The Islamic Caliphate: Legitimate Today?

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When the Islamic State declared itself a caliphate in June 2014, an old ideological wound was ripped open, raising questions in the minds of Muslims around the globe (Bradley). The Islamic State's declaration was universally deemed the most significant development in international Jihadism since 9/11 (Bradley). The term caliphate comes from the Arabic word *khilāfa*, which means "succession" or "representation" (Sowerwine). The caliphate is an Islamic form of government which continues the Prophet Muhammad's rule, follows Sharia'a law, and seeks worldwide Muslim allegiance (Black).

The declaration of a caliphate by the Islamic State has brought the caliphate back onto the socio-political scene, raising many questions. Is the caliphate a Muslim ideal, or is it a means of political manipulation that has been exploited throughout the centuries? Is the caliphate consistent with the founding beliefs of Islam, or is it an ideological intrusion that is out-of-step with the religion? To address this question, this paper will analyze the historical context of the caliphate and of the Qur'an itself.

Review of Major Literature Concerning the Caliphate

The Islamic State's declaration has generated significant debate in the Islamic scholarly community. Some claim that the caliphate is an extremist interpretation of the Qur'an, while others believe the caliphate to be a legitimate Muslim requirement (Black). Scholarly literature addressing the idea of a caliphate sharply divides along fault lines of Islamic theology. One sector (secularized) claims that the caliphate is a political ideal whose time has passed, while the other sector (orthodox) says that the caliphate is authorized, indeed mandated, by Allah today.

Secularized Scholars' Views of the Caliphate

Many modern scholars champion the compatibility of Islam and the secular state. They claim that the caliphate doesn't belong in current day, regarded more as an attempt at political manipulation than a commission from Allah (Hermann). The leading scholars on this side of the issue often favour a broader interpretation of Islamic dogma (Hermann).

The Challenges of Pluralism: Paradigms from Muslim Contexts, edited by Abdou Filali-Ansary and Sikeena Ahmed, seeks to refute the conservative view that "pluralism [the coexistence of multiple religious belief systems in society] is inherently antithetical to Islam" (Filali-Ansary and Ahmed). Filali-Ansary and Ahmed claim that the caliphate has "a historical but not an essential or conceptual relationship to Islam". They say that the Muslim ideal of divine sovereignty has been misinterpreted, "giving a free rein to the imposition of political authority in all spheres of life". They argue that the idea of the caliphate is an overextension of theology, an incorrect interpretation of Islam that need not be applied to current political religious theory (Filali-Ansary and Ahmed).

In his book *The Caliphate Question: The British Government and Islamic Governance*, Sean Oliver-Dee attempts to reconcile Islamic doctrine and secular government. Although the book contains various policy recommendations for the British government, it also tackles the leading issues in the field of Islamic political theology. Oliver-Dee addresses the development of the caliphate, claiming that a right understanding of this institution is important for the governmental policy of Muslim countries. He makes three central historical claims that should inform the question of the caliphate to current-day Muslims. First, he denies that the caliphate was divinely ordained. Second, he claims that the true caliphate lasted only thirty years after the death of the prophet Muhammad. Third, he argues that much of the historical caliphate was "fictitious", based on political coercion and force. Ultimately, although Oliver-Dee alludes

to passages from the Qur'an and the Hadith that seem to mandate a caliphate, he nevertheless concludes that the "scriptural basis for the caliphate seems remarkably small" (Oliver-Dee).

All of these authors speak of Islam's compatibility with secular society. By extension, they assert that the formation of a caliphate is not necessary in the practice of orthodox Islam, as the caliphate is a rejection of the pluralist society that characterizes much of the world today. These authors champion cultural coexistence and believe that the caliphate, although it has historical religious significance, is no longer applicable to modern civilization. These scholars claim the caliphate is an unnecessary form of Islamic government, stretched out of its time frame and often politically manipulated.

Orthodox Scholars' View of the Caliphate

Other Muslim scholars assert that the caliphate is mandated by Islam. Many of these scholars are orthodox Muslims, holding closely to the teachings of Muhammad and the Qur'an. The debate of the Islamic intersection of religion and politics centers around the idea that Islam should be expressed in both *diin* (religion) and *dawla* (state) (Ardıç).

Dr. Nurullah Ardıç claims that Islam and the secular state are essentially incompatible. In his groundbreaking work *Islam and the Politics of Secularism*, he argues that the historic caliphate's modern secularization was not a mark of its defeat, but rather a marking of its accommodation to Western powers (Ardıç). Ardıç claims that Allah formed the institution of the caliphate to mediate between God and humans. Accordingly, the caliph is a political-religious leader invested with rule of the state in the name of Allah, and agrees that Islamic religion and the state are inseparable (Ardıç).

Dr. Reza Pankhurst claims that the caliphate is highly applicable, even "inevitable", in modern Muslim society (Pankhurst). In his book *The Inevitable Caliphate*, he claims that although the West often vilifies the caliphate, it is the ideal Islamic polity. For Pankhurst, the ideal caliphate would be situated in the Muslim Middle Eastern region and would bring about accountable, elected government. Ultimately,

he defends and supports the legitimacy of the caliphate in orthodox Islam and even calls for its creation (Pankhurst).

Dr. Efraim Karsh writes extensively on the nature of Islam and on its imperialist tendencies. In his article *Islam's Imperial Dreams*, Karsh describes Islam as a universal religion that envisages a "global political order in which all humankind will live under Muslim rule as either believers or subject communities." He claims that Islam has never "distinguished between temporal and religious powers", and this unique property of Islam developed into the institution of caliphate as the religion itself developed. He also argues that the vision of a caliphate is not "confined to a tiny extremist fringe", claiming that one day, "all humankind will live under Muslim rule" (Karsh).

These scholars agree that the caliphate is not an outmoded institution – rather, that it is relevant to modern times and to the worldwide community. Dr. Karsh and Dr. Ardıç both claim that the caliphate is legitimate Islamic polity and a legitimate institution in the modern age. Dr. Pankhurst extends this argument, championing the creation of a caliphate and claiming that its existence is "inevitable." According to these scholars, the caliphate is simply a natural consequence of orthodox Islam.

Western Scholars' Views of the Caliphate

Many of the leading Western scholars in the field of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies agree that the caliphate is integral to Islam. Bernard Lewis has authored several works concerning the caliphate in Islam. In his book, *The Arabs in History*, he outlines the development of the caliphate and the effect of Islam on Eastern civilization. Lewis claims that the caliph has ultimate authority over Muslims, as "prescribed and regulated by the [Muslim] holy law" (Lewis, "Faith and Power"). He clearly addresses the mandate of the caliphate in Islam, and its effect on centuries of history.

John O. Voll has written extensively about political Islam and the state in the *Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*. He reviews the history of the debate over Islam and the state, dividing it into four

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stages in history. Voll identifies the Islamic caliphate as the great struggle of many Muslims in the present age. The modern aspiration of the Islamic world, according to Voll, is the achievement of the right balance of *diin* and *dawla* – "religion comprehensively understood as the foundation for state, society, and faith" (Voll).

Major Stephen P. Lambert of the U.S. Joint Military Intelligence College argues that Islam's theological foundations lead to expansionist imperatives. In his book, *Y: The Sources of Islamic Revolutionary Conduct*, he claims that the Islamic "fusion between religion and state" calls for the proliferation of theocratic governments. Under Islamic jurisprudence and Shari'a law, Lambert claims, Muslims have come to "see themselves as endowed with a broader, transnational identity – undoubtedly with local textures and variances, sometimes with rifts and bloody feuds – but nevertheless unified by the fundamental doctrines of the religion" (Lambert).

The caliphate question is crucial for the future of the global Muslim community as well as the ongoing threat of Islamic terrorism against the West. The English-speaking academic world has focused primarily on the religious nature of Islam, with little treatment of the caliphate's political identity. The vast majority of Islamic literature on the issue of a caliphate is deeply intertwined with the history of Islamic civilization and the Arabic language. But in the English-speaking world, insufficient attention has been given to the caliphate as a religious phenomenon. Therefore, in this paper, the nature and requirement of the caliphate will be more closely assessed through the lense of the Qur'an.

Research Method

Contemporary evaluation of the caliphate has tended to revolve around political and cultural considerations. But a thorough analysis of the religious nature of Islam will require two distinct scholarly approaches: exegetical methodology (aided by Qur'anic exegetical methods called *tafsir*) and historical research.

Methods for an English-speaking secular analysis of the Qur'an are not clearly and extensively outlined. Peter Wright, a noted British intelligence officer, claimed in 1989 that "the modern study of Islamic hermeneutics is in its infancy" (Abou Majid). Because of this, it is useful to analyze the Qur'an through the general methods of exegesis, while also taking into account the aforementioned unique qualities of Islam. An "exegetical" method of inquiry is a form of literary interpretation applied to religious works ("Steps in Doing Exegesis").

An exegetical method includes five steps. First, the writer must establish the context of the passage within the text as a whole ("Steps in Doing Exegesis"). Through the careful reading of the Qur'an and its commentaries, a knowledge of the wider context of Muslim writings can be secured. Second, the writer must establish the context of the passage within its time period ("Steps in Doing Exegesis"). This observation of the historical context of Islam and Islamic writings will be done as a large part of the paper. Third, the writer must critically analyze and apply the text. This may include analysis and application in light of history, current developments, or religious politicization ("Steps in Doing Exegesis"). This exegetical method applies to Islamic holy texts as to any others.

Tafsir, the widely-recognized Qur'anic method of interpretation, is an essential addition to this exegetical methodology. There is no concrete methodology in English for *tafsir*, but there are several widely-recognized requirements for this form of research ("Quranic Tafsir and Methods of Tafsir"). A knowledge of classical Arabic is important in understanding the linguistics of the Qur'an ("Quranic Tafsit and Methods of Tafsir).[1] A phenomenon in Islamic literature, called the *ghariib al Qur'an* (literally translated as the strangeness of the Qur'an), describes the "extraordinary vocabulary" and "obscurity" of Qur'anic language (Emara). Some suggest that the antiquity of Qur'anic language means that it cannot be understood, but others argue that, with proper attention, it can be adequately addressed in a scholarly

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[1] The researcher has been studying classical Arabic for eight years and has gained some understanding of the language and its nuances.

paper (Emara). With the inclusion of modern Qur'anic dictionaries, Qur'anic commentaries, and English

translations in research, the unique vocabulary of the Qur'an is accessible. Another consideration in *tafsir*

research methods is the seemingly contradictory claims within the Qura'an or between two Islamic

primary sources, called *naskh* (Fatoohi). The principle of *naskh*, or abrogation (recognized by a vast

majority of Muslim sects, including both Sunni and Shia'a Islam) gives attention to the chronological

nature of the Qur'an. Because the Qur'an is organized in chronological order, the

sometimes-contradictory claims made at the end of the book are considered by Muslims to abrogate, or

repeal, other claims made before them (Fatoohi). Thus, to make sure the clearest understanding of Islamic

theology is reached, the meaning of the verses at the end of the Qur'an will be interpreted to supercede

the meaning of the verses at the beginning of the Qur'an.

Historical research is also essential in establishing context around the issue of Qur'anic

interpretation of the caliphate. The history of Islam is directly intertwined with its theological principles –

the doctrine of abrogation can be used when observing Islamic history. Under the lense of abrogation, the

most recent development of the ancient history of Islam can be deemed most important. In their book

Practical Research, Leedy and Ormrod cite the importance of conceptual research, which is concerned

with "the origin, development, and influence of ideas and concepts" (Leedy and Ormrod). Conceptual

historical research, that takes into consideration the development of ideas within their context, will be

utilized in this research paper.

Specifically, the nature of the historical caliphate will be evaluated through primary sources, such

as writings or commentaries by caliphs or other Islamic leaders throughout the ages. Secondary sources

used will include the caliphs' and other historic Muslim scholars' interpretations of the Qur'an in relation

to the caliphate.

The Founding and Growth of the Islamic Caliphate

For most of its 1400 year history, Islam was governed by a caliphate (Myre). The caliphate was born in the lifetime of Muhammad, but it ended overnight under Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey (Lewis, "What Went Wrong?"). A universally recognized caliphate has only been absent for around a century. A study of the early caliphate is important in establishing the Islamic precedent that sets expectations for Muslims today.

The early beginnings of the Islamic empire are divided into three stages. Under the first stage, as Mohammed first gained a following, the Muslim community was a small, weak minority among many warring tribes (Lewis, "The Arabs in History"). During this time (AD 610 to 622), many of the Qur'anic writings that command peace and restraint were written. Under the second stage (AD 623-626), the larger Muslim community was relocating to Medina – mandated to fight in defense. In the third and final stage of the Islamic caliphate's beginning (AD 626-632), Muslims were commanded to fight an aggressive war against polytheists, and later certain monotheists (Lewis, "The Arabs in History"). The definition of Islamic holy war shifted over the years, but culminated and solidified as *jihad*, the offensive war of a holy, united, Islamic community (Lambert). This three-stage history is widely recognized by secular historians and Muslim theologians alike. Viewed in light of the Qur'an, this history can provide clear insight into the mandate and nature of the Islamic community.

Many of the Qur'an's statements are contradictory – later commands overwrite earlier ones (Slick). In Surah 2:106, it is written that "none of our revelations do we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but we substitute something better or similar: knowest thou not that Allah hath power over all things?" (*The Qur'an,* Al-Baqarah 2.106). This verse introduces the idea that, while the sentiments of prior verses in the Qur'an hold importance, something "better or similar" can be substituted in their place because "Allah hath power over all things". In other words, he can contradict himself. In Surah 16:101, the Qur'an

says: "When we substitute one revelation for another – and Allah knows best what He reveals (in stages)– they say, 'Thou art but a forger': but most of them understand not" (*The Qur'an,* An-Nahl 16.101). This verse again supports the idea of abrogation, the substitution of "one revelation for another". According to the Qur'an, the most recent revelation supersedes all other revelations.

Following this reasoning, the change of mindset in the Islamic community over these three stages of history is justified. According to Islam, Allah's first revelation to Muhammad emphasized restraint and accommodation (while the Muslim community was at its smallest and weakest). His second revelation to Muhammad highlighted Muslims as a fighting people (while the Muslim community was expanding). His third revelation to Muhammad was that of conquest (while the Muslim community was at its peak, an advancing religio-military force) (Lambert). If this path of Islamic history is viewed in light of the Qur'anic ideal of abrogation, the third and most recent revelation to Muhammad is the most applicable and most current mandate to Muslims.

More than a religious figure, Muhammad was a visionary political leader – a "soldier-statesman" (Lambert). He unified the divided Arabian tribes, giving them a theocratic identity. Muhammad led this united, religiously motivated group to over 70 victories in battle, confirming their view of God's approval of the new Islamic caliphate (Huntington). Offensive violence was now characterized as an act of devotion to God (Lewis, "The Arabs in History"). The military nature of Islam's infancy left a lasting mark on the religion. As the Islamic political army developed, so did its social structure. Centered around the Muslim theocratic military, a new type of society was being created. Bernard Lewis writes of the Muslim people's perception of their theocracy, saying: "political authority was not a human evil... it was a divine good. The body politic and the sovereign power within it [were] ordained by God himself, to promote faith and help extend the law" (Lewis, "The Political Language of Islam). This sovereign

government instituted Islamic law, derived from the religious precepts of Islam, which became known as

shari'a, and still exists today in many modern Muslim governments (Johnson and Sergie).

The early history of Islam cemented the unique mix of politics and religion into Islamic culture.

This union of politics, law, military, and religion made Islam, from its conception, a unique combination

(Lambert). The caliphate's expansionist nature continued for centuries, as depicted in *Fig. 1* (Lewis, "The

Arabs in History"). Under some caliphs, Jews and Christians were allowed to exist as second-class

citizens, labeled the *dhimmitude*, but many caliphs required conversion to Islam or death (Karsh). Islamic

theocracy, according to Steve Lambert, "could never recognize another religion because Islam viewed

itself as the ultimate and final divine revelation, and this lent it a historical imperative that endures to this

day" (Lambert). Islam was viewed by Muslims as the perfected civilization for mankind – a culture with a

militaristic combination of church and state under the leadership of divinely inspired rulers.
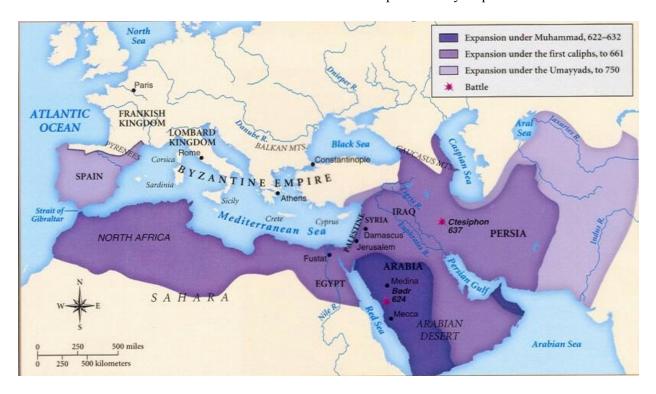

Fig. 1. Muslim Worldwide Expansion in the Time of Muhammad and the first Caliphates

How does Muhammad's political-military empire relate to current day Islam? Does the caliphate, as an ideal, hold any authority under Islamic theology today? Observation of the Qur'an, with reference to Islamic methods of interpretation, can answer these questions.

Qur'anic Basis for the Legitimacy of the Caliphate

The Ummah

As centuries have passed, confusion has grown over the definition of the caliphate and its importance in the modern day. Historically, the caliphate was deemed the Muslim *ummah* - the "community of believers" (Al-Ahsan). The word *ummah* refers to the supra-national group of followers of Islam (Al-Ahsan). It translates roughly to English words like community and identity, but also suggests a sense of deep, loyal devotion and brotherhood (Lambert). The *ummah* is a community of mankind, gathered throughout centuries of Islamic history and united by submission to Allah. It is the connection between the fellowship of religious bonds and the brotherhood of political unity. Surah 3:110 states: "Ummah: you are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the Scripture [Jews and Christians] had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient" (*The Qur'an,* Ali-Imran 3.110). The *ummah* is portrayed as a superior community, one that believes the truth and can serve as an example for the rest of mankind.

According to Muslims, this Qur'anic discussion of the *ummah* validates its legitimacy, bringing it from the realm of historical tradition to the realm of religious reality. Abu Al-Hasan Al-Māwardī (972-1058 AD), an ancient Islamic jurist, addresses the *ummah*'s oneness, saying: "it is forbidden for the ummah to have two leaders at the same time" (Al-Māwardī). This *ummah* is a unified Muslim caliphate community under one religio-political leader.

The Domains

Another set of Qur'anic vocabulary that clarifies the mindset of orthodox Islam is the *dar*, or

domain. There are two clearly recognized domains in Islam: *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb*. *Dar Al-Islam*

is the domain of Islam, while *Dar al-Harb* is the domain of war. Professor Muhammad Ishaq Zahid

defines *Dar al-Harb* as "the territory under the hegemony of unbelievers, which is on terms of active or

potential belligerency with the Domain of Islam, and presumably hostile to the Muslims living in its

domain" (Zahid). The *Dar al-Islam,* then, is defined as the abode of Islam, the Muslim nation. *Dar*

al-'Ahd, a third group mentioned in the Qur'an, is the domain of covenant – the countries that have

diplomatic agreements with the Muslim nation (Zahid). The domain of *Dar al-'Ahd* historically has been

a provision of semi-free religious practice under the Islamic caliphate ("Dar al-Harb"). So the Islamic

tradition provides for three groups of people: Muslims in the caliphate, enemies outside of the Islamic

caliphate, and those under the protection of the caliphate.

The Caliphate

The word *khilāfa*, caliphate in Arabic, is used in Surah 2:30, in which Allah says to the angels:

"Indeed, I am going to place a *khilāfa* on the earth" (*The Qur'an,* Al-Baqarah 2.30). The angels respond,

asking "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare

Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah replies, saying, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know" (*The*

Qur'an, Al-Baqarah 2.30). This verse states that Allah will institute a *khilāfa*, a rightful government, to

represent him on the earth. It also states that Allah is all-knowing, maintaining control of any corruption

or shedding of blood that takes place under the *khilāfa*.

The word *khalifa* is used multiple times in the Qur'an to refer to a political-religious leader with

divinely-received authority. Surah 38:26 of the Qur'an addresses King David of the Jewish people as

God's *khalifa*, and calls him to rule with justice under God: "'O David, indeed we have made you a

khalifa upon the earth, so judge between the people in truth and do not follow [your own] desire, as it will

lead you astray from the way of Allah.' Indeed, those who go astray from the way of Allah will have a

severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Account" (*The Qur'an,* Sad 38.26). This verse

recognizes King David (c. 1000 BC), who ruled the Jewish people before the advent of Islam, as a *khalifa*

following "the way of Allah" ("David"). According to Surah 38, the function of a *khalifa* is the

enforcement of submission to God and judgement of the people.

       The Qur'an views Muhammad as the final monotheistic prophet, bringing in a new era of truth to

mankind . The Qur'an likewise speaks of Islam as the ultimate and true fulfillment of past monotheistic

caliphates. Surah 42:13 says that "he [Allah] decreed for you the same religion for Noah, and what we

inspired to you [Muhammad], and what we decreed for Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: 'You shall uphold

this one religion, and do not divide it'" (*The Quran,* Ash-Shura 42.13). This verse shows the caliphate

status of the earlier monotheistic religions embodied in "Abraham, Moses, and Jesus", suggesting that

these figures were previous caliphs, but that Muhammad was the culminating caliph who came to purify

and restore the true monotheistic religion. According to the Qur'an, both the Jewish and Christian

religions became distorted (Lambert). Muhammad and his successors brought in the ultimate caliphate of

truth. Since they were historically connected, the three monotheistic religions were regarded as superior to

all polytheism, with Islam supreme as the final revelation. In Surah 42:13, the phrase "you shall uphold

this one religion, and do not divide it" is more literally translated as "you shall establish the religion and

not be divided therein" (*The Noble Quran,* Ash-Shura 42.13). In Arabic, the phrase "establish the

religion" is literally translated as *aqeem ud deen*, a phrase suggesting worldwide authoritarian dominance

– the final establishment of the right way brought in by the Prophet Muhammad (Lambert). Later in Surah

42:13 it is written that under the caliphate there shall be no *tatafarraqu*, which is translated as "division",

but is simultaneous with other English words like scattering, dispersing, and separation (*The Noble*

Quran, Ash-Shura 42.13). This verse states that Muhammad, as the recipient of Allah's final revelation to mankind, must establish Islam as the sole monotheistic religion that should not be scattered, but should exist in a unified state. Verse 42:13 clearly defines the caliphate: the undivided religious state that exists as the fulfilment of monotheism.

In Surah 24:55 there is a Qur'anic call for the continuance of the caliphate in future generations. It says that "God promises those among you who believe and lead a righteous life, that He will make them sovereigns on earth, as He did for those before them, and will establish for them the religion that was chosen for them, and will substitute peace and security in place of fear. All this because they worship me alone; they never set up any idols beside Me. Those who disbelieve after this are the truly wicked" (*The Qur'an,* An-Nur 24.55). This verse explains the caliphate mindset: in future generations, God will establish true, loyal believers as "sovereigns on earth" – the leaders of the caliphate (*The Qur'an,* An-Nur 24.55). Additionally, those who disbelieve after God's clear revelation of the true religion are "truly wicked," also translated as "defiantly disobedient" (*The Qur'an,* An-Nur 24.55). This verse, Surah 24:55, is known as the *istikhlaf* verse – *istikhlaf* meaning the "granting of succession" or the "appointing of a successor" (*The Qur'an,* An-Nur 24.55). It is the iconic Qur'anic caliphate verse, demonstrating Allah's command of religious submission to all and his mandate for future leaders of the Islamic caliphate.

Worldwide Dominion

Surah 61:9 emphasizes the universality and domination of Islam over all other religions. It says that Allah "has sent His messenger [the Prophet Muhammad] with the guidance and the true religion, and will make it dominate all religions, in spite of the idol worshipers" (*The Noble Quran,* As-Saf 61.9). This verse also establishes the caliphate. Led by Muhammad, the Muslim "true religion" will dominate all religions. This exclusivist principle is an established characteristic of Orthodox Islam – not just the truth

of the religion, but its inevitable physical domination, in spite of the existence of other religions. Surah 61:9 makes it clear that the Islamic mandate is the establishment of domination over other religions.

Orthodox Islam also validates the military nature of the caliphate in the roots of Islamic history and the Qur'an itself. One of the most controversial verses in the Qur'an, known as āyat al-sayf, the sword verse, sheds light on the nature of the caliphate. Surah 9:5 says: "And when the sacred months have passed, kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them in every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, give zakat, let them go on their way. Indeed, Allah is forgiving and merciful" (*The Qur'an,* At-Tawbah 9.5). This verse, which was one of the last Qur'anic revelations, has been claimed by conservative Muslim scholars to abrogate earlier, more peaceful verses. When considered in light of the Islamic doctrine of abrogation, this verse of the sword cannot be ignored. The verse ends in a seemingly magnanimous tone, saying: "But if they should repent, establish prayer, give zakat, let them go on their way. Indeed, Allah is forgiving and merciful" (*The Qur'an,,* At-Tawbah 9.5). However, this repentance language is simply a requirement of conversion to Islam. When polytheists repent, perform Muslim prayer, and pay Muslim alms, they have become Muslims. So the true message of this verse is clear: convert to Islam or be slain. It is a command to Muslims: "kill the polytheists," or offer captives the option of conversion to Islam (*The Quran,* At-Tawbah 9.5).

Liberal scholars argue against the militant nature of Islam, drawing from other verses in the Qur'an that seem to claim tolerance. Surah 2:256 (which was written in Muhammad's first year of residence in Medina, when he needed Jewish support for his fledgling movement) is commonly used in this regard, stating: "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (*The Qur'an,* Al-Baqarah 2.256). Later Surahs, however (like the ones cited throughout this paper), became more militaristic and intolerant of other religions. Surah 9, called *At-Tawbah,* the Repentance, is recognized as the ultimate or penultimate

Surah, written after Muhammad conquered Medina at the end of his reign (Voll). Surah 9:73 directly

contradicts the "no compulsion" clause, saying: "O Prophet [Muhammad], fight against the disbelievers

and the hypocrites and be harsh upon them. And their refuge is Hell, and wretched is the destination" (*The*

Qur'an, At-Tawbah 9.73). Hence, according to the doctrine of abrogation, the sentiments in Surah 9

abrogate the earlier "no compulsion" sentiment of Surah 2.

The argument of Islam as a non-expansionist, peaceful religion seems to find little to no support

in the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an commands a united Muslim community under *shari'a* law, following

caliphate rule, and seeking to secure Allah's territory for the *ummah*.

Conclusion

Other Islamic texts, like the *Hadith* and the *Sīra*, provide additional information on the caliphate

but were not considered in this study ("The Qur'an"). Both Sunni and Shi'a sects place high importance

on the teachings of the Qur'an, while they dispute the teachings of these other acclaimed revelations

("Sunni and Shi'a"). This study exclusively examined the Qur'an in the attempt to remove the presence of

ideas that are only supported by a certain sect of Islam, to render the conclusion more universally

applicable.

According to the Qur'an itself, the caliphate is the true Islamic ideal – a political, religious, and

military entity with a view toward global dominion. On the other hand, liberal Muslims (and indeed most

Western scholars) insist that Islam is a "religion of peace", without global ambitions or any necessary

bearing on a modern nation-state (Daher). The problem with this view is that it ignores the weight of the

Qur'an itself, the chief Islamic authority.

The Islamic State's claim to be a modern-day caliphate has sent tremors throughout the Muslim

world. Whether that claim is legitimate exceeds the scope of this paper. However, one cannot argue that

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Islam has no concept of a unified caliphate with worldwide ambitions. According to the Qur'an, a unified,

global caliphate is not only legitimate – it is commanded.

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