

Leadership in the Reborn Caliphate:  
Thematic Network Analysis of ISIL's  
*E-zine Dābiq*

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## List of Abbreviations

COIN: Counter-insurgency

*Daish*: *Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah fe Al-Iraq wa Al-Sham*

E-zine: electronic magazine

IO: Information Operations

ISIL: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

IS: Islamic State

ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham

Kl: Kindle location: some kindle e-books do not have page numbers, where these are unavailable  
kindle locations are given in the citations

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## Abstract

*Dābiq* is an electronic magazine (e-zine) that utilises strategic utopianism and savagery messages supported by exemplary leadership, eschatological interpretations, and current events reports. This project analyses the narrative themes present within *Dābiq* and how relevant and prevalent these themes are across issues. The project applies Thematic Network Analysis of the first six issues of *Dābiq*, laying foundations for understanding ISIL's culture and for counter-narrative development. It argues that present terminology and first generation research constrain understanding of ISIL's cultural specifics.

Analyses of Militant Islamist rhetoric have a broad scholarly history; however, much scholarship has been restrictive in scope. Instead of producing understanding regarding specific Muslim cultures, scholarship instead often produces wider debates dichotomising the driving forces behind violent extremism. The broad scope of this debate primarily endorses theses of either political or religious motivation.

This project establishes that Militant Islam in the case of ISIL and its rhetoric within *Dābiq* contains attributes of both political and religious narratives. The further research establishes that the terminology in current parlance may be inadequate through its false dichotomy of religious or political root causes. This project argues for a specific distinction between terminologies such as Islam, Islamism, and Militant Islamism, and that counter terrorism research into specific Militant Islam cultures is required.



Finally, this project establishes that an ‘Exemplary Leadership’ theme dominates ISIL’s rhetoric within *Dābiq*. This supports the contention that counter-narratives require cooperation from Muslim leaders for their successful transmission. Additionally, in the case of ISIL, this research lends some credible support for military ‘targeting’ strategies in relation to anti-ISIL actions.

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

### 1.1 Thesis Statement

This project argues that terminology in current parlance falsely dichotomises religion or politics as root causes for ISIL's violent extremism. This dichotomy adds confusion to discourse, and potentially contributes to radicalisation and Islamophobia. Stated simply, not all Muslims are militants. Neither are Militant Islamists representative of the majority forms of Islam. Similarly, not all Muslims are overtly religious or share political ideals. Reverence for a deity does not translate into uniform interpretations regarding matters of politics and faith. Muslims and Islam generally are not 'monolithic' cases for generalised terminology and categorisation. Adoption of terminology regarding specific Islamic, Islamist, and Militant Islamist cultures is required in discourse discussing terrorism.

This project addresses the overarching argument through conducting research that illustrates the need to produce knowledge on specific Militant Islamist cultures and nuanced terminology. This thesis conducts a Thematic Network Analysis of ISIL's (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) propaganda by establishing a coding framework for analysis of the rhetoric within *Dābiq*'s first six issues. It is argued that ISIL utilises 'Exemplary Leadership' as the primary thematic narrative within *Dābiq*. The extremely prevalent 'Exemplary Leadership' theme underlines and supports all other thematic messages within *Dābiq*. Similarly, other prevalent themes (such as 'Building Good Muslims', 'Islamic Caliphate' and 'Reports/Current Events') support the dominant theme of 'Exemplary Leadership'. Thematic Network Analysis, the methodology utilised in this project, illustrates the prevalence of *Dābiq*'s themes in schematic maps of each issue.

The aim of this project is to produce a nuanced analysis of the thematic content within *Dābiq*'s first six issues. The objective is to begin to establish terminology specific to the rhetoric within *Dābiq*, and lay foundational groundwork for establishing understanding of ISIL and its culture.

## 1.2 *Dābiq*

*Dābiq* is an electronic e-zine published by the Militant Islamist group ISIL. The e-zine first appeared online in July 2014 in a variety of languages including English. The name for the magazine derives from a *hadith* (quotes and narrations from the life of the Prophet Muhammad), naming the township of Dabiq as the site for the final decisive battle of Armageddon (Gambhir, 2014: 3-5; Styszynski, 2014: 11). The production of *Dabiq* is of a high-end professional quality and the content covers a diverse range of topics (religious narratives, political commentaries, personal reflections, strategies for Islamic State development, slavery, theft, sharia law, report on current events, and interpretations on how to be a 'true' Muslim). The content of *Dābiq* has attracted some scrutiny; thus, some research and broader interpretations exist and are discussed within the literature review chapter.

The following page shows captured images of the front covers of four of the issues of *Dābiq*, taken from electronic copies of the magazine. These images provide examples of the slick production present within *Dābiq* magazine.

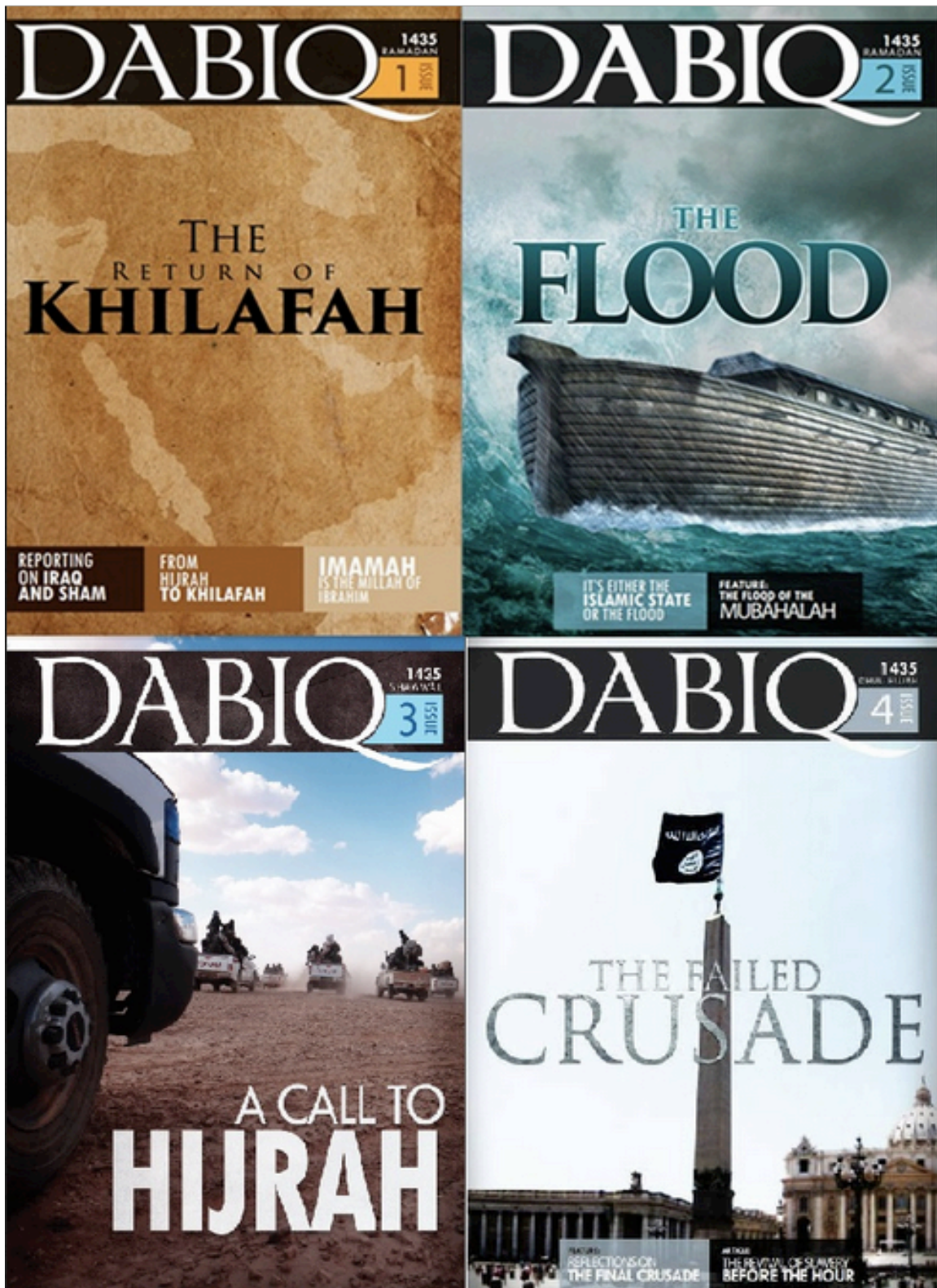


Figure 1 Images of Dābiq Magazine's Front Covers Issues 1 - 4

### 1.3 Significance

The significance of this research resides in two main areas: scholarly and applied; first, for academic debates; second, for counter-narratives and counter-violent extremism work. The first significance resides in support for specific terminology regarding Islamic, Islamist, and Militant Islamist cultures. At present, a debate exists over driving forces behind ISIL's violent extremism. This debate largely consists of oppositional viewpoints that root causes for its terrorism are either political or religious. Thus, there is confusion about what ISIL actually is, and what its aims and motivations are. This research argues against generalized terminology and categorization, and endorses specificity.

The second significance is in the development of a coding framework for understanding ISIL's rhetoric, and its narrative within *Dābiq*. Through this understanding, we can combat *Dābiq*'s rhetoric, and work towards understanding and defeating ISIL's violent extremism. To this aim, the project identifies 'Exemplary Leadership' as the most prevalent theme in *Dābiq* and the key driving force behind its acts of terrorism. The significance of this is threefold. First, to develop counter-narratives, a nuanced understanding of specific violent extremist cultures is required. Second, to have counter-narratives accepted in the Muslim mindset, cooperation of Muslim leaders is essential for transmitting messages to Muslims. Third, in the case of ISIL, there is some support for targeting as an effective strategy. Targeting or High Value Targeting (HVT), is a term for specific removal of high-level organizational leadership by military means. Importantly however, targeting must be on a case-by-case basis. Aspects of ISIL make it particularly vulnerable to targeting – this is NOT a broad endorsement for targeting strategies.

## 1.4 Terminology

This project uses ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) rather than ISIS/IS. The reason for this selection in the case of IS (Islamic State) is it is not a recognised state, nor is it representational of Islam, and to call it such adds support to its claim of legitimacy. The term ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham) does not fully cover the extent of ISIL's territorial ambitions and presence (Karmon, 2015). Additionally, both terms of ISIS and IS are confusing for legibility, and can lead to errors in writing and reading. The term *Daish* is often argued as the most appropriate however, this term also has shortfalls in regards to adequately describing the organisations territorial aspirations. *Daish* (not *Daesh*, as is often misspelt in the West) is the Arab acronym for *Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah fe Al-Iraq wa Al-Sham* (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or Sham).

Additionally, this project utilises the terms Islam, Islamist and Militant Islamist. This supports terminology developed by Aboul-Enein (2010: 1-2) that provides distinctions between Muslims, and political/religious variants. Aboul-Enein (2010: 1) defines Militant Islamist as “a group of individuals advocating Islamist ideological goals, principally by violent means”. Aboul-Enein (2010: 2) defines Islamists as “a group of individuals advocating Islam as a political as well as a religious system”. Last, Aboul-Enein (2010: 2) defines Islam as “the religious faith of Muslims, involving belief in Allah as the sole deity and Muhammad as his Prophet”.

Finally, the term ‘targeting’ refers to specific military targeting of key personnel within an organization, with the aim of disrupting and disaggregating the organization as a whole. Shortfalls of this strategy are that it is often ineffective, is high cost, and often contributes to high death tolls of innocent citizens within conflict areas.

## 1.5 Thesis Overview

This project builds its argument in the second chapter by initially reviewing and mapping the literary domain of discourse regarding ISIL. The literature review identifies several research gaps and centres on the primary debate regarding driving forces behind Militant Islam, and false dichotomization. Additionally, schematic mapping of the literature enables identification of themes in current parlance, useful for research coding.

The third chapter of the project examines several methodologies useful for analyzing *Dābiq* and selects the method most appropriate for this project. Additionally, the examination cross-references themes identified in the literature review against themes identified in research methodologies in similar projects. The chapter then describes the methodology used in this project, and the themes identified through the literature review and methodological cross-referencing.

The fourth chapter of this project provides results from the research process using identified themes. The chapter illustrates each issue as a Thematic Network, discussing thematic prevalence and relevance within individual issues, while referring back to the literature review in discussion.

The final chapter of this project draws conclusions from the research and discusses its findings and limitations. This discussion includes highlighting the central arguments of this research. Specifically, that the terminology of Islam, Islamist and Militant Islamist needs universal adoption to negate false dichotomisation in discourse; additionally, that nuanced analysis of specific Militant Islamic cultures is required in order to understand their cultures; and finally, that ISIL's e-zine *Dābiq* exhibits several traits, both consistent and unique to *Takfiri Salafist* media. The theme of 'Exemplary Leadership' is noted as consistent in Militant Islam however, ratios of politics and religion are noted to vary in specific cultures (Ingram, 2013). In the case of ISIL, this theme forms the central nexus of its narrative, and lays foundational support for all other narrative themes. ISIL is both a political and religious organisation and views to the contrary are a false dichotomisation in discourse, likely supporting ISIL's aims, as well as Islamophobia.

This chapter discusses the project's contribution towards establishing clear terminology and understanding specific to ISIL and its culture through Thematic Network Analysis. The project concludes by highlighting research gaps, strengths and limitations of this project, and providing recommendations for further research.



## Chapter 2 – Review of Literature

### 2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter reviews literature pertinent to comprehending ISIL's rhetoric within *Dābiq*, by mapping academic debates, identifying a coding framework, and isolating research gaps. Comprehending ISIL's rhetoric is essential, as understanding cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts of Militant Islamists is pivotal to counter-narrative development (Aboul-Enein, 2010: xvii; Egerton, 2011; Rapoport, 1984; 1991; Rękawek, 2015: 2; Sorenson, 2014). This chapter contains two sections: global narrative interpretations and themes in global discourse. These contribute to the thesis by identifying research gaps and providing a survey of prevalent themes for use in *Dābiq*'s coding framework.

This examination includes a broad scope of discourse in the review of literature, as presently research regarding ISIL's rhetoric is in its initial generations (Ingram, 2015: 3-4). Therefore, an essential 'schematic mapping' of the field is required to establish a grounded coding framework. Charting emerging discourse incorporates numerous sources and disciplines, including literature generally considered non-scholarly. Sources included in this literature review include: academic papers or books, journalist books, and papers from policy institutions. All authors in this review are experts in their fields and researchers of Levant regional violent extremism. Therefore, while not academically pure, this review utilises an array of knowledge, and, more relevantly, allows for extensive second-generation mapping of the ISIL phenomenon.

## **2.2 Global Narrative Interpretations**

Present in the global discourse are a multitude of interpretive positions regarding terrorism. This subsection reduces these interpretive positions to a primary debate regarding driving forces behind terrorism. The subsection poses the question: is current discourse falsely dichotomising and providing unconsidered and immature analysis for defining and understanding specific Islamic, Islamist, and Militant Islamist cultures?

### **2.2.1 The Debate in Global Discourse**

According to the first position, ISIL is an organization with political intentions. ISIL's Islamist focus is on political and territorial affairs and its use of terrorism serves a 'defensive jihad' brought about by socioeconomic and political concerns. This defensive jihad, according to those interpreting ISIL's narrative in such a way (Acun; Burke; Feldman; Pape), is a political response to aggression from nearby Arab 'apostate' regimes and far-off Western 'crusader' powers occupying Muslim lands.

According to a second position, ISIL is a religious organization motivated by sectarian eschatological interpretations of Islamic texts and divine commandments. ISIL's Islamic focus is on globally 'offensive jihad' aimed at purifying the earth from non-Muslim 'infidel' regimes, and establishing a prophesied utopian theocracy. From this perspective, for those interpreting ISIL's narrative in this manner (Egerton; Cockburn; Harris; Rapoport; Wood), ISIL's terrorism arises from obligations and interpretations of Islam, and retaliation against secular states and their purported immoral social norms.

According to the third position, ISIL is neither solely political nor religious in organizational structure. Rather, these are false dichotomies due to an inadequate terminology (Anderson, 2015) that imposes limited understanding on ‘specific Islamic cultures’ (Schmid, 2011). According to those supporting this thesis (Celso; Gohel; Ingram; Mansoor; Nalbando; Rękawek; Schmid; Whine), politics and religion are present, yet terminology and understanding is immature, particularly regarding jihadi terrorist groups. Thus, while ISIL’s tactics produce global responses, the research informing public mindsets and counter-narratives requires nuanced redevelopment.

This research project contributes to the debate, analysing all three positions while arguing that the third position is correct. The contribution of the research project in this area determines (in the case of ISIL) that driving forces for its terrorism are religious and political, and understanding of its culture and cyber-culture requires nuanced refinement. Furthermore, this research aims to determine that comprehension of ISIL’s specific language, history, and culture can assist in countering and defeating ISIL.

### **2.2.2 The Political Narrative**

Robert Pape (2015) views ISIL as a political organization. Two decades of Pape’s research centres upon root causes for terrorism, specifically suicide terrorism. In *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (2005), Pape analysed 315 worldwide suicide bombings occurring between 1980 and 2005. Pape (2003); (2005: 4) evaluates suicide bombings as part of larger coherent political and military campaigns that have little to do with Islam or religion in general. The argument contends:

Deep anger at the presence of Western combat forces ... nationalism ... is the central explanation for why some individuals ... willingly chose to defend their community's way of life. (Pape and Feldman, 2010: 43)

Specifically discussing ISIL, Pape (2015) iterated its strategy of suicide attacks as driven by the desire to compel democracies into withdrawing from territories where they are considered to be invaders.

Abdel-Rahim (2005: 27-32) argues, however, that the three divisions of *Ikhwani* (Muslim Brotherhood), *Salafi Ilmi* (Practical Salafists) and *Salafi Jihadi* (Salafi Jihadists or Takfiri Jihadists) all contain religious legitimization in varying degrees. Salafi Jihadi fundamentalists can often be violent terrorist extremists (Aboul-Enein, 2010). Thus, while Pape's argument that jihadists seek to establish an Islamic state is consistent across these cultures, the degrees of religious legitimacy for violence in specific cultures varies (Zech and Kelly, 2015: 87). Lewis et al. (2009: 19) similarly counter Pape's perspective, stating, "religion and politics inevitably intermingle". Gambhir (2014: 1) notes ISIL's strategic aims to exert control and establish a caliphate "require political and religious control in addition to military victory". Yet, ideas regarding terrain disputes as the root cause of terrorism are also the crux of Jason Burke's argument. Burke states:

Islamic militants' main objective is not conquest, but to beat back what they perceive as an aggressive West that is supposedly trying to complete the project begun during the Crusades and colonial periods of denigrating, dividing, and humiliating Islam. The militants' secondary goal is the establishment of the caliphate, or single Islamic state. (Burke, 2009)

Can Acun also agree with Pape and Burke, Acun (2014: 1) commenting that “the Sunni insurgency has emerged following Coalition forces and US-led occupations”. Acun (2014: 6) argues that ISIL now “attempts to become more dominant through sectarian discourses, adamant and brutal tactics, and military power”. However, Celso (2014: 1) counters that viewing ISIL as “a rational political actor is mistaken for it confuses the group’s instrumental rationality with a logical long-term vision”.

This research tests the defensive jihad argument by identifying and measuring the prevalence of political themes in *Dābiq*’s discourse. Similarly, this project also explores religious prevalence within *Dābiq*. It argues choices of politics or religion do indeed constitute a false dichotomy. Highlighting this last perspective, Merriam notes:

Permeating the entire Islamic heritage has been a characteristic fusion of language, politics, and religion. Central to the Muslim *Weltanschauung* is the notion of a theocracy or religious state, in which secular power derives its impetus from adherence to the doctrines of Islamic law (the Sharia). (Merriam, 1974: 46)

Thus, an inherent foundation linking Islamic religion to political territorial claims within the Muslim world historically underpins Islamist terrorism. Furthermore, Merriam adds:

Throughout the Muslim world, the village spiritual leader (*mullah*) often functions as the chief legal administrator and political spokesman as well. Since Mohammed, military commanders have served as leaders of prayer, and Borthwick has shown that sermons and related religious institutions continue to provide a highly credible medium for politically oriented messages. (Merriam, 1974: 46)

The scholarship of Borthwick (1967) delineates the role of sermons utilized by ruling elites in the Middle East to implement and influence political change. This aligns with Muslim tradition, where the mosque is the location wherein Imans begin a sermon reciting the name of the ruling sovereign. Thus, it is from this podium, culturally, that political authority and religious legitimacy intermingle and flow into Muslim mindsets.

### 2.2.3 The Religious Narrative

Countering the ‘defensive jihad’ thesis is the argument that religious identity is the nexus of Militant Islamist ideology. For those taking this position, ISIL’s politics are incomprehensible without first referring to its theological and eschatological interpretations. Introducing the religious argument, Rapoport (2002) states, “Religion (the basis for the fourth wave) transcends the state bond”. Egerton (2011: 13) also argues that, Militant Islamist terrorism “cannot be explained only on the roll call of allegedly unjustified military involvement overseas”. However, Egerton (2011: 17) elaborates further that, “What is significant here is not some reified idea of a particular religion, but rather religious culture”. Wood (2015) simply states that the “reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic”. In discussion with Sam Harris, a co-supporter of the religious argument, Wood reiterates, “We are, by definition, talking about religiously motivated terrorism” (Harris and Wood, 2015). Anc (2014: 18) and Cockburn (2015: 51Ki) provide support, arguing that ISIL is “enforcing compliance with its own exclusive and sectarian variant of Islam”. Cockburn (2015: 478Ki) adds that this is not only a ‘Muslim versus Muslim’ narrative; rather, he argues, ISIL seeks to create a dictatorial theocracy willing to “fight anybody who does not adhere to its bigoted, puritanical, and violent variant of Islam”.

Herein there is potential for unconsidered use of terminology such as Islam, Islamist, and Muslim to confuse and conflate the situation (Aboul-Enein, 2010). While Militant Islamist narratives draw upon Quranic texts, they do not communicate as a unified monolithic voice for Islam, Islamists and Muslims, and motives are equally political and militant (Lewis et al., 2009: 19). The key, as Egerton (2011: 17) indicated, is in understanding specific Islamic cultures. Ignoring Islamic, Islamist and Militant Islamist sectarianism appears culturally naïve, is academically immature, and produces simplistic analyses (Ingram, 2015: 1; Zech and Kelly, 2015: 87-88). This project explores this concept. Specifically, it is clearly important to note, when discussing Muslims, Islam, Islamists, and Militant Islamists, that terminology in broad parlance is not universal. Thus, a dangerous potential for misinterpretation and misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims exists in discourse and potentially contributes to extremism and Islamophobia.

Jack Jenkins contends Wood assists ISIL's agenda by making unconsidered claims. Jenkins (2015) quotes Islamic Professor Jerusha Lamphey who elaborates, "Wood's argument perpetuates the false idea that Islam is a literalistic tradition where violent texts are taken at face value". Jenkins (2015) also cites Nihad Awad, executive director of the Council on American Islamic Relations, who articulates that "de facto endorsement of literalistic Quranic interpretations amounts to an advertisement for ISIL's horrific theology". Such arguments, according to Marsden and Savigny (2009), hold substance and highlight a need for informed discourse countering specific violent sectarian agendas, such as those that ISIL aims to perpetuate.

#### 2.2.4 Inadequate Understanding of ISIL's Rhetoric and Culture

The third position elucidates that Militant Islam involves all elements of religious, political and military leadership (Celso, 2014: 1; 2015: 250-251; Cohen, 2014: 8; Gambhir, 2014: 1-2, 5-7). In this exposition, all three elements are present to varying degrees of prevalence within Militant Islamic rhetoric (Ingram, 2013). In *ISIL: The State of Terror*, Stern and Berger (2015: 421K1) postulate that “ISIL is best defined as a hybrid terrorist and insurgent organization”. They contend that ISIL’s hybrid terrorism tactics and insurgency strategies are currently “rewriting the playbook for extremism” (2015: 335). In their interpretation, ISIL’s narrative is both “a daring experiment in the power of horror, but also in the marketing of Utopia” (2015: 338), a view also shared by Flannery (2015). Berger (2015) reasons that while religion is of “primal importance in the narrative ... a group’s extremism does not naturally proceed from its claimed religious basis”.

Weiss and Hassan (2015: 39) argue that ISIL is a “hybridized insurgency made up of al-Zawqari’s disciples and the Baathists”. Weiss and Hassan (2015: 162) explicate that as ISIL came closer to its ambitions of creating a caliphate, the less religion played a part in its radicalization process. In, *ISIL: Inside the Army of Terror*, Weiss and Hassan emphasize ISIL’s narrative as:

Defence against a host of enemies – the ‘infidel’ United States, the ‘apostate’ Gulf Arab States, the ‘Nusayri’ Alawite dictatorship in Syria, the ‘*rafida*’ one in Iran and the latter’s satrapy in Baghdad. (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: xvi)



Weiss and Hassan (2015: 29) further state that ISIL has managed to “translate real socio-political grievances into an eschatological showdown”. Weiss and Hassan (2015: 84) further claim that, for ISIL, “money, not ideology” is the primary motivator. The most significant indicator of this, Weiss and Hassan (2015: 235) state, is ISIL’s oratory of “*ghanimai* (war spoils, which in ISIL’s definition encompasses robbery and theft)”. This rhetoric purportedly legitimises criminal savagery through religion for what they contend is one of the organisation’s largest and most significant income sources. This indicates a need for ISIL to use spoils to buy off militants, clans and leadership.

In a highly robust analysis, former CIA terrorism expert Richard Barrett (2014: 18) theorizes that ISIL’s ideology “comes from two very different directions”. “The first and now dominant strand is the fundamentalist canon of Islamic opinion”, says Barrett (2014: 18), “The other strand ... most evident in its organization and political objectives, is Ba’athism”. According to Barrett (2014: 19), both “share a vision of a new beginning through a return to the past”. Audrey Cronin (2015) has expressed the view that ISIL represents “the post-al-Qaeda jihadist threat”. Debating assertions that ISIL is an atypical terrorist organization, Cronin (2015) argues, “ISIL hardly fits that description ... If ISIL is purely and simply anything, it is a pseudo-state led by a conventional army”. In Cronin’s analysis, she determines that ISIL:

Seeks to control territory and create a “pure” Sunni Islamist state governed by a brutal interpretation of sharia; to immediately obliterate the political borders of the Middle East ... and to position itself as the sole political, religious, and military authority over all of the world’s Muslims. (Cronin, 2015)

Alex Bilger's (2014) report also indicates ISIL conducts a mixed campaign. Bilger (2014: 11) argues that ISIL strategically pursues "a phased campaign design", which convincingly resembles "tactical and operational" insurgent adaptations of counter-insurgency (COIN): "Clear, Hold, Build" tactics (Cohen, 2014: iii). Bilger (2014: 11) asserts, in this manner, ISIL is a "military organization" with an "advanced campaign" strategy. Adding support for Cohen (2014: 2), Bilger (2014: 11) concludes "ISIL is not simply a terrorist organization, but rather an armed insurgency moving to control terrain". Terrain control, a common theme in insurgency and counter-insurgency campaigns, in general, also relies heavily on the strategic use of propaganda (Cohen, 2014).

Haroro Ingram (2014a) also considers ISIL's narrative reflects "core principles of modern insurgency thinking". Ingram (2014d) notes that ISIL utilises a "sophisticated systems approach" in its information operations (IO), synergistically and intimately linked to political-military field actions. Ingram (2014d) reflects, "potency of the IS narrative lies in how adroitly it attaches perceptions of crisis to out-group identities [i.e. anyone not a Sunni Muslim] and links solutions to the in-group [i.e. Sunni Muslims]". In Ingram's (2014c) analysis, ISIL has established a masterful "strategic mechanism" in its IO designed purposefully to shape perceptions. ISIL's "magnetic appeal", according to Ingram (2014c), is deeply rooted within its leverage of "psychosocial dynamics", and he argues that "religious counter-narrative" is precisely what ISIL is pursuing. Ingram (2014d) summarizes his position on ISIL's narrative resonance as a strategic portrait of itself as the quintessential "protector of the Sunnis".

Analysing these positions, indications exist that ISIL utilises “combined political and religious authority” (Celso, 2014: 3), yet confusion and “immature understanding of culture” occurs in Western observers (Fromson and Simon, 2015: 7; Mansoor, 2013: 123; Zech and Kelly, 2015: 87). Perhaps exemplary of Robb’s (2007) ‘next-generation terrorism’ or Celso’s (2015) ‘fifth-generation terrorist *takfiri* jihadi groups’, predicted to be the evolution of terrorism, we understand little about ISIL’s culture. Nevertheless, Robb’s (2007: 133-151) perception of a transition to entrepreneurship utilising a modern veneer upon a pre-modern mindset appears significant. Aligning also with Celso’s (2015) concept of *takfiri* jihadi groups, the general confusion indicates a requirement for additional nuanced comprehension. A major contribution of this research project is that it produces data that will help address understanding. The prevalence of themes in this project provides indication of ISIL’s ideology and furthers nuanced understanding.

### 2.3 Themes in General Discourse

This section reviews literature on ISIL in order to identify themes useful for coding and analysis of *Dābiq*. While themes of politics, religion and militancy are likely to prove highly prevalent and relevant in *Dābiq*, they may not portray the most useful and relevant interpretational framework. This review therefore identifies additional themes by exploring their prevalence in the literature, highlighting these themes for significance, and compiling them into a framework for coding and analysis of *Dābiq*’s e-zine issues.

### 2.3.1 Islamic Caliphate, Emigration, and the Unity of Muslims

Substantial interpretation within the body of discourse concerns the establishment of Islamic caliphate and proclamations of Muslim unity. According to Sheik Dr Usama Hasan, an Imam in the Islamic Tradition, PhD of Physics and Artificial Intelligence, and Senior Researcher at the Quilliam Foundation:

An Islamic caliphate, by definition, covers the entire ‘Muslim World’ ... The hypothetical return of a caliph in Islamic Jurisprudence implies a large degree of Muslim unity, with the united Muslim masses willingly pledging allegiance to him. (Usama Hasan in Lister, 2015: 349K1)

The *ummah*, is understood as the community of all Muslims worldwide (Avanesi, 2014: 10; Burke, 2009; Crooke, 2014b; Marsden, 2012: 164; Saltman and Winter, 2014: 6; Whine, 1999b: 130). This universal body of united believers, irrespective of nationalities, falls under the sole jurisdiction of the caliphate (Friedland, 2014: 21; Low, 2015).

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the current leader of ISIL, declared Islamic caliphate on 29 June 2014 and outlined ISIL’s aims (Styszynski, 2014: 10-11). Proclaiming himself as caliph (head-of-state), al-Baghdadi called it “a state where the Arab and the non-Arab, the white man and the black man, the easterner and the Westerner are all brothers ... The Earth is Allah’s” (Cockburn, 2015: 61K1; Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 163; Low, 2015). Summarizing the narrative’s significance, Lister (2015: 51K1) states, “ISIL is determined to build a unitary state, or caliphate. That eliminates all borders in the Middle East and to extend those borders even further ... ISIL wants to also build a paradise on earth”.

Weiss and Hassan note this strategic reconstruction of the caliphate and label it, “an eleven year Utopian quest made sweeter by suffering” (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 114). They comment on the expansiveness of this vision, citing Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who extolled, “if Muslims were strong, the caliphate would again reach Spain and even conquer Rome” (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 8). ISIL aims to unite ‘true Muslims’ under caliphate, calling followers to emigrate and support its Islamic utopian vision (Flannery, 2015; Low, 2015; Mahadevan, 2015; Schmid, 2015: 9). Vino Avanesi interprets three distinct messages surrounding the caliphate theme existing within *Dābiq*:

- 1) The caliphate, and thus the caliph, are legitimate successors of earlier Islamic caliphates and caliphs.
- 2) The successes of the caliphate are a divine sign for the notion that it operates under the providence of Allah.
- 3) Muslims worldwide have a religious and ethical obligation to travel to Iraq or Syria. (Avanesi, 2014: 16)

### **2.3.2 The Management of Savagery and the Social Media Jihad**

Many scholars (Al-Tamimi, 2015a; 2015b; Belli et al., 2014; Celso, 2014; Neurink, 2015; Ryan, 2014b; Stern and Berger, 2015; Weiss and Hassan, 2015; Winter, 2015b: 41) perceive ISIL’s strategy as inspired by Abu Bakr Naji’s (2006) *The Management of Savagery*. This treatise theorises a period of savagery preceding establishment of the Islamic caliphate (Naji, 2006), by focusing upon the “power of vexation and exhaustion” and utilising savage extremism (Al-Tamimi, 2015a; Belli et al., 2014; Neurink, 2015; Stern and Berger, 2015: 576Kl; Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 40; Zech and Kelly, 2015: 83).

*The Management of Savagery* advocates extreme violence to destabilize areas and create “regions of savagery”, wherein local populations submit to control in order to end conflict (Crooke, 2014a; Gastal, 2008; Jenkins, 2014; McCoy, 2014; Siboni et al., 2015). Citing McCants forthcoming book, Jenkins (2014) contends that the strategy is to “carry out attacks on a local government and sensitive infrastructure tourism and energy in particular”. These attacks aim to cause government security forces redistribution, in order to protect infrastructure, thereby opening up a “security vacuum” (McCants in Jenkins, 2014). The plan deters opponent attacks on the caliphate by “paying the price” through horrific prisoner executions (Crooke, 2014a; Jenkins, 2014; McCoy, 2014).

Stern and Berger (2015: 337K1) call ISIL’s savagery “a daring experiment in the power of horror, but also in the marketing of Utopia”. They argue, “ISIL for all its barbarity, is both more pragmatic and more utopian. Hand in hand with its tremendous capacity for destruction, it also seeks to build” (Stern and Berger, 2015: 1311K1). Sageman (2004: 151) states social media attracts followers “to a violent abstract global movement based on ties to a virtual community”. Similar discourse by Anderson (1991), Egerton (2011: 53-72), Flannery (2015), Roy (2004: 18-20 and 272-275), Whine (1999a); (1999b) and Winter (2015a), shows social media terrorism is not a new phenomenon, rather one of growing complexity. Egerton (2011: 55) explains, “The political imaginary is neither a flight of fantasy nor materially determined”. Not yet tangible, it is an attractive mindset to those of likeminded utopian values, and social media forms the platform for its transmission (Flannery, 2015; Whine, 1999a; 1999b).

According to Weiss and Hassan (2015: 5), an estimated “half of Jihad is media”, and they maintain contemporary jihadi communications and internet skills surpass most political expertise globally (2015: 10). Lister (2015: 532K1) adds ISIL’s “effective use of social media and exploitation of international media attention” has been a significant aspect of its organisational operations. In Lister’s (2015: 533K1) appraisal, ISIL has “significantly outperformed any other militant groups on Twitter” and he ascertains that ISIL’s videos tweet at rates of approximately 2500 times per hour (2015: 532K1). ISIL’s technique of hijacking *hash tags* that utilize world events, such as the 2014 World Cup using “#Brazil2014 and #WC2014”, are examples of ISIL’s sophisticated social media strategies and audience manipulation (Farwell, 2014: 51; Lister, 2015: 538K1; McCauley, 2015; Prucha, 2014; Schmid, 2015: 1-2). Lister summarizes:

Al-Zawqari proved a dire pioneer ... of important ultra-violence and mass media. Like ISIL commanders today he was especially fond of beheadings and the attention they get in the West. (Lister, 2015: 555K1)

Celso (2014: 1) observes ISIL’s “publications espouse an apocalyptic, *takfiri*, sectarian and a salafist world-view that builds upon the strategy of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s AQI”. Citing Shiraz Maher (2014), Weiss and Hassan (2015: 166) add “digital apps” and “social media platforms ... have revolutionized jihadist agitprop”. In this manner, argue Weiss and Hassan (2015: 169), “ISIL has resorted to a sophisticated tool kit of propaganda and disinformation”. Celso (2014: 2) states, “*Dābiq*’s evocation of prophetic imagery is a predominant religious motif and a key component in its social media outreach to young jihadists”.

Stern and Berger (2015: 295K1) state, “ISIL has made its name on the marketing of savagery, evolving its message to sell a strange but potent new blend of utopianism and appalling carnage to a worldwide audience”. ISIL’s media strategy is “as aggressive as its military tactics” with intent to “extend its influence around the world” (Stern and Berger, 2015: 993K1). Stern and Berger (2015: 1241K1) add that ISIL has “mounted a systematic and devastating campaign for hearts and minds on social media”. Employing Howard Rheingold’s terminology, Al-Khateeb and Agarwal (2015), and Stern and Berger (2015: 1269K1) argue ISIL “amassed and empowered a ‘smart mob’ of supporters ... harassing its enemies and enticing new recruits”. According to Al-Khateeb and Agarwal (2015) and Rheingold (2002: xii), “Smart mobs consist of people who are able to act in concert even if they don’t know each other”. Stern and Berger (2015: 1881K1) explicate, by utilizing a “strange dichotomy of ultra-violence and civil order”, ISIL employ “social media as a tool for military and psychological offence” (Al-Khateeb and Agarwal, 2015; Farwell, 2014; Gambhir, 2014: 5; Stern and Berger, 2015: 2625K1). This coincides with social identity theory concepts that insecurity, social bonding mediums, and self-interest, create group identities and radicalisation (Kfir, 2015: 235-236). Lister (2015: 544K1) and Milmo (2014) add emphasis to the management of savagery and social media themes, reiterating ISIL’s strategic use of social media has “attracted recruits and worldwide attention” and “enabled potential recruits to coordinate their arrival in Syria or Iraq”. Prevalent comments across the discourse promote ISIL as a “slick propaganda machine”, well-organized at “disseminating its message and calling its new recruits via social media” (Ingram, 2015: 2; Lister, 2015: 549K1; Ryan, 2014a; Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 3).



*Management of Savagery* themes are significant, not only for understanding ISIL's social media, but for identifying and countering ISIL's legitimacy. Ayaz and Ahmad (2013: 72-75), Sorenson (2014) and (Schmid, 2015) illustrate the importance of delegitimising savagery on several points. They state that Sunni theology and ethics clearly endorse the avoidance of conflict, and specifically forbid surprise attacks, killing of the helpless, killing of prisoners, pillaging, mutilation, and burning of the enemy alive. Explicitly, Ayaz and Ahmad (2013: 74) and Schmid (2015: 2) identify "Revenge and savagery are forbidden". They argue, "The Qur'an categorically condemns those persons and groups that commit acts injurious to peace and public order" (Ayaz and Ahmad, 2013: 75). As such, *The Management of Savagery* is a considerably relevant theme if prevalent within *Dābiq*, predominantly for precise applications in developing counter-narratives. Working in synergy with religious and political utopianism ideology and legitimacy, any perception that ISIL conducts illegitimate actions diminishes its attraction to the Muslim mindset (Holbrook, 2015: 102; Schmid, 2015: 7-8; Sorenson, 2014).

### **2.3.3 Exemplary Leadership, Legitimacy and Prophetic Signs**

According to Can Acun of the Seta Foundation, ISIL's strategy of savagery has also "generated questions about its leadership" (Acun, 2014). Lister explains:

*Baqiya wa tatamadad*, or, lasting and expanding. This slogan concisely sums up the fundamental modus operandi of the IS organization, the roots of which date back at least to 1999, when its notorious father figure, Amad Fadl al-Nazal al-Khalayleh (Abu Mubab al-Zarqawi), was released from prison in Jordan. (Lister, 2015: 539K1)

ISIL's leadership structure and Al-Zarqawi's history of "drug possession and sexual assault" raise enquiries of ISIL's motives (Gill, 2014; Hashim, 2014; Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 2; al-'Ubaydi et al., 2014). Stern and Berger (2015: 428K1) state, "from the mind of Abu Masab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian thug-turned-terrorist" a brutal sectarian jihad has emerged. Weiss and Hassan (2015: 10) scrutinise ISIL's criminal foundations, saying for al-Zarqawi, "prison was his university" providing criminal connections and ideals. They emphasize he incorporated into ISIL "his most enthusiastic champions, 'near enemies' he previously declared himself oppositional to: the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein" (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 10). Research by Barrett (2014: 24-34), Lister (2015: 465K1) and Sherlock (2014) concurs: ISIL's majority "top decision-makers served either in Saddam Hussein's military or security services". Lister (2015: 460) further ascertains ISIL's ex-Baathist leaders encompass "roughly 1000 median and top-level field commanders, who all have technical, military and security experience".

Considering this exploration of ISIL's leadership, emphasis on its "jihadist state" (Celso, 2014: 1) and al-Baghdadi's purported linkage to "Quraysh tribe" prophecy (Cockburn, 2015: 333K1) are important. This prophecy foretells of the next caliph to establish an Islamic state (Celso, 2015: 265). Cockburn (2015: 333K1) notes that ISIL has compared "its political and religious political and territorial influence with that of the Prophet Muhammad during his time at Medina" thereby claiming its religious legitimacy by al-Baghdadi's lineage (Celso, 2015). Cockburn (2015: 746K1) theorises, "seizing even part of Baghdad ... would give credibility to its claim to be founding a new state".

Weiss and Hassan (2015: 176) state that Iraq and Syria are “birthplaces of many of God’s prophets, and burial sites for many of the Prophet’s companions”. They emphasize these “are also sites for end-times foretold by Muhammad”, symbols utilized by ISIL “to promote its ideology and gain legitimacy among conservative Muslims” (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 176). Ingram (2014b); (2015: 5) argues, “Legitimacy and pragmatism dominate IS’s macro-relationships”, contending, “authenticity as an Islamic government ... and its perceived functionality as a politico-military apparatus ... are key factors in legitimacy-based support”. Thus, de-legitimizing leadership may be foundational for acquiring broad Muslim support (Holbrook, 2015: 102). From a propaganda perspective, exemplary leadership and role models are pivotal to persuasion (Bernays, 1928). Legitimization through leadership also plays a central role in developing a following in Muslim cultural sects (Borthwick, 1967; Ingram, 2013; Merriam, 1974). Delegitimising or decapitating ISIL’s leadership and providing alternative leadership may prove central to counter-terrorism and counter-narratives strategies (Sorenson, 2014).

#### **2.3.4 Western Failures and Arab Apostate ‘Othering’**

Leadership themes also exist in the ISIL/Western narrative. Cockburn (2015: 237K1) proclaims, “America, Britain, and the Western powers, the rise of ISIL and the Caliphate is the ultimate disaster ... the war on terror ... failed miserably”. Arguably, in this view, nowhere is Western leadership failure more apparent than in the collapse of Iraq forces. After significant numbers of allied force lives were lost and hundreds of billions spent on training, infrastructure was simply not resilient. Lister explains:

Between sixty-five and ninety-five thousand of Saddam's other praetorian division, the Special Republican Guard, the Fedayeen Saddam, and state subsidized militiamen were all rendered unemployed with the stroke of a pen after Paul Bremer, the Bush-appointed head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), chose to disband the Iraqi military. (Lister, 2015: 783K1)

Cockburn (2015: 475-477K1) argues the collapse is a Western failure: "Underlying these conditions has been the failure of the Western occupation force in Iraq to carry out effective nation building after the US invasion". Lister (2015: 614K1) reinforces this: "So long as Syrian military opposition groups do not receive what they perceive to be sufficient military and financial assistance, IS will benefit". As an example, Weiss and Hassan (2015: 12) note when ISIL attacked Mosul, "a force numbering some 1,300 men" was victorious against "a nominal 60,000-strong force including the Iraqi army and federal and local police". Throughout Mosul, Baiji, and Tikrit, "security forces disintegrated and fled, the rout led by their commanding officers".

Cockburn (2015: 1285K1) comments that ISIL's position on local regimes stems from al-Zarqawi, who thought "society across the traditional Islamic world had been corrupted and needed cleansing through terrifying violence". Cockburn (2015: 228K1) argues, "The Iraqi army was detested as a foreign occupying force of Shia soldiers, regarded in Mosul as a puppet regime led by Maliki". Lister (2015: 211K1) notes ISIL theologically considers the Arab governments "on par with the devil". According to Lister (2015: 453K1), ISIL see "An Iranian-American alliance ... purposefully keeping them from their rightful place as the true masters and custodians of Baghdad".

ISIL's narrative elucidates itself as 'pure', the Shia as "confirmed polytheists", and de-legitimises Arab regimes/Western forces (Celso, 2014: 2-3; Ingram, 2015: 1-2; Rękawek, 2015: 3-4). Thus, social media rhetoric and 'othering' appear significant in inspiring radicalisation, sectarian conflict, and Islamophobia (Aboul-Enein, 2010; Celso, 2014; 2015: 255; Ghobadzdeh and Akbarzadeh, 2015; Haynes, 2012; Ingram, 2015: 1-2; Kfir, 2015; Marsden and Savigny, 2009; Marsden, 2012; McCauley, 2015).

### **2.3.5 Salafi/Wahhabi Identity and Moderate Islamic Scholars 'Othering'**

Purification of global Islam is an impassioned theme (Schmid, 2015: 4; Ghobadzdeh and Akbarzadeh, 2015), and 'othering' has begun to come to the fore in second-generation research on ISIL (Ingram, 2015). ISIL projects itself to Muslims, says Lister (2015: 396K1), as the "protector of true and pure Sunni ideals" in an agenda of "establishing a *Sunni* Islamic State" (2015: 592). Weiss and Hassan (2015: 124) comment, "To ISIL, the Shia are religiously void, deceitful, and only marked for death". Weiss and Hassan (2015: 29) contend ISIL perceive Shia as "grave-worshippers, idolaters, and polytheists". Lister (2015: 29K1) and Zelin (2014) add that sectarianism is a front for ISIL's "military strategy ... to spark or sustain sectarian conflict". Weiss and Hassan discuss ISIL's stand on Sunni oppositional ideologies, stating:

Al-Baghdadi was always very consistent about his position on Sunni militant Islam groups that were not part of his own organization. He would say: Fighting them is more of a priority than fighting the Americans. (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 119)

Islamic ‘othering’, according to Ghobadzdeh and Akbarzadeh (2015) and Weiss and Hassan (2015: 183), is historically “a doctrine that ... advocates a return to the theological purity and the traditions of the Prophet Mohammad”. Alvi (2014), Sorenson (2014: 27), Ghobadzdeh and Akbarzadeh (2015: 694) and Weiss and Hassan (2015: 36) point to “Islamic theologian Ibn Taymiyyah – the godfather of Salafism” who proclaimed: “Beware of the Shi’ites, fight them, they lie”. Cockburn (2015: 772K1) and Ghobadzdeh and Akbarzadeh (2015: 694) extend historical influence to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Wahhabism. Ghobadzdeh and Akbarzadeh (2015: 695-700) indicate that ‘othering’ is deeply rooted in the culture, with first conflicts dating to the *Khawarij* sect of the early 7<sup>th</sup>-Century, a trait that continues throughout the Militant Islamist tradition. Aboul-Enein (2010: xvii) states, “We cannot contain Militant Islamist Ideology but only work to marginalize, de-popularize, and erode its influence and mass appeal, by identifying it as different from Islam or even from Islamist political groups”. Aboul-Enein (2010: xvii) notes, “We must take into account the language, concepts and interpretations of Islamic militants that justify violence against Muslim and non-Muslim alike”. These comments strike at the issues’ roots, because understanding Islam, Muslims, and secular narrative is a clear path towards de-radicalisation (Kfir, 2015; Schmid, 2015).

### 2.3.6 Armageddon/Apocalypse

Weiss and Hassan (2015: 174) state, “In much of its public discourse ISIL relies on Islamic eschatology for legitimacy and mobilization”. Referring to *Dābiq* as proof of this, they state that it:

Explains ISIL's core mission and its behaviour through its eschatological prism. The introduction of sex slavery, for example, was defended by the editors as one of the signs of "the Hour", meaning Judgment Day. According to a hadith, the Apocalypse will come when a slave gives birth to her master. (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 176)

Weiss and Hassan (2015: 175) contend, "Many of the practices that ISIL has revived are intended as tocsins of Islamic prophecy"; this includes the looting and blowing up of shrines (Daly, 2015) and the "tossing of homosexuals from rooftops" (Ahram, 2015: 68).

Stern and Berger (2015: 3416K1) state, "ISIL has begun to evoke the apocalyptic tradition much more explicitly, through actions as well as words". They clarify, "Like other apocalyptic groups in history, ISIL's stated goal is to purify the world and create a new era, in which a more perfect vision of Islam is accepted worldwide" (Stern and Berger, 2015: 3562K1). They further add, "Considerable diversity exists, however, in writings about what will precede this final judgment" (Stern and Berger, 2015: 3428K1). Referring to Cook, they explain, "the events in this period are typically described as Lesser Signs of the Hour and Greater Signs of the Hour" (Cook in Stern and Berger, 2015: 3432K1; Fromson and Simon, 2015: 29). They conclude, "ISIL is using apocalyptic expectation as a key part of its appeal" (Stern and Berger, 2015: 3446K1). Eschatology may also be an avenue for discourse however, while Islam itself is peaceful Militant Islamists are not (Aboul-Enein, 2010; Kafeyan, 2010). Yet, eschatology could prove a potential nexus for counter-narratives if built upon nuanced knowledge of specific Muslim cultures.

### 2.3.7 Spreading Islam and Sharia

At a core of controversy is ISIL's strict enforcement of "primeval religious and social norms throughout its territory" (Lister, 2015: 181K1). Lister states that ISIL:

... seeks to establish law and order immediately after capturing territory. Police forces – male and female – are rapidly formed and deployed to patrol the streets and enforce traditional civil and sharia laws, and sharia courts are promptly established. (Lister, 2015: 577K1)

According to Celso (2014: 3) and Weiss and Hassan (2015: 230), the first facility ISIL establishes is "the so-called Hudud Square, to carry out Sharia punishments, such as crucifixions, beheadings, lashings, and hand-loppings". Weiss and Hassan (2015: 230) elucidate ISIL's secondary protocol is to then establish "a Sharia court, police stations, and security operation stations". Stern and Berger (2015: 3253K1) and Wass de Czege (2014: 64) elaborate: "The punishment [beheading] derives from the Wahhabi interpretation of the Islamic religious laws of Sharia". They concur that everywhere ISIL controls, they "instituted a harsh theocratic rule, which included at least skeletal governance, with a functioning economy and civil institutions" (Stern and Berger, 2015: 947K1; Wass de Czege, 2014: 64). Zech and Kelly (2015: 83) give the example that "After overtaking the Syrian 17th division outside Raqqa, IS displayed soldiers' decapitated bodies and mounted more than fifty heads on fence posts ... Later that month the Islamic State beheaded 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians on a Libyan beach". Even small infringements are punished with severity according to Cockburn (2015: 485K1), who states, "smoking and drinking of alcohol are also banned with transgressors punished harshly".



Spreading of non-violent cultures is not an issue to be discouraged, in either discourse or action. However, fundamentalist Sharia law undoubtedly infringes upon basic human rights, and countering this is a matter of either counter-narrative development or force. Contending with sharia law is not a simple matter, as Islamists and Islam alike endorse it as law. Yet, the harsh uncompromising sort of fundamentalist Sharia law that ISIL endorses is savage, unmerciful, inhumane and contradictory to the Quran, the hadiths and Islam (Aboul-Enein, 2010; Kafeyan, 2010).

### **2.3.8 Jihad, Foreign Fighters and Martyrdom**

Stern and Berger (2015: 597K1) and Schmid (2015: 13-14) argue that ISIL also endorses “lone wolf attacks”. Stern and Berger (2015: 597K1) contend that Zawahiri’s influence was the jihadi publication, *A Call to a Global Islamic Resistance* by Abu Masab al-Suri, advocating individual jihad. Weiss and Hassan (2015: 22) identify ISIL’s inspirational power led to “more than 18,000 Muslims from ninety countries” joining their ranks. According to Maher (in Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 167), foreign fighters divide into three categories: “missionary jihadists”, “martyrdom-seekers”, and “adventure jihadists”. “Missionary jihadists”, explains Maher (in Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 167), are “driven by civilian suffering”, and see “jihad as an obligation to defend women and children”. Martyrdom-seekers on the other hand, Maher explains (in Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 167), “want nothing more than to carry out a suicide operation and thus be lionized in the annals of jihadism”. Adventure jihadists, says Maher (in Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 167), are “adrenaline junkies ... non-practising Muslims and are often drug users or addicts, or are involved in criminality or drug violence back home”.

(Stern and Berger, 2015: 3075K1) concur that ISIL has a history of seeking “recruits and supporters who are further down the path towards ideological radicalization or more inclined by personal disposition towards violence”. They further comment, “fighters of ISIL are a new and untested breed”, and if they return home someday, “they will be unimaginably different from their predecessors” Stern and Berger (2015: 3071K1). (Stern and Berger, 2015: 3075K1) adds that social media, makes “light of the perceived threat of blowback”. Arguing this point, he cites Peter Neumann Lister (2015: 35K1), who declares, “the threat of foreign fighter blowback is realistic”. According to (Lister, 2015: 302K1), “deliberate martyrdom through suicide bombing” has been at the core of ISIL’s effective military tactics. Cockburn (2015: 57K1) believes ISIL is making “a cult out of martyrdom” by claiming to be “fulfilling the will of God”. He argues that ISIL’s narrative draws upon “a set of Islamic beliefs, centring on the creation of an Islamic state”, that emphasizes “self-sacrifice and martyrdom as a symbol of religious faith and commitment” Cockburn (2015: 53K1). The result in Cockburn’s (2015: 135K1) assessment theorises “untrained but fanatical ... suicide bombers” exploited by ISIL to “devastating effect”.

These concepts lend support for Juergenmeyer’s (2015: 135) thesis on “cultures of violence” and the “cosmic war” concept. There is also potential for profiling ISIL’s radicalisation and motivations through Criminology theory research. However, in-depth research in this area is beyond the scope of this current study, and has begun to some extent in the work of Juergenmeyer (2003; 2008: 432) and Hansen (2014).

### 2.3.9 Governance and Benevolence

According to Kfir (2015) and Styszynski (2014: 12), ISIL “does not just focus on disciplinary justice ... It also spends significant financial resources on providing social services”. Cockburn (2015: 569Kl) reiterates that ISIL “frequently subsidizes the prices of staple products, particularly bread, and has been known to cap rent prices”. Lister (2015: 83Kl) contend, “Governance has been a winning strategy for ISIL”; they argue, “the strategy in the area it controlled was to win hearts and minds and reach out to the local community leaders” Weiss and Hassan (2015: 228). ISIL’s image of benevolence indicates how vital cultural support is for its ‘remaining and expanding’ strategy Weiss and Hassan (2015: 196). This aspect of benevolence supports a case for developing counter-narratives, winning hearts and minds, and delegitimising ISIL (Gambhir, 2014: 5). ISIL’s secular savagery is illegitimate and inconsistent with Islam. Counter-narratives therefore require nuanced understanding and strategic delivery. Counter-narratives identifying ISIL’s rhetorical dichotomy can delegitimise ISIL, reveal its hypocrisy, and distance its appeal to Muslims (Farwell, 2014; Sorenson, 2014). However, (Sorenson, 2014) disputes “hearts and minds” as an effective strategy, and argues territorial control is the key to winning against insurgents.

## 2.4 Review of Literature Conclusions

The aim of this literature review was to map out the academic domain and to establish the beginning of a coding framework for *Dābiq*. To achieve this aim, this research has drawn upon a range of expert literature. This literature coverage has highlighted a central

debate, located key themes for coding, and identified significant research gaps for future research considerations.

This project considered narratives concerning the role of ISIL's political, religious and military leadership and determined initial themes for framework coding. To achieve this aim, the project has reviewed a broad scope of sources, identifying 36 themes in the literature that may be prevalent within *Dābiq*. The thematic coding framework drawn from this review of literature is cross-referenced against other research examined within the methodology chapter. This cross-referencing aims to further identify research gaps and substantiate literature review conclusions.

## Chapter 3 – Methodology

### 3.1 Methodology Overview

This chapter details the project's research methodology and identifies research gaps and cross-referencing coding themes against those identified in the literature review. The methodological selection process examines several research projects for strengths, limitations and their usefulness within this current research project. To this aim, thematic Network Analysis is selected as the most appropriate method for the project's scope and limitations. Thematic Network Analysis contributes to the fields of previous research in Terrorism Studies, Intelligence Studies, and broader Humanities/Social Science rhetorical analysis. Attride-Stirling's six-step Thematic Network Analysis research process is used to analyse each of *Dābiq*'s first six issues individually, and then comparatively against each other in final analysis. Ending the chapter is a list of identified themes potentially prevalent within *Dābiq*, identified from the literature and methodology cross-referencing.

### 3.2 Expert Studies

This sub-section analyses expert studies in parlance while aiming to identify an appropriate narrative research methodology and highlighting research gaps. Cohen (2014) contends, "In the end, we cannot hope to have a strategy without defining the threat". Aboul-Enein (2010: xvii) adds, "Clarity of thought, history, and language is required to begin separating Islamist Ideology from Islamists and Islam". The section aims to select a methodology for defining and clarifying ISIL's themes within *Dābiq* as well as providing additional coding framework themes.

### 3.2.1 Content Analysis

In 2002, Tsfari and Weimann conducted Content Analysis of terrorism rhetoric on the Internet. Using US State Department lists of terrorist organizations, the study analysed 14 terrorist organizations and 16 terrorist Internet sites between January 1998 and January 2002. They found common content of terrorist sites are reports, histories and current events (Aboul-Enein, 2010: 2). Additionally, organizational identity, ideology, aims, violent activities (including martyrdom), political prisoners, legitimacy, de-legitimacy of the enemy, and Zionism themes were prevalent (Tsfati and Weimann, 2002: 321). Significantly, “A common element on the terror sites is the organization’s communiqués and the speeches and writings of its leaders, founders, and ideologists” (Tsfati and Weimann, 2002: 321-325).

This project considers Tsfari and Weimann’s Content Analysis highly relevant research, and potentially effective for counter-terrorism. However, Content Analysis (as in the case above) typically includes both image and textual analyses, and, as such, is beyond this project’s current scope and space limitations. This project acknowledges omission of visual imagery analysis, and identifies it as a research gap. This is a significant limitation, as *Dābiq* contains extensive usage of altered images within its issues (Tsfati and Weimann, 2002: 323), and it is unknown how relevant these altered images are. Accordingly, Scot (Farwell, 2014: 50) states, “if the pen is already mightier than the sword, the altered image might prove mightier than both”. However, to some extent, research in this area has recently begun in the work of Macdonald (2007: 5).

### **3.2.2 Mixed Methods Research and Thematic Metrics**

In 2008, Smith et al. examined Al Qaeda, two affiliates and two control groups, for rhetoric that would indicate violent intent. The study utilized Thematic Content Analysis and Integrative Complexity within a framework of five value reference scores. The study found high prevalence of religion, morality and aggression values Walli (2015). Additionally, also indicated was significant prevalence of negative connotations regarding moral and religious values of enemies (Smith et al., 2008: 154-158). Funding by the US Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate built upon the study further in 2011. The expanded study assembled a group of expert scholars to undertake research using a variety of methods (Smith et al., 2008: 158). The expanded research project used "rigorous qualitative and quantitative approaches from a wide range of disciplines ... to explore the relationship between the rhetoric of groups and their likelihood of engaging in terrorist violence" (Smith, 2013). The expanded analysis proved highly significant and included a variety of different methodologies generating a wide array of analyses and research findings.

Thematic Metrics and Mixed Methods rhetorical research studies in the cases noted above are relevant for predictive analysis and potentially useful for ongoing research. Initially, this project planned to include Thematic Metrics; however, after progression in stages of analysis, it was concluded to be beyond the project scope and space limitations. Therefore, Mixed Methods and Thematic Metrics is an acknowledged gap in this project and identified as an area for potential further research.

### 3.2.3 Thematic Network Analysis

In 2013, using Thematic Network Analysis, Shane Peattie conducted an analysis on six issues of Al-Qaeda's e-zine *Inspire*. (Smith, 2011: 85) identified 38 themes in four categories that mapped out the e-zine's thematic content across issues. Building upon Attride-Stirling's method, Peattie incorporated Grounded Theory. Peattie identified themes of Arab apostates; clash of civilizations; exemplary leadership; jihad; Islamophobia; legitimacy; occupation; suffering; humiliation; Zionism; Muslim unity; martyrdom; and Western aggression, immorality, and failure, among others. The value of Peattie's research is its significant contribution to the understanding of Al-Qaeda's rhetoric and its culture. Additionally, Peattie indicated the research method is significant for developing counter-narratives.

After examining Peattie's thesis, it became apparent that the method is highly effective for identifying, visualizing, describing and analyzing narrative. Furthermore, Thematic Network Analysis, as Peattie's study illustrates, also generates Thematic Metrics providing data for further Mixed Methods research analyses. While Peattie's thesis did not have scope for Thematic Metric's research, this project considers it useful for further Mixed Methods research and development of counter-narratives. Scrutiny of Peattie's research shows Thematic Network Analysis is a significant method for research with a rhetorical focus. Peattie's work also identifies Thematic Metric's in the data, as well as its potential for ongoing research.



### 3.2.4 Expert Studies Conclusions

This sub-section analysed several methodologies useful for rhetorical analysis coding, and the strengths and limitations of each method. All methods analysed exhibit potential for identifying relevance and prevalence of themes within *Dābiq*. Content analysis has additional benefits of exploring visual data to support its research findings. Thematic Metrics allows for the inclusion and extensive exploration of quantitative data. Mixed methods allows for a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that can explore rhetoric and image either separately or synergistically. However, largely due to space limitations, this project identifies Thematic Network Analysis as the most compatible methodology. Additionally, this project further acknowledges Image Analysis, Thematic Metrics and Mixed Methods research as gaps in this project's analysis. The strength of this project is therefore in its thematic analysis, and its significance is in its contribution to the field by identifying thematic relevance and prevalence. While imagery and metrics are beyond the project's current scope, these areas hold potential for further research in the domain. Lastly, the review of various research projects and their methodologies indicated a similarity in thematic coding and supported literature review findings for the coding framework.

### 3.3 Data Collection

For this research project, electronic copies of the first six *Dābiq* issues were obtained via the website The Clarion Project. This project obtained all issues of *Dābiq* analysed herein without payment or subscription, and at no point has any collection of data contributed to funding ISIL, *Dābiq*, or any of its affiliations.

### 3.4 Thematic Network Analysis Methodology

This research project uses Thematic Network Analysis as developed and described by Jennifer Attride-Stirling. The benefit of Thematic Network Analysis is that it provides a visually descriptive network map incorporating systematic classification of narrative themes. Attride-Stirling's method uses a six-step process outlined in Figure 2.

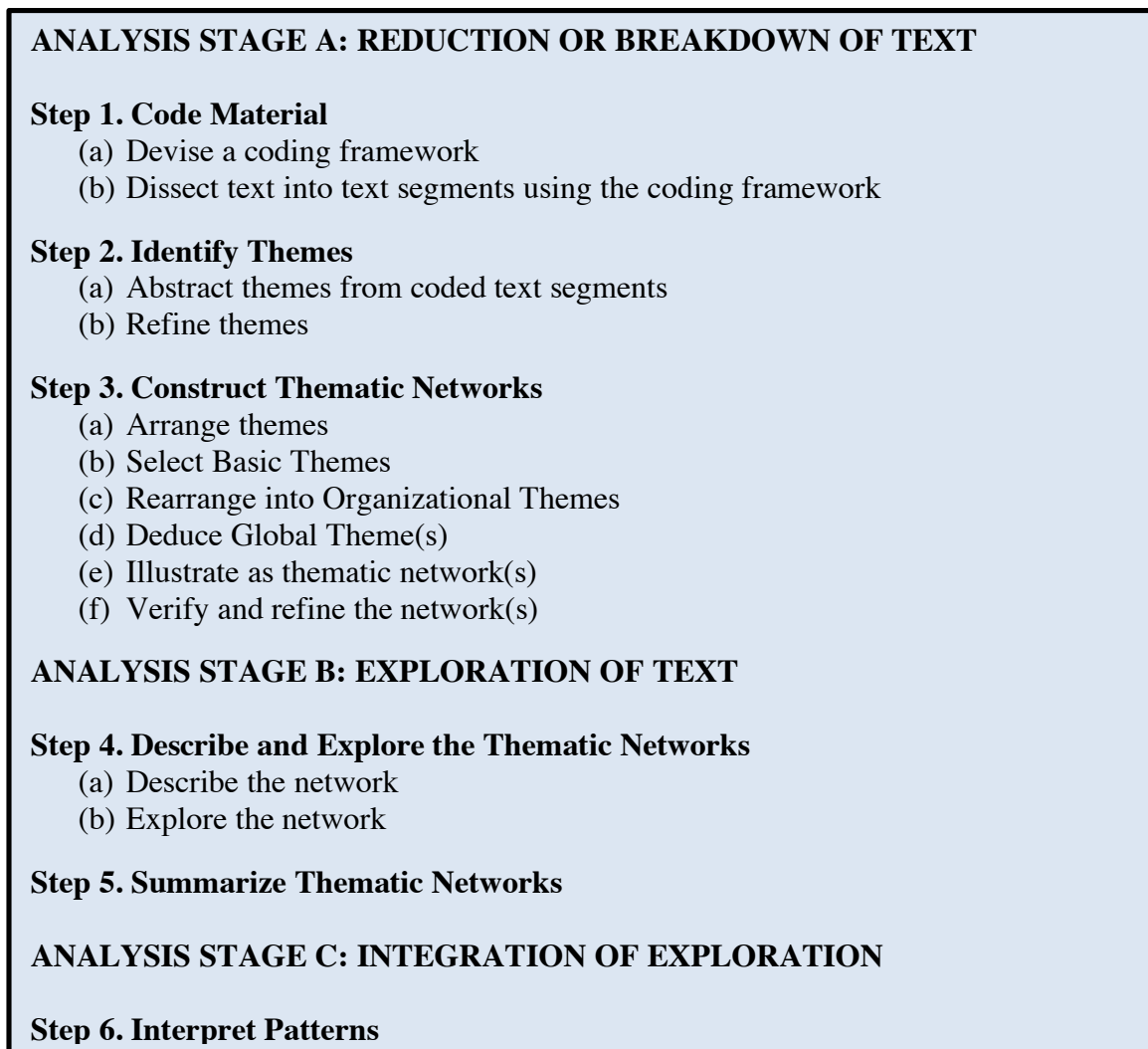


Figure 2 Attride-Stirling's Thematic Network Analysis Process

### 3.4.1 Thematic Network Analysis Stage A

Part (a) in the first step provides the initial coding framework for the text. Coding is the symbolic assigning of a summative label for themes in the text. For this research project *NVivo* software is the data management tool in the cycles coding. Part (b) of the first step of involves the manual entry of the text into the software, and assigning the coding framework to sections of the text.

The development of codes is formulated as follows: first, by a review of literature and identification of pre-existing expert definitions (see Chapter Two); second, by Grounded Theory (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The literature establishes a set of *a priori* code themes observed by experts that develops (prior to data analysis) the coding framework. When a segment of text matches an *a priori* code theme, this project codes the segment accordingly. When text does not match a coded theme, Grounded Theory establishes a set of *a posteriori* codes. *A posteriori* codes are subjective in interpretation, yet allow for an addition and analysis of datasets not previously identified in the literature.

Part (a) in the second step involves identifying and extracting “salient, common and significant themes” in the array of abstract identified themes present within the data pool (Peattie, 2013; Prunckun, 2015). Part (b) in the second step of analysis Stage A involves refining the abstract themes within the data pool.

Part (a) in the third step involves arranging the meaningful thematic arrays and sorting them into similar logical groups. The aim here is to provide a grouping resulting

in “a distinct Global Theme, supported by discrete Organizing and Basic Themes” (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 392). Parts (b) through to (d) in the third step involves sorting the logical groups into Basic, Organizing, and Global Themes. Part (e) in the third step involves illustrating the network as a non-hierarchical, web-like network. Part (f) in the third step involves verification of the network structure, ensuring that the data supports the structural representation, and that it accurately reflects the text. If the text and the data are inconsistent under scrutiny, then refinement occurs at this point. This thematic coding sequence also produces several quantitative datasets (included in the appendix) that may prove useful in further research.

### **3.4.2 Thematic Network Analysis Stage B**

Part (a) in the fourth step involves describing the network and part (b) in the first step involves exploring the network. Depending on what is most suitable to the data, network map, and literature, conducting these two steps can occur in a variety of ways within the research. More specifically, at this point Global, Organizational, and Basic Themes data are discussed and explored in conjunction with the literature review within and across *Dābiq*'s issues (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 393-394) In this project, additional discussion referring to the literature occurs in the final conclusive chapter of this research.

Step five involves a summary of the themes that emerge in the description of the network, and emphasizing the dominant patterns that have emerged.

### 3.4.3 Thematic Network Analysis Stage C

According to Attride-Stirling, the final phase of the six-step Thematic Network Analysis methodology aims to interpret the patterns present in the data. Attride-Stirling states that this final phase aims to:

Bring together (i) the deductions in the summaries ... and (ii) these deductions and the relevant theory, to explore the significant themes, concepts, patterns and structures that arose ... to return to the original research questions and the theoretical interests underpinning them, and address these with arguments grounded on the patterns that emerged in the exploration of the texts. (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 394)

## 3.5 Coding Framework

This project's literature review and methodology provided a coding framework of themes expected to be prevalent within *Dābiq* issues prior-to conducting any analysis of its thematic content. A set of *a priori* themes emerged from the consensus evident through a review of expert interpretations of Militant Islam, ISIL and *Dābiq* narratives. Summarizing the consensus found within the literature review, this project observed the following themes used herein for developing an *a priori* coding framework.

### 3.5.1 Arab Apostates

This theme includes accusations stating Arab governments have abandoned Islam, are puppets of the West, or are tyrants who are fitting into the Western system via an Arab Spring and thereby betraying 'real' Muslim values.

### 3.5.2 Benevolence

This theme includes any narrative that portrays ISIL as a humanitarian and/or compassionate organization caring for the needs of Muslims and ‘state’ citizens.

### 3.5.3 Building Good Muslims

This includes themes pronouncing ISIL’s interpretation of Islam that focus on the teaching of its doctrine for the ‘righteous’ Muslim life. This includes such ideas as ‘oneness with Allah’ (*tawhīd*), ‘teaching and listening’ (*manhaj*), and ‘congregational/communal sectarian assembly’ (*jamā’ah*).

### 3.5.4 Call to Arms

This theme includes all narratives that call upon Muslims to take up arms and fight against the West, its allies, or other regional actors. This theme includes direct calls to arms only. Further themes ‘Individual Jihad’, ‘Obligatory Emigration’ and ‘Obligatory Jihad’ account for geographic call to arms considerations.

### 3.5.5 Clash of Civilizations

This theme includes all suggestions that Islam and the West are two distinct, diametrically opposed enemies engaged in a prolonged civilizational conflict. This theme refers predominantly to Samuel P. Huntington (1996) seminal work *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

### **3.5.6 Enrage/Shame to Action**

This theme includes any narratives or statements intended to either enrage or shame believers to take action. These themes do not take a direct ‘Call to Arms’ approach.

### **3.5.7 Exemplary Leadership**

This theme includes any narratives or references to scholars, political and/or military leaders whereby they are role models for legitimacy, motivation or action.

### **3.5.8 Geographic Scope**

This theme includes any reference to states, territories and/or regions with a specific description of the geographic and/or human terrain.

### **3.5.9 Humiliation of Muslims**

This includes any themes stating that the honour and dignity of Muslims has been violated by Zionists, Western crusaders, or Arab apostates.

### **3.5.10 Individual Jihad**

This theme includes any narratives inciting Muslims to conduct individual jihad operations, or any discussions of past individual jihad operations.

#### **3.5.11 Insulting the Prophet**

This theme includes any accusations of blasphemy, as well as any reference to actions that insult or humiliate Allah, the prophet Muhammad or Allah's messengers.

#### **3.5.12 Islamic Caliphate**

This theme includes any references to an Islamic State or caliphate, as well as statements declaring any intention to expand ISIL's current territory.

#### **3.5.13 Islamophobia**

Includes any reference to/or accusation that the West discriminates against Muslims, or that Muslims are slaves to a corrupt discriminatory Western system.

#### **3.5.14 Jihad is Defensive**

This theme includes references aimed at legitimizing jihad as an act of self-defence due to Western forces either invading Muslim territories or conducting violent/discriminatory acts upon Muslims.

#### **3.5.15 Jihad is Obligatory**

Includes any reference that jihad is a religious/moral obligation upon all Muslims as a requirement delivered by God through prophetic texts or scripture.



### **3.5.16 Moderate Scholars**

This theme includes all accusations claiming Muslim scholars with different interpretations of Islam from that of ISIL are illegitimate, corrupt, immoral, or lacking knowledge of Allah's will.

### **3.5.17 Occupation of Muslim Lands**

This theme includes references to the invasion or occupation of Muslim lands by Western armed forces or illegitimate Arab regimes.

### **3.5.18 Palestine Suffering**

This theme includes references to emotional connection to Palestinian victims and Muslim suffering experienced in Gaza and the West Bank.

### **3.5.19 Religious/Political Legitimacy**

This theme refers to religious or political claims of ISIL that its state or its actions are legitimate based upon history, law/religious texts or socio-cultural values.

### **3.5.20 Reports and Current Events**

This theme includes any narratives providing reports or current events and news, either in the West or the Levant in an individual or geographic perspective.

### **3.5.21 Salafi Identity**

This theme includes indications connecting ISIL to Salafi or Wahhabi ideology and identity through direct statements from organizational members.

### **3.5.22 Spreading Islam/Sharia**

This theme includes any reference to motivation of ISIL for spreading of Islam or the reinstatement of Sharia law throughout any geographic area.

### **3.5.23 Superiority of Islam**

This theme includes any statement of perceived superiority of Islam to other religions, political institutions, beliefs, faiths, ideologies or legal systems.

### **3.5.24 Terrorism Claim**

This theme includes any narrative wherein ISIL claims responsibility for terrorism attacks within ‘enemy’ territory.

### **3.5.25 Terrorism Legitimacy**

This theme includes any reference to terrorism being a legitimate act through emotional connection to victims of war due to ‘Western Aggression’. This theme does not include political or religious justification covered under the Religious/Political Legitimacy theme.

### **3.5.26 Trust/Credibility**

This theme includes any narratives extolling the trustworthiness, credibility, or transparency of ISIL as a political, religious or military organization.

### **3.5.27 Unity of Muslims**

This theme includes any statements that attempt to present perceived ‘true’ Muslims as a unified monolithic *ummah*.

### **3.5.28 Vengeance and Justice**

This theme includes any statements that endorse terrorism as justifiable vengeance due to Islamophobia or cultural discrimination against Muslims.

### **3.5.29 Victimhood**

This theme includes any statements illustrating perceptions of Muslims as victims of Western asset theft or rape of Arab women by Western forces. This does not include ‘Western Theft of Arab Oil’ which is covered separately.

### **3.5.30 Virtues of Martyrdom**

This theme includes any references to the benefits of martyrdom, the blessing or desirability for death in the cause of Allah, or the ideological glorification that comes to those who die fighting to further Islam as a cause.

### **3.5.31 Western Aggression/Oppression**

This theme includes any references to Western acts of aggression and oppression against Muslims outside the West. This excludes the separately covered themes of ‘Humiliation of Muslims’ and ‘Victimhood’.

### **3.5.32 Western Hostages**

This theme includes any themes declaring capture or abduction of Western citizens held as prisoners or hostages. This project takes into account the outcome of the hostage situation under thematic codes of ‘Display of Savagery’ or ‘Repentance’.

### **3.5.33 Western Moral Depravity**

This theme includes any references to a perceived immorality or corruption of Western culture, including sexual decadence, material coveting, or falsehood.

### **3.5.34 Western Theft of Arab Oil**

This theme includes any reference to the theft of Arab oil under the purported guise of military intervention, or through forced corporate acquirement/takeovers.

### **3.5.35 Western Weaknesses/Failures**

This theme includes any reference to the weaknesses and failures of the Western forces, its Arab allies or the Western system. Such failures include economic or infrastructure vulnerabilities, security failures and military defeats.

### 3.5.36 Zionists/Crusaders

This theme includes any reference to a conspirator alliance between Israeli ‘Zionists’, Westerner ‘crusaders’ and Arab ‘apostates’ implemented to undermine Islam and Muslims.

## 3.6 Additional Grounded Theory Themes

This research project’s method for identifying *Dābiq*’s themes did not rely solely on identifying the presence of *a priori* themes through a Literature Review analysis. A precedent was set in this regard by Peattie (2013: 29) who states that “restricting analysis to the above themes alone would have precluded any identification of obscure or unexpected themes within the text”. Similarly, just as in Peattie’s thesis, this research identified themes ‘grounded’ in the theory developed by the Literature Review. These themes include:

### 3.6.1 Apocalyptic Vision

This theme includes any theme that refers to an apocalyptic showdown resulting in Armageddon brought about by a prophesized final battle between Western and Islamic forces.

### **3.6.2 Allegiance**

This theme includes any calls for declarations of allegiance (*bay'ah*) to ISIL and its leadership, supposedly obligated by interpretations of religious texts and/or scriptures.

### **3.6.3 Creating Chaos**

This includes any themes extolling asymmetrical warfare actions creating civilizational chaos as a beneficial act, not necessarily requiring acts of violent conflict, such as cyber espionage or infrastructure control.

### **3.6.4 Display of Savagery**

Any reference to acknowledge and publicize acts of extreme violence, such as beheadings, burning people alive, stoning, rape, slavery, mutilation or torture.

### **3.6.5 Divine Blessing**

This theme includes any reference to Allah blessing the actions of ISIL, or calls from leadership or organizational members for Allah to bless the actions and cause of ISIL and its followers.

### **3.6.6 False Messiah**

This includes any reference to the appearance of a prophesied false Messiah or satanic entity (*Iblīs* or *Shayṭān*) before a final apocalyptic battle.

### **3.6.7 Fear of God**

This includes any statement that attempts to put the ‘Fear of God’ into a Muslim, either through reference to an afterlife punishment or to tribulations in life on earth as a direct result of not adhering to ISIL’s ideological identity.

### **3.6.8 War Spoils/Slavery**

This includes any statement that legitimises war spoils as righteous riches (*ghanimah* or *fay*) justified in the sight of God, such as seizing of land and assets or taking women and/or children as slaves for sexual acts and/or labour.

### **3.6.9 Obligatory Emigration**

This includes any reference to a perceived religious obligation upon Muslims to emigrate to ISIL’s Islamic caliphate as a required act of faith and support for Allah (in either military or non-military dimensions).

### **3.6.10 Prophetic Signs**

This includes any reference perceived by Muslims as a ‘sign of the times’ indicating that ISIL is a legitimate actor acting on behalf of Allah and Islam. This also includes prophetic declarations or visions of future events.

### 3.6.11 Repentance

This includes any narrative discussing previously opposing forces, apostate Muslims or captives turning to Islam in an act of repentance. This repentant act supports ISIL's claims of legitimacy and growing unity of its ideology.

### 3.6.12 Taxation

This includes any reference to the required support by Muslims to ISIL by providing taxation (*zakah*) as a religious requirement under law. This also includes references or reports of non-payment, cheating or refusal to pay taxation; however, it does not include actions taken by ISIL in repercussion of non-payment of taxation. These themes are covered under the Spreading Islam/Sharia Law theme.

## 3.7 Methodology Conclusions

This chapter identified an appropriate methodology for scrutiny of *Dābiq*, and for identifying prevalent and relevant themes. The project uses Attride-Stirling's six-step Thematic Network Analysis research process, and incorporates Peatties's Grounded Theory approach.

This chapter adds to the research project by clearly delineating its methodology and by identifying research strengths and limitations. The project's strength resides in a concise method for identifying *Dābiq*'s relevant and prevalent themes, while restricting subjective interpretation through Grounded Theory. The project's limitations are the



omission of visual analysis, extensive Thematic Metrics, and Mixed Methods approaches;  
this project identifies these areas as gaps and areas for further research.

## Chapter 4 – Results

### 4.1 Results Overview

This chapter divides into two sub-sections making up the research project's analysis of the first six issues of ISIL's e-zine *Dābiq*. The first subsection provides the project's results illustrated as a Thematic Network and describes the network. The final subsection provides a comparative analysis of thematic consistencies and variances uncovered from the project's Thematic Network Analysis.

### 4.2 *Dābiq* as a Thematic Network

This subsection provides a series of visualizations mapping the narrative themes contained within the first six issues of ISIL's magazine *Dābiq*. The illustrated themes (coded and defined in the first subsection of this results chapter) combine to form a Thematic Network Analysis (described in the methodology chapter) of each issue. The Thematic Network Analysis visualization has several illustrated components that Peattie describes as:

Rectangular boxes represent Basic Themes, circles represent Organizational Themes, and squares represent the Global Theme. Arrows indicate which Organizational Theme/s a Basic Theme belongs to. Basic Themes supporting only one Organizational Theme are referred to as 'exclusive' themes. Basic Themes used to support multiple Organizational Themes are 'dual-use' themes. Percentage measurements indicate the percentage of an issue's theme-containing paragraphs within each Basic Theme appears. (Peattie, 2013: 31)

This project also uses percentages alongside metric coding counts, with colour coding for additional ease of analysis. White Basic Themes with a <10% presence in the Thematic Network are ‘minimally prevalent’. Yellow Basic Themes with a 10.0-19.9% presence in the Thematic Network are ‘moderately prevalent’. Orange Basic Themes with a 20.0-29.9% presence in the Thematic Network are ‘highly prevalent’. Red Basic Themes with a >30%, presence in the Thematic Network are ‘extremely prevalent’. Following on from each Thematic Network Analysis visual presentation is the description and summary of the networks of *Dābiq*’s first six issues.

#### 4.2.1 *Dābiq* Issue One

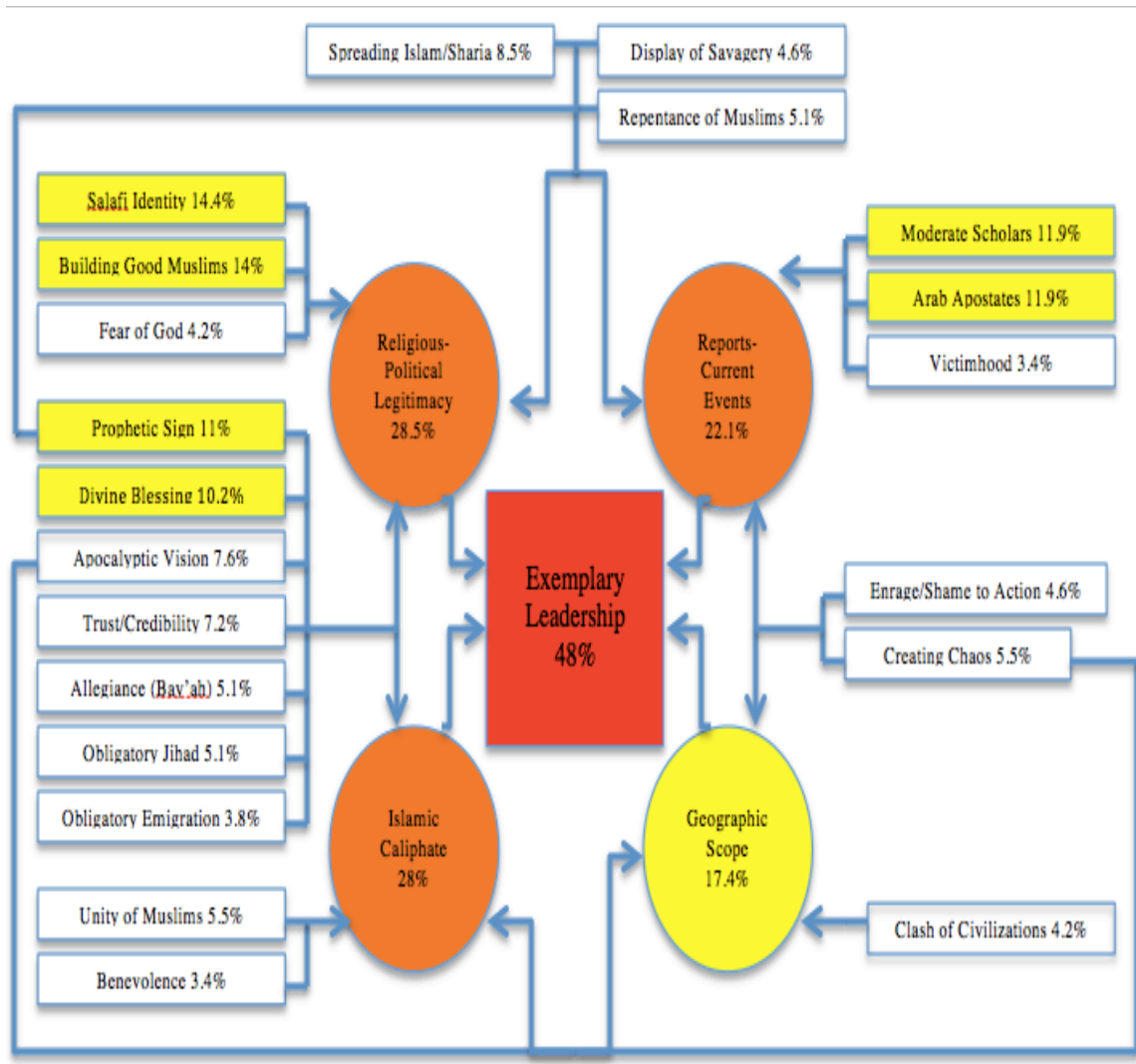


Figure 3 *Dābiq* Issue One (Ramadan 1435/5 July 2014)

The first issue of *Dābiq* contains 26 narrative themes (not including any insignificant themes that appear in <2.5% of themes containing paragraphs). This project separates these themes into four distinct Organizational Themes that synergistically support the magazine's Global Theme – 'Exemplary Leadership'.

*Religious-Political Legitimacy Organizational Theme:* In *Dābiq*'s first issue the 'Salafi Identity', 'Building Good Muslims' and the 'Fear of God' Basic Theme all supported this Organizational Theme exclusively. Both the 'Salafi Identity' and the 'Building Good Muslims' themes were highly prevalent, with the 'Fear of God' theme minimally prevalent. The minimally prevalent dual-use themes of 'Spreading Islam/Sharia', 'Display of Savagery', and 'Repentance' also co-support the 'Reports/Current Events' Organizational Theme.

The moderately prevalent 'Divine Blessing', and the minimally prevalent 'Trust/Credibility', 'Allegiance', 'Obligatory Jihad' and 'Obligatory Emigration' themes, all co-support the 'Islamic caliphate' Organizational Theme. The moderately prevalent theme of 'Prophetic Sign' is a dual-use theme co-supporting both the 'Reports/Current Events' and 'Islamic Caliphate' Organizational Themes. The minimally prevalent 'Apocalyptic Vision' theme is also dual-use, supporting the 'Islamic Caliphate' and 'Geographic Scope' Organizational Themes.

*Islamic Caliphate Organizational Theme:* The minimally prevalent Basic Themes of 'Unity of Muslims' and 'Benevolence' support this Organizational Theme exclusively. The minimally prevalent dual-use theme of 'Apocalyptic Vision' co-supports the 'Religious-Political Legitimacy', and 'Geographic Scope' Organizational Themes. The minimally prevalent dual-use Basic Theme of 'Creating Chaos' co-supports the 'Geographic Scope' and 'Islamic Caliphate' Organizational Themes.

*Geographic Scope Organizational Theme:* The minimally prevalent ‘Clash of Civilizations’ Basic Theme supports this Organizational Theme exclusively. The minimally prevalent dual-use theme of ‘Enrage/Shame to Action’ co-supports the ‘Reports/Current Events’ Organizational theme. The minimally prevalent dual-use ‘Apocalyptic Vision’ theme co-supports the ‘Religious-Political Legitimacy’ and ‘Islamic Caliphate’ Organizational Themes. ‘Creating Chaos’ is a minimally prevalent dual-use Basic Theme and co-supports the ‘Reports/Current Events’ and ‘Islamic Caliphate’ Organizational Themes.

*Reports/Current Events Organizational Theme:* The moderately prevalent ‘Moderate Scholars’ and ‘Arab Apostates’ themes, as well as the minimally prevalent ‘Victimhood’ theme, support the ‘Reports/Current Events’ Organizational Theme exclusively. Minimally prevalent dual-use themes of ‘Spreading Islam/Sharia’, ‘Displays of Savagery’ and ‘Repentance of Muslims’ co-supported the ‘Religious-Political Legitimacy’ Organizational Theme. The minimally prevalent ‘Enrage/Shame to Action’ theme is a dual-use theme co-supporting the ‘Geographic Scope’ Organizational Theme. A minimally prevalent dual-use ‘Creating Chaos’ theme co-supports ‘Geographic Scope’ and ‘Islamic Caliphate’ Organizational Themes.

*Issue Summary:* *Dābiq*’s first issue places an extreme emphasis on an ‘Exemplary Leadership’ Organizational Theme. The overall aim of the ‘Exemplary Leadership’ Organizational Theme is to legitimise its establishment as an “Islamic State” and place its leadership in authority over the Muslim *ummah*.

The issue aims to achieve a unified perception of its leadership through use of ‘Exemplary Leadership’ models drawn from history, religious texts and from its leadership. A clear distinction from history and scripture within the first issue unifies its ‘Political/Religious Legitimacy’ dimensions. Tribal leaders swearing allegiance help drive this theme and the equally prevalent ‘Islamic Caliphate’ theme. The issue alludes to a strong contrast between ‘Arab-Apostate’ regimes and ISIL’s own leadership. The ‘Exemplary Leadership’ theme supports sub-theme ideologues of ‘Obligatory Jihad’, ‘Creating Chaos’, ‘Obligatory Emigration’, and ‘Unity of Muslims’.

The issue follows established propaganda models of leadership to support its ideology. In Bernays opinion, leadership plays a central role in successful propaganda transmission. As Bernays points out in a chapter devoted specifically to political leadership:

The voice of the people expresses the mind of the people, and that mind is made up for it by the group leaders in whom it believes and by those persons who understand the manipulation of public opinion. (Bernays, 1928: 92)

In this particular case, the leadership model of ISIL utilises examples from religious texts, specifically from hadiths, history, and prophecy, to legitimise its leadership. The issue also utilises ‘Reports/Current Events’ and ‘Geographic Scope’ to contrast itself against what it proposes is a corrupt and divinely doomed world. This similarly supports Barrett’s (2014: 19) suggestion that ISIL transmits “a vision of a new beginning through a return to the past”.

#### 4.2.2 *Dābiq* Issue Two

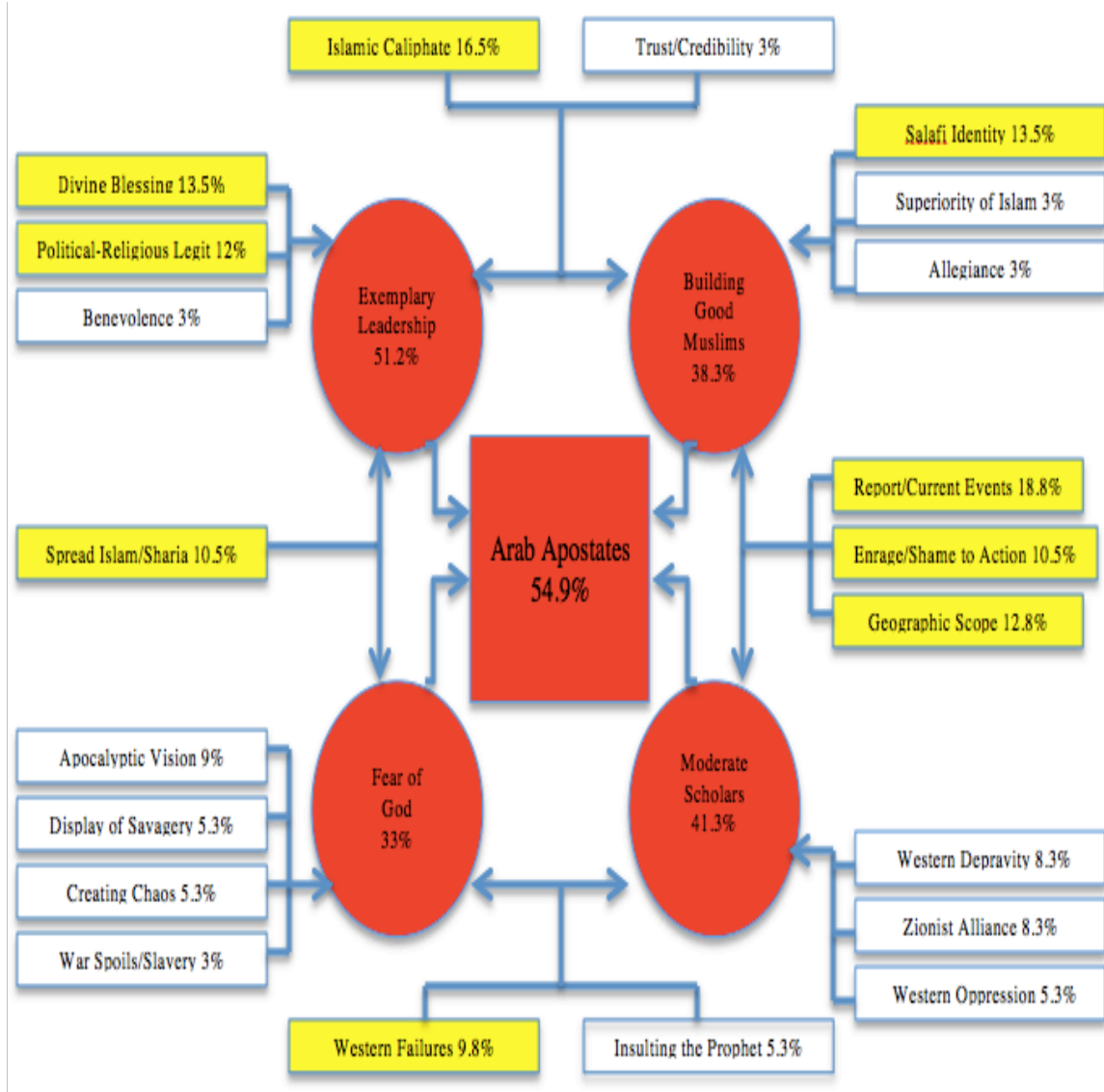


Figure 4 *Dābiq* Issue Two (Ramadan 1435/27 July 2014)

The second issue of *Dābiq* contains 26 narrative themes (not including any insignificant themes). As in the previous issue, we separate these themes into four distinct Organizational Themes that support the magazine's Global Theme – 'Arab Apostates'.



*Issue Summary:* *Dābiq*'s second issue indicates a extreme prevalence of 'Arab Apostate' themes contrasting against extremely prevalent 'Exemplary Leadership' themes of near-equal dominance. There is also an additional extreme prevalence of 'Moderate Scholars', 'Building Good Muslims', and 'Fear of God' themes.

This issue emphasizes these themes with horrific warnings of burning as well as drowning of the wicked in a prophesized 'Armageddon'. Threats are backed-up by perceived historical/religious references and religious 'Exemplary Leadership' statements issuing divine judgment/curses (*mubāhalah*) upon non-adherents to ISIL's ideology. The crux of the issue divides the world into "two camps": on one side the Christian-Zionist-Crusader-Apostates, and on the other is ISIL. The issue states that the outcome of *mubāhalah* (divine judgment) appears one year after elicitation. The issue continues to maintain propaganda strength based upon 'Exemplary Leadership' relying upon historical and religious references, in spite of the more extreme prevalence of 'Arab Apostates' themes. However, it expands greatly upon the extremely prevalent theme of 'Fear of God' from the first issue. Building upon this it highlights betrayal by 'Moderate Scholars' and 'Reports/Current Events' of 'Western Failures' while attributing successes of building an 'Islamic Caliphate' to 'Divine Blessing' for ISIL's strict adherence to its 'Salafi Identity' and 'Spreading of Islam/Sharia'. Such elements as 'Creating Chaos', and 'Displays of Savagery' further add to the factor of fear. The perception is of 'Divine Blessing' for maintaining its ideology through eradicating the "path of choice" which will lead up to a divine judgment upon the 'Arab Apostates', 'Moderate Scholars' and 'Zionist Crusaders'.

In this manner, ISIL appears to encompass Acun's (2014) argument that ISIL attempts to "gain dominance through sectarian propaganda". Similarly, this concurs with Cockburn (2015: 51K1) that ISIL is "enforcing compliance with its own exclusive and sectarian variant of Islam". The significance of these points resides in the thesis that ISIL uses religion and politics to motivate its followers into military actions. The first two issues reveal that ISIL has both religious and political agendas, particularly establishment of a global caliphate, ruled dictatorially and harshly through fundamental sharia law. This also identifies that the first two primary debates discussed in the literature review are likely incorrect. This indicates that a deep understanding of Muslim history, religious scripture and its cultures is required for analysis, and transmission of counter-narratives is likely only to be effective using Muslim 'Exemplary Leadership'.

### 4.2.3 *Dābiq* Issue Three

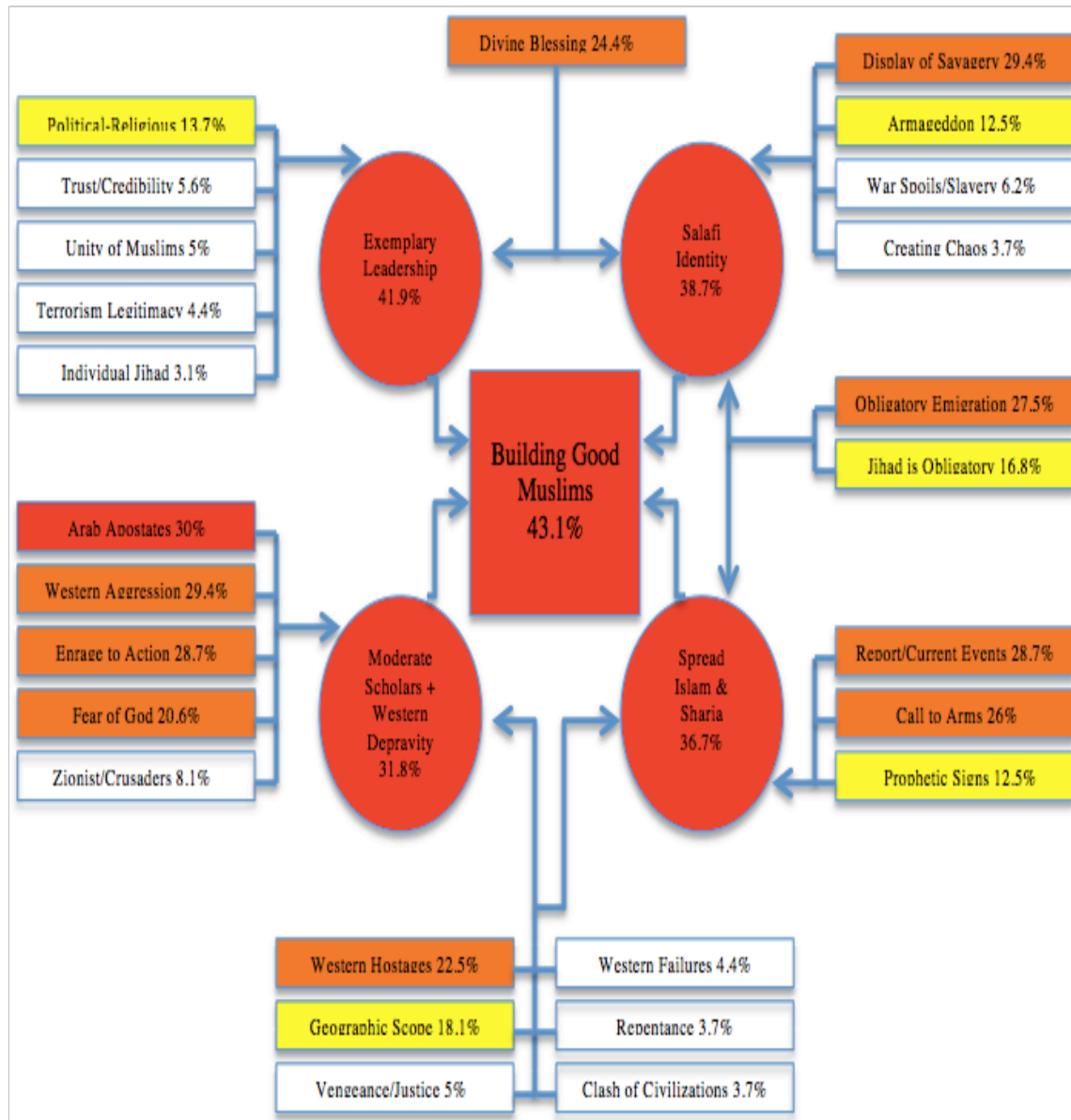


Figure 5 *Dābiq* Issue Three (Shawwal 1435/29 August 2014)

The third issue of *Dābiq* contains 32 narrative themes (not including any insignificant themes). This project separates themes into four Organizational Themes and links support to the e-zine's Global Theme – 'Building Good Muslims'.

*Issue Summary:* *Dābiq*'s third issue indicates a extreme emphasis upon 'Building Good Muslims' through principles deemed as true Muslim values by ISIL's leadership. Supporting this dominant theme is the consistently extreme prevalence of 'Exemplary Leadership' models drawn from historical and religious examples. The extremely prevalent 'Salafi Identity' contrasts against extremely prevalent 'Moderate Scholars' and 'Western Depravity' themes.

ISIL's ideological identity presents an image of trustworthiness and a path towards divine blessing. These qualities characterize the 'Salafi Identity' frame that ISIL has adopted and reinforces. Individual themes such as 'Armageddon', 'Display of Savagery', and 'Creating Chaos' are particularly relevant signifiers of this identity. Additionally, obligations towards *hijrah* and *jihad* display as true Muslim identifiers, the only true way to happiness in life and salvation and blessing in the afterlife. The themes work synergistically with the 'Call to Arms' and 'Reports/Current Events' that are promoted as indicative of 'Prophecy Signs' of the time. The West also features heavily as an influence, watering down the faith of Muslims while making them slaves within its democratic system. ISIL identifies 'Western Failures' through a purported lack of values, which in turn – it is claimed – will bring about prophesized divine punishment. A Western portrayal through 'Reports/Current Events' is that it is hypocritical and uncaring of its citizens, contrasting with ISIL's reports on itself, where it is purported as 'benevolent'. A particular case is made of the execution of 'Westerner hostages'. Overall, the issue is heavily critical of everyone who does not conform to ISIL's ideological identity of the path to righteousness and 'Divine Blessing'.

In this issue, ISIL appears to resemble more of a religious organization. This appears to add support to Egerton's (2011: 17) thesis that "what is significant here is not some reified idea of a particular religion, but rather religious culture". While Wood and Harris would argue this is a clear case for support of the religious argument, Egerton appears more correct in confining this idea to a particular religious culture. ISIL certainly does not represent the entire unified *ummah*, in fact its sectarian agenda appears to work contrary to Wood's "ISIL is Islamic" argument. It makes no sense to use such terminology to categorize ISIL as representative of Islam, when the current majority of its targets are Muslim. Certainly this dichotomy places ISIL into the political domain, and indicates ISIL does not fit into any one clear terminology of religious or political rather our categorizations appear inadequate.

#### 4.2.4 *Dābiq* Issue Four

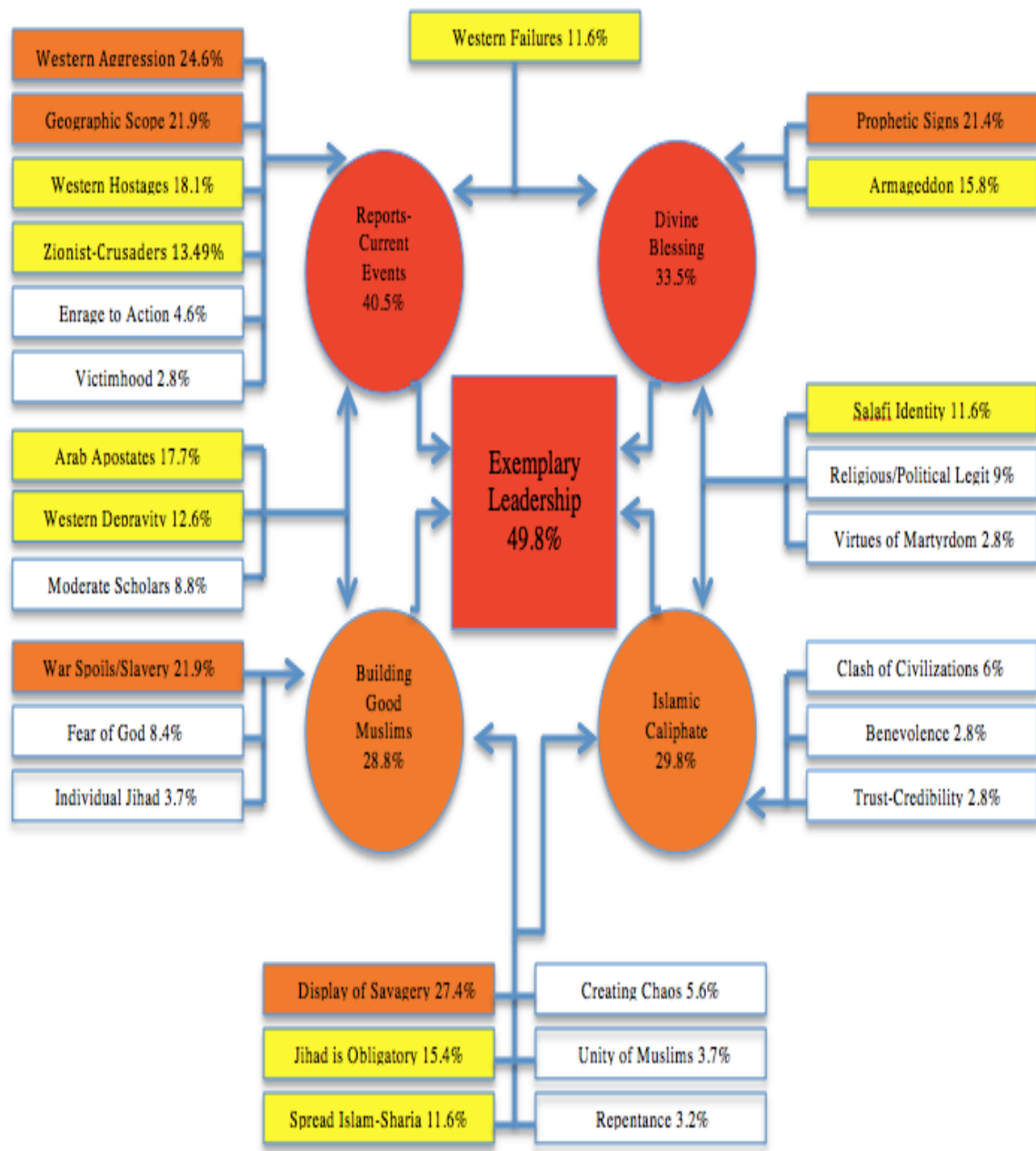


Figure 6 *Dābiq* Issue Four (Dhul-Hijjah 1435/12<sup>th</sup> October 2014)

The fourth issue of *Dābiq* contains 32 narrative themes separated into four Organizational Themes supporting the Global theme – ‘Exemplary Leadership’.

*Issue Summary:* Issue four of *Dābiq* returns to a extreme prevalence of ‘Exemplary Leadership’ supported by extreme prevalence of ‘Reports/Current Events’ and ‘Divine Blessing’ themes. Themes of ‘Building Good Muslims’ and ‘Islamic Caliphate’ are also highly prevalent within the fourth issue. Heavily reinforced in this issue is “a return to slavery before the hour”, purported being a ‘Prophetic Sign’ indicator, as well as an inciter of prophesized Western invasion and eventual ‘Armageddon’. The issue’s apocalyptic focus includes a union of nations in ‘Western Aggression’ against ISIL, leading to the eventual falling of ‘Crusader Zionist’ Rome and the invasion of the West. Much of this issue legitimises ‘War Spoils/Slavery’ as the true wealth of ‘Divine Blessing’ in the eyes of God. Indications of prophetic realization also continue to draw upon historical/religious references, supported by ‘Reports/Current Events’ interpreting a perception of ‘Western Failure’ due to “Western Depravity” and ISIL’s success due to strict interpretations of Islam.

Highly prevalent ‘Displays of Savagery’, particularly in relation to hostage executions and the ‘Creating of Chaos’ promote perceptions that ‘Obligatory Jihad’, ‘Individual Jihad’ and the ‘Virtues of Martyrdom’ will pre-empt ‘Islamic Caliphate’ success and expansion. ISIL justifies its savagery through religious texts and ‘Victimhood’, offset by a ‘benevolent’ face towards Muslims within its ‘state’. These themes are largely aimed at ‘Moderate Scholars’ and ‘Arab Apostates’ whom ISIL aims to ‘Shame/Enrage to Action’. Supporting this, ISIL promotes itself as merciful to Muslims who show ‘repentance’ for living by watered-down values of Islam.

The fourth issue of *Dābiq* once again returns to ‘Exemplary Leadership’ as its central theme, again showing that the campaign is most likely a highly sophisticated propaganda strategy. ISIL continues to promote itself as the sole legitimate voice of Islam, and its actions as divinely orchestrated. While this reveals a religious theme, its sectarian agenda certainly appears to be far more political. The only leadership that ISIL promotes as legitimate are Muslim leaders that swear allegiance, adhering to its dictatorial fundamentalist views. This agenda appears to be motivated by territoriality, whereby ISIL does not tolerate any individuals to have oppositional views within its areas of control. The use of ‘Reports/Current Events’ and ‘Geographic Scope’ are tools to show that all other regimes are illegitimate and ungodly, and that ISIL and its followers are divinely blessed. This supports Stern and Berger’s (2015: 338) thesis that ISIL is “a daring experiment in the power of horror, but also in the marketing of Utopia”. In this manner, *Dābiq* indicates ISIL is using a mix of religion, politics and militancy to achieve its goals.



#### 4.2.5 *Dābiq* Issue Five

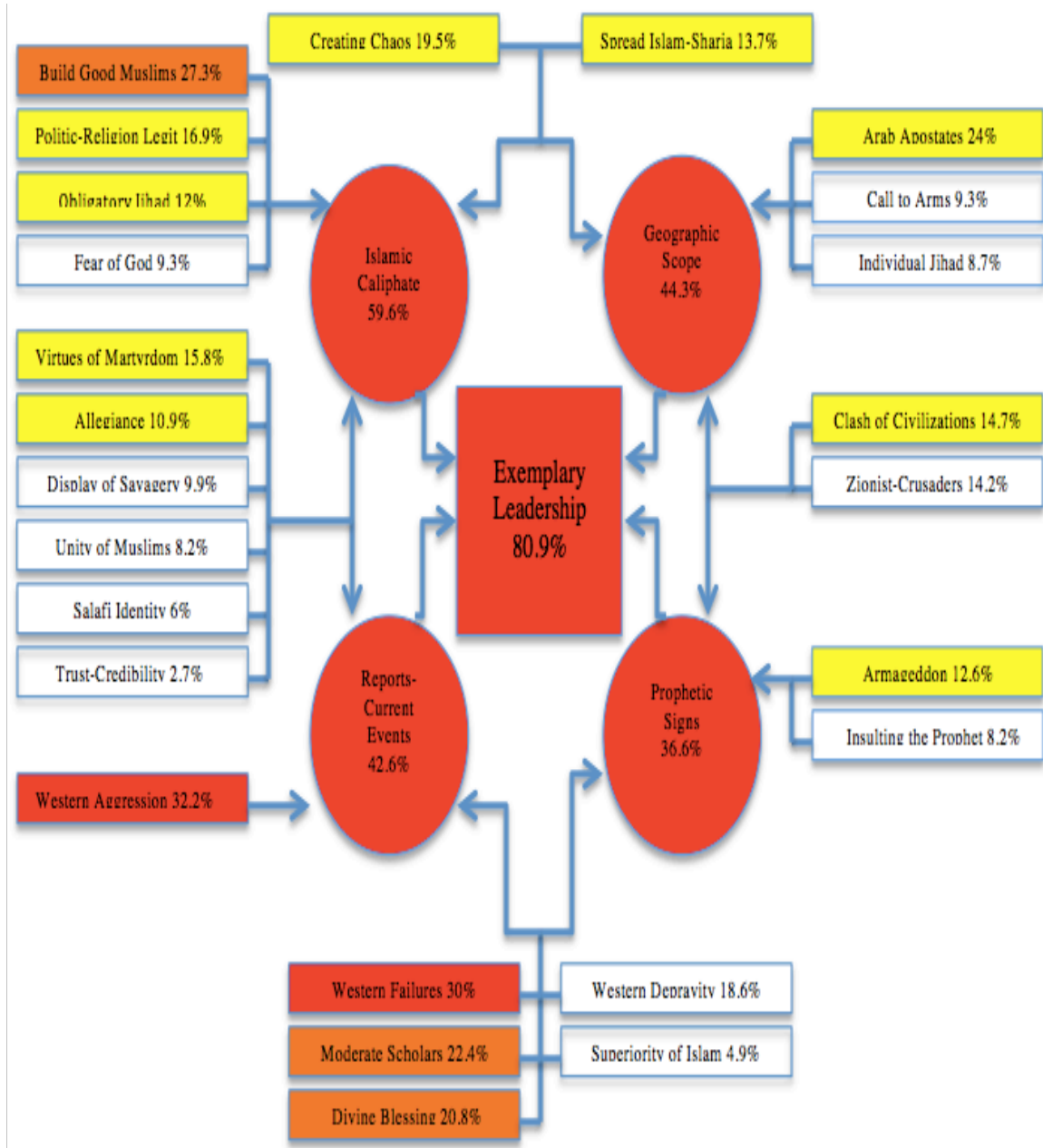


Figure 7 *Dābiq* Issue Five (Muhharam 1436/21 November 2014)

The fifth issue of *Dābiq* contains 30 narrative themes separated into four Organizational Themes supporting the Global Theme – ‘Exemplary Leadership’.

*Issue Summary:* Issue five of *Dābiq* places an extreme prevalence on ‘Exemplary Leadership’ intermingled with extreme prevalence of ‘Islamic State’, ‘Geographic Scope’, ‘Reports/Current Events’ and ‘Prophetic Signs’ themes. Thematic narratives within issue five of *Dābiq* have the most extreme prevalence of leadership examples seen in all six issues. As previously, these include contemporary reports illustrating the expansion of the Islamic State, religious legitimization through prophecy, and advice from ISIL leaders.

The issue provides ISIL’s historical and future ‘Islamic Caliphate’ vision. ‘Reports/Current Events’ perceive ‘Western Aggression’, aligned alongside ‘Insulting the Prophet’ themes. Similarly, ‘Western Failures’, ‘Western Moral Depravity’ and ‘Moderate Scholars’ contrast against ‘Divine Blessing’ and ‘Superiority of Islam’. This supports a propaganda message of a divinely orchestrated path towards ‘Armageddon’. There is a minimal ‘Call to Arms’ with moderate pervasiveness of ‘Creating Chaos’ and ‘Spreading Islam and Sharia’ through ‘Individual Jihad’ against ‘Arab Apostates’.

Within the territories controlled by ISIL, it continues to legitimise its ‘Islamic Caliphate’ predominately through ‘Exemplary Leadership’ and ‘Building Good Muslims’. A moderate emphasis of ‘Political-Religious Legitimacy’ sits alongside the ‘Obligatory Jihad’, ‘Virtues of Martyrdom’, ‘Creating Chaos’, ‘Spreading Islam and Sharia’ and ‘Allegiance’ Basic Themes. Supporting this perspective are combinations of ‘Fear of God’, ‘Salafi Identity’ and ‘Trust/Credibility’ aiming to unite the caliphate through fear or faith in Allah and ISIL’s leadership.

The fifth issue of *Dābiq* continues to support the thesis that ISIL utilises leadership propaganda to support its religious, political and military campaigns. This issue adds additional support to the argument that terminology in current parlance appears to be inadequate to define and understand ISIL's culture. This also supports the thesis that Islamic leadership is required to create effective counter-narratives.

*Dābiq* also continues to reflect Robb's (2007: 133-151) and Celso's (2015: 265) argument that terrorism is transitioning to guerrilla entrepreneurship utilising a modern veneer upon an ancient mindset. *Dābiq*'s utilisation of religious rhetoric appears to lend continued support for its military, political and criminal agendas. ISIL turns to religion to legitimise any of its actions, and claims them to be supported by Allah, subsequently placing all against it as infidels or apostates, while building its religious fervour in its followers. The use of fear, blessing and prophecy here is significant, as these are fundamental signs and symbols of its purportedly divinely appointed leadership legitimacy.

#### 4.2.6 *Dābiq* Issue Six

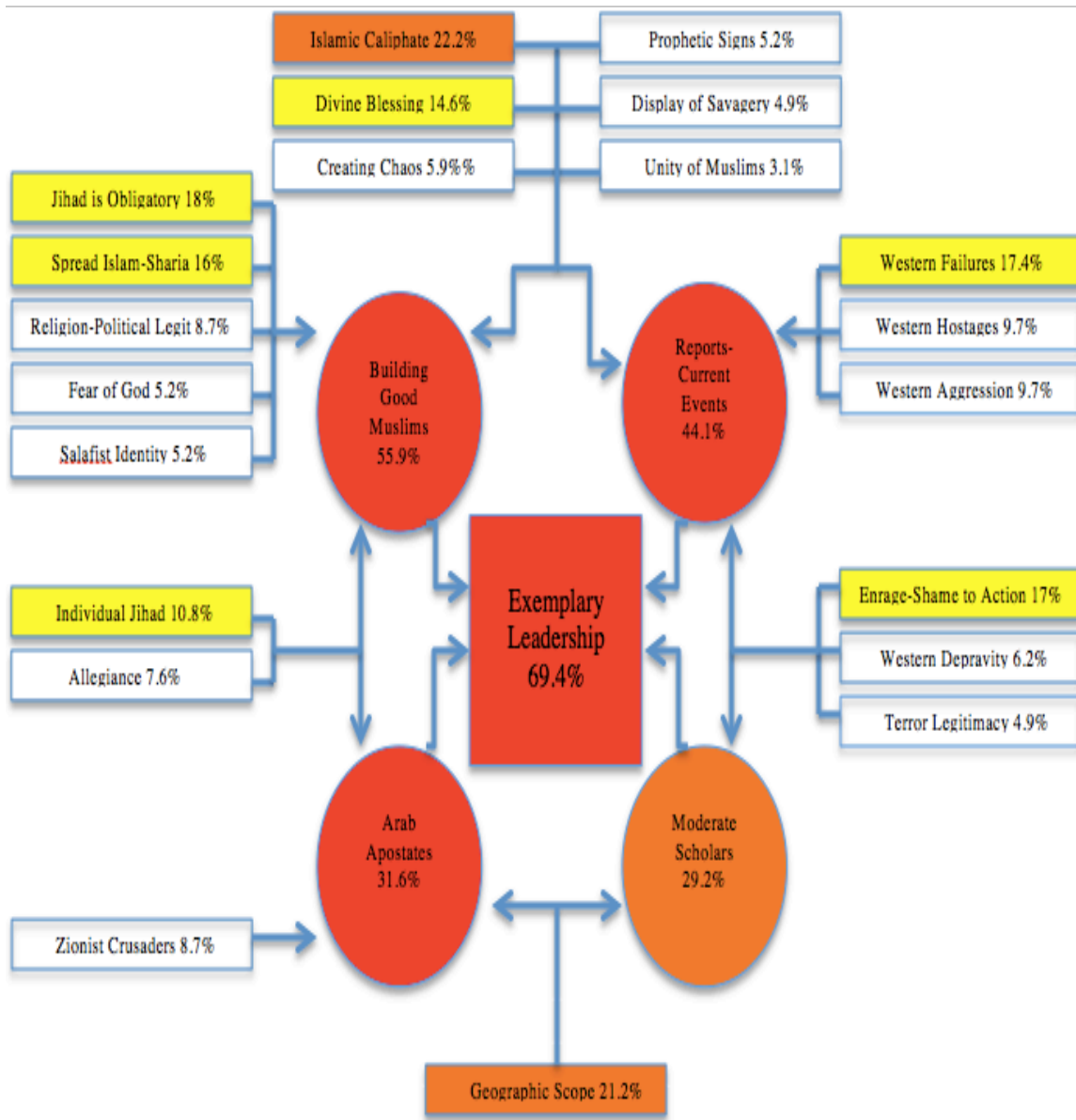


Figure 8 *Dābiq* Issue Six (Rabi' Al-Awwal 1436/29 December 2014)

The sixth issue of *Dābiq* contains 27 narrative themes (not including insignificant themes). As previously, this research project separates these themes into distinct Organizational Themes supporting the Global Theme – ‘Exemplary Leadership’.

*Issue Summary:* The most dominant theme within issue six of *Dābiq* is the extremely prevalent ‘Exemplary Leadership’ theme. Extremely prevalent ‘Building Good Muslims’ themes support the thesis that creating caliphate citizens adhering to an unswerving ideological identity of ‘Obligatory Jihad’, ‘Individual Jihad’ and ‘Spreading Islam/Sharia’ is a priority for ISIL. Supporting the dominant theme is extreme prevalence of ‘Reports/Current Events’ contrasted against an extreme prevalence of ‘Arab Apostate/Puppets’ and high prevalence of ‘Moderate Scholars’ themes. Several narratives from leaders testify to ISIL’s ‘Political/Religious Legitimacy’ and its ‘Divine Blessing’. This appears to support ISIL’s aim to ‘Enrage/Shame to Action’ against other actors and their purported ideological watering-down of literal interpretations of Islam. Ideological leadership examples, such as Man Haron Monis’s terrorist attack in Sydney, advice from soldiers of ISIL, and religious interpretation from scholars make up the bulk of the issue. The leadership narratives include a significant section discussing the Western currency system, and its fragility in relation to infrastructure, as opposed to ISIL’s gold currency.

This issue’s themes support the hypothesis that ISIL utilises ‘Creating Chaos’ strategies aimed at collapsing the civilizational systems through use of ‘Martyrdom’ and ‘Individual Jihad’ attacks. The issue provides a broad geographic history of the region, and the perceived inherent failure of the “Arab Spring” Apostates, purported as authored by ‘Zionist Crusaders’. The issue summarizes in its final paragraph, drawing upon prophecy that false leaders will come before the Final Hour. This narrative portrays ISIL as the only legitimate actor, and all others as non-believers, a narrative aimed to instil fear of an eternal punishment, and fervour in Muslims.

Issue six of Dābiq exemplifies the findings in the previous five issues with an extreme prevalence of the major themes. The findings again tend to lend credence to the argument that ISIL is using propaganda techniques with religion supporting its political and military agenda led by ‘Exemplary Leadership’ to build loyal followers.

### 4.3 Comparative Analysis

This section explores *Dābiq* across its first six issues, analyzing for consistencies and changes in its thematic focus over time. One theme was shown to have a consistent extreme prevalence: that of ‘Exemplary Leadership’. The thrust of this Global Theme and its supportive basic and organizational themes is the nexus of ISIL’s media message that instructs and motivates followers towards ISIL’s strategic outcomes. Supportive sub-themes fluctuate over time in reaction to events and to direct outcomes of future events. This is reflected in thematic variations through *Dābiq*’s reports and prevalent narratives.

Excluding the Global Theme, several other themes showed a high prevalence and fluctuated in response to events or to direct strategic outcomes. Three other themes showed an average extreme prevalence across all six issues, these were the ‘Building Good Muslims’, ‘Islamic Caliphate’ and ‘Reports/Current Events’. Three themes showed an average high prevalence across all six issues, these were: ‘Arab Apostates’, ‘Moderate Scholars’ and ‘Geographic Scope’. Twelve themes showed an average of moderate prevalence these were: ‘Display of Savagery’, ‘Divine Blessing’, ‘Enrage/Shame to Action’, ‘Fear of God’, ‘Obligatory Jihad’, ‘Prophetic Signs’, ‘Religious/Political Legitimacy’, ‘Salafi Identity’, ‘Spreading Islam/Sharia’, ‘Western Aggression’, ‘Western Depravity’ and ‘Western Failures’. Sixteen themes showed an average minimal prevalence with all remaining themes showing negligible prevalence across the first six issues of *Dābiq* analysed here. What follows is an analysis of the extremely and highly prevalent themes; all other fluctuations appear in the Appendix.

### 4.3.1 Extremely Prevalent Themes

The four themes that exhibited an average extreme prevalence across all six issues were ‘Exemplary Leadership’, ‘Building Good Muslims’, ‘Islamic Caliphate’ and ‘Reports/Current Events’. This project analyses each of these extremely prevalent themes in individual sub-sections as follows. The final discussion drawn from this section appears in the conclusion chapter where final arguments addressing the literature review and any additional concepts are articulated.

#### 4.3.1.1 *Exemplary Leadership*

The ‘Exemplary Leadership’ theme exhibited an average 57% prevalence across issues, with a high of 80.8% in issue five, a low of 41.8% in issue three, and a standard deviation of 15%. This theme was the most dominant theme in all but two issues, and in those two issues, was only marginally edged-out of primary prevalence. This concept of ‘Exemplary Leadership’ fits firmly within Bernays' (1928) thesis on propaganda, and the centrality of leadership in its successful transmission and reception. Bernays states:

No serious sociologist any longer believes that the voice of the people expresses any divine or specially wise and lofty idea. ... It is composed of inherited prejudices and symbols and clichés and verbal formulas supplied to them by the leaders. Bernays (1928: 92)

In this regard, ‘Exemplary Leadership’ (in combination with powerful sub-narrative themes) is the focal lens through which ISIL dictates its perceived elements of truth, and is the primary tool for its propaganda messaging apparatus.



#### 4.3.1.2 *Building Good Muslims*

The ‘Building Good Muslims’ theme exhibited an average 35% prevalence across all six issues, with a high of 55.9% in issue six, a low of 14% in issue one, and a standard deviation of 15.7%. Throughout *Dābiq*’s first six issues there is a clear focus on instructional teaching, which, as Bernays (1928: 122) notes, is a twofold job “as a teacher” and “as a propagandist”. Clearly, considering the success ISIL has had in drawing its followers through their media and campaigns, ISIL has the upper hand in social media savvy.

#### 4.3.1.3 *Islamic Caliphate*

The ‘Islamic Caliphate’ theme exhibited an average 31% prevalence across all six issues, with a high of 59.6% in issue five, a low of 16.5% in issue two, and a standard deviation of 14.5%. Throughout *Dābiq*’s first six issues, ISIL places extreme focus on establishing itself as a caliphate. From the outset of issue one, the proclamation of Al-Baghdadi’s speech precipitated the premise that the caliphate is legitimate on historical and religious grounds. The debate of this proclamation is evident in the heavy prevalence of ‘Arab Apostates’, ‘Moderate Scholars’ and ‘Geographic Scope’. These heavily prevalent sub-themes work in synergy with ‘Exemplary Leadership’, “Building Good Muslims” and ‘Reports/Current Events’. Using these themes, ISIL portrays itself as the only legitimate political, religious and military actor that has the right methodology and path for re-establishing caliphate (Ghobadzdeh and Akbarzadeh, 2015; Ingram, 2015; Kfir, 2015).

#### 4.3.1.4 *Reports/Current Events*

The ‘Reports/Current Events’ theme exhibited an average 32.8% prevalence across all six issues, with a high of 44.1% in issues six, a low of 18.8% in issue two, and a standard deviation of 11%. The ‘Reports/Current Events’ themes exhibited an average extreme prevalence in all of *Dābiq*’s first six issues.

The utility of these reports was to reinforce the other dominant themes, predominantly the ‘Exemplary Leadership’ theme, as well as the ‘Islamic Caliphate’ theme. The reports are used predominately to emphasize the perceived legitimacy of ISIL, and the purported illegitimacy of all other actors, regional and international. These themes support ‘Exemplary Leadership’ by reinforcing that ISIL is ‘remaining and expanding’.

The ‘Reports/Current Events’ themes additional utility is to also report on ‘Arab Apostates’, ‘Moderate Scholars’ and ‘Zionist Crusaders’. The reports on these actors steer towards de-legitimization with a strong undercurrent that all such actors have a history of failure. In opposition, ISIL reports on its successes and expansions through reported ‘Allegiance’ from exemplary leaders. All other leadership oppositional to ISIL’s ideology is opposed; through ‘Obligatory Jihad’, ‘Individual Jihad’, ‘Creating Chaos’, or ‘Displays of Savagery’.

### 4.3.2 Highly Prevalent Themes

The three themes that exhibited an averaged high prevalence across all six issues were ‘Arab Apostates’, ‘Moderate Scholars’ and ‘Geographic Scope’. All of these themes also have a strong link to the Global Theme and are worthy of additional analysis. As previously, each of these highly prevalent themes are analysed separately in individual sub-sections as follows

#### 4.3.2.1 *Arab Apostates*

The ‘Arab Apostates’ theme exhibited an average 28.3% prevalence across all six issues, with a high of 54.9% in issue two, a low of 11.9% in issue one, and a standard deviation of 14.9%. This theme exhibited an average high prevalence across all of *Dābiq*’s first six issues. The utility of this theme is in support of extremely prevalent themes by diametrically opposing other Arab actors, either legitimate or illegitimate in political, sociocultural and military spheres.

#### 4.3.2.2 *Moderate Scholars*

The ‘Moderate Scholars’ theme exhibited an average 24.2% prevalence across all six issues, with a high of 41.3% in issue two, a low of 8.8% in issue four, and a standard deviation of 14.9%. This theme exhibited an average high prevalence across all of *Dābiq*’s first six issues. The utility of this theme is in support of extremely prevalent themes by diametrically opposing other Arab actors.

#### 4.3.2.3 *Geographic Scope*

The ‘Geographic Scope’ theme exhibited an average 22.6% prevalence across all six issues, with a high of 44.3% in issue five, a low of 12.8% in issue two, and a standard deviation of 11%. This theme exhibited an average high prevalence across all of *Dābiq*’s first six issues. The utility of this theme is in support of providing factual evidence supporting statements by ‘Exemplary Leadership’. This usually revolves around the purported successes of ISIL’s ‘Islamic Caliphate’ and the failures of all other actors in political, religious, military, socioeconomic, and moral spheres.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusion

### 5.1 Research Findings

This chapter discusses the conclusions of the research. This project mapped and analysed the research domain and the themes contained within the first six issues of ISIL's e-zine *Dābiq*. The results centre around two findings: 1) Thematic Network Analysis mapping of *Dābiq*'s first six issues, and 2) the contribution to the central debate surrounding driving motivations behind ISIL's violent extremism and its radicalisation attraction. Thematic mapping of *Dābiq* reveals the core component of *Dābiq*'s narrative resides in 'Exemplary Leadership', a theme exhibiting extreme prevalence with minor dynamics. What this research reveals regarding the primary debate is threefold. First, that politics and religion are both present as themes within the narrative of *Dābiq* and play a role in ISIL's Militant Islam. However, while these themes are present, the nature of the relationship is not clear from *Dābiq*'s data alone. Second, that our current understanding and terminology for defining ISIL's culture are likely inadequate, and require additional research and refinement. Additionally, counter-narrative development and transmission defeating ISIL requires culturally specific Muslim leadership for its delivery.

Limitations of this research exist in multiple areas of the project. First, the lack of visual data inclusion, extensive Thematic Metrics, and Mixed Methods analysis is significant. Second, the exclusion of Muslim history and culture limits findings and confines analysis to current academic terminology, considered here as immature. Finally, the author is not Muslim, nor has expert Arabic knowledge, and therefore analysis is constrained. This project recommends further research in these areas.

## 5.2 Thematic Structure

It has been demonstrated that ISIL constructs and maintains a consistent thematic framework exhibiting slight dynamics across its first six issues. In this regard, all six issues maintained an extremely prevalent nexus of ‘Exemplary Leadership’ in global thematic comparison. While in two issues this theme did not appear as the global theme, this is marginally by a few per-cent on those occasions. More importantly, when other narrative themes appeared marginally more dominant, ‘Exemplary Leadership’ retained an extremely prevalent reinforcement of the issues’ global theme. At a more precise interpretational level, the three extremely prevalent themes of ‘Building Good Muslims’, ‘Islamic Caliphate’ and ‘Reports/Current Events’ all support, and are supported by, ‘Exemplary Leadership’. This exhibits a consistency of messaging, as opposed to the fluctuations exhibited in *Inspire* (Farwell, 2014; McCauley, 2015; Peattie, 2013).

## 5.3 Thematic Dynamics

This project demonstrates that *Dābiq*’s narrative themes within the first six issues exhibited minor dynamics throughout the coding framework. This dynamic is most evident in the network maps, percentages, averages, and the standard deviation of narrative themes (Appendix A and B) presented in the thesis data. The thematic data variance table (Appendix B) reveals that each theme exhibited dynamics across issues and in averages and standard deviations. This project considers dynamic variations of themes to be reactions to current events, such as Muslim tribal statements, and the introduction of US bombing and allied forces into the conflict. Such deviations are to be expected and are considered here to add to, not deter major findings.

While *Dābiq* maintains consistent thematic focus on ‘Exemplary Leadership’, current affairs affect the e-zine’s various thematic dynamics and thematic focus. In the e-zine’s initial phase, declaration of caliphate and emigration to the Levant dominated much of the rhetoric, supported by its leadership focus. In the middle issues of this project’s sample, the rhetorical shift moved towards denouncing other Arab regimes more than in the first two issues. Considered pre-emptive of this shift are counter-narratives from Arab regimes, oppositional terrorist organizations, and Allied forces. For example, in initial issues of the e-zine, the narrative focused more on establishing the caliphate, legitimacy, calls for Muslim emigration to the region, and declarations of allegiance to ISIL. In the middle issues, after terrorist organisations refused to declare allegiance, narrative turned to refuting the legitimacy of opposition towards ISIL, and legitimization of allegiance to ISIL. In the later phase of our sample, following allied forces entry into the conflict, the e-zine focused heavily on anti-Western narratives, yet continued to legitimise terrorist actions and allegiance declarations. In support of terrorism actions, the role of ‘Exemplary Leadership’ remained central, utilising leaders from politics, religion, and its military forces. Much of this exemplary leadership includes personal narratives, and interpreted quotes from the Quran and hadiths. One such example is the purported legitimization of slavery, war spoils and torture, of which rhetorical legitimization relies on interpretations of prophecy and signs. Reaction to ISIL’s actions and its rhetoric has prompted responses and thereby generated thematic dynamics as ISIL reacts to actions and counter-narratives against it. ISIL’s reactions generally take the form of ‘Exemplary Leadership’ in various forms.

It has been convincingly argued that ISIL attempts to maintain specific thematic propaganda dominance through ‘Exemplary Leadership’. In this regard, this strategic focus appears to be highly successful for ISIL. The focus of this leadership narrative is on legitimisation of ISIL, the ‘othering’ of Arab apostates and the West, and inspiring foreign fighters to emigrate to the caliphate through reports of divinely blessed successes.

#### **5.4 Contribution to the Academic Debate**

In addition to the domain mapping and Thematic Network Analysis contribution of this research project, this project contributes to the debate surrounding terrorism’s root causes. Specifically, the research demonstrates that religion and politics intermingle in the narrative of ISIL within *Dābiq*, clearly indicating that the politico-religious dichotomization arguments are false. Furthermore, this project argues that broad academic terminology and classification are likely inadequate for understanding and analyzing Militant Islamic cultural divisions (Lewis et al., 2009: 19). In particular, this research supports Egerton’s (2011: 17) argument that what is required is “not reified idea’s of a particular religion, but rather religious culture”. In order to understand specific Militant Islamic cultures, this research supports specific research and development of cultural experts for nuanced understanding and responses. To accomplish this, research should expand strategic counter-narratives based upon specific “clarity of thought, history, and language”, and military actions should be considered carefully (Anc, 2014: 40; Mansoor, 2013: 123). However, such a counter-terrorism strategy requires and is considerably limited to Arab Islamic scholars for its delivery to Muslims.



Considering the data this research reveals, it is highly relevant that leadership is the central component of ISIL's radicalization transmission strategy to Muslim mindsets. Thus, counter-narratives are most effective from culturally accepted Islamic figures. Such experts would likely have to have an extensive past history of Islamic study and research, hold positions of authority, and be able to deliver culturally specific counter-narratives. This latter statement is self-evident considering some division that occurs between the Sunni and Shia Islamists. Experts outside of the Muslim culture may prove helpful in assisting research and counter-narrative development, but are unlikely to be successful in counter-narrative delivery. In order to effect successful counter-narratives transmission to potential terrorists, Muslim leaders should continue to be encouraged to be involved in forums, summits and conferences. In such forums, views can be expressed, cultural understanding developed, and relationships founded. Such events are already occurring; however, this thesis adds support to their importance.

This project further argues that ISIL exhibits specific cultural traits that Celso calls an "Apocalyptic Neo-Zarqawist World View". Celso states:

The Islamic State's ideology combines millennial, takfiri, salafi and sectarian components in a powerful jihadist narrative of Islamic regression, exploitation, ultimate redemption, and triumph. It is a Manichean world view that separates the world in two camps. Celso (2014: 1)

Considering this alongside the prevalence of 'Exemplary Leadership', it is clear that Celso correctly pinpoints Zarqawi. (Celso, 2014: 1) states, "Dabiq reifies his memory and Zarqawi serves as the organization's inspiration for its *takfiri* and sectarian violence".

A leadership-led ‘othering’ narrative is present throughout Islamist cultural history. Celso (2014: 1) explain: “The rapid spread of sectarianism, advocated as jihad by Islamists, rests on the dubious foundation of an ‘othering’ tradition in Sunni Islamic scholarship”. Ingram puts it this way:

IS draws on pragmatic factors - such as security, stability and livelihood - in messages that promote the efficacy of its politico-military campaign and denigrate the efforts of its enemies via rational-choice (logic of consequence) appeals. Perceptual factors tend to be tied to the interplay of in-group, out-group (Other), crisis and solution constructs, which are fused in narratives that are designed to shape how IS’s audiences understand and evaluate the conflict and its actors. By leveraging identity-choice (logic of appropriateness) appeals, IS produces narratives that frame itself as the champion of Sunni Muslims (the in-group identity) and its enemies as malignant Others (out-group identities) responsible for Sunni perceptions of crisis, and thus presents IS as the sole bearer of the solution to the lethal malaise facing Sunnis. Ghobadzdeh and Akbarzadeh (2015: 691)

As this research indicates this narrative is leadership-led, the significance of this is twofold. First, leadership targeting strategies hold some credence in the case of ISIL. This is primarily because al-Baghdadi’s heritage and leadership signifies to the Muslim mindset the success of the caliphate and its divine blessing. Al-Baghdadi’s removal erodes ISIL’s religious validation and hinders effectiveness of its narrative. Second, any counter-narratives must consider cultural factors, be presented strategically, and preferably by respected Muslim leadership.

## 5.5 Limitations of the Research

Given this project's focus on *Dābiq*'s narrative themes, the research cannot account for the impact of its altered images, the significance of Thematic Metrics, nor provide the robustness of a full Mixed Methods analysis. *Dābiq* makes frequent use of images throughout the six issues explored in this research sample. Many images are striking, with emotional impact, and powerful in their own right; Thematic Network Analysis has no avenue to analyse these images. This is a notable gap in the research, and the domain is largely unexplored in the case of ISIL.

A second limitation of this research is the omission analysis of Thematic Metrics, and Mixed Methods analysis. As was discussed in the methodology, these methods have applications for predictive analysis and various measurements that can assist in analysis. This project focused on themes alone, yet specific words, emotions, phrases, and images have significant research applications. The above noted methods have extensive applications for countering terrorism, identifying radicals, predicting attacks, and developing counter-narratives. This is another significant limitation in this research.

The final limitation is in the area of its thematic scope, and in time and space limits. In this regard, only the first six issues of *Dābiq* have been analysed here and only for Thematic Networks. These themes are somewhat restrictive, and in certain cases the coding framework may not fully encompass culturally-specific thematic meanings. Specifically, ISIL is not *Dābiq*, and *Dābiq* is not fully representative of ISIL's rhetoric.

## 5.6 Research Applications and Recommendations for Further Research

Combined with extensive use of social media, *Dābiq* is at the forefront of ISIL's propaganda and radicalization campaign to the Muslim mindset. Without a nuanced understanding of ISIL's rhetoric, Muslim history and its cultures, effective relationships with Islamic scholars and subsequent counter-narratives cannot develop. In this sense, this research has shown that a nuanced understanding of ISIL, Muslim history and its culture, as well as co-operation of Muslim scholars, is essential. By mapping the domain and the themes within *Dābiq*, this research project forms the foundation for counter-narrative development and provides support for counter-narrative development alongside Islamic experts. In this regard, the research shows that co-operative relationship building requires Muslim scholars to be at the forefront of transmission of counter-narratives.

The most significant application of this research project is support for the thesis that knowledge of specific Militant Islamic cultures is essential for counter-narratives. Unconsidered categorization and understanding within the general populace and the Muslim mindset is a potentially significant aspect of radicalization and Islamophobia.

Findings from this project support and recommend further research into specific Militant Islamic cultures. A significant finding is the support this research generates regarding the importance of cross-disciplinary perspectives that incorporate religious studies, anthropology, media studies, etc. This includes ongoing development of forums, summits and conferences for forging co-operative relationships with Islamic experts.

Expanded intensive interdisciplinary research holds the potential to develop extensive cultural understanding and provide effective counter-terrorism narratives and policies. Research in this area also presents a broad scope of opportunities to counter Islamophobia. Furthermore, this project supports ongoing research of ISIL's narrative through the lenses of classical 'othering' theory and Social Identity theory. Both theories utilized alongside extended rhetorical analysis present a primary means for confronting and countering Militant Islamic cultures.

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### Appendix A – List of Themes in *Dābiq* Issues 1-6

Themes	Issue 1	Issue 2	Issue 3	Issue 4	Issue 5	Issue 6
Abduction of Westerners			36	39	0	28
Arab Apostate-Puppets	28	73	48	38	44	91
Armageddon-Apocalypse	18	12	20	34	23	6
Bay'ah (allegiance)	12	4			20	22
Benevolence	9	4		6	0	2
Betrayal of Moderate Islamic Scholars	28	55	51	19	41	84
Building Good Muslims	33	51	69	62	50	161
Call to Arms			26		17	3
Claiming Terror Attack Responsibility					2	3
Clash of Civilizations	10		6	13	27	5
Creating Chaos	13	7	6	12	32	17
Displays of Power-Savagery	11	7	47	59	17	14
Divine Blessing	24	18	39	72	38	42
Enrage-Shame Believers into Action	11	14	46	10	4	49
Establishment of Islamic Caliphate	65	22	46	64	109	64
Exemplary Leadership	113	68	67	107	148	200

False Messiah					1	4
Fear of God	10	44	33	18	17	15
Geographic Scope	41	17	29	47	81	61
<i>Ghanimah</i> (War Spoils-Slavery)		4	10	47	3	6
Hijrah is Obligatory	9		44		1	1
Humiliation of Muslims					0	0
Individual Jihad			5	8	16	31
Insulting the Prophet-Blasphemy		7			15	2
Islamophobia-Discrimination					2	1
Islamic Legitimacy					1	0
Jihad is Defensive					0	3
Jihad is Obligatory	12		27	33	22	52
Legitimacy of Terrorism			7		1	14
Occupation of Muslim Lands					1	5
Palestine Suffering					0	0
Prophetic Signs-New Era	26		20	46	67	15
Religious-Political Legitimacy	67	16	22	19	31	25
Repentance of Muslims	12		6	7	0	4

Reports-Current Events	52	25	46	87	78	127
Salafi-Wahibi Identity Pillars	34	18	62	27	11	15
Spreading Islam and Sharia	20	14	59	25	25	46
Superiority of Islam		4			9	1
Trust, Credibility and Transparency	17	4	9	6	5	1
Unity of Muslims	13		8	8	15	9
Vengeance and Justice			8		0	1
Victimhood	8			6	2	3
Virtues of Martyrdom				6	29	10
Western Aggression-Oppression		7	47	53	59	28
Western Moral Depravity		11	51	27	34	18
Western Theft of Arab Oil					0	0
Western Weakness-Failures		13	7	25	55	50
Zakah (obligatory taxation)					0	0
Zionist-Crusader Conspiracy		11	13	29	26	25
Paragraphs in issue - Total	235	133	160	215	183	288

*Note: Black sections indicate 'insignificant' paragraph numbers.*

### Appendix B – Thematic Metrics from *Dābiq* Issues 1-6

Themes	Issue 1	Issue 2	Issue 3	Issue 4	Issue 5	Issue 6	Av.	StDev.
Abduction of Westerners	0.00%	0.00%	22.50%	18.14%	0.00%	9.72%	8.39%	9.93%
Arab Apostate-Puppets	11.90%	54.90%	30.00%	17.67%	24.04%	31.60%	28.35%	14.97%
Armageddon-Apocalypse	7.60%	9.00%	12.50%	15.81%	12.57%	2.08%	9.93%	4.40%
Bay'ah (allegiance)	5.10%	3.00%	2.50%	1.86%	10.93%	7.63%	5.17%	3.12%
Benevolence	3.80%	3.00%	1.80%	2.79%	0.00%	0.69%	2.01%	1.32%
Moderate Islamic Scholars	11.90%	41.30%	31.88%	8.84%	22.40%	29.17%	24.25%	12.38%
Building Good Muslims	14.00%	38.30%	43.12%	28.84%	27.32%	55.90%	34.58%	15.71%
Call to Arms	1.70%	0.00%	26.00%	2.32%	9.28%	1.04%	6.72%	9.13%
Claiming Terror Attacks	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.39%	1.09%	1.04%	0.59%	0.65%
Clash of Civilizations	4.20%	0.75%	3.75%	6.05%	14.75%	1.73%	5.21%	5.03%
Creating Chaos	5.50%	5.30%	3.75%	5.58%	19.49%	5.90%	7.59%	5.88%
Displays of Power-Savagery	4.60%	5.30%	29.37%	27.44%	9.28%	4.86%	13.48%	11.70%
Divine Blessing	10.20%	13.53%	24.37%	33.49%	20.76%	14.58%	19.49%	8.57%
Enrage-Shame Believer Action	4.60%	10.52%	28.75%	4.65%	2.18%	17.01%	11.29%	10.10%
Islamic Caliphate	27.60%	16.54%	28.75%	29.77%	59.56%	22.22%	30.74%	14.50%
Exemplary Leadership	48.00%	51.12%	41.87%	49.77%	80.87%	69.44%	56.85%	14.97%
False Messiah	0.42%	0.00%	0.62%	0.46%	0.55%	1.38%	0.57%	0.41%
Fear of God	4.20%	33.08%	20.62%	8.37%	9.29%	5.21%	13.46%	11.25%
Geographic Scope	17.40%	12.78%	18.12%	21.86%	44.26%	21.18%	22.60%	11.09%
<i>Ghanimah</i> (War Spoils-Slavery)	0.42%	3.00%	6.25%	21.86%	1.64%	2.08%	5.88%	8.07%
Hijrah is Obligatory	3.80%	1.50%	27.50%	1.86%	0.55%	0.35%	5.93%	10.64%
Humiliation of Muslims	1.28%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.21%	0.52%

Individual Jihad	1.28%	0.00%	3.12%	3.72%	8.74%	10.76%	4.60%	4.25%
Insulting the Prophet-Blasphemy	0.00%	5.30%	0.62%	0.46%	8.20%	2.69%	2.88%	3.27%
Islamophobia-Discrimination	0.00%	0.00%	0.62%	0.00%	1.09%	0.35%	0.34%	0.44%
Islamic Legitimacy	2.13%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.55%	0.00%	0.45%	0.85%
Jihad is Defensive	1.70%	0.00%	1.25%	1.39%	0.00%	1.04%	0.90%	0.73%
Jihad is Obligatory	5.10%	0.75%	16.87%	15.39%	12.02%	18.05%	11.36%	6.98%
Legitimacy of Terrorism	1.28%	0.75%	4.37%	0.93%	0.55%	4.86%	2.12%	1.95%
Occupation of Muslim Lands	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.46%	0.55%	1.74%	0.46%	0.67%
Palestine Suffering	0.00%	0.75%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.13%	0.30%
Prophetic Signs-New Era	11.00%	0.75%	12.50%	21.39%	36.61%	5.21%	14.58%	12.87%
Religious-Political Legitimacy	28.50%	12.03%	13.75%	8.84%	16.94%	8.68%	14.79%	7.40%
Repentance of Muslims	5.10%	2.25%	3.75%	3.25%	0.00%	1.39%	2.62%	1.81%
Reports-Current Events	22.10%	18.79%	28.75%	40.46%	42.62%	44.10%	32.80%	11.04%
Salafi-Wahibi Identity Pillars	14.40%	13.53%	38.75%	12.56%	6.01%	5.21%	15.08%	12.24%
Spreading Islam and Sharia	8.50%	10.52%	36.87%	11.63%	13.66%	15.97%	16.19%	10.45%
Superiority of Islam	1.70%	3.00%	2.50%	1.86%	4.92%	0.35%	2.39%	1.53%
Trust and Credibility	7.20%	3.00%	5.62%	2.79%	2.73%	0.35%	3.62%	2.43%
Unity of Muslims	5.50%	2.25%	5.00%	3.72%	8.20%	3.12%	4.63%	2.12%
Vengeance and Justice	0.00%	0.00%	5.00%	0.46%	0.00%	0.35%	0.97%	1.99%
Victimhood	3.40%	0.75%	2.50%	2.79%	1.09%	1.04%	1.93%	1.11%
Virtues of Martyrdom	0.42%	0.75%	1.25%	2.79%	15.85%	3.47%	4.09%	5.88%
Western Aggression-	1.70%	5.30%	29.37%	24.65%	32.24%	9.72%	17.16%	13.17%



Oppression								
Western Moral Depravity	1.28%	8.27%	31.87%	12.56%	18.60%	6.25%	13.14%	10.89%
Western Theft of Arab Oil	0.42%	0.00%	0.00%	0.46%	0.00%	0.00%	0.15%	0.23%
Western Weakness-Failures	0.42%	9.77%	4.37%	11.63%	30.05%	17.36%	12.27%	10.50%
Zakah (obligatory taxation)	0.85%	0.75%	0.00%	1.39%	0.00%	0.00%	0.50%	0.59%
Zionist-Crusader Conspiracy	0.42%	8.27%	8.12%	13.49%	14.20%	8.68%	8.86%	4.94%
Paragraphs in issue - Total	235	133	160	215	183	288		