 2023: 14), which they say is stated in the next line of the verse. The writer quotes this as reading 'The most superior of you in the sight of Allah is the one who has the most Taqwa'⁶⁴ (ibid: 14). This is used as evidence that the Muslim is above the non-Muslim, which is to argue that while we may come to know one another from various tribes, there must be an acknowledgment that a hierarchy exists in which the Muslim sits at the top of the chain. The writer argues that the 'non-Muslim' may not necessarily be those who turn away from Islam but can also include individuals who identify themselves as Muslims but do not behave according to Islamic principles and practises (which are perceived as being correct conduct by ISKP). Division within the Islamic community is heavily emphasised within Salafi-jihadi literature and other forms of propaganda, despite verse 3:103 promoting the opposite and being one of the most frequently utilised verses of the Qur'an.

While verse 3:103 calls on Muslims to not be divided and, yet, IS and ISKP writers continue to call for division within the ummah, there are verses which are employed whereby one verse is used for two different ends – an example of which is verse 8:39. This verse reads 'And fight them until there is no fitnah and until the religion, all of it, is for Allah.'

⁶⁴ Taqwa is an Arabic term which refers to having consciousness or fear of Allah.

In issue 6 of Dabiq, which is titled Al Qa'idah of Waziristan: A Testimony from Within, the verse is mentioned in the foreword where the IS writers discuss the attack carried out by Man Haron Monis (discussion of which can be found in section 7.6 of Chapter 7, where the use of verse 8:39 in Dabiq and VoK is detailed). The writer discusses the international medias' 'attempt to smear his character and, by extension, the noble cause that he was fighting for – the cause of Allah (ta'ālā)' (Dabiq 6, 2014: 3), with verse 8:39 being used to illustrate 'the cause of Allah.' The IS writer goes on to state that there will be others who follow the example set by Monis (and those like him), saying that

all that the West will be able to do is to anxiously await the next round of slaughter and then issue the same tired, cliché statements in condemnation of it when it occurs. The Muslims will continue to defy the kāfir war machine, flanking the crusaders on their own streets and bringing the war back to their own soil (ibid: 4).

The individuals who are to be fought, mentioned in the verse as 'them,' are identified here as being 'the West' who will continue to suffer rounds 'of slaughter.' Similarly, in issue 4 of VoK, which is titled Hijrah, verse 8:39 is mentioned in an article called 'Our War With the Mushrikin Will Remain.' The article begins by stating that 'Allah made the conflict between the people of tawhid and the people of shirk a tradition without end, as Islam and kufr must inevitably contend in every place and time' (Voice of Khurasan 4, 2022: 8). It discusses the 'eternal divine command for the people of Islam' to 'engage in war with shirk and its people, waging jihad against them with their hands, tongues and hearts' (ibid: 8).

The primary focus of this article is on the mushrikīn which includes 'one who commits apostasy from his din'⁶⁵ who in 'dying in kufr, will have lost all he had done of good deeds before his apostasy, even if he was a muwāhhid, a muhajir, and a mujahid' (ibid: 8). The article discusses individuals who identify themselves as Muslims but are 'boasting about not establishing the Din or ruling by the Shari'ah!' (Voice of Khurasan 4, 2022: 9). Unlike in issue 6 of Dabiq, the 'non-

⁶⁵ Din in Arabic refers to one's religious way of life or religion.

Muslim' target at the heart of the article and towards whom the verse is directed is not the West, but are 'false' Muslims instead.

Similarly, another verse which is mentioned in both Dabiq and VoK calling for division between different 'types' of Muslims is verse 9:29, which reads

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Prophet, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued (9:29).

This is mentioned in issue 14 of Dabiq which is titled The Murtadd Brotherhood, in an article of the same name, which is a play on the Muslim Brotherhood. The article discusses the position of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) towards Jews and Christians, as expressed by Hassan al Banna – the founder of the organisation. In front of a joint American-British committee holding a meeting in Egypt on the Palestinian issue, al Banna is quoted in Dabiq as having said

Our dispute with the Jews is not religious, because the Qur'ān encouraged us to be friendly with them. Islam is a human law before being an ethnic law. The Qur'ān praised the Jews... and when the Qur'ān dealt with the matter of the Jews, it approached it from an economic and legal angle (Dabiq 14, 2016: 31).

The MB also released an official statement which is referenced in this issue of Dabiq, saying

Our position towards our Christian brothers in Egypt and the Muslim world is a historic, famous, and clear position. They have the same rights and responsibilities as us. They are our partners in the nation and our brothers in the long, national struggle. They have all the rights of citizenship: the material and moral rights, the civilian and political rights (ibid: 33).

The equal standing that is offered to Muslims and those of other religions or no religion at all by the MB is viewed by IS as their kufr. IS argue that the Muslim is not permitted to offer friendship, support, or protection to a non-Muslim, and partaking in any of these actions is like following a law that was not mandated by Allah – making the individual a kuffar, and one amongst the Jews and Christians themselves. The IS writers write of the MB that the ‘Christians are their brothers in kufr. They do not want to oppose any other religion. They want to treat all kuffār as equals with Muslims. They thus reject the obligation of jihād against the Jews and Christians’ (Dabiq 14, 2016: 33). Verse 9:29 is evidence of the obligation placed upon the Muslim to fight against the Jews and Christians, as well as against all who do not believe in Allah. The MB, who are widely acknowledged and accepted as an Islamic or ‘Islamist’ organisation, are labelled as kufr by IS due to their acceptance of followers of other religions.

Similarly in issue 8 of VoK which is titled Khurasan – The Graveyard for Kuffar and Apostates, in an article called ‘Nullifiers of Islam Applicable on Taliban’ the ISKP writers discuss the actions and words of the Taliban which invalidate their claims of being Muslims and implementing Islamic rule. Verse 9:29 is referenced in this article in relation to what the ISKP writer lists as the ‘fifth pillar’ which is ‘to show one’s enmity towards the kuffar’ (Voice of Khurasan 8, 2022: 13). There is clarification offered of the ways ‘enmity’ is to be shown, which is divided into two types – one is to show enmity towards the non-Muslims through belief and thought, the other is to practise enmity through action.

If someone shows enmity by doing Jihad, then his disassociation is completed, and if one assumes that he or she cannot do such disassociation then he or she has to disassociate bodily from him/her. Like becoming happy when a kafir is sad and being sad when a kafir is happy and not help him/her against the Muslims in any way. One must make firm intentions to fight him/her if chances are available. Then and only then a Muslim’s disassociation from the kuffar is completed, and he or she is considered by mumin billlah and fafir bit-taghut’ (ibid: 13).

Those who do not disassociate from non-Muslims are considered to be non-Muslims themselves, which is relayed in this article, stating ‘People of knowledge have said that if someone does not

make [takfir] on kafir then he/she is also kafir, it is an act of rejecting Allah and His messenger’ (Voice of Khurasan 8, 2022: 13).

A distinction is made between the Muslim and the non-Muslim, of which the writer states that

‘all humans are not equal in judgmental rights, the believers in Islam are honored and believers in kufr are humiliated. The believers in Islam will have peace and security but the kuffar will be targeted and their blood will be permissible to shed, their wealth can be taken as booty and there will be no mercy to kafir or mushrik as Allah mentioned in the glorious Quran’ (ibid: 13).

A fundamental message that is laboured in Salafi-jihadi literature is the distinction between the ‘true’ and ‘false’ Muslims, with the pool of those to be considered ‘true’ Muslims getting smaller and smaller as further qualifiers are added. The move to classify individuals or groups as ‘non-Muslims’ or ‘kufr’ can be viewed as something of a strategic move, which strips individuals of power, authority, and legitimacy.

8.2 Free Will

The stripping of power and authority is not reserved for the Taliban alone but is also something that the mainstream Muslim is subjected to. In the second issue of Dabiq, in an article titled ‘It’s Either the Islamic State or the Flood’ the writers of IS discuss the concept of free will and the forceful implementation of shari’ah. The article begins by laying out the perceived principles upon which Western democracy rest – this being the right for individuals to decide their own path and make choices of how to behave and act. The writers state

From amongst the polluted ideologies that have afflicted people the entire world over through-out the course of the tyranny carried out by the forces of kufr, is the notion that the people can choose whether to follow the truth or to embark upon falsehood. This ideology teaches that no one has the right, regardless of whom he may be, to impose any creed or set of morals on anyone else even if that creed or set of morals is the truth revealed by Allah (Dabiq 2, 2014: 5).

The primary aim of this article is to demonstrate to the reader why the concept of free will is dangerous and how adhering to it and providing the individual with the ability to make choices of how to act can take the individual away from Islam, leading them down a path towards destruction and Hell-fire. The writer(s) argue that ‘giving the people choice was no longer a possibility in this new state of affairs. Rather, the guiding principle became that every time choice is allowed it will result in misguidance, either in the present or in the future’ (Dabiq 2, 2014: 5).

The article is divided into five parts, the last of which is titled ‘The Widespread Ignorance Amongst the People’ which discusses those who claim to be Muslim and are Muslim only by name, but do not practise Islam as they are obliged to. The argument is made that it is important and necessary for the Islamic State to impose shari’ah law and force individuals to practise Islam in the way that it was intended by Allah, to prevent them from making regretful decisions. The writer(s) argue that

until we return to the correct state of Islamic affairs, it’s upon us all to work together to eradicate the principle of “free choice,” and to not deceive the people in an attempt to seek their pleasure, neither by calling to “free choice” directly, nor by alluding to it indirectly. Rather, we must confront them with the fact that they’ve turned away from the religion, while we hold onto it, grasping its purity, its clarity, its comprehensiveness, without any blemishes due to shirk, misguidance or heresy, and that we’re completely ready to stand in the face of anyone who attempts to divert us from our commitment to making the religion of Allah triumphant over all other religions, and that we will continue to fight the people of deviation and misguidance until we die trying to make the religion triumphant (ibid: 11).

There is a clear hierarchy evident in the writing of IS, in which they view themselves as the true Muslims and ones who have remained true to prescriptions in the Qur’an and Islam. This superiority and what they call their ‘commitment to making the religion of Allah triumphant’ is used to justify their eradication of ‘free choice,’ however, this leads to a contradiction in the case of the pillars of Islam.

The first and primary pillar of Islam is the shahada, which is the profession of one's faith and which translates to mean 'there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger.' The core of this is one's belief – simply speaking the words and declaring one's faith is insufficient, for it is believed that Allah knows the contents of one's heart and their true intentions. It is necessary that one accept Allah into their life and believe in Him and Islam before making the shahada declaration.

If an individual is forced to partake in Islamic practises such as observing fasts and partaking in prayer, as well as having Islamic codes of conduct made mandatory – such as dress codes and the segregation of genders in public spaces – the question arises of one's belief. It is wholly possible that an individual partakes in these actions because it is legally implemented in society, while also having no faith or belief in Islam or Allah. There is no way of fact checking whether an individual has any such belief or inclination towards Islam or whether they do not, for example, eat in public during the month of Ramadan due to the ramifications and punishments distributed for such behaviour. Belief in Allah and the Messenger of Allah is a fundamental and core principle in Islam, without which the other four pillars of Islam are made redundant, and one which can be overridden when Islamic codes are made essential. It is impossible to trust that faith is present and the intention to follow Islam for the sake and duty of Islam is true when they are legal obligations.

The 'widespread ignorance' which is referenced in section five of this article refers to all those who identify themselves as Muslims but do not practise it in the way the Islamic State sees fit. Those who are not as aggressive or firm in their belief and practises are viewed as deviating from the path of Islam – something which IS view themselves as rectifiers of, through the harsh and strict implementation of the shari'ah. For IS, this is true salvation. The individual is not responsible or knowledgeable enough to be permitted to make their own decisions.

This raises the question of how an individual is to know, believe, or view IS as being purveyors of truth and a group who represent the purest form of Islam, and being closer to the truth than other groups – such as the Taliban. There is emphasis by all extremist groups on the failings of other organisations and why their political and religious stance is more valid and superior to all others.

It becomes impossible to weigh up the religiosity of a group in comparison to others, with little or no reason to believe one is more lawful (in an Islamic sense) to another.

8.3 Nationalism

In issue 8 of Dabiq, the IS writer states that the ‘idea of nationalism and patriotism contradicts the religion in a number of its fundamentals. First, preferring people to others is in accordance with their piety not their blood’ (Dabiq 8, 2015: 7). Writers of Dabiq argue that

Nationalism, patriotism, tribalism, and revolutionism were never the driving forces behind the heart of the muwahhid mujāhid. For him to lose his tongue would be more beloved to him than to voluntarily utter slogans of nationalist Jāhiliyyah. Rather, the banners of nationalism are beneath his dusty feet (ibid: 4).

Nationalism and patriotism are mentioned in both the Dabiq and VoK series, in which the writers criticise Muslims who are nationalistic, calling for them to not show any love for their respective countries of residence and instead to identify as a Muslim and as a member of the ummah above any feelings of nationalism or patriotism. While discussing ‘false’ believers, ISKP writers state in issue 4 of VoK that

Today, if we look around the world, we see the world sunk in the shirk of democracy, supported by the scholars of evil. They have tarnished and changed the religion of Allah for the sake of the world. They have entered in to a transaction with the shaitan and have sold the verses of Allah for a few dollars. They call the enemies of Allah as friends, and call for coexistence with other religions and call for the tolerance of shirk. They have given space to innovations in the religion, and changed the brotherhood of Islam to be only recognized by the sickness of nationalism (Voice of Khurasan 4, 2022: 5).

In the UK, such a stance is particularly poignant given the ostracization post-colonial migrants experience in a nation where they do not feel accepted. I focus here on the post-colonial South Asian migrants as a significant proportion of those charged and convicted with terror related offences in the UK are of South Asian heritage (as discussed in Chapter 2). In such a context, it

becomes unthinkable for some that one would show loyalties to a country (usually a Western country) and oppose the actions of the 'Muslim' community, when these actions are portrayed as being violent acts with the hopes of bringing Islamic, political, and social reform for the betterment of the Islamic community in countries where they are a minority. The ummah is given the utmost importance.

In jihadist literature, there is mention of the stateless and borderless existence of the ummah with claims that Muslims all over the world belong to it. There is mention and acceptance of all Muslims as being a part of this Islamic community, irrespective of the country in which they reside, while also calling for Muslims to migrate to join the Islamic State. Simultaneously, while mentioning the statelessness of the ummah, IS call on Muslims to join them in their defined perimeters to aid in the building of an Islamic State.

There is mentioning of the evils and ills of nationalism, while calling for individuals to love the Islamic State and pledge allegiance to the group, state, and the conquering and acquisition of more land and materials to grow the state. How can one condemn feelings of love for a country and state, arguing that it is un-Islamic to love anything other than the ummah, while calling for individuals to pledge allegiance and love for a state being built by IS?

8.4 Chapter Summary

While there are contradictions in the points made in the literature produced by IS and ISKP, it is more important to understand the contradictions in the fundamental beliefs that form their paradigm. There are many inconsistencies in the messaging and the points made, which are drawn upon and recontextualised based on the narrative that the writer seeks to deliver. In this chapter, I have attempted to illustrate some of these contradictions. I believe that de-radicalisation programmes such as Channel and the DDP would benefit from detailed understandings of the rhetoric and discourse being disseminated in extremist produced literature, particularly the core values and beliefs that underpin their ideology. It is through researching these, understanding the messages, and highlighting contradictions and inconsistencies that we may be able to form some sort of barrier between those who are vulnerable to extremism and radicalisation and the content they have engaged with.

In the next chapter, I summarise my findings and how I hope this will be able to aid the disengagement of vulnerable individuals from Islamic fundamentalism and jihadism. I have provided an overview of how I believe de-radicalisation programmes can be refined and strengthened with the research I have conducted in mind, and how my findings can be used to enhance the practises currently in place.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss my research contribution and limitations before summarising my findings and how they apply to the research questions and aims that have driven this study. I consider each research question in turn, before discussing developments made in countering Islamic extremism and radicalisation, as well as making recommendations for areas that could be improved through the application of the research conducted.

9.1 Aims of the Thesis

This thesis has aimed to identify the specific Qur'anic verses referenced in propaganda materials produced by the proscribed groups Islamic State (IS) and Islamic State in Khurasan Province (ISKP). Once the verses were identified, I then attempted to demonstrate how they had been utilised by these groups to justify their campaigns and actions, and how Islam as a religion has been politicised as a result.

I believe that with the research that I have conducted, I have provided a clearer understanding of the historical contexts of particular verses which provide indication of how the verses themselves are dominantly intended to be received, as well as the ways in which the verses have been recontextualised and reappropriated to fit the aims of Salafi-jihadis. It is my hope that this research offers some new perspectives for how de-radicalisation programmes in the UK can be delivered, by taking into consideration the particular narratives that are being consumed. I hope that this greater understanding of how religion is being utilised may provide insights for intervention providers that might be useful in one-to-one sessions.

A crucial element for de-radicalisation to be effective is that the individual partaking in the programme be open to change, which is more likely if the intervention provider has familiarity and understanding of the subjects' thought-processes and religious beliefs. This entails not only knowledge of the individuals' understanding of specific religious phrases, scriptural references, and religious commandments, but also the social context in which certain communities have been brought up, their treatment by society and the polarising effect this can have on such communities. With the South-Asian community for instance, there is a strong imbalance in the power dynamic

between the coloniser and colonised – a imbalance that did not end with the end British colonial rule. With the pushing of ‘British values’ and a heavy emphasis being placed on the need for post-colonial migrants to assimilate, it is easy to see how this could lead to individuals feeling disenfranchised and alienated. It is important to not only remain sympathetic but also to be aware of the political and sociocultural landscape against which individuals have been radicalised; simply having knowledge of Islam alone will not suffice.

The research questions that have driven this study are the following:

RQ1 What are the justifications presented for acts of violence in extremist literature produced by Salafi-jihadis, and in what ways is Qur’anic scripture used to give credibility to this?

RQ1 has been addressed across chapters 6 and 7. In Chapter 6, I have provided a discussion of the preliminary observations from the initial reading of the text – a step which acts as a precursor to Fairclough’s ‘descriptive interpretation.’ In this discussion, I have offered some of the narratives and ideologies presented in the discourse and which contribute to arguments which justify the use of violence against perceived enemies of Islam. In Chapter 7, I have then examined the data that have been collected during the reading of the text to identify the specific verses and the frequency with which they are referenced.

RQ2 When Qur’anic scripture is offered as a means of legitimising acts of terror, how are the verses which are drawn upon recontextualised so as to be applicable to modern times?

RQ2 is also answered in Chapter 7, where I have discussed the situational and intertextual contexts of the texts produced. I have attempted to provide some historical context for the scriptural verses most popularly employed in the datasets I have analysed in an attempt to demonstrate the differences in the original ‘meanings’ of the references and their use in extremist literature.

RQ3 In what ways are language and scripture utilised on online platforms for the purposes of radicalisation?

While this is not a question that I have sought to answer directly, it is one which has guided the research as the focus of my work is on the dissemination of extremist materials online, and the radicalising effect of politicising religion to justify violence. I have provided a summary of my findings for these research questions in section 9.3 of this chapter.

To analyse the selected texts, I read them closely to find the Qur'anic verses that have been referenced in the materials presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. These verses – along with all relevant information, such as the location of the verse in the text as well as the context in which it was employed – were entered into tables which provide insights into when, where, and how the verses have been referenced. The statistics for verses referenced in each issue and series, as well as how frequently, were then entered into a larger database to determine their popularity with such groups. This allowed me to determine which verses are most commonly referenced in the propaganda materials, which have been analysed.

In order to understand the purposes of the utilisation of the verses, I have analysed the context and co-text in which the verses were referenced in the online magazines, taking into consideration the articles in which they feature, and a possible interpretation and reading of the verse based on the arguments made in the article and the points raised. While I do not argue that the interpretation that I have provided is binding or correct while others are false, I have attempted to provide a possible preferred reading which is in accordance with what I perceive to be the intentions of the text and writer. I have also attempted to demonstrate what the preferred reading of the verse may be in the Qur'an by determining the context and co-text of the verse in the Qur'an itself. Tafsirs have been consulted to provide Qur'anic exegesis for potential readings of the verse as well as providing a greater narrative and context. By looking closely at the verses, their context, and co-text in both the Qur'an as well as in the jihadist materials, it allows the possibility to identify similarities and differences in the preferred interpretation. By following this process, I have attempted to illustrate ways in which Qur'anic verses have been decontextualised and manipulated by IS and ISKP such that the interpretation of the verses as presented in Dabiq and Voice of

Khurasan (VoK) mirror the objectives of the magazine writers, which often run contrary to the more widely accepted preferred readings of the Qur'an. Throughout this research, I have remained aware that, given its interpretative nature, I—as the researcher—cannot be entirely separate from the study itself. In many ways, the researcher becomes part of the research process. With this understanding, I have aimed to present interpretations of scripture that align with the broader teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, ensuring they do not contradict other parts of the texts. My goal has been to offer interpretations that go beyond personal opinion and are grounded in the wider context of Islamic tradition.

With the knowledge and information provided in this research, I hope to provide some insight into how Islam as a religion has been politicised by such individuals as well as an understanding of how this has been achieved. Particularly in the context of the UK's imperial history and the push for post-colonial migrants to assimilate into society while simultaneously ostracising them, it is important to understand interpretations of scripture and social concepts such as nationalism through this lens. With these in mind, I hope to contribute towards making the UK's current counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, more effective.

CONTEST was first developed in 2003 and has undergone many revisions over the years; it consists of four main streams which are Prevent, Pursue, Protect, and Prepare – a discussion of these streams can be found in sections 4.2 to 4.5 of Chapter 4. The research carried out is particularly interested in Prevent, as well as in an arm of Prevent known as the Desistance and Disengagement Programme (DDP), discussion of which can be found in section 4.6 of Chapter 4.

At its core, Prevent aims to identify individuals who show support for or inclination towards radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism. Prevent is run by local authorities who work with teachers, doctors, youth centres etc. to help those with safeguarding responsibilities to be able to recognise and refer those who may be vulnerable to extremism. When referrals are made to the Prevent strategy, an investigation is opened into each case to determine the risks and vulnerabilities of the individual and, where appropriate, a further referral is made to Channel – a safeguarding agency which offers support for those who are vulnerable to all forms of extremism. If a preliminary investigation of a Prevent referral finds that the grounds are unfounded, then the case

is closed. It is only when an investigation proves the referral is legitimate that a referral to Channel is made. Participation in the Channel programme is entirely voluntary. Any case where an individual declines Channel participation but is deemed to be a terror risk becomes the responsibility of the police. Unlike the voluntary nature of Channel, the DDP is compulsory for all those who are referred to it and refusal to participate may result in re-imprisonment.

The DDP is an element of Prevent which was introduced in 2017 and which places its focus on individuals who have specifically been involved in terrorism or terror related activities. The aim of the DDP is to provide individualised rehabilitative support to de-radicalise those who have partaken in terrorist activity.

My primary concerns with the administering of de-radicalisation programmes are with the individuals who are providing the rehabilitative support and the training they receive, what kind of support is provided, and how. I believe that the research I have conducted can provide greater insight into the narratives that are being perpetuated by Salafi-jihadists. While there is no way to know with any certainty if the writers of the texts hold with any conviction the claims being made in their production, what we can explore is what is being presented for consumption and offer an interpretation and critique of that. Through identifying the narratives that are circulated, the legitimacy that is afforded to them, and the aspirations underlying the extremist prescriptions that result, the intervention provided by the DDP can be made more specialised and individualised. I discuss some recommendations for CONTEST in section 9.4 of this chapter.

9.2 Limitations of the Research

At its core, this research is informed by post-structuralist perspectives on textual interpretation, which contend that there is no single, definitively correct or incorrect way to interpret a text. However, this does not imply that all interpretations are equally valid. I argue that certain interpretations can hold greater validity if they demonstrate a clear consistency with how the text seems to invite being read. Exercising judgemental rationality is essential when engaging with texts that are largely subjective. It involves recognising the text's preferred reading, the apparent intentions of its author, and the purpose of the text itself.

This approach has been central to my analysis of propaganda materials produced by jihadist groups, particularly IS and ISKP. In evaluating their use of scripture, I have endeavoured to consider both the immediate textual context and the broader co-text, in order to identify interpretations that align with the wider teachings of the Qur'an.

Adopting this interpretivist stance also means acknowledging that I, as the researcher, cannot remain entirely detached from the research process. As both reader and interpreter, I am inherently part of the study. While I do not claim to be free from bias, I have remained critically aware of how my Bangladeshi and Islamic heritage may shape my engagement with and interpretation of the texts under examination.

When analysing the magazines produced by IS and ISKP, I have had to read and assume what their interpretations of scripture are based on the way they relay this in the materials produced and the accompanying narrative provided. Conducting interviews with members of IS and ISKP and mainstream Muslims would provide a more accurate understanding of what the interpretations of Qur'anic verses are for these groups. By doing this, it would be possible to read a verse to participants and ask questions relating to their understanding and interpretation of it.

While interviews allow this possibility, they raise the question of accuracy and validity. There is no assurance that the answers being provided by the interviewee would be in accordance with their true beliefs. It is entirely possible that the interviewee might provide answers which do not reflect their true opinions for fear, for example, that their true opinions might be viewed as being too radical. There have been instances in which some Muslims have felt the need to self-censor their speech, as a direct response to the Prevent strategy. This, coupled with the potential dangers of interviewing extremists as a female researcher who seeks to question their rationale, has meant that I have not conducted any interviews for this research project. I do, however, acknowledge the benefits of speaking directly to such individuals. If it is possible to speak to members of IS and ISKP and gain an understanding of their reasoning and beliefs, this would be worth pursuing and would allow the Prevent and DDP practitioner as well as other members of CONTEST to construct what their paradigms look like and how to counter those narratives.

9.3 Summary of Findings

RQ1 What are the justifications presented for acts of violence in extremist literature produced by Salafi-jihadis, and in what ways are Qur’anic scripture used to give credibility to this?

I have addressed RQ1 in Chapters 6 and 7. In O’Regan’s TACO model (O’Regan, 2006), he argues that prior to analysing the linguistic features of a text, the analyst ought to engage in an initial reading of the text in which the analyst begins to understand the subject matter, the framing of the text, and what the preferred reading of the text seems to be, whereby the reader tries to determine what the text is saying and with that what it is trying to convey. This step of an initial reading precedes the first stage of Fairclough’s CDA (Description), which is where I begin my analysis in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, I have answered the first half of the research question, looking at the justification provided for acts of violence and narratives which are provided to promote aggression. The second part of this question has been answered in Chapter 7, where I have discussed the Qur’anic scriptural verses that are used to give credibility to actions prescribed by extremist groups. In Chapter 6, I have provided the descriptive interpretation of the texts being analysed, which considers the intended audience and the topics being discussed, as well as the overarching ideological meanings behind the narratives that are shared and the content that is published.

From an initial reading of the text, it was evident that there were some subjects that were of particular importance for these organisations – topics which were recurring themes over many issues of the magazines analysed. Two themes that recur which are presented as justification for acts of violence are (1) a call for individuals to join jihad and make hijrah, and (2) conceptions of what I have called ‘Just War.’

The IS and ISKP call for jihad is predominantly based on religious teachings, scriptural references, and an interpretation of what it means to be a ‘true’ Muslim. In one such article, authored by a female IS member who writes under the name Al-Muhājirah, the author tries to inspire women to push their husbands to join jihad, labelling those who do not as being ‘false’ Muslims or hypocrites.

Characterising in this way is something that has been used extensively by IS and ISKP in their propaganda materials as a legitimisation tactic to form in and out-groups.

In what I refer to as the concept of Just War, IS state that the Qur'an calls for retaliation which is in equal measure to the attacks one endures. This teaching has been used to justify the call for terror attacks, which have been portrayed as being defensive rather than offensive, to remain in keeping with Qur'anic teachings. An example that is provided is that of the Jordanian pilot, Kasasbeh, who was burned alive by IS – an execution which was documented by IS and circulated online. In the Dabiq magazine in which the death of Kasasbeh was recounted, IS included photos of children who had been burned by Western coalition forces in wars in the Middle East, arguing on these grounds that the death of Kasasbeh was legitimate and in keeping with Islamic teachings. This analysis of the messages delivered, the intended audience, and the subjects and contents of the data collected have enabled the answering of the first part of RQ1 in keeping with the descriptive interpretation stage in TACO.

In Chapter 7, which covers the representative interpretation and social interpretation stages of TACO, the findings from the research conducted have been discussed in depth, looking at the context in which the Qur'anic verses were revealed as well as the recontextualisation of the verses in jihadist materials. Through organisation and analysis of the data collected, I have been able to determine which Qur'anic verses feature most frequently in the two online magazine series, how these are framed, and the co-text and context of the verses in the magazine setting as well as in the Qur'anic setting.

The verses which featured most frequently between both magazine series were verses 5:51, 8:39, 3:103, and 60:4. For each of these verses, I have discussed the co-text and context in which the verses have been utilised in the articles and the potential preferred reading in accordance with the surrounding text and message of the articles. This was then cross referenced against the co-text and context in which the verse was written in the Qur'an and the potential preferred scriptural reading in accordance with the message of the surah and teachings of the tafsirs.

In the analysis of the verses and the language used, I discovered that many of the crucial terms did not offer specific definitions and were left open-ended. For example, verse 8:39 is referenced in issue 6 of Dabiq and is written as reading ‘And fight them until there is no fitnah and until the religion, all of it, is for Allah’ (Dabiq 6, 2014: 3) . It is not clear in verses such as this what terms such as ‘fitnah’ mean, and the interpretation one has of a verse would be wholly dependent on the understanding of the term.

RQ2 When Qur’anic scripture is offered as a means of legitimising acts of terror, how are the verses which are drawn upon recontextualised so as to be applicable to modern times?

RQ2 has been answered largely in Chapter 7, where I have looked at the situational and intertextual contexts of the texts produced. In keeping with TACO, I have taken into consideration the relationship between the discourses contained within the texts as well as the societal and historical backgrounds against which they were constructed. In analysing the magazine issues that make up my dataset, I have identified the specific verses which are referenced, how frequently each verse is referenced, and determined which verses have proven to be most ‘popular.’ The verses which appeared most frequently between both the Dabiq and VoK magazines were verses 5:51, 8:39, 3:103, and 60:4, which I have analysed systematically in Chapter 7, showing the context in which the verses were revealed and a preferred reading for the text which is in keeping with the Qur’an as a whole. The messages of these verses can be summarised as the following:

- 5:51 Do not befriend the Jews and Christians
- 8:39 Fight the non-Muslims
- 3:103 Remain true to your faith and united as one
- 60:4 Do not associate with the non-Muslims

These are sentiments which are disseminated in extremist literature by groups who use highly decontextualised verses to illustrate that their motives are legitimate and validated by the Qur’an. I have attempted to show in Chapter 7 that these verses, when read in the scriptural context, read entirely differently to how they have been presented in IS and ISKP texts. Scriptural verses, as

well as wider religious Islamic teachings, have been largely manipulated to fit the political, social, and military agendas of these groups, who have demonstrated their ability to repurpose and reappropriate historical teachings to modern circumstances. Their agendas include the spread of Islam globally, the conversion or slaughter of those who oppose the spread, and the installing of shari'ah as a legal system across the world, among others.

In Chapter 8, I have applied the deconstructive interpretation of TACO to show some of the inconsistencies in the teachings of IS and ISKP within their texts, and how the manipulations of scripture are at odds with one another. An example of this is the great importance that both organisations place on all Muslims remaining together as an ummah and not allowing themselves to be divided – a point which is stressed with the use of the verse 3:103, which I have identified as being one of the most frequently referenced verses in Dabiq and VoK. Despite this, IS and ISKP draw many distinctions and introduce qualifiers for who they consider to be 'Muslim' – a pool which continuously shrinks as the goal post moves. Drawing distinctions between Muslims and forming in and out-groups is contradictory to the teachings they preach concerning the unity of all Muslims. Discourse which forms in and out-groups draws a clear Us and Them divide, which is used to highlight intra-group similarities while simultaneously emphasising inter-group differences. There are a number of themes found in the materials analysed that are conflicting and reveal inconsistencies.

RQ3 In what ways are language and scripture utilised on online platforms for the purposes of radicalisation?

RQ3 is not a question which I have answered directly in the analysis of my data but instead has been used to guide the research and to achieve the aims of the research – which is to gain a clearer understanding of how people are radicalised online through Salafi-jihadi material, and if there are steps that can be taken to strengthen de-radicalisation programmes in the UK.

A recurring theme in the use of language in Salafi-jihadi materials circulated online is the use of labels in ways places, and people are designated, all of which achieve one goal: a call for identity formation. Examples of this include creating in and out-groups for Muslims and labelling certain

states or countries as being either dar al-harb or dar al-kufr. These associations made with people and places determine whether they are considered to be on the 'right' side, standing with the group in question or if they are to be considered as the 'enemy.' This is something that I have discussed throughout the chapters and which I have highlighted with evidence from the data collected. It is with this in mind that I have looked at the current counter-terrorism strategy in the UK to assess if there are areas which can potentially be improved.

9.4 Recommendations

While some who oppose Prevent and how it operates have suggested that Prevent be disbanded altogether, I believe that a version of Prevent which aims to achieve the similar aim of identifying individuals vulnerable to radicalisation and preventing them from being drawn into extremism is possible and necessary. If Prevent were disbanded, it would leave a void as there would be no referral system to cater for individuals who have been subject to radicalisation. The recommendations that I suggest for the UK's counter-terrorism strategy to be refined have been separated out below into two categories: de-radicalisation and social perception.

De-radicalisation

CONTEST – the current counter-terrorism strategy in the UK – is not without fault and has attracted much criticism over the course of its existence, particularly in recent years. The majority of this criticism has been directed towards the Prevent strand of the strategy, which has been accused of propagating anti-Islamic hate, and causing fear and paranoia in the public. Prevent is said to have stunted people's ability to speak freely for fear of being accused of being an extremist, among many accusations (Faure Walker, 2019a). Some have called for the Prevent strategy to be discarded altogether, arguing that it causes more harm than good in society.

While I acknowledge that there have been mistakes made which have seen children as young as five being referred by their teachers, I do not believe that this is due to the strategy itself. It is my belief that such mistakes are made due to poor training provided to individuals with safeguarding duties, such as teachers and doctors, and a lack of understanding of what signs individuals should be looking out for, who should be referred, and when such referrals should be made. There also

needs to be consideration of other safeguarding options, where referrals can be made, which may be more suitable, such as referrals relating to mental ill health or housing.

At present, those who serve the public – such as teachers and doctors etc. – and who have safeguarding responsibilities must partake in Prevent awareness training. However, the numbers of those who require such training are in the millions and delivering the kind of training that would be sufficiently specific and specialised for their diverse roles is next to impossible. What this means is that much of the training that is made available is provided online through the Prevent Duty Training page on the government website (GOV.UK, 2015). While this makes the training accessible to a wide group of people, it also means that there is no standard for checking that the training has been accurately interpreted and understood. In a personal conversation with a Prevent practitioner – having completed some of the training online myself – I mentioned that it was reminiscent of a DVLA Theory test, in which participants partake in tick box exercises without necessarily retaining any of the information. The Prevent practitioner agreed. It would be preferable for all training to be received in person and delivered by professionals who are well versed in Prevent regulations. However, with budgetary and time restrictions, this is unlikely to occur in the near future. The online training provided could be made more rigorous by containing activities in which participants are made to identify appropriate recommendations for vulnerable individuals, including referrals to Prevent, or providing aid through housing or mental health facilities etc.

Some have argued that Prevent should be discarded altogether, however I do not believe that a feasible alternative has been provided to replace the services it offers. It is still essential that we can identify individuals who are vulnerable to radicalisation and provide them with the support that they require. Removing Prevent entirely without providing an alternative creates a void. I do not believe that the solution to the problems raised by Prevent and how the Prevent strategy is practised is to remove the Prevent duty altogether, but rather to reform it.

The second recommendation is focused on the individuals who are delivering the Desistance and Disengagement Programme (DDP). The DDP's aim is to provide support to individuals who have

previously been involved in terrorism or terrorism related activity. The UK government's website details the work of the DDP as the following:

- The programme works to provide tailored interventions that support individuals to stop participating in terrorism-related activity (desist) and to move away from terrorist ideology and ways of thinking (disengage).
- Interventions are designed to provide the best possible means for these individuals to disengage from terrorism and reintegrate safely back into society.
- Support is delivered by specialist Intervention Providers (IPs).
- The IPs provide a range of intensive, tailored interventions including mentoring, theological, ideological and practical support, working to reduce the offending risk through direct engagement with the offender ('Factsheet: Desistance and Disengagement Programme', 2023).

While the majority of the programmes which make up part of the Prevent strategy are not compulsory, the DDP is made mandatory for some individuals, including as part of probation requirements. Failure to partake in the programme may lead to imprisonment. The number of people partaking in the DDP has grown since its inception in 2016, which I illustrated below. The table below shows the total number of active participants in the DDP in each year who received at least one intervention session from the programme between 2016 and 2022.

Financial Year	Total Number of People Engaged
2016/17	<10
2017/18	64
2018/19	116
2019/20	126
2020/21	100
2021/22	146

Figure 27. Number of People Engaged in the DDP

In detailing how the DDP works, it is stated that

- The programme works with independent supplies and selected Prison chaplaincy staff who provide a range of support and rehabilitation skills.
- Intervention Providers are onboarded through a rigorous selection and vetting process before they can provide interventions to DDP participants.
- DDP is just one tool available for supporting rehabilitation and is frequently used as part of a package of interventions available to an individual ('Factsheet: Desistance and Disengagement Programme', 2023).

While using prison chaplains for cases where this is relevant, for Salafi-jihadi extremists the DDP uses imams as well as other educators as part of the IPs. While the imams are exceptionally well versed in the Qur'an, hadith, and sunnah, and are people of religious authority, their understanding of terrorism is lacking. For this reason, the individuals delivering the DDP are not well equipped to deliver the de-radicalisation programmes as it is hoped. It is essential that these individuals have knowledge of and understand terrorist ideology and behaviour, radicalisation, and how to counter extremism etc. A possible way this can be strengthened may be to provide training and education to the religious figures providing the specialised intervention. Perhaps not as specialised but in a similar fashion to how terrorist negotiators are trained to demonstrate excellent levels of emotional intelligence and maintain conversations that may be hostile or require de-escalation; IPs could receive similar training to be able to navigate difficult and emotive subjects. To enhance the knowledge the IP has of terrorist ideologies, radicalisation, and extremism, I would suggest some form of educational course. In a similar way to how topics of terrorism and extremism are taught in university courses, this may be a three-to-six month course which examines how ideologies evolve, the roots of terrorism and extremist thought, and the various causes that may influence an individual into leading this kind of life, such as identity issues and disenfranchisement. A course such as this would also aid in building the emotional intelligence of the IP and provide them with stronger tools with which to handle difficult participants. It is essential that the IP is able to connect with the DDP participant in order to be able to change their perspective(s).

De-radicalisation is unlikely to be effective unless the person it is targeted at is willing to participate. Three factors that affect an individual's amenability to de-radicalisation are education, reflection, and self-awareness. The education that is necessary is not simply a teaching of the Qur'an but should include the evolution of the shari'ah, differences among Muslim jurists, and epistemological consideration of Qur'anic 'evidence' used to justify violence. Reflection and self-awareness are not things which can be taught and are achieved through dialogue and rapport. For those partaking in the DDP to be able to reflect and show self-awareness, they must possess doubt. Doubt is essential for sincerity. To create doubt in individuals who possess hard-line philosophies, the IP delivering the support must understand how terrorists work and think. Delivering lessons on what the Qur'an says is insufficient, and unlikely to be as effective as building a relationship in which the individual can show signs of uncertainty to the IP. It is my recommendation that all IPs, including religious figures, be provided with sufficient practical skills and educational knowledge and understanding of terrorism and the ideologies which legitimise acts of terror.

From this position, we can begin to think about the specific teachings that the IP delivers to past, and potentially present, Islamists undergoing the DDP. While we have knowledge of the kinds of materials that are being propagated by Islamist groups, there is a wealth of advantage to knowing the specific verses being taught and the ideologies that are attached to them. By having this insight into the specific teachings and narratives associated, it is possible to tailor the DDP programmes further in a specialised way. It provides more clarity of the ideologies that have been consumed and possibly internalised, which provides a starting point for possible de-radicalisation efforts. I have endeavoured to demonstrate some of the ways Qur'anic verses have been recontextualised and manipulated, and the inconsistencies in the teachings provided. This is information that I believe will be beneficial to IPs, who could take this into consideration during the administering of one-to-one specialised intervention. Discussions can be approached from the same starting point, with the IP showing awareness of the narratives presented in extremist literature. For example,

Social Change

In the most recent Independent Review of Prevent conducted by Sir William Shawcross, the word ‘Islamophobic’ has been abandoned, with Shawcross instead using the word ‘anti-Muslim’ (Shawcross, 2023). This was a conscious decision to draw a distinction between the religion and the people. Often, terms relating to Islam and Muslims are conflated with similar terminology – an example being Islam and Islamism. Of this and the criticism that Prevent has received for being Islamophobic, Shawcross writes that

Islamism as an ideology is not the same as Islam as a faith. In many parts of the world, Muslims are the principal victims of Islamist extremism – in both its non-violent and violent manifestations. Millions have been killed or had their lives ruined by the attacks of terrorist groups like al-Qa’ida, Islamic State, Boko Haram, and others. It is not anti-Muslim to try to prevent the spread of that brutal ideology in Britain or to stop our country’s Muslim children being lured online into the hell of Islamist wars in Syria and elsewhere (ibid: 4).

It has been suggested by some that the terms ‘Islamism’ and ‘Islamist’ also be abandoned in order to separate Islam as a religion from the extremist political ideology which looks to Islam for its justification. Just as we refer to, for example, the bible-founded extremist beliefs of right-wing White groupings in the US as political extremism rather than as ‘Christianism,’ perhaps there is a term better than ‘Islamism’ for referring to extremists who are motivated by Islam – Salafi-jihadism, perhaps? In the same way that the term ‘Islamophobic’ is here replaced with ‘anti-Muslim’ by Shawcross, perhaps there are grounds for practising the same caution with the term ‘Islamism.’ If the UK government were publicly to draw such a distinction, that might make a significant difference to the way the Prevent strategy is viewed by its critics.

While it is important for Muslims and the wider non-Muslim community to view Prevent with less hostility, it is equally – if not more – important for the Prevent strategy to reform itself in order to be worthy of this change in public perception. There have been many instances in which the Prevent strategy as well as other arms of the UK government have proven themselves to be overly preoccupied with ‘Islamist’ extremism and with the Muslim community in the UK.

In February 2024, former Communities Secretary Michael Gove ordered an audit of Tower Hamlets council, without disclosing that this was driven by a search for extremism within the council, instead stating this was to inspect ‘whether the standards expected for effective and convenient local governments are being upheld’ (Mulla & Osborne, 2024). Tower Hamlets is widely known for being a borough with great ethnic diversity and for having a large Muslim population. Leading this investigation into the council and appointed by Gove was former British ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Sir John Jenkins. The appointment of Jenkins in this position, given his lack of expertise in local government, was questioned by many including local politicians and academics. The true nature was revealed in September when a letter written by government lawyers made apparent that the appointment of Jenkins was due to his ‘specialist knowledge of extremism.’ It stated that

The then Secretary of State [Michael Gove] was concerned about evidence of the existence of extremism within LBTH [London Borough of Tower Hamlets] and the effect that may have on its ability to deliver best value in the areas within which he ordered it to be inspected (ibid).

This is reminiscent of the Trojan Horse scandal of 2014 (see section 2.3 of Chapter 2). It reproduces in a similar manner the notion that the Muslim community in the UK is one that is to be treated with suspicion and in need of investigation. It instils fear in the community not only of Muslims but also of Muslim leaders in the UK as it singles them out as being problematic, while also instilling fear in the Muslim community of government agencies and the non-Muslim community who treat them as fifth pillars and criminals. While the UK government continues to single out Muslims in this way, it will be difficult to change public opinion of the government and its treatment of Muslims, but particularly of Prevent – which has become almost synonymous with government miscarriages of justice against Muslims.

I acknowledge that it is easy to say that we need equality and social reform, but this is a core part of the issue. While de-radicalisation processes undoubtedly require change, it is equally – if not more important – to bring about social change which addresses structural problems and inequality.

Strengthening de-radicalisation programmes is necessary but it is also essential to work towards trying to prevent vulnerable people from becoming radicalised in the first instance. Change must be sustainable. While people feel disenfranchised from society due to social injustices, systemic racism, and complex histories of imperialism, there will always be vulnerable people seeking acceptance and purpose – a space which politicised religion can fill with ease if delivered with purposefulness. The Muslim community cannot be treated as an alien group to be investigated as this does nothing for the development of social cohesion and trust. It is crucial to have a systemic change that adopts an impartial view and strategy for investigating extremism – one which does not single out particular ethnic or religious minorities, and which treats all as equals.

With the recommendations that I have made for ways to strengthen the DDP and the way interventions are delivered, I hope that IPs who have an understanding of extremist ideologies and behaviours, as well as of Islam, will be able to use this research to aid in the de-radicalisation of individuals through specialised one-to-one interventions provided to those undergoing the DDP. Greater understanding of the narratives disseminated on online platforms will be crucial not only to debunk the ideologies currently held but also to debunk those ideologies altogether. Through this work, I aim to inform the development of more nuanced, inclusive, and context-sensitive approaches to deradicalisation.

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Dabiq 15 – Break the Cross

Quote	Scriptural reference	Location in text	Co-text	Context & Interpretation
<i>And when it is said to them, 'Follow what Allah revealed,' they say, 'Rather, we follow that upon which we found our fathers.' Even though their fathers did not comprehend a thing and were not guided.</i>	2:170	P62	In the penultimate section of the article titled 'Break the Cross,' the IS writers discuss the choice one makes to follow Allah despite those around you being followers of a different religion, saying 'O People of the Scripture, follow the truth from your Lord, whom you claim to love.' P62	The IS writers argue that following a religion other than Allah, even if it is something that you are familiar with, is like following your parents into a fire that they have walked into. 'It is clear from their doctrines and the history of their "Church" that they had neither guidance nor comprehension in religion.' P62
<i>Then kill the pagans wherever you find them.</i>	9:5	P63	These quotes are used in the closing sections of the penultimate section of the 'Break the Cross' article, called 'A Final Invitation' in which they ask all readers to accept Islam.	This is a warning for those who choose not to obey Islam despite it being made evident in the Qur'an that Islam is the correct way.
<i>Fight those who neither believe in Allah and the Last Day, nor do they forbid what Allah and His Messenger forbade, nor do they follow the religion of truth, of those who were given the Scripture, until they give the jizyah willingly while they are humbled.</i>	9:29	P63		'Know well that our fight will continue until you are defeated and submit to the rule of your Creator, or until we achieve martyrdom. Allah has made our mission to wage war against disbelief until it ceases to exist, as he has ordered us to kill all pagans wherever they are found.' P63
<i>Honor belongs to Allah, His Messenger, and to the believers, but the hypocrites do not know.</i>	63:8	P63		The closing of this section of the article, as a summary. Which is followed by the conclusion.
<i>Verily the example of Jesus according to Allah is like that of Adam. He formed him of earth</i>	3:59	P63	These are closing words of the conclusion of the 'Break the Cross' article.	IS say that they 'challenge all of the arrogant Christian disbelievers with the

<i>and then said, 'Be,' so he became. So whoever disputes with you regarding him, after this knowledge has come to you, then say, 'Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then humbly pray for Allah's curse to be upon the liars.'</i>				<p>challenge presented by Allah for those who lie against Jesus' P63.</p> <p>The writer argues that to believe in Jesus truly, is to accept him in his true position, which is that held in Islam as a Prophet of Allah but not as the son of God.</p>
<i>Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves – [the angels] will say, 'In what [condition] were you?' The angels will say, 'Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?' For those, their refuge is Hell – and evil it is as a destination.</i>	4:97	P69	This is written on the last page of an interview between Dabiq and an IS soldier in Trinidad. The title of the article is 'Interview: Abu Sa'ad at-Trinidad.' This verse is given as part of an answer to the question 'What message would you like to direct to the Muslims of Trinidad?' posed by Dabiq.	<p>The answer given is twofold: the first is to accept Islam and 'not become deluded and allow yourselves to follow these evil leaders.' P69</p> <p>The second point is for those who have already accepted Islam but have not travelled to join the jihad. The quote is used to demonstrate that you will be questioned on why you did not travel to the Muslim land, was it not spacious enough for you? He says that those who do not travel for the hijrah have become 'deceived and deluded by the devil. Years have gone by and you still haven't performed hijrah to the land of Islam, your land, the place that we used to speak about and dream of. It has become a reality, and yet you've become from amongst those who remained behind. You wanted your children to live in a land where Allah's law is the highest, yet you now remain in a place where you have no honor and are forced to live in humiliation, subjugated by the disbelievers.' P69</p>

Appendix II – Excerpt from Analysis of Voice of Khurasan 1

Voice of Khurasan 1 – Who Are the Taliban?

Quote	Scriptural reference	Location in text	Co-text	Context & Interpretation
<i>And each nation has its set term. They can neither delay it for an hour nor advance it.</i>	7:34	P3	This is the first article of the first issue in the series, titled ‘The Fighting Has Just Begun’ and is setting the tone for the magazine issues to come.	<p>ISKP say that the ‘people of falsehood’ who fight against them use examples of the deaths of Islamic State members as a sign that they are being defeated. They say that Allah has already decided those who win and lose, and the ‘people of falsehood’s attempts make no difference to this.</p> <p>‘The fools fail to realize that Allah (ta’ala) protects his religion however he wills. The religion of Allah will remain established and firm even though the lands of Muslims are taken away by the kuffar or the death of any person.’ P3</p>
<i>Verily the help of Allah is near.</i>	2:214	P4	In the same article as above, the ISKP writers discuss Allah’s ability and the strength of the followers of Islam despite those who conspire against Islam.	<p>Whatever pressures Islam and its followers have experienced, Allah has preserved Islam and protected it.</p> <p>‘The groups of Kufr pushed relentlessly to demolish the religion of Allah for Allah to preserve of establishing the first ever Islamic State. The groups of Kufr pushed relentlessly to demolish the religion of Allah for Allah to preserve it through the hands of the Prophet [...] and the noble companions.’ P3-4 This precedes the quote.</p>

				<p>‘The loss of territory was just a mere setback for the Islamic State mujahidin, which only increased the determination in the hearts of its mujahidin. Where it has lost lands, Allah has granted numerous victories in the African sub continents terrifying the world of kufr and proving to them that Allah would preserve his religion and that the Islamic State remains.’ P4</p>
<p><i>Perhaps you dislike a thing which is good for you, and that you like something which is bad for you. Allah knows while you know not.</i></p>	2:216	P12	This article is titled ‘So Patiently Preserve for Verily the Promise of Allah is True.’ P12	<p>The ISKP writers ask men to pray for their Muslim brothers for no one knows when the call from Allah will come to strike. Allah knows best.</p>
<p><i>And when my servants ask concerning me, I am indeed close to them. I listen to the supplication of every supplicant when he calls upon me.</i></p>	2:186	P13		<p>Allah is always there for those who need Him or call on Him. They go on to illustrate this with examples of those who have been imprisoned.</p>
<p><i>If a wound had touched you, be sure that a similar would had touched them too. Such days of varying fortunes. We give to men and men by turns: Allah knows those that believe, and that he may take from you ranks martyrs. And Allah does not love the oppressors.</i></p>	3:140	P13	Continuing on in the same article as above, the writers call on people to not ask to be freed, but rather for the strength to remain firm.	<p>If you are caught or suffer, then know that you are not alone. The opposition suffers too and your efforts were not for nothing</p> <p>‘Certainly, the trial of the prison is one of the toughest, and Allah does not give trials except that it may raise you in your status so hold firm. The jail is not the end of the world, nor it is the evidence that the oppressor has won over you.’ P13</p>
<p><i>When Allah decrees any matter, he only says to it: ‘Be’, so it becomes.</i></p>	36:82	P13		<p>This is used as evidence of Allah’s will. The writer speaks of the ‘supplication of almost 2000 brothers and sisters at once in the jail of the Afghanistan Taghut and set them free at the hands of the Murtadeen. Brothers who were given death sentences, sisters given life sentences along with their children, were</p>

<i>And when my servants ask concerning me, I am indeed close to them, I listen to the supplication of every suppliant when he calls upon me.</i>	2:186	P13		freed by the command of Allah when He willed for it.' P13 'O my brothers and sisters in the prisons, never cease to supplicate to your lord and never get disheartened and lose hope for the delayed time. Think well of your lord and never lose hope.' P13
And among the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with Allah. Of them some have completed their vow.	33:33	P15	This is the opening of a new article titled 'Caravan of the Shuhada.'	All Muslims make a covenant with Allah, some see it through and others do not. Jihad is part of this covenant. 'Without a doubt, Jihad is the highest of the deeds in Islam after faith, which has its return like no other.' P16 The writers quote the Prophet Muhammad as saying 'No one who enters paradise will like to return to the world, even if he could have everything on earth, except for the martyr. He will wish to return to the world and be killed ten more times, due to what he sees of dignity.' P16

Appendix III – Details of Dabiq Publications

All issues of Dabiq were published by Al-Hayāt Media Center. The dates provided are for the English language versions of the magazine issues – issues in other languages have not all been released on the same date.

Issue	Title	Publication Date
1	The Return of the Khilafah	5 th July 2014
2	The Flood	27 th July 2013
3	A Call to Hijrah	10 th September 2014
4	The Failed Crusade	11 th October 2014
5	Remaining and Expanding	21 st November 2014
6	Al Qa'idah of Waziristan: A Testimony from Within	29 th December
7	From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Greyzone	02 nd February 2015
8	Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa	30 th March 2015
9	They Plot and Allah Plots	21 st May 2015
10	The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men	31 st July 2015
11	From the Battles of Al-Ahzāb to the War of Coalitions	09 th September 2015
12	Just Terror	18 th November 2015
13	The Rafidah from Ibn Saba' to the Dajjal	19 th January 2016
14	The Murtadd Brotherhood	13 th April 2016
15	Break the Cross	31 st July 2016

Appendix IV – Details of Voice of Khurasan Publications

All issues of Voice of Khurasan were published by Al-Azaim Foundation for Media Production. The dates provided are for the English language versions of the magazine issues – issues in other languages have not all been released on the same date.

Issue	Title	Publication Date
1	Who are the Taliban?	January 2022
2	Here is the Islamic Khilafah, Where are the Rest of the Jihadi Claimants?	March 2022
3	Bāqiyāh	April 2022
4	Hijrah	April 2022
5	They Intend to Put Out the Light of Allah with Their Tongues	May 2022
6	Taliban Guards of Shirk	May 2022
7	Can Scholars Become Taghut?	June 2022
8	Khurasan – The Graveyard for Kuffar and Apostates	June 2022
9	Khurasan – The Graveyard of Murtaddin and Kuffar	July 2022
10	Nullifiers of Islam Applicable on Taliban Part 02	July 2022
11	The Black Hole in Ukraine	August 2022
12	They Satisfied the International Community	August 2022
13	Break the Idol of Nationalism	September 2022
14	Fighting for Worldly Means is Not Jihad	September 2022
15	Hindutva, RSS, and an Islamophobic State	October 2022
16	They Meet CIA Operatives in Secret	October 2022
17	Palace Worship Can't Protect Them From the Rockoning of Allah	November 2022
18	Today's Traitors: Following in the Footsteps of Yesterday's Traitors	November 2022

19	Jihad Betrayed: The Riddah of al-Jawlani the Munafi	December 2022
20	The Rise of Far Right Extremists in Palestine and the Silence Before Storm for the Muslims	January 2023
21	Allah's Hudood and Taliban's Drama	February 2023
22	Reality of the Wild West	February 2023
23	A Message to the Inhabitants in the Land Occupied by Cow and Mice Worshipping Filths	March 2023
24	They Have Commercialised Allah's Ayat in Hind	April 2023
25	O Allah, Guide Us on the Straight Path	May 2023