

# **Syria: Between its Virtues Morality According to the Sacred Text and Geopolitical Conflict**

**Muh.Syaifudin**

Islamic Education Faculty, Wahid Hasyim University  
X/22 Menoreh Tengah Street, Sampangan, Semarang, Indonesia 50236  
sayfuddin\_iz@yahoo.com

**Bakr Zaki Awad**

Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt  
1 Al Mokhaym Al Daem, Gameat Al Azhar, Nasr City, Cairo Governorate, Mesir

**Abstrak**-Islam dalam beberapa teks sucinya menganggap Syiria (Syam) sebagai Negara yang sangat dihormati dan mulia. Tapi konflik dewasa ini menengarai adanya penolakan terhadap teks-teks suci tersebut. Saudi yang nota bene terstigmakan sebagai bangsa yang literalis justru turut bertarung di dalamnya bersama-sama dengan Negara-negara non muslim. Dari background inilah artikel ini ditulis. Dengan metode deskriptif analisis, tepatnya dengan pendekatan linguistik dan hermeneutik, artikel ini mengkritisi teks-teks suci yang berkaitan dengan keutamaan Negara Syam. Di samping itu, artikel ini, dari sisi tinjauan politis, menggunakan pendekatan fungsional (*functional approach*) karena para aktor yang bertarung dalam konflik ini lebih memainkan peran-peran mereka yang bersifat temporer, atau kepentingan-kepentingan sesaat. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa kendatipun ada teks-teksucitentangleutamaanSyam, tapipihak-pihak yang secara lahiriah memporakporandakan Syam tidak bisa serta merta dituduh menolak teks-teks tersebut. Sebab di samping keutamaan Syam yang terkandung dalam teks-teks tersebut bersifat kontekstual, pemuliaan yang dikehendaki dalam teks tidak berarti membiarkannya tetap dalam ketenangan kendati di dalamnya banyak hal yang perlu dibenahi meski dengan ketegasan. Sementara itu, legalitas dari apa yang dilakukan oleh pihak-pihak yang berkonflik di Syam harus dilihat dari aspek hukum, baik hukum Islam maupun Internasional yang sudah disepakati bersama.

**Kata kunci:** Syiria, teks suci, konflik

**Abstract**-This article aims to reveal the extent of the validity of the sacred texts of Islam, the traditions of the prophet about the primacy of the nation of Syria on the one hand, and the current conflict impressive this nation as one nation accused by some parties. Writing this article uses descriptive analysis method to analyze the text of the traditions of the prophet either textual or contextual, also using a functional approach. The authors chose this approach because of the actors who played in the conflict in Syria is more appropriate to say, playing for the function or interests that are temporary. This is evidenced by the difference of their attitude to the case and other regions, outside Syria. Resultsthat writer get from search two sides, namely the text of the hadith and the circumstances of the real Syrian conflict is that the texts are not only meaningful, but the systemic. Thus cannot be said that an attack on Syria, even by Muslims themselves, considered denial of the traditions of the Prophet. That is true whether or not the attack on Syria must be seen from the case itself in terms of Islamic law.

**Keywords:** Syria, virtues morality, geopolitical conflict

## **1. Introduction**

Syria, officially known as the Syrian Arab Republic (Arabic : al-Jumhūrīyah al-‘Arabīyah as-Sūrīyah), is a country in Western Asia, bordering Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, Jordan to the south, and Israelto the southwest. Syria's capital and largest city is Damascus.

The name Syria is derived from the 8th century BC Luwian term "Sura/i", and the derivative ancient Greek name: Σύριοι, or Σύροι, both of which originally derived from Aššūrāyu (Assyria) in northern Mesopotamia (Rollinger, 2006). However, from the Seleucid Empire (323–150 BC), this term was also applied to The Levant, and from this point the Greeks applied the term without distinction between the Assyrians of Mesopotamia and Arameans of the Levant (Herodotus, 2016). Mainstream modern academic opinion strongly favours the argument that the Greek word is related to the cognate Ἀσσυρία, Assyria, ultimately derived from the Akkadian Aššur (Douglas, 2001). In the past, others believed that it was derived from Siryon, the name that the Sidonians gave to Mount Hermon (Daniel, 1992). However, the discovery of the Çineköy inscription in 2000 seems to support the theory that the term Syria derives from Assyria, whose ancient homeland was located in modern northern Iraq.

Since approximately 10,000 BC, Syria was one of centers of Neolithic culture (known as Pre-Pottery Neolithic A) where agriculture and cattle breeding appeared for the first time in the world. The following Neolithic period (PPNB) is represented by rectangular houses of Mureybet culture. At the time of the pre-pottery Neolithic, people used vessels made of stone, gypsum and burnt lime (Vaisselle-Blanche). Finds of obsidian tools from Anatolia are evidences of early trade relations. Cities of Hamoukar and Emar played an important role during the late Neolithic and Bronze Age. Archaeologists have demonstrated that civilization in Syria was one of the most ancient on earth, perhaps preceded by only those of Mesopotamia.

The earliest recorded indigenous civilization in the region was the Kingdom of Ebla (Giovani, 1977) near present-day Idlib, northern Syria. Ebla appears to have been founded around 3500 BC, and gradually built its fortune through trade with the Mesopotamian states of Sumer, Assyria and Akkad, as well as with the Hurrian and Hattian peoples to the northwest, in Asia Minor (Gill, 2007). Gifts from Pharaohs, found during excavations, confirm Ebla's contact with Egypt.

One of the earliest written texts from Syria is a trading agreement between Vizier Ibrum of Ebla and an ambiguous kingdom called Abarsal c. 2300 BC (Neff, 2014). Scholars believe the language of Ebla to be among the oldest known written Semitic languages after Akkadian. Recent classifications of the Eblaite language have shown that it was an East Semitic language, closely related to the Akkadian language (Yildiz, 2016).

Ebla was weakened by a long war with Mari, and the whole of Syria became part of the Mesopotamian Akkadian Empire after Sargon of Akkad and his grandson Naram-Sin's conquests ended Eblan domination over Syria in the first half of the 23<sup>rd</sup> century BC (Bryce, 2014).

By the 21st century BC, Hurrians settled the northern east parts of Syria while the rest of the region was dominated by the Amorites; Syria was called the Land of the Amurru (Amorites) by their Assyro-Babylonian neighbors. The Northwest Semitic language of the Amorites is the earliest attested of the Canaanite languages. Mari reemerged during this period, and saw renewed prosperity until conquered by Hammurabi of Babylon. Ugarit also arose during this time, circa 1800 BC, close to modern Latakia. Ugaritic was a Semitic language loosely related to the Canaanite languages, and developed the Ugaritic alphabet (Healy, 1990). The Ugarites kingdom survived until its destruction at the hands of the marauding Indo-European Peoples in the 12th century BC.

Yamhad (modern Aleppo) dominated northern Syria for two centuries (Dalley, 1985), although Eastern Syria was occupied in the 19th and 18th centuries BC by the Old Assyrian Empire ruled by the Amorite Dynasty of Shamshi-Adad I, and by the Babylonian Empire which was founded by Amorites. Yamhad was described in the tablets of Mari as the mightiest state in the near east and as having more vassals than Hammurabi of Babylon. Yamhad imposed its authority over Alalakh, Qatna, the Hurrian states and the Euphrates Valley down to the borders with Babylon. The army of Yamhad campaigned as far away as Dēr on the border of Elam (modern Iran). Yamhad was conquered and destroyed, along with Ebla, by the Indo-European Hittites from Asia Minor circa 1600 BC (Barevarova, 2005).

From this time, Syria became a battle ground for various foreign empires, these being the Hittite Empire, Mitanni Empire, Egyptian Empire, Middle Assyrian Empire, and to a lesser degree Babylonia. The Egyptians initially occupied much of the south, while the Hittites, and the Mitanni, much of the

north. However, Assyria eventually gained the upper hand, destroying the Mitanni Empire and annexing huge swathes of territory previously held by the Hittites and Babylon.

## **2. During Muhammad's era**

First interaction of Prophet Muhammad with the people and tribes of Syria was during the Invasion of DumatulJandal in July 626 (William, 1961). He ordered his followers to Invade Duma, because Prophet Muhammad received intelligence that some tribes there were involved in highway robbery and preparing to attack Medina itself (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2016).

William Montgomery Watt claims that this was the most significant expedition Muhammad ordered at the time, even though it received little notice in the primary sources. Dumat Al-Jandal was 800 kilometers (500 mi) from Medina, and Watt says that there was no immediate threat to Muhammad, other than the possibility that his communications to Syria and supplies to Medina being interrupted. Watt says "It is tempting to suppose that Muhammad was already envisaging something of the expansion which took place after his death", and that the rapid march of his troops must have "impressed all those who heard of it" (Montgomery, 1956).

William Muir also believes that the expedition was important as Muhammad followed by 1000 men reached the confines of Syria, where distant tribes had now learnt his name, while the political horizon of Muhammad was extended.

## **3. Islamic Syria (al-Sham)**

By AD 640, Syria was conquered by the Arab Rashidun army led by Khalid ibn al-Walid. In the mid-7th century, the Umayyad dynasty, then rulers of the empire placed the capital of the empire in Damascus. The country's power declined during later Umayyad rule; this was mainly due to totalitarianism, corruption and the resulting revolutions. The Umayyad dynasty was then overthrown in 750 by the Abbasid, which moved the capital of empire to Baghdad.

Arabic –made official under Umayyad rule became the dominant language, replacing Greek and Aramaic of the Byzantine era. In 887, the Egypt-based Tulunids annexed Syria from the Abbasids, and were later replaced by once the Egypt-based Ikhshidids and still later by the Hamdanids originating in Aleppo founded by Sayf al-Dawla (Hamidé, et.al., 2013).

## **4. Conflict background**

The conflict in Syria began as an offshoot of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. Sparked on April 29th in the town of Daraa by a group of 13 year old boys who wrote on the side of their school "The Government must go!" the movement began as a uprising for democracy. But in the past four years, it has since disintegrated into a cauldron of competing rebel groups, terrorist elements, international powers, and religious factions, all with a quarter million Syrians killed with millions displaced.

The wave of Arab unrest that began with the Tunisian revolution reached Syria on March 15, 2011, when residents of a small southern city took to the streets to protest the torture of students who had put up anti-government graffiti. The government responded with heavy-handed force, and demonstrations quickly spread across much of the country.

President Bashar al-Assad, a British-trained doctor who inherited Syria's harsh dictatorship from his father, Hafez al-Assad, at first wavered between force and hints of reform. But in April 2011, just days after lifting the country's decades-old state of emergency, he set off the first of what became a series of withering crackdowns, sending tanks into restive cities as security forces opened fire on demonstrators. In retrospect, the attacks appeared calculated to turn peaceful protests violent, to justify an escalation of force.

In the summer of 2011, as the crackdown dragged on, thousands of soldiers defected and began launching attacks against the government, bringing the country to what the United Nations in December called the verge of civil war. An opposition government in exile was formed, the Syrian National Council, but the council's internal divisions have kept Western and Arab governments from

recognizing it as such. The opposition remains a fractious collection of political groups, longtime exiles, grass-roots organizers and armed militants, divided along ideological, ethnic or sectarian lines.

The conflict is complicated by Syria's ethnic divisions. The Assads and much of the nation's elite, especially the military, belong to the Alawite sect, a minority in a mostly Sunni country. While the Assad government has the advantage of crushing firepower and units of loyal, elite troops, the insurgents should not be underestimated. They are highly motivated and, over time, demographics should tip in their favor. Alawites constitute about 12 percent of the 23 million Syrians. Sunni Muslims, the opposition's backbone, make up about 75 percent of the population.

The United States and countries around the world condemned President Assad, who many had hoped would soften his father's iron-handed regime. Criticism has also come from unlikely quarters, like Syria's neighbors, Jordan and Turkey, and the Arab League. Syria was expelled from the Arab League after it agreed to a peace plan only to step up attacks on protesters. In late 2011 and early 2012, Syria agreed to allow league observers into the country. But their presence did nothing to slow the violence. In February 2012, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to approve a resolution condemning President Assad's unbridled crackdown on the uprising, but China and Russia, Syria's traditional patron, blocked all efforts for stronger Security Council action.

Tensions have also spilled over borders into Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Jordan, and fears have increased with evidence that Al Qaeda was behind a rise in suicide bombings in 2012. By the summer of 2012, the conflict had greatly increased in tempo and violence on all sides, as advocacy groups estimated that about 400 died in June 2011 and more than 3,000 people in June 2012. According to estimates from the United Nations, the conflict has left more than 10,000 dead, thousands more displaced. The Syrian government has waged an unrelenting campaign of arrests that has snared tens of thousands of people.

In cities throughout Syria, including the capital, Damascus, and the largest city, Aleppo, the opposition had coalesced around armed groups identifying themselves as elements of the Free Syrian Army. From bases in refugee camps on the Turkish side of the border, the flow of weapons, medical supplies and money increased. As the conflict has continued without resolution, Syrians involved in the struggle say it is becoming more radicalized: homegrown Muslim jihadists, as well as small groups of fighters from Al Qaeda, have been taking a more prominent role and demanding a say in running the resistance.

The nature of the Syrian conflict, now in its fifth year, has become overtly sectarian and ideological. Undoubtedly the foreign fighters who continue to trickle in are colored by this. There is also enough evidence to suggest that the presence of informal recruiters, usually through friendship networks, play an influential role in the choices they make. There seems to be a confluence of humanitarian, political and ideological factors that has led to a situation that looks and feels apocalyptic. However, what has often been ignored is the unique position that Syria occupies within Islamic tradition.

Keeping our focus on Sunni foreign fighters, Syria has attracted foreign fighters in a way that no other conflict has. Burma or Central African Republic certainly has not attracted Muslim foreign fighters. Not even the lands of Afghanistan or Yemen or Iraq for that matter have drawn so many men and matériel in from all corners of the Muslim world. Admittedly, their remoteness is certainly one of the inhibitors. Syria after all is easy to get to. But now with Turkey tightening its border and Europe being more vigilant and punitive, they still seem to trickle through. If it was simply Salafi-Jihadi ideology that galvanized men, then many of these ideological fighters would flock to the aforementioned countries; but they do not. They are choosing to travel to Syria. Whilst William McCants has tried to explain the Islamic apocalyptic narrative that ISIS has to an English speaking audience, it does not deal with the role of Syria within the Muslim sacral imagination. Rather Syria or Sham- by Sham I mean modern day Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, parts of Turkey and parts of Iraq- is the meeting point not only for geopolitics, a terrible humanitarian crisis, but also for Jihad within in the Sunni tradition.

Arguably, Syria has become a destination for rootless Muslims already struggling with their place in Europe. Sham has become the land that transcends arbitrary borders and where they can belong. The powerful image of ISIS bulldozing the border between Iraq and Syria has demonstrated how transient the lines drawn in the sand by Sykes and Picot truly are. The name Islamic State has, despite its association

with cruelty and terror, introduced an idea within the Muslim world that perhaps it is possible to have some sort of state ruled by Islamic law. It has also reignited the idea of Sham and offered up new questions. If an Islamic state should come to being what should it look like and how should it behave? The answers to these questions will undoubtedly lead to further tumult in the Middle East and Europe, long after ISIS or AQ or any other organization which calls for it has faded away.

Certain parts of the Muslim world such as Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem and Syria have sacral importance in the Muslim imagination. These places entwine the eschatological traditions involving the past with the prophetic predictions made of the future. It is for no reason that ISIS calls its magazine Dabiq, the place where Muslims will have their final victory in the Islamic tradition. It is redolent with significance. The Syrian conflict cannot just be interpreted through the cold lens of geopolitics, for Syria is indivisible to faith by virtue of their sacral associations. To ignore this aspect will result in ill-conceived policy decisions that will last decades.

The very symbolism of Sham itself and what it promises, the return of the Shariah, has meant that foreign fighters can now attach themselves to a land which not only is intrinsically linked to their faith, but supersedes the Westphalian nation state. Their Hijra, their Jihad, their Ribat- all of it is blessed, as Sunni tradition seems to suggest. This is accompanied with a vision of an end game. Unlike CAR, Burma and others- Sham has an end game: victory for the believers. Admittedly, Afghanistan does too in the sense that there are prophetic traditions suggesting that the Black banners of Islam will come from Khorasan, modern day Afghanistan. But it does not have the potency of Syria. Syria is the place where, according to tradition, the caliphate will revive, where prophets walked, and where it shall all end in the Muslim imagination. Syria then, as a land, is bigger than nationalism and yet paradoxically has many affinities. Thomas Hegghammer in *The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad*, is on to something when he says: "Transnational militancy is obviously ideology driven, but the ideology in question—extreme pan-Islamism—arguably has more in common with nationalisms than with utopian religious constructions."

Syria gives the rootless Western Muslim an identity, a purpose and also a glorious end game in a way that no other land will. Faith is intrinsic to the land. And so Turkey might close their borders but foreign fighters will continue to enter.

Jihadi ideologies like the late Abu Mus'ab al-Suri identified it as a crucial geopolitical chess piece in the Muslim world, but Syria isn't just relevant to Jihadists. Syria's importance exists within several axes: Islam's martial tradition, within the prophetic past, within its historical past, and the future eschatological tradition. Salafi-Jihadis don't own this tradition. Up to recent times the Syrian government boosted its tourism industry by encouraging the concept of *Siyaha* that is Muslim spiritual travel to its sacred places. It is similar to the way Christian pilgrims travel to holy sites such as Santiago de Compostela in Spain or Lourdes in France.

To illustrate this point more clearly let us take a text that does not come from the Salafi-Jihadi tradition. The *Excellence of Syro-Palestine -al-Sham- And its People* by Gibreel F. Haddad, a sufi scholar, and a follower of the late Sheikh Nazim Haqqani of the Naqshbandi order and a vehement opponent of the Salafis. This text follows a common literary genre within Islamic scholarly tradition; that of collecting forty canonical sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. But here Haddad has focused on the virtues of Syria. This is not novel. Nasir al-Din Albani for instance, one of the scholars that Salafis follow, has also edited a text on the virtues of Greater Syria. Haddad's text, it should be noted, was written in 2002, several years before the Syrian uprising.

The author draws on nine books of the canonical sayings of the Prophet in order to establish Syria's paramountcy in the Muslim imagination. He draws on the Prophetic canonical collections of Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, al-Nasa'i and IbnMajah. He draws on the Musnads of Ahmad and al-Darimi as well as extracting traditions from ibnHibban, ibnKhuzayma and al-Hakim. Moreover Haddad relies on the giants of Sunni Islamic tradition such as al-Nawawi, ibnHajar and al-Suyuti, as well as on great Quranic exegetes such as al-Qurtubi, al-Bayhaqi and al-Tabari. He goes to great lengths to frame his work within the Sunni intellectual tradition. In other words this work is not just for Sufis but also for the orthodox with no Sufic inclinations.

Moreover Haddad points out his connection to the likes of Muhammad al-Yaqoubi in order to firmly ground his work within Sunni scholarship. To emphasize this point, he has a foreword written by some prominent religious scholars of Sham such as Shaykh Adib Kallas, one of the leading jurists of Damascus, Salah al-Din al-Fakhri, the administrative director of Dar al-Fatawa in Lebanon and finally it is endorsed by ‘Abd al-Razzaq Turkmani on behalf of the Sufi sheikh Sayyidi ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Shaghuri.

These names are relevant to demonstrate that traditions around Sham are cultivated and are not just for those living in the rarified stratosphere of Islamic scholarship. The very existence of these traditions within Islam will draw foreign fighters to Syria despite the hardship that they may encounter. This author interviewed one foreign fighter who recounts how he met a battalion of Chechens who had left the fight against the Russians in their homeland; in order to fight in Syria due to the latter’s importance in the Islamic world. It demonstrates clearly that Syria is not owned by the Salafi-Jihadis, nor does it have more significance to them than to the rest of the Muslim world. But just like the Zengids and the Ayoubids during the Crusades, who utilised the symbolism of Jerusalem to propagate Jihad, so too has similar symbolism been used by the Salafi-Jihadi groups to encourage men to fight and come to Syria. Jerusalem after all is part of Sham.

Syria, according to Haddad, is mentioned ten times in the Quran and there are numerous hadiths that recount its virtues. The Prophet is said to have prayed for the land and it is considered blessed. Accordingly, God has put angels in charge of guarding Sham and the Prophet Muhammad has prayed for the country. It is cited by Syrians as proof that their country has a manifest destiny. Syrians know and often cite the hadith that says if goodness ends in Sham there will be no goodness in the world. Now it is doubtful that most foreign fighters know all of these traditions, but most at some point will be schooled by those already in Syria about its importance. And Syrians will certainly make you aware of its significance in the religious landscape as this author has experienced.

## 5. The Land of Faith

The land then, according to Haddad, is intrinsically linked to Islamic tradition. Al-Tabarani narrates a hadith by one of the Prophet’s Companions, Salama ibn Nufayl that the Prophet said: “The heartland of the abode of Islam is Sham”. Another saying of the Prophet:

*“[Sham] is the quintessence of the lands of Allah. There do the quintessence of his servants go for protection. Therefore whoever departs from Syro-Palestine earns [His] wrath, and whoever enters it from somewhere earns His mercy...” [See Haddad]*

Thus blessing and the land are intimately connected in a way that other territories of the Muslim world are not, apart from Medina and Mecca.

The land, according to one prophetic tradition, is said to house seventeen thousand graves of prophets alone. Makhul, one of the earliest Islamic scholars, relates that there were five hundred prophets buried in Damascus alone. Some of these prophets visited locations in Syria. The Prophet Muhammed visited Bosra, Adam visited mount Qasyoun, Eve went to Ghouta, Seth went to the Bekaa valley in Lebanon, Lot passed by Barzeh in Damascus, John the Baptist was buried in the Umayyad mosque, Job in the Hawran, and Jesus and Mary sought refuge in al-Rabwa and so on.

Thus blessing and the land are intimately connected in a way that other territories of the Muslim world are not, apart from Medina and Mecca. The land in between Damascus and Homs is known as the land of the thousand martyrs on account of the numerous anonymous Companions of the Prophet said to have died there whilst fighting the Byzantine Empire. The land was visited by the Companions of the Prophet and early Muslims. It is well known that Hussein’s head, the grandson of the Prophet, is in the Umayyad Mosque, Khaled bin al-Walid, Islam’s greatest general is buried in Homs. Bilal, the Muezzin of the Prophet, is buried in Damascus. It is also said that both Abu Ubaydah, the conqueror of Damascus, Shurahbil bin Hasana, the famous warrior commander, are also buried close to Bab Sharqi in the Old City and so on. Numerous scholars have passed through Syria including the great ascetic and scholar al-

Ghazali. Ibn Taymiyyah, the father of the Salafis, is buried in Damascus University grounds, as are Sunni Islam's great heroes, such as Salah al-Din and Nur al-Din Zengi. One needs only to flick through the voluminous collection of the History of Damascus by the medieval scholar Ibn Asakir to realise that the who's who of the Islamic world all gathered in Damascus.

Moreover, Syria is mentioned by several companions including Ali, the cousin of the Prophet, and Ibn Masu'd as the land of the Abdals, a group of forty awliya or saints, through whom people are given sustenance and victory. And it is these men and women who will aid the awaited Mehdi, the messianic figure who will restore the land on the methodology of Prophethood in the Final Days. Syria is also the place where Jesus will descend and slay the anti-Christ. In fact, the environs of Ghouta, which Jaysh al-Islam currently control, is the rallying place on the day of Armageddon and it is believed to be the land of Resurrection. In fact, in Ghouta's history, Muslim communities fleeing persecution have settled specifically there to fulfill this prophecy.

As a Companion of the Prophet, Abu Darda, narrates: *"The Prophet said: The rallying place of the Muslims on the day of Armageddon is in al-Ghouta, next to a city called Damascus which is among the best cities in al-Sham"* [see Haddad]

## 6. Syria's role in Jihad and Hijra

Syria is also tied to Jihad and Ribat, Ribat here means guarding and fortifying front lines. There is a mass transmitted (mutawatir) hadith which says:

*"a part of my community will remain in firm adherence to the Divine command, unharmed by those who betray or desert or oppose them, until the coming of the order of Allah, while they are victorious over all people...they are the people of al-Sham"* [see Haddad]

The Prophet has described the outer borders of Sham as permanent frontiers. Whoever takes up residence there is a Mujahid, a fighter in the service of God. It suggests that those travelling to fight in Syria then, will be rewarded. As the Prophet has said:

*"Now has fighting come! There will not cease to be a group in my Community that will remain victorious over all people. Allah will cause the hearts of some to go astray and those [the former] will fight them and receive from them His sustenance until His command comes to pass...Lo! Truly, the heartland of the believers is al-Sham! Immense good will remain tied to the forelocks of horses [i.e. Jihad] until the Day of Rising!"* [See Haddad]

Another hadith related by Abu Hurayrah: *"A part of my Community will not cease to fight at the gates of Damascus and its surroundings, and at the gates of Bayt al-Maqdis [Jerusalem] and its surroundings. The betrayal or desertion of whoever deserts them will not harm them the least. They will remain victorious, standing for the truth, until the Final Hour rises."* [See Haddad]

There are also traditions which suggest that Syria is the place of Hijra- or emigration. For instance the Prophet advises people: if Fitna, [usually translated as civil strife] increases one should head to Syria. And this injunction is something that Muslims have done since Islam's inception, whether that be the Kurds settling in Rukned-Din during the time of the Crusades or the Hanabila settling in Salihiyeh district in Damascus or the Circassian community escaping the push of the Russian empire.

There are two points here that feed the Jihadi's call: that of Jihad and that of emigration. In the modern context, some Salafi-Jihadis interpret fitna- to mean shirk, associating partners with God, meaning that when shirk proliferates in the land then Sham is the place to head to. And since Shirk, in the puritanical vision of Salafi-Jihadis, has proliferated then it is best for people to emigrate to Sham. There is a Prophetic tradition mentioned in Haddad's text which says: *"The Hour will not rise before the best of the people of Iraq first go to Sham and the worst of the people of Sham first go to Iraq. The Prophet said: "You must go to Sham!"* [See Haddad]

This is why one Western Muslim woman was told by a foreign fighter to go against the fifth pillar of Islam the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, and make Hijra to Sham instead, because Shirk has even entered the holy city.

## 7. Conclusion

Sacred texts which indicated the primacy of Syria can be understood in several sides. First, the actual condition when the Prophet Muhammad to say it. This means that there are conditions that led to Syria acquire virtues. So it can not apply in general and continuously. Second, the Prophet called the primacy of Syria (Sham) does not mean that in addition to Syria is not a major. Even the Qur'an itself confirms that size is not the primacy of ethnic background or descent, but because of piety. Prophet Muhammad also said that God does not view people of the picture were born but God looks on the side of deeds.

The conflict in Syria cannot be regarded as a denial of the Prophet ordered to keep Syria. But, this conflict is simply because of worldly considerations. Or rather is the difference in mindset each camp. In other words, this is a problem ijthadi. Nonetheless, the conflicts that have been going on for years and claimed many victims remain intolerable and unjustified. Any party who dropped the victim would still be justified.

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