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**CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENTS IN PROPHETIC AḤĀDĪTH:
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON INTERPRETATIONS BY ISIS
AND MAINSTREAM MUSLIM SCHOLARS**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the ideological misuse of Prophetic Aḥādīth by the extremist group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), focusing on how selective, literalist interpretations are employed to legitimize violence and radical ideologies. The research analyses three specific Aḥādīth frequently cited by ISIS: “Know that paradise is under the shade of swords,” the hadith of the Black Banners from Khorasan, and “I have been commanded to fight the people...” and compares their interpretation to those of mainstream Muslim scholars. Employing a qualitative methodology that includes comparative textual analysis, jurisprudential review, and contextual interpretation, the study aims to demonstrate that classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship applied ethical reasoning, legal principles, and historical context to these narrations. The findings reveal a significant divergence between ISIS’s ideologically driven hermeneutics and the balanced methodologies upheld by traditional scholars by explore the wider implications of such divergent interpretations, including their effects on radicalization, interreligious relations, and global perceptions of Islam. By critically exposing the methodological distortions employed by ISIS, this research aims to contribute to scholarly efforts to reclaim Islamic discourse from extremism and promotes a more principled and contextualized engagement with Prophetic traditions.

Keywords: Aḥādīth, ISIS, radicalism, interpretation, jihad, Islamic scholarship, extremism, textual misuse

1 INTRODUCTION

The current global landscape is marked by complex challenges—social, cultural, religious, economic, and political—that have left deep impacts on societies worldwide. Among the most affected is the Muslim Ummah, which has experienced decades of internal and external turmoil. Internally, many Muslim-majority countries have witnessed significant upheavals, including shifts in governance structures, disruptions to traditional social norms, and the imposition of secular education systems that often marginalize Islamic identity. Externally, global superpowers such as the United States, European nations, and Russia have continually interfered in the affairs of the Muslim world, exacerbating instability and contributing to conflicts in regions like Syria, Tunisia, Libya, Iraq, and Palestine. These combined pressures have not only strained the material and political conditions of the Muslim world but have also led to intellectual fragmentation within the Ummah—among both its general masses and its scholarly leadership.

This state of crisis has produced serious challenges in the interpretation and application of Islamic teachings, particularly the primary sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Amidst this intellectual and spiritual disorientation, various movements have emerged claiming to defend Islam and the Muslim community. Among the most notorious is the so-called “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” (ISIS), a group that rose to prominence in the past decade through a campaign of violence, propaganda, and ideological manipulation. ISIS presented itself as the guardian of Islamic orthodoxy and a champion of jihad, declaring war not only against non-Muslims but also against Muslims who disagreed with its vision. By weaponizing Islamic texts—especially Prophetic Aḥādīth—ISIS sought to legitimize its violent actions, portraying them as divinely sanctioned and religiously obligatory. This has led to significant confusion among ordinary

Muslims, as well as among intellectuals and policymakers, about the meaning and application of these sacred texts.

This paper explores the interpretation of Prophetic Aḥādīth—essential and revered texts within Islam that serve as a foundational source of spiritual, moral, and legal guidance for Muslims. It investigates how extremist groups like ISIS have selectively appropriated certain hadiths, interpreting them through a literalist and decontextualized lens to justify radical ideologies and violent agendas. In contrast, the paper examines how mainstream Islamic scholarship interprets the same texts through the lens of established jurisprudential methodologies, ethical reasoning, and contextual analysis. By highlighting the stark differences between extremist and scholarly interpretations, this study aims to expose the mechanisms through which sacred texts are misused for ideological ends. The research underscores the implications of such interpretive divergences for processes of radicalization, identity formation, and the global image of Islam. Ultimately, this work contributes to broader efforts aimed at countering extremism through knowledge-based strategies, reaffirming the importance of contextual integrity and scholarly rigor in engaging with Islamic sources, and promoting balanced and principled interpretations as a means of safeguarding both faith and society.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The exploitation of specific Prophetic Aḥādīth used by ISIS to justify acts of violence and to advance their extremist ideologies serves as the main concern of this study. In stark contrast to this approach, globally recognized Muslim scholars have provided interpretations rooted in ethical reasoning, historical context, and scholarly discipline—interpretations that emphasize peace, justice, and human dignity. The misuse of these sacred texts by extremist groups not only distorts the essence of Islam but also contributes significantly to processes of radicalization and the global

misperception of Islamic teachings. The ISIS frequently cites as theological justification for its actions the following Aḥādīth: (1) “*Know that paradise is under the shade of swords*” (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2818); (2) “the Black Banners from Khorasan” (Sunan Ibn Majah, 4084), and (3) “*I have been commanded to fight the people until they testify that there is no god but Allah*” (Sahih al-Bukhari, 25 and Sahih Muslim, 22).

Each of these Aḥādīth has been interpreted by ISIS in a literal and militaristic way to support their call to violence, while mainstream Muslim scholars provide interpretations that are context-sensitive, ethically grounded, and legally nuanced. A systematic and critical examination of these divergent interpretations is therefore essential. These disparities not only shape internal Muslim discourse but also influence how Islam is perceived externally. Addressing them becomes vital in formulating corrective strategies to combat extremist propaganda and in fostering preventive approaches against radicalization. The aim of this research is to shed light on how religious texts can be manipulated for ideological purposes and to propose how authentic interpretation of Islamic scholarship can reclaim the discourse, restore integrity to the Prophetic tradition, and contribute to global peace and intercommunal harmony.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present research project has been keen to discuss how religious texts are quoted by extremist groups in their bid to support their ideologies. Key questions that it dwells on include:

1. Which Hadiths were most frequently cited by ISIS as legitimization for their deeds?
2. How does ISIS present its interpretation on these issues compare to the scholarly views of mainstream Islamic scholars?
3. What are the possible impacts on the perception of Islam from the outside world that could result from these divergent interpretations of "jihad"?

The study attempts to answer these key questions regarding how religious texts are abused in radical ideologies and their effect on the world perception of Islam.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study is structured to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify and critically analyze three specific Hadiths that are most used and referred to by ISIS members to justify their ideological dogmatic claims and militant actions.
- To conduct a detailed comparative analysis of each Hadith, examining ISIS's interpretations alongside those provided by established mainstream Islamic scholars rooted in classical and contemporary scholarship.
- To evaluate the broader implications of these divergent interpretations for the internal dynamics within the Muslim community, including issues of radicalization, social cohesion, and religious authority.
- To discuss how these differing viewpoints influence global perceptions of Islam and affect international policies related to security, counterterrorism, and inter-religion relations.

Through this analysis, the study seeks to illuminate how contested interpretations of religious texts contribute to both intra-Muslim debates and wider geopolitical discourses.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

This research holds significant value in both academic and practical domains, as it provides a focused investigation into how ISIS manipulates specific Prophetic Hadiths to legitimize its ideology and violent agenda. By identifying and critically analyzing three central hadiths frequently cited in ISIS propaganda—*“Know that paradise is under the shade of swords,”* the hadith of the Black Banners from Khorasan, and *“I have been commanded to fight the people...”*—

this study reveals the methodological distortions and theological misuse employed by extremist actors.

The significance lies in the comparative framework adopted: each of these hadiths is examined in light of classical and contemporary interpretations offered by mainstream Islamic scholars. These comparisons highlight how ISIS removes such texts from their ethical, legal, and historical contexts, transforming nuanced spiritual teachings into tools for ideological warfare. In doing so, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how sacred texts can be weaponized for radicalization, while also reaffirming the importance of contextually grounded and ethically sound scholarship in preserving the integrity of Islamic teachings. It also enhances transparency into the strategic use of religious texts in extremist narratives and demystifies the theological basis of their propaganda.

This study is significantly important as it attempts to provide findings of which are directly relevant to scholars, educators, policymakers, religious authorities, and community leaders. By exposing the interpretative gulf between extremist and orthodox readings of hadith, this study offers a foundation for constructing effective counter-narratives, advancing deradicalization efforts, and promoting resilience against ideological extremism. Ultimately, this research contributes to a more accurate projection of Islam—one that is informed by scholarly rigor, ethical clarity, and the Prophetic model of mercy, justice, and wisdom.

1.5 BACKGROUND ON ISIS AS A MOVEMENT

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or simply the Islamic State (IS), is a transnational jihadist militant organization that gained international prominence in 2014 after seizing large territories in Iraq and Syria. Emerging from the remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), ISIS was formally established under the leadership of Abu

Bakr al-Baghdadi, who declared a so-called caliphate in June 2014. The movement claims to restore the Islamic Caliphate and enforces an ultra-literalist interpretation of Islamic texts, particularly the Qur'an and Hadith, as the foundation of its ideology and governance. Its ideological roots are drawn from a hybrid of radical Salafi-jihadist thought, political grievances, and apocalyptic narratives. Unlike its predecessor al-Qaeda, ISIS combines insurgent strategies with state-building ambitions, establishing bureaucratic structures, collecting taxes, and issuing official publications such as *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* to propagate its ideology. These English-language magazines served as central components of ISIS's propaganda strategy, particularly targeting Muslims living in the West. *Dabiq* was first published in 2014 and was later replaced by *Rumiyah* in 2016. Both magazines were used to disseminate ISIS's ideological narratives and to recruit followers. The group has been responsible for widespread atrocities, including mass executions, enslavement, and destruction of cultural heritage, all justified through selective and decontextualized readings of Islamic scripture. Its rise and global recruitment efforts have had a profound impact on both Muslim societies and international security, making it a central subject in the study of religious extremism and the manipulation of sacred texts (Bunzel, 2015; Ingram et al., 2020; Cook, 2015).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores scholarly discourse on the interpretation of hadiths, the ideological mechanisms of radical groups like ISIS, and the responses of mainstream Islamic scholars to extremist misinterpretations. The review synthesizes contributions from classical hadith commentators, modern Islamic scholars, counter-terrorism researchers, and political analysts.

Together, these sources provide the academic foundation for understanding the divergence in hadith interpretation and its socio-political impact.

This literature review explores scholarly discourse on hadith interpretation, the ideological strategies of radical groups like ISIS, and mainstream Islamic scholarly responses to extremist misreadings. It synthesizes perspectives from classical hadith commentators, contemporary Islamic scholars, counter-terrorism experts, and political analysts. Together, these sources provide an academic framework for understanding divergent hadith interpretations and their socio-political consequences.

Classical Islamic scholarship offers a highly contextualized approach to hadith interpretation. Works such as *Fatḥ al-Bārī* by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* by al-Nawawī, and *Ma‘ālim al-Sunan* by al-Khaṭṭābī emphasize the relevance of *asbāb al-wurūd* (reasons for the ḥadīth), *isnād* (chain of transmission) scrutiny, and harmonization of seemingly contradictory narrations. For example, combative hadiths such as “*I have been commanded to fight the people*” are commonly interpreted within historical and legal contexts, typically referencing defensive warfare or treaty violations, not as open-ended calls to violence (al-‘Asqalānī, 1989, v. 8, p. 432-435; al-Nawawī, 2000, v. 5, p. 78-82).

Contemporary researchers have addressed the misuse of ḥadīths by radical movements. Jonathan A.C. Brown (2014), in *Misquoting Muhammad*, critiques the selective and decontextualized use of hadiths by extremists, describing this as a “cut-and-paste” theology that disregards centuries of legal and ethical tradition (p. 176). He underscores the importance of scholarly training and contextual awareness in navigating the Prophetic tradition. David Cook (2015), in *Understanding Jihad*, tracks the historical evolution of jihad, showing how militant groups have removed moral and jurisprudential constraints from the concept. He documents how hadiths are distorted to

support totalitarian and eschatological worldviews (Cook, 2015, pp. 105–112). Suleiman and Akhmetova (2020) argue that ISIS formulates an ideological “uṣūl of violence,” replacing classical juristic methodology with militarized hermeneutics. They note that hadiths are stripped from their isnād, interpretive tradition, and fiqh-based frameworks to construct reactive doctrines (Suleiman & Akhmetova, 2020, p. 63). The ISIS Reader by Ingram, Whiteside, and Winter (2020) analyzes how ISIS systematically builds a theological narrative through selective hadith citation, especially those pertaining to violence, the Caliphate, and end-times prophecy. This textual strategy creates an echo chamber designed to legitimize violence and cultivate martyrdom (Ingram et al., 2020, pp. 57–61). Cole Bunzel (2015), in *From Paper State to Caliphate*, shows how ISIS transitions from political propaganda to theological justification by positioning itself as the authentic heir to Prophetic authority. His work illustrates how hadith literature is central to this narrative construction (Bunzel, 2015, pp. 18–22). Ajjoub (2021) provides a critical framework on the theological-political development of jihadist Salafism. He demonstrates that while radical groups claim to follow Salafī tradition, they depart significantly from Salafī scholarly methodology—especially in interpreting hadiths on fighting, martyrdom, and leadership (Ajjoub, 2021, pp. 89–95).

Reports from international organizations further highlight the instrumentalization of hadiths in radicalization. The Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), a Singapore-based initiative, promotes counter-narratives rooted in traditional Islamic scholarship. Their publications emphasize contextual, juristic, and ethical engagement with sacred texts to combat extremism (RRG, 2020). This material is available on their official website and publications distributed through Singapore’s Ministry of Home Affairs. Similarly, United Nations reports on violent extremism stress that extremist groups often misappropriate religious texts, including hadiths, to recruit and indoctrinate

followers. These reports recommend empowering religious authorities to disseminate authentic interpretations grounded in mainstream Islamic tradition (United Nations, 2017, pp. 13–15). The International Crisis Group (ICG, 2016) emphasizes the role of religious narratives in extremist recruitment. They argue for greater scholarly engagement in deconstructing theological justifications for violence, especially around themes of jihad and martyrdom (ICG, 2016, p. 7).

2.5 GAPS IDENTIFIED

Despite extensive academic material on jihad and religious extremism, fewer studies directly compare specific hadith interpretations between radical groups and mainstream scholars. This research aims to fill that gap by closely analyzing three prophetic hadiths and offering a comparative theological framework, contributing to the broader discourse on Islam, peace, and ideological reform. The existing literature reveals a deep chasm between extremist and mainstream interpretations of hadiths. While radicals weaponize these texts to legitimize violence and establish authority, traditional scholars emphasize spiritual ethics, jurisprudential discipline, and the objectives of the Shariah. This research situates itself within this scholarly divide to demonstrate the importance of contextual and ethical reading of Prophetic traditions as a means of both intellectual resistance and social healing.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a descriptive method, analytical interpretive method, and comparative method grounded in the interpretivist paradigm that seeks to understand how religious texts—specifically Prophetic Hadiths—are interpreted, misinterpreted, and manipulated within ideological frameworks. The focus is on the hermeneutical and comparative analysis of selected hadiths, using scholarly tools of textual interpretation, historical contextualization, and jurisprudential insight.

The primary sources of this research are three specific Prophetic traditions that have been repeatedly cited and exploited in ISIS propaganda:

- *“Know that paradise is under the shade of swords,”*
- The hadith of the Black Banners from Khorasan, and
- *“I have been commanded to fight the people until they say: ‘La ilaha illa Allah’.”*

These ḥadīths are examined as they appear in ISIS publications such as Dabiq, Rumiyaḥ, and other ideological manifestos. The analysis focuses on how these narrations are selectively quoted and ideologically weaponized, often divorced from their historical, jurisprudential, and exegetical contexts. In contrast, the same ḥadīths are analyzed through the lens of classical Islamic scholarship—utilizing commentaries such as Faḥ al-Bārī by Ibn Ḥajar, Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim by al-Nawawī, and Ma‘ālim al-Sunan by al-Khaṭṭābī—as well as insights from contemporary scholars. This comparative framework enables a robust theological distinction between extremist appropriations and normative Islamic interpretations.

Secondary material is drawn from a wide range of academic literature, policy reports, and scholarly articles dealing with jihadist theology, the manipulation of hadith, and the broader epistemological and sociopolitical effects of religious misinterpretation. This includes the work of scholars such as Jonathan A.C. Brown, David Cook, and Omar Ajjoub, as well as research disseminated by institutions like the Brookings Institution, the International Crisis Group, and academic publications from IIUM and other universities. These sources provide critical context regarding the ideological infrastructure of groups like ISIS, the historical evolution of jihad-related texts, and the impact of theological distortion on both Muslim societies and global perceptions of Islam.

The methodological aim of this study is not merely descriptive but both analytical and corrective. By situating the extremist readings of hadith within the broader tradition of Islamic jurisprudence and ethics, this research seeks to expose textual and theological distortions, to reaffirm the importance of contextual interpretation, and to contribute to principled, religion-based responses to extremism.

4 ANALYSIS OF ISIS INTERPRETATION OF HADITH

This section presents a detailed analysis of how ISIS interprets specific Prophetic Hadiths to support its ideological framework. The objective is to demonstrate how selective literalism, decontextualization, and theological manipulation are employed in their radical narrative. The three hadiths selected are among the most cited in ISIS literature and propaganda, forming theological cornerstones in their call to violence and legitimacy.

4.1 HADITH 1: “KNOW THAT PARADISE IS UNDER THE SHADE OF SWORDS”

Text:

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ: حَدَّثَنَا مُعَاوِيَةُ بْنُ عَمْرٍو: حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو إِسْحَاقَ، عَنْ مُوسَى بْنِ عُقْبَةَ، عَنْ سَالِمِ أَبِي النَّضْرِ، مَوْلَى عُمَرَ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ وَكَانَ كَاتِبَهُ قَالَ: كَتَبَ إِلَيْهِ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ أَبِي أَوْفَى - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا -: أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ (A.S.W.S) قَالَ: "وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ الْجَنَّةَ تَحْتَ ظِلَالِ السُّيُوفِ." تَابَعَهُ الْأَوْسِيُّ عَنِ ابْنِ أَبِي الزِّنَادِ عَنْ مُوسَى بْنِ عُقْبَةَ.

“Wa a‘lamū anna al-jannah taḥta ḡilāl as-suyūf.”

“*Know that paradise is under the shades of swords.*”

— Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 2818

This section analyzes the hadith “*Know that paradise is under the shade of swords,*” which has been prominently featured in ISIS propaganda. The analysis focuses on how the group interprets

the hadith in a literalist and militant manner to legitimize acts of violence, and contrasts this with the interpretations offered by classical and contemporary Islamic scholars who situate the hadith within historical, ethical, and legal contexts. The purpose is to demonstrate how extremist ideologies manipulate sacred texts to serve political ends, and how traditional scholarships offer safeguards against such distortions.

ISIS Interpretation

ISIS frequently cites this hadith as a divine endorsement of violence, framing it as a religious obligation for Muslims to engage in continuous armed struggle. In its propaganda materials—including videos, magazines like *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, and recruitment speeches—this hadith is quoted to present armed jihad as the most direct and honored path to Paradise (Ingram, H. J., Whiteside, C., and Winter, C., 2020, p. 60). The metaphor of the "sword" is taken literally, stripped of its historical and situational context, and transformed into a permanent symbol of holy war. By doing so, ISIS promotes a theology in which martyrdom through violence becomes the pinnacle of Islamic virtue. Participation in battle is not viewed as conditional or defensive, but rather as an fundamental and ongoing duty. The hadith is invoked to sanctify acts of terrorism, suicide operations, and mass killings under the banner of religious martyrdom. Young and disillusioned individuals are often attracted to this glorification of heroic death, especially when it is marketed as a guaranteed ticket to Paradise, accompanied by promises of divine reward, honor, and status among *shuhadā'* (the martyrs) (Revkin, M., 2016, p. 20).

This literalist and weaponized interpretation completely ignores the broader Islamic legal discourse surrounding jihad, the conditions of combat, and the ethics of warfare. There is no reference to the qualifications for jihad, legitimate authority, the protection of non-combatants, or

the Prophet's (A.S.W.S.) numerous directives that emphasized mercy, justice, and restraint in war (Al-Nawawi, 2011, v. 12, p. 41).

Historical and Scholarly Context

In classical Islamic scholarship, this hadith has been interpreted in light of specific historical contexts. According to commentators like Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī in *Fath al-Bārī*, the phrase "*Know that paradise is under the shade of swords*" was likely uttered by the Prophet Muhammad (A.S.W.S.) during the Battle of Uhud or similar engagements where Muslims were under attack (Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, 2001, v. 7, p. 85v). The hadith is understood as a motivational statement for a defensive military effort under strict ethical guidelines—not an open-ended call to violence.

Imam al-Nawawi, in his commentary on *Sahih Muslim*, emphasized that such hadiths refer to legitimate, state-sanctioned warfare in defense of Islam, and not to vigilantism or rebellion (Al-Nawawi, 2011, v. 12, p. 42). Moreover, he—and other jurists like al-Mawardi, Ibn Taymiyyah, and al-Shafi'i—made clear that armed *jihad* is *fard kifāyah* (a collective obligation), only becoming *fard 'ayn* (an individual obligation) under specific circumstances, such as when one's land is under direct invasion (Peters, R., 2005, p. 74-75).

Modern scholars like David Cook and Rudolph Peters argue that jihadist groups ignore this scholarly tradition entirely, replacing it with a self-styled religio-military doctrine detached from *usul al-fiqh* (legal method) and ethical reasoning. Cook notes that ISIS uses hadiths like this as slogans, rather than engaging in any serious jurisprudential analysis (Cook, D., 2015, p. 136-137).

In my view, ISIS's interpretation of this hadith represents a blatant departure from the holistic Islamic tradition. Their decontextualized and weaponized reading not only undermines the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (objectives of the Sharia) but also erases centuries of juristic consensus regarding the ethical parameters of *jihad*. By stripping the hadith of its historical and

jurisprudential framework, ISIS manufactures a theology of violence that is alien to Islam's normative teachings. The scholarly tradition clearly situates such texts within strict legal and ethical limits, emphasizing state authority, just cause, and the protection of innocents. As a student of both classical and modern Islamic thought, I believe it is imperative to reclaim these texts from extremist misreadings and to reassert the scholarly tradition that upholds justice, mercy, and moral responsibility in all acts, including those related to warfare.

Ideological Role in ISIS Doctrine

This hadith plays a central ideological role in constructing the martyrdom culture within ISIS. It becomes part of a larger mythos where violence is sacralized and death on the battlefield is portrayed as the supreme religious achievement. This redefinition of piety and heroism serves several ideological functions:

- **Justification of Suicide Bombings:** Framed not as sinful but as the highest form of sacrifice, especially when aimed at "enemies of Islam." Scholars analyzing ISIS propaganda note that the group frames suicide bombings as acts of ultimate sacrifice rather than sin (Revkin, 2016, p. 22).
- **Recruitment Tool:** Ideal for appealing to alienated youth in the Muslim world and Western converts who seek meaning, honor, or revenge. ISIS uses this narrative to recruit alienated youth and Western converts seeking meaning, honor, or revenge (Bunzel, 2015, p. 56).
- **Glorification of Violence:** The hadith is used to spiritually legitimize indiscriminate warfare and attacks on both Muslim and non-Muslim civilians, completely detached from the traditional Islamic rules of engagement. ISIS glorifies indiscriminate violence,

including attacks on civilians, which stands in stark contrast to classical Islamic rules of engagement (Cook, 2015, p. 140).

By building a theology in which death through violence is inherently sanctified, ISIS shifts the very axis of Islamic ethics. The concept of *jihad al-nafs* (struggle of the soul), widely regarded by classical scholars as the highest form of jihad, is ignored or ridiculed (Yusuf al-Qaradawi, 2013, p. 75). The emphasis is instead placed on outward confrontation, even when it violates Islamic law, treaties, and moral standards.

4.2 HADITH 2: THE BLACK BANNERS FROM KHORASAN

Text (weak attribution):

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَحْيَى، وَأَحْمَدُ بْنُ يُوسُفَ، قَالََا حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّزَّاقِ، عَنْ سُفْيَانَ الثَّوْرِيِّ، عَنْ خَالِدِ الْحَدَّادِ، عَنْ أَبِي فَلَابَةَ، عَنْ أَبِي أَسْمَاءَ الرَّحْبِيِّ، عَنْ ثَوْبَانَ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ . صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ . " يَفْتَتِلُ عِنْدَ كَنْزِكُمْ ثَلَاثَةٌ كُلُّهُمْ ابْنُ خَلِيفَةٍ ثُمَّ لَا يَصِيرُ إِلَى وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمْ ثُمَّ تَطْلُعُ الرَّايَاتُ السُّودُ مِنْ قِبَلِ الْمَشْرِقِ فَيَقْتُلُونَكُمْ قَتْلًا لَمْ يُقْتَلْهُ قَوْمٌ " . ثُمَّ ذَكَرَ شَيْئًا لَا أَخْفَظُهُ فَقَالَ " فَإِذَا رَأَيْتُمُوهُ فَبَايَعُوهُ وَلَوْ حَبْوًا عَلَى الثَّلْجِ فَإِنَّهُ خَلِيفَةُ اللَّهِ الْمَهْدِيُّ " .

“Yaqtatilu ‘inda kanzikum thalāthatun kulluhumu ibn khalīfatin thumma lā yaṣīru ilā wāḥidin minhum thumma taṭlu‘u ar-rāyātu as-sūdu min qibali al-mashriqi fayaqtulūnakum qatlan lam yuq’talhu qawmun. Thumma dhakara shay’an lā aḥfazuhu faqāla: “Fa-idhā ra’aytumūhu fabāyī‘ūhu walaw ḥabwan ‘alā ath-thalji fa-innahū khalīfatu llāhi al-mahdīyu.”

“Three will fight one another for your treasure, each one of them the son of a caliph, but none of them will gain it. Then the black banners will come from the east, and they will kill you in an unprecedented manner.” Then he mentioned something that I do not remember, then he said: “When you see them, then pledge your allegiance to them even if you have to crawl over the snow, for that is the caliph of Allah, Mahdi.”¹

—Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith 4084

¹ Ibn Majah. Sunan Ibn Majah, Book of Fitan, 4084; al-Tabarani. al-Mu‘jam al-Kabir; al-Hakim. al-Mustadrak, Vol. 4, p. 464, claimed to be authentic by al-Hakim but rejected by scholars like al-Dhahabi due to weak narrators. – Most scholars grade this hadith as da‘if or mawdu‘.

This section examines the so-called Hadith of the Black Banners, which ISIS has elevated to a central ideological symbol within its self-legitimizing narrative. By invoking this hadith, ISIS links its movement to prophetic traditions about the end times, using it to claim divine endorsement and to inspire its followers with a sense of historical inevitability. The section explores how ISIS interprets and employs this hadith in its propaganda and recruitment efforts, the scholarly critiques regarding its authenticity, and the broader ideological role it plays within ISIS's apocalyptic worldview. Through this analysis, the aim is to highlight the divergence between ISIS's radical appropriation and mainstream Islamic scholarship's cautious and critical approach to such eschatological reports.

ISIS Interpretation

The so-called Hadith of the Black Banners has become one of the most potent symbols of ISIS's self-legitimization campaign. In ISIS ideology, the black banners represent both a literal fulfillment of end-time prophecy and a divine endorsement of their movement's eschatological mission. Their flag—black with the shahādah and the seal of the Prophet—is deliberately designed to evoke this hadith. By linking themselves with the banners of Khorasan, they seek to portray their group as part of a divinely guided movement heralding the coming of the Mahdi (Ingram, H. J., Whiteside, C., & Winter, C., 2020, p. 38).

ISIS propagandists frequently cite this hadith in Dabiq and Rumiya magazines and in recruitment materials to depict their organization as the final vanguard of true Islam. The region of "Khorasan" (a historical area encompassing parts of modern-day Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia) is interpreted metaphorically to include fighters emerging from that region, such as al-Qaeda's affiliates and Central Asian militants (Ajjoub, O., 2019, p. 47).

It is understood that ISIS combines this hadith with other apocalyptic traditions, constructing a theology of urgency, confrontation, and finality. Their aim is to convince followers that history is nearing its end, and that joining their cause is not only righteous but historically inevitable. This eschatological appeal plays heavily on emotional, political, and religious sentiments among disenfranchised Muslims worldwide, making it a powerful ideological and recruitment tool.

Scholarly Critique and Authenticity

Mainstream hadith scholars have long questioned the authenticity and reliability of the narrations about the Black Banners. Most chains of transmission (*asānīd*) for this hadith are weak (*da'if*) or fabricated (*mawdu'*). Scholars such as Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, al-Dhahabī, and al-Albani have critiqued its *isnād* and *matn* (content), often rejecting its theological or eschatological value (Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, 2001, v. 7 p. 110-112).

- Al-Albani, in his work *Silsilat al-Ahadith al-Da'ifah*, categorically declares it as unreliable and warns against building belief or action on such reports (Al-Albani, M. N., 1993, v. 4, p. 192).
- Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut, a prominent hadith editor, also notes the inconsistency and unreliability of the narrators in the chains, stressing that eschatological claims cannot rest on such flimsy foundations (Al-Arna'ut, S., 2003, v. 1 p. 45-50).

Even in classical sources where the narration is found—such as *al-Fitan* by Nu'aym ibn Hammad or *al-Mustadrak* by al-Hakim—the narration is not treated as evidence for creed or legal rulings, but rather as speculative material that must be carefully scrutinized.

Furthermore, Islamic theology does not permit forming religious movements or launching violent campaigns based on uncertain or disputed prophecies. The doctrine of *qati'* vs. *zanni*

(certain vs. speculative texts) holds that only clear and authentic evidence can be used for religious obligations or rulings (Kamali, M. H., 2008, p. 100-105).

Ideological Role in ISIS Doctrine

For ISIS, the symbolism of the Black Banners fulfills several ideological functions:

- **Apocalyptic Legitimacy:** It connects their modern campaign to Prophetic end-time traditions, thereby investing their mission with cosmic importance (Ingram, Whiteside, & Winter, 2020, p. 38; Bunzel, 2015, p. 54).
- **Visual Branding:** The black flag becomes a theological icon, a rallying point for followers and a psychological symbol of fear and power (Roy, 2004, p. 92; Lister, 2015, p. 210).
- **Recruitment Appeal:** By claiming to be part of the Mahdi's army, ISIS attracts individuals who seek religious certainty, historical significance, or divine approval in a chaotic world (Ajjoub, 2019, p. 47; Revkin, 2016, p. 22).
- **Counter-Sectarian Framing:** In claiming to represent Sunni eschatological prophecy, ISIS positions itself against Shi'a Mahdism and other interpretations, further fueling sectarian narratives (Mamdani, 2018, p. 75; Gerges, 2016, p. 180).

However, scholars warn that this is a complete misuse of weak traditions for the purposes of religious manipulation. As noted by scholars like Omar Ajjoub and Olivier Roy, groups like ISIS do not operate within any legitimate madhhab or school of thought; they instead create an entirely new religious narrative drawn from disjointed eschatological fragments (Roy, O., 2004, p. 73-75).

The so-called hadith of the Black Banners, though powerful in imagery, is based on unreliable narrations and has been rejected by mainstream scholars as a foundation for belief or

action. ISIS's appropriation of this hadith demonstrates how apocalyptic symbolism can be used to build a false aura of divine legitimacy around violent movements. Classical Islamic scholarship emphasizes caution in interpreting such reports, while ISIS's selective literalism exploits these texts for radical mobilization. It is essential for Muslim scholars and educators to debunk such misuse and to educate communities about the standards of hadith authentication and the dangers of eschatological manipulation.

4.3 HADITH 3: "I HAVE BEEN COMMANDED TO FIGHT THE PEOPLE..."

Text:

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ الْمُسْنَدِيُّ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو رَوْحٍ الْحَرَمِيُّ بْنُ عُمَارَةَ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا شُعْبَةُ، عَنْ وَاقِدِ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ، قَالَ سَمِعْتُ أَبِي يُحَدِّثُ، عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أُقَاتِلَ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَشْهَدُوا أَنَّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ..."

"Umirtu an uqātila al-nās ḥattā yash-hadū an lā ilāha illa Allāh..."

"I have been commanded to fight the people until they bear witness that there is no deity but Allah..."

— Sahih al-Bukhari (Hadith 25), Sahih Muslim (Hadith 22)

One of the most controversial and widely misused prophetic traditions in modern extremist discourse is the hadith: *"I have been commanded to fight the people until they say 'La ilaha illa Allah'."* This hadith has been selectively appropriated by groups like ISIS to justify their violent campaigns and theological worldview. In their narrative, it becomes a license for unrestricted jihad, religious coercion, and takfir, forming a central pillar of their ideological and operational strategy. However, this appropriation stands in stark contrast to centuries of mainstream Islamic scholarship, which has interpreted this narration within specific historical, legal, and ethical parameters. Classical and contemporary scholars have consistently stressed the importance of contextualizing such hadiths, reconciling them with Quranic principles of religious freedom, peace, and justice.

This section examines how ISIS distorts this hadith for ideological purposes and contrasts that with the interpretations of classical jurists and modern scholars who uphold a nuanced and principled understanding of Islamic teachings on warfare, conversion, and human rights.

ISIS Interpretation

ISIS uses this hadith as a theological foundation for offensive *jihad*, *takfīr* (excommunication), and the indiscriminate killing of non-Muslims and even Muslims who do not adhere to their ideology. Their interpretation is literal and absolute: they claim that *al-nās* (all people) are targets of combat until they convert to Islam. The hadith is cited repeatedly in ISIS materials to legitimize violent campaigns against civilians, religious minorities, and governments (Hassan, 2016, pp. 10–12).

They disregard centuries of jurisprudential discussion and ethical restraints in favor of a black-and-white worldview. In this framework, faith is enforced by the sword, and refusal to accept ISIS's narrow vision of Islam justifies execution. This interpretation allows them to sanction suicide bombings, mass killings, and the targeting of peaceful Muslims, under the banner of fulfilling a prophetic command (Ingram, H. J., Whiteside, C., & Winter, C., 2020, p. 37).

ISIS propaganda promotes the idea that the Prophet Muhammad (A.S.W.S) was sent to conquer the world by force, and that modern Muslims must follow this model. It presents violent jihad as the only valid expression of Islamic commitment and frames nonviolent interpretations as heretical or cowardly.

Mainstream Scholarly Interpretation

Classical scholars have consistently rejected such an absolutist reading of this hadith. Scholars such as Imam al-Nawawī, Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, al-Khattābī, and al-Shāfi‘ī contextualize this narration within the specific political and historical circumstances of the Prophet's mission in the

Arabian Peninsula. According to these scholars, *al-nās* (the people) refers specifically to the polytheists of *Quraysh*, who had broken treaties and waged war against the Prophet and his followers (Al-Nawawi., 2011, v. 1 p. 181).

Furthermore, Islamic jurisprudence holds that belief cannot be forced. The Quran clearly states: **“There is no compulsion in religion”**² (Surah al-Baqarah 2:256), and **“If your Lord had willed, all who are on earth would have believed. Will you then compel the people to become believers?”** (Surah Yunus 10:99).

Al-Nawawi, in his commentary on *Sahih Muslim*, explains that this hadith refers to a particular legal context and is not a universal command for eternal warfare (Al-Nawawi., 2011, v.1 p. 180). Ibn Hajar, in *Fath al-Bari*, writes that the hadith must be reconciled with other hadiths and Quranic verses that affirm religious freedom and call for peaceful coexistence (Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, 2001, v. 1, p. 143).

Al-Khattabi, in *Ma‘ālim al-Sunan*, asserts that the intent was to end hostility, not to compel belief, and that the phrase “*until they say ‘La ilaha illa Allah’*” represents the outward sign of surrender and peace, not coerced religion (Al-Khattabi., 2016, v. 1 p. 438).

This interpretation is further reinforced by the Prophet’s own treaties with Jews and Christians, his agreements with tribes who retained their faith, and his refusal to harm those who did not fight him.

Modern Reaffirmation of Classical Views

Modern scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, and Abdulaziz Sachedina have reaffirmed the traditional understanding that Islam does not permit forced

² The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation and Commentary, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, new ed. (Brentwood, MD: Amana Publications, 2001).

conversion and that jihad must be framed within defensive, just war principles. They emphasize that this hadith refers to a specific stage in Islamic history, where war was carried out against hostile forces violating agreements and committing aggression (Kamali, M. H., 2008, p. xvi–xvii).

Jonathan A.C. Brown and David Cook both observe that ISIS’s absolutist reading ignores not only the ethical standards of the Prophet but also the legal distinctions made between combatants and non-combatants in classical fiqh (Kamali, M. H., 2008, 315-317).

In my view, ISIS’s interpretation of this hadith reflects a willful distortion of Islamic teachings, driven more by political ambition than genuine religious understanding. Their selective literalism ignores the scholarly tradition that emphasizes justice, context, and the sanctity of human life. Upholding the classical interpretations is essential not only for theological accuracy but also for protecting Islam from being weaponized by extremist agendas.

Ideological Role in ISIS Doctrine

For ISIS, this hadith is not merely a textual reference—it is a doctrinal linchpin. It serves several strategic and ideological purposes:

- **Takfir Doctrine:** Scholars note that ISIS extensively employs takfir to declare apostasy upon Muslims who oppose or fail to adhere to their ideology, thereby justifying violence against them (Gerges, 2016, p. 110).
- **Justification for Mass Killings:** Ingram, Whiteside, and Winter (2020) document how ISIS targets civilians, religious minorities, aid workers, and scholars, rationalizing mass killings as enforcement of religious conformity (p. 85).
- **Delegitimizing Dialogue:** Ajjoub (2019) explains that ISIS systematically rejects peace initiatives, interreligious dialogue, and nonviolent Islamic activism, branding them as forms of betrayal or apostasy (p. 45).

The hadith “*I have been commanded to fight the people until they say: ‘La ilaha illa Allah’*” is one of the most misused texts in jihadist rhetoric. While ISIS manipulates it to promote violence and compulsion, mainstream Islamic scholarship has always understood it within the context of early Islamic warfare against hostile, treaty-breaking opponents. Classical jurists, as well as the Qur’an itself, affirm that faith must come from free conviction, not coercion. Exposing the distortion of this hadith is essential in refuting extremist ideologies and reclaiming the ethical and spiritual integrity of Islam.

5 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH MAINSTREAM ISLAMIC INTERPRETATIONS

This chapter presents a scholarly comparison between the interpretations of the selected Hadiths by ISIS and those of mainstream Islamic scholars. While ISIS readings are often literalist, decontextualized, and ideologically motivated, the interpretations of recognized scholars are based on classical methodologies of *usul al-hadith*, *fiqh*, and *asbab al-wurud* (historical context). The objective here is to expose the methodological flaws in the extremist approach and highlight the ethical and balanced framework of authentic Islamic scholarship.

5.1 HADITH: “KNOW THAT PARADISE IS UNDER THE SHADE OF SWORDS”

Narration:

“*Know that paradise is under the shades of swords.*”

— Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 2818

This section presents the mainstream Islamic scholarly interpretation of the hadith “*Know that paradise is under the shade of swords,*” situating it within its historical context, classical jurisprudential frameworks, and ethical principles. It contrasts these traditional understandings with the distorted reading propagated by extremist groups like ISIS. By exploring authoritative

commentaries and legal doctrines, this part clarifies how the hadith has been historically applied as a metaphor for legitimate, defensive jihad governed by strict moral and legal conditions, rather than an unrestricted call to violence.

Mainstream Interpretation

The hadith “Know that paradise is under the shade of swords” has been classically understood by scholars as referring to legitimate, defensive jihad, not an open-ended license for perpetual violence. Rather than glorifying war for its own sake, it is understood within the framework of just warfare, tied to specific historical contexts and moral conditions. This conclusion is based on the detailed analysis presented earlier in this study, which contrasted extremist literalist readings with the nuanced interpretations of classical and modern Islamic scholarship.

Historical Context and Commentary

Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, in his authoritative commentary *Fath al-Bārī*, places this hadith in the context of the Battle of Uhud, a moment of existential threat for the Muslim community. He writes that the hadith was intended to encourage courage and self-sacrifice among Muslims facing overwhelming enemy forces—not to incite offensive or indiscriminate war (Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, 2001, v. 7, p. 85v).

Similarly, Imam al-Nawawī, in *Sharḥ Sahih Muslim*, notes that this hadith must be interpreted alongside other teachings of the Prophet (A.S.W.S), who emphasized mercy in battle, the protection of non-combatants, and the importance of *dawah* (invitation to Islam) before combat (Al-Nawawī, 2011, v. 12 p. 42). Al-Nawawī also states that seeking martyrdom is praiseworthy only when fighting is for a just cause and under legitimate authority, not through rebellion or terrorism.

Al-Khattabi, in *Ma‘ālim al-Sunan*, interprets the hadith metaphorically: the “shade of swords” is not to be taken literally but as an indication of proximity to battle, where sincere struggle under divine guidance may lead to martyrdom and Paradise—not as a standing invitation to violence (Al-Khattabi, 2016, v. 2, p. 215).

Jurisprudential Foundations

According to classical *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *jihad* is categorized into two types:

- ***Jihad al-daf‘*** (defensive jihad): Obligatory when Muslims are under direct attack.
- ***Jihad al-talab*** (offensive jihad): Subject to strict limitations, declared only by a legitimate ruler and governed by clear ethical rules.

Al-Mawardi, in *Al-Aḥkām al-Sultāniyyah*, emphasizes that the authority to declare war rests solely with the *imam* (ruler) and cannot be undertaken by individuals or groups acting independently (Al-Mawardi, 1996, p. 150).

Ibn Taymiyyah, despite being cited by jihadist groups, clarified in *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā* that combat must serve a clear shariah purpose and be guided by justice, not vengeance or ambition. He explicitly condemned fighting that causes harm to innocent people or violates treaties (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995, v. 20 p. 348-352).

Al-Shatibi, in *al-Muwafaqat*, stresses that one of *maqasid* of Islamic law (the primary goals) is the preservation of life, which overrides opportunistic readings of hadiths that seem to promote violence (Al-Shatibi, 2004, v. 1 p.101-104).

Ethical Conditions in Classical Thought

Mainstream scholars consistently mention several conditions that must be met for jihad to be considered legitimate:

- **Rightful Authority:** Only a recognized Muslim government or leader can declare war.

- **Just Cause:** War must be in response to aggression or treaty violation—not ideological expansion.
- **Ethical Conduct:** Prohibition of harming non-combatants, religious leaders, women, children, the elderly, or destroying crops and places of worship.
- **Niyyah (Intent):** The purpose must be sincere for the sake of Allah, not political gain or chaos.

These principles are grounded in hadiths and Prophetic practice. For instance, in an authentic narration, the Prophet (A.S.W.S) commanded his army: “*Do not kill women or children...*” (Sahih Muslim, Hadith 1731).

Key Differences from ISIS’s Interpretation

While ISIS distorts this hadith to justify unrestricted violence, suicide attacks, and global warfare, mainstream scholars:

- Contextualize the hadith within a specific, defensive battle scenario (like Uhud or Badr).
- Reject vigilante jihad or combat without legitimate leadership.
- Emphasize the ethics of war, especially protection of innocents.
- Affirm that martyrdom is a byproduct of just defense, not a goal achieved through indiscriminate bloodshed.

It is remarked that ISIS ignores these legal and ethical principles, adopting an absolutist reading that directly contradicts the Prophetic example. Their use of this hadith strips it of moral boundaries and turns a deeply spiritual message about sacrifice for justice into a rallying cry for nihilistic violence.

In the Islamic tradition, the hadith “*Know that paradise is under the shade of swords*” has never been interpreted as a carte blanche for violence. Rather, it has been understood by scholars

as a metaphor for the noble, ethical, and sacrificial nature of legitimate combat under shariah-based constraints. The classical framework is fundamentally opposed to the way ISIS instrumentalizes this hadith. Where scholars see it as a reminder of duty in exceptional circumstances, ISIS weaponizes it to promote continuous, politicized warfare.

5.2 HADITH: THE BLACK BANNERS FROM KHORASAN

Narration:

“Three will fight one another for your treasure, each one of them the son of a caliph, but none of them will gain it. Then the black banners will come from the east, and they will kill you in an unprecedented manner.” Then he mentioned something that I do not remember, then he said: *“When you see them, then pledge your allegiance to them even if you have to crawl over the snow, for that is the caliph of Allah, Mahdi.”*

—Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith 4084

This hadith, often linked to apocalyptic prophecies and the coming of the Mahdi, lacks reliable chains of transmission and is unsuitable as a foundation for theology, legal rulings, or political agendas. Classical and contemporary hadith critics unanimously caution against using such dubious narrations to justify violent movements or sectarian claims, emphasizing the need for rigorous authentication and careful contextual interpretation. This section outlines the scholarly consensus on the hadith’s authenticity, its limitations, and the dangers of its misappropriation.

Mainstream Interpretation

The so-called Hadith of the Black Banners from Khorasan—often quoted in the wording *“When you see them, then pledge your allegiance to them even if you have to crawl over the snow, for that is the caliph of Allah, Mahdi”*—has been strongly critiqued by mainstream hadith scholars, both classical and contemporary. Most agree that its *isnād* (chain of transmission) is *da‘īf* (weak) or

even *mawḍūʿ* (fabricated) and that it is unsuitable for deriving theology, legal rulings, or political strategy.

Grading and Authenticity

Prominent hadith critics such as Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Al-Suyūṭī, and al-Albānī have examined various versions of this narration and concluded that it suffers from serious issues in both chain and content:

- Ibn Hajar, in *Taqrīb al-Taḥdhīb*, and al-Dhahabī, in *Mīzān al-Iʿtidāl*, identify problematic narrators such as Harun ibn Antarah and other unknown or unreliable transmitters in these *isnāds* (Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani, 2001, v. 4, p. 1787-1789).
- Al-Albānī, in *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍaʿīfah* (Vol. 2), explicitly classifies this hadith as unreliable and warns against basing eschatological beliefs or actions on such narrations (Al-Albānī, M. N., 1993, v. 2, p. 127-130).
- Al-Suyūṭī, while compiling eschatological hadiths in works like *Al-ʿUrf al-Wardī*, includes this narration only with cautionary notes, recognizing its limited evidentiary weight (Al-Suyuti, 1997, p. 45).
- Shuʿayb al-Arnaʿūt, in his critical edition of *al-Mustadrak* by al-Ḥākim, also deems the hadith unauthentic, citing disconnected *isnāds* and exaggerative *matn* (content) as signs of fabrication (Al-Arnaʿut, S., 2003, v. 3 p. 2010).

In general, the criteria for accepting hadiths with eschatological or creedal implications are extremely strict. Mainstream scholars hold that *ʿaqīdah* (creed) must be built on *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound) texts—not on solitary, weak reports.

Caution Against Eschatological Speculation

The tradition of Sunni orthodoxy has always discouraged speculative end-time theology, especially when based on isolated or doubtful reports. The Qur'an clearly states: **“Verily, the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah alone”** (Qur'an 31:34).

Classical scholars like Imam al-Shāfi'ī and Imam Mālik emphasized that unverified apocalyptic narratives should not be the basis for political or social action. According to al-Nawawī, eschatological hadiths should be interpreted cautiously, avoiding literalist readings and emotional manipulation (Al-Nawawi, 2011, v. 12 p. 45).

ISIS, however, builds a pseudo-apocalyptic narrative, treating this hadith as a divine blueprint for military rebellion, despite the absence of any such instruction in the original text. They weaponize weak narrations to portray their actions as part of a preordained cosmic battle.

No Direct Command to Violence or Rebellion

Even if the hadith were accepted as *ḥasan li ghayrih* (weak-but-usable), scholars argue that it does not contain any explicit instruction to wage war. The reference to “black banners” is symbolic and ambiguous, and the appearance of the Mahdi is described in Islam as a matter of divine decree, not human orchestration.

Ibn Kathīr, in *al-Nihāyah fī al-Fitan wa al-Malāḥim*, states that most of these narrations are subject to interpretation and not suitable for political applications (Ibn Kathir, 1997, p. 216).

Scholars also underscore that the Mahdi's identity is unknown, and he will not be preceded by political violence, especially not one initiated through fabricated prophecy. According to hadith methodology, even *sahīḥ* hadiths involving *ghayb* (the unseen) must be handled with epistemic humility.

Scholarly Consensus on Limits of Application

There is a clear *ijmā‘* (consensus) among mainstream scholars that weak hadiths may be cited for encouraging virtue, but not for *aḥkām* (legal rulings), warfare, or political legitimacy. This is a well-established principle in *usūl al-ḥadīth* and *usūl al-fiqh*.

Imam al-Nawawī, in *Taqrīb wa al-Taysīr*, stipulates that weak hadiths can only be used in *fadā’il al-a‘māl* (virtues), and never in rulings involving punishment, reward, or warfare (Al-Nawawī, 1987, p. 127).

ISIS violates this consensus by using this hadith as if it were a legally binding prophecy, forming the basis for revolution and terrorism. They ignore classical constraints and build a cult of militancy around a narration rejected by most scholars.

Key Differences from ISIS’s Interpretation

Aspect	Mainstream Scholars	ISIS
Authenticity	Weak/fabricated	Treated as central
Meaning	Symbolic, eschatological	Literal, militarized
Use	No legal or political basis	Basis for caliphate legitimacy
Timing	Subject to divine will	Interpreted as imminent
Application	Caution, not action	Mobilization for war

Table 1 Key differences of mainstream scholars vs ISIS on Black Banners from Khorasan

Mainstream Islamic scholars have consistently rejected the use of weak or fabricated hadiths for political action, especially those involving end-times speculation. The hadith of the Black Banners is one such example: a textually weak, symbolically ambiguous narration that ISIS weaponizes for theological manipulation and violent mobilization. Classical and contemporary

scholarship urges restraint, methodological integrity, and recognition that matters of eschatology lie in the domain of Allah—not in human speculation or armed rebellion.

5.3 HADITH: “I HAVE BEEN COMMANDED TO FIGHT THE PEOPLE...”

Narration:

“I have been commanded to fight the people until they testify there is no deity but Allah...”

— Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim

Among the most frequently distorted prophetic texts by extremist ideologues is the hadith: “*I have been commanded to fight the people until they testify there is no deity but Allah...*” Groups like ISIS extract this hadith from its legal and historical context, employing it as a blanket justification for violence, forced conversions, and war against all non-Muslims. However, classical and contemporary scholars have offered a more nuanced, jurisprudential reading—grounded in the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* (objectives), Qur’anic ethics, and the lived practice of the Prophet (A.S.W.S).

This section explores the mainstream interpretation of this hadith, highlighting how it has been classically understood as a time-bound directive against hostile polytheists rather than a universal command for coercive jihad. It also outlines the legal and moral principles that govern warfare in Islam, underscoring the centrality of justice, treaty adherence, and non-compulsion in belief.

Mainstream Interpretation

This hadith is one of the most frequently misquoted and misapplied texts by extremist groups. ISIS reads it in isolation and absolutism, while classical and contemporary scholars frame it through the lens of context, jurisprudence, and harmony with Qur’anic principles of justice, *da‘wah* (invitation), and religious freedom.

Classical Contextualization

Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, in *Fath al-Bārī*, explains that *al-nās* (the people) in this hadith refers to the Arab polytheists of the Prophet’s time, especially Quraysh, who had been actively fighting the Muslims, breaking treaties, and persecuting believers (Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, 2001, v. 7, p. 194). He stresses that this command was time-bound, not universal, and must be reconciled with verses promoting peaceful coexistence and freedom of belief.

Al-Nawawī, in his *Sharḥ Sahih Muslim*, elaborates that this hadith does not call for coercive conversion, but rather relates to ending military hostilities. Once a person embraces Islam outwardly—or enters into a treaty—their life and property are protected (Al-Nawawi, 2011, v. 1 p. 181).

Al-Khattābī also affirms in *Ma‘ālim al-Sunan* that this hadith must be interpreted in harmony with the Qur’an, particularly verses like **“There is no compulsion in religion”** (Qur’an 2:256).

Qur’anic Foundation and Ethical Restraint

The Qur’an contains numerous verses affirming religious liberty and non-coercion. For example:

- **“If your Lord had willed, all those on earth would have believed. Will you then compel the people to become believers?”** (Qur’an 10:99).
- **“There is no compulsion in religion. Truth has become clear from falsehood...”** (Qur’an 2:256)

Mainstream scholars insist that any hadith must be interpreted in light of the Qur’an, not in contradiction with it. Furthermore, the Prophet (A.S.W.S) himself engaged in peace treaties, including the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, and never forced non-Muslims to convert. Jews and Christians in Medina lived under covenants and were not harmed.

Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn Bāz, former Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, explained this hadith in his *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā* by affirming that it referred to a specific time in the Prophet’s mission. He wrote:

“This command was related to the disbelievers who opposed and fought the Messenger (A.S.W.S). As for peaceful disbelievers or those under a treaty, there is no command to fight them unless they break the treaty.” (Ibn Bāz, 1999, v. 5, p. 181).

He also strongly condemned terrorist actions and indiscriminate violence, calling them violations of Islamic law.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, in his *Sharh al-Arba‘īn al-Nawawīyyah*, stated that this hadith is often misunderstood by extremists:

“The Prophet was commanded to fight until the truth was established and the means of persecution were removed, not to compel belief. Islam came with mercy and wisdom.” (Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, M. S., 2003, p. 126-127).

He added that belief must be voluntary, and jihad is not to force religion, but to remove obstacles to the free expression of the truth. He emphasized that non-combatants, civilians, and peaceful non-Muslims are not legitimate targets in Islamic warfare.

Jurisprudential Framework

Islamic jurists have consistently stressed the following principles related to jihad and the application of this hadith:

- **Legitimate Authority** (*Imām Shar‘ī*): Only an established Muslim ruler can declare war—individuals or groups cannot act independently.
- **Ethical Limits**: Warfare must exclude non-combatants, protect civilians, and uphold treaties.

- **Defensive Nature:** The default in Islamic warfare is defense, not conquest. This is affirmed by Al-Māwardī, Ibn Qudāmah, and Al-Shāfi‘ī (Al-Māwardī, 1996, p. 112; Ibn Qudāmah, 1992, v. 3, p. 365; Al-Shāfi‘ī, 2001, p. 150).
- **Purpose of Jihad:** As stated by Imam al-Ghazālī, the aim is to lift oppression, not to compel people to accept Islam (Al-Ghazālī, 2000, v. 2, p. 247).

Key Differences from ISIS’s Interpretation

Aspect	Mainstream Scholars	ISIS
Scope of “al-nās”	Specific to Quraysh in war	Universal – applies to all
Goal	Ending persecution and hostility	Enforced conversion or death
Method	Legal, state-sanctioned jihad	Vigilantism and terrorism
Qur’anic alignment	Harmonized with verses of peace	Contradicts Qur’an 2:256, 10:99
Scholars’ Verdict	Conditional, contextual command	Absolutist, used for killing

Table 2 Key differences of mainstream scholars vs ISIS on “I have been commanded to fight the people...”

The hadith “*I have been commanded to fight the people...*” has a specific historical context and was never meant to be a universal command for forced conversion or global war. Classical and contemporary scholars, including Shaykh Ibn Bāz and Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, have clarified that the purpose was to remove oppression, not to spread Islam by the sword.

ISIS’s exploitation of this hadith reflects a complete departure from traditional jurisprudence, ethical war conduct, and the Qur’anic spirit of justice and mercy. They extract the

hadith from its legal and spiritual context to justify indiscriminate violence and ideological coercion, making their interpretation both textually invalid and theologically dangerous.

5.4 CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER

This comparative analysis demonstrates that the interpretive framework adopted by ISIS stems from ideological absolutism rather than scholarly integrity. Their approach disregards the foundational principles of hadith sciences, jurisprudence, and ethical reasoning. In contrast, traditional Islamic scholarship is grounded in a rigorous methodology that includes the authentication of hadith through *isnād* analysis, contextualization via *asbāb al-wurūd* (circumstances of revelation or narration), jurisprudential principles rooted in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and a firm commitment to the ethical *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (objectives of Islamic law), such as the preservation of life, justice, and religious freedom. The divergence between the two approaches is not merely a matter of interpretation but a fundamental epistemological and methodological rift. Whereas mainstream scholars seek to derive balanced rulings that align with the Qur'anic spirit of mercy and justice, extremist groups seek textual justification for predetermined political and violent agendas. This results in outcomes that include not only misapplication of sacred texts, but also the erosion of public trust in Islamic teachings, the justification of indiscriminate violence, and the distortion of the Prophet's (A.S.W.S) message of guidance and compassion. Ultimately, this underscores the urgent need to promote authentic scholarship and ethical literacy in the face of ideological manipulation.

6 DISCUSSION ON IMPACTS OF DIVERGENT INTERPRETATIONS

The divergence in interpretation between ISIS and mainstream Islamic scholars goes far beyond theological disagreement; it carries deep implications for Muslim societies, global perceptions of

Islam, inter-religion relations, and counter-extremism strategies. This chapter analyzes the broader consequences of such divergence on multiple levels.

6.1 IMPACTS ON MUSLIM SOCIETIES

The manipulation of Islamic texts by extremist groups like ISIS produces serious sociological impacts within Muslim communities. First, it fuels social polarization by cultivating a binary worldview that divides individuals into “true believers” and “apostates.” This takfīr-based ideology fosters sectarian division and mistrust within communities (Bunzel, 2015, pp. 54–56).

Second, it amplifies youth radicalization, especially among marginalized or identity-seeking individuals. Studies show that youth exposed to extremist online messaging—absent robust religious guidance—are more vulnerable to adopting simplified, violent interpretations of Islam (Neumann, 2016, pp. 64–66).

Third, it erodes trust in religious authority, as ISIS portrays traditional scholarship as compromised and positions its own ideological claimants in opposition to established scholars. This creates confusion, undermines institutions of learning, and disorients those seeking religious certainty (Brown, 2015, pp. 210–212).

Additionally, in my view, the ideological use of hadiths has broader outcomes that, though not widely quantified, are grounded in the trends discussed earlier:

- Erosion of community cohesion, leading to splintering and intra-religion hostility.
- Undermining of religious literacy and scholarship, as charismatic propaganda replaces historically rooted scholarship.
- Deepening identity crises, especially among second-generation Muslims in the West, as extremist narratives appeal to alienated youth without formal religious education.

These observations align with the evidence and analysis presented in the analysis section of this study. Together, the scholarly findings and interpretive conclusions underscore the profound societal risks posed by doctrinal distortion and the urgent need to reinstate authentic Islamic scholarship and ethical reasoning. In contrast, mainstream scholars emphasize Islamic ethics, moderation, and social harmony, offering a stabilizing force for communities threatened by ideological extremism.

6.2 IMPACTS ON THE GLOBAL IMAGE OF ISLAM

The rise of extremist groups like ISIS has broader negative consequences beyond internal Muslim community dynamics. One major impact is the increase in Islamophobia, where Muslims worldwide face heightened fear, hostility, and discrimination driven by the conflation of violent extremist acts with Islamic teachings (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2018, pp. 45–47). Studies have documented a marked rise in hate crimes and societal suspicion toward Muslims correlating with media coverage of terrorism (Pew Research Center, 2017, pp. 32–34).

Additionally, media misrepresentation plays a significant role. Global media often simplify complex issues by equating ISIS’s extremist ideology with “authentic Islam,” perpetuating stereotypes and misunderstanding (Alsultany, 2012, pp. 65–67). This distorted portrayal marginalizes the voices of moderate and scholarly Muslims who advocate peaceful interpretations (Cesari, 2013, pp. 78–80).

These dynamics also cause diplomatic strain for Muslim-majority countries, which are frequently pressured to respond to violence they neither authorize nor support. This situation complicates international relations and can lead to unjust political consequences (Wiktorowicz, 2011, pp. 102–104). Meanwhile, the nuanced and peaceful perspectives of classical and contemporary scholars often remain unheard amidst the sensationalist coverage of violence.

6.3 IMPACT ON INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTRA-RELIGIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

Divergent interpretations of Islamic texts significantly impact Muslim interactions both with non-Muslims (inter-religion) and within the Muslim community itself (intra-religion). Firstly, inter-religion mistrust escalates when non-Muslim populations associate Islam primarily with violence, a perception fueled by extremist actions and media portrayals (Modood, 2019, pp. 122–125). This mistrust often leads to social exclusion and hinders constructive dialogue (Cesari, 2013, pp. 88–90).

Secondly, intra-religion takfīr—the practice of declaring other Muslims apostates—is weaponized by groups like ISIS to delegitimize mainstream Muslims and justify sectarian violence (Wiktorowicz, 2005, pp. 45–48). This has led to increased sectarian tensions and fragmentation within Muslim communities, exacerbating conflict and undermining unity (Hegghammer, 2010, pp. 67–70).

Thirdly, radical interpretations that reject pluralism and peace agreements cut off avenues for coexistence, promoting a worldview that dismisses treaties, tolerance, and religious diversity as invalid (Kamali, 2008, pp. 115–118). In stark contrast, mainstream Islamic scholarship advocates for interfaith dialogue, respect for religious pluralism, and universal ethics rooted in justice and mercy, exemplified in the works of scholars like al-Ghazālī and contemporary voices such as Tariq Ramadan (Ramadan, 2004, pp. 51–54).

6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNTER-EXTREMISM POLICIES

Recognizing the divergent interpretations of Islamic texts is essential for designing effective counter-extremism strategies. First, deradicalization programs benefit significantly from incorporating mainstream hadith commentary to intellectually and spiritually challenge extremist

narratives, providing alternative theological frameworks that discredit takfīr ideology (Hassan, 2011, pp. 102–105; Boucek, 2008, pp. 37–40).

Second, curriculum reform in Islamic educational institutions is critical to ensure that students are taught authentic methods of scriptural interpretation (*tafsir and usul al-fiqh*), equipping them with tools to resist literalist and extremist readings (Stern, 2010, pp. 84–87; Jackson, 2014, pp. 145–148).

Third, there is a pressing need to amplify the voices of credible Islamic scholars in media and public discourse to promote accurate understandings of Islamic ethics, thereby countering the simplistic and sensationalist portrayals that extremists exploit (Neumann, 2013, pp. 63–66; Roy, 2017, pp. 110–112).

Only through addressing the epistemological distortions underlying extremist interpretations and engaging communities at intellectual and spiritual levels can counter-extremism efforts achieve meaningful prevention and rehabilitation (Kepel, 2015, pp. 201–204).

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter presents a summary of the major findings of the study and provides informed recommendations for scholars, community leaders, educators, and policymakers to counter extremist misinterpretations of Hadith. The goal is to reaffirm the role of authentic Islamic scholarship in promoting peace and to offer practical steps forward.

7.1 FINDINGS

This research examined three hadiths frequently misused by ISIS and compared their interpretations with those of mainstream Islamic scholars. The findings can be summarized as follows:

1. ISIS interpretations are literalist, decontextualized, and ideologically driven, using hadith selectively to justify violence, promote *takfir*, and establish their illegitimate political authority.
2. Mainstream Islamic scholarship applies a holistic and ethical methodology, grounded in principles of hadith criticism, context, *fiqh* (jurisprudential reasoning), and the higher *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* (objectives of Islamic law).
3. The misuse of Hadith by extremist groups like ISIS results in:
 - Theological corruption.
 - Social fragmentation.
 - Global Islamophobia.
 - Radicalization of youth.
 - Undermining traditional scholarship.
4. Authentic interpretations provide a foundation for peaceful co-existence, ethical governance, and spiritual reform rooted in compassion, justice, and knowledge.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

A. For Islamic Scholars and Educational Institutions

- Revive and teach the methodology of Hadith interpretation with a focus on *asbāb al-wurūd*, *‘ilm al-rijāl*, and *al-jam‘ bayna al-adillah* (reconciliation between texts).
- Promote critical engagement with hadith literature, especially among young students in madrasahs and Islamic universities.

- Publish accessible rebuttals to extremist claims, using both classical references and contemporary language.

B. For Religious and Community Leaders

- Lead awareness campaigns that clarify the true meaning of jihad, martyrdom, and caliphate.
- Build platforms that give space to qualified scholars, not ideologues, and encourage open questions and dialogue within mosques and community centers.
- Identify early signs of radicalization and work with families to provide spiritual guidance.

C. For Policymakers and Counterterrorism Agencies

- Include Islamic scholars in advisory roles for deradicalization programs and prison rehabilitation initiatives.
- Invest in counter-narrative media content that highlights Islamic values of mercy, peace, and social justice.
- Avoid securitizing Muslim communities—engage them as partners, not suspects.

D. For Inter-religion and International Organizations

- Support inter-religion dialogue initiatives that foster mutual understanding about scriptural texts and religious motivations.
- Challenge media misrepresentations of Islam by promoting religious literacy in journalism and public education.
- Collaborate on research and peacebuilding projects that address the root causes of extremism—poverty, oppression, ignorance, and isolation.

7.3 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To extend this research, further studies can be done on:

- The role of social media in spreading hadith-based radical narratives.
- Comparative studies between Sunni and Shi'a responses to extremist interpretations.
- The psychological profiles of individuals attracted to literalist hadith usage.
- A broader analysis of how Quranic verses are similarly exploited and the scholarly responses to that misuse.

FINAL REFLECTION

This research has demonstrated that hadiths, when misinterpreted outside their scholarly frameworks, can become powerful weapons in the hands of extremists. Yet those same hadiths, when correctly understood, offer profound guidance for justice, mercy, and ethical living. The responsibility now lies with scholars, institutions, and communities to preserve the prophetic legacy by defending its meaning, upholding its values, and confronting ideological abuse wherever it arises.

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