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From Spain to Al-Andalus: Discursive Uses of The Spanish Referent in *Voice of Khurasan*

Abstract

This study analyzes how Spain appears in *Voice of Khurasan* (VoK), the English-language magazine associated with Islamic State in the Khorasan Province, throughout the complete series of 46 issues published between January 2022 and June 2025. Based on approaches that treat the country as an object in jihadist publications and on the tradition of research on Spain as a propaganda reference point, a mixed design combining quantitative content analysis with qualitative classification is applied. Using a dictionary organized into three levels, 17 textual mentions are identified across 11 issues, covering 23.9% of the series. Although the mentions are episodic, a progressive concentration is observed in 2024. Typologically, the historical-territorial inscription predominates, followed by contemporary Spain, while references to Gibraltar are residual. In discursive terms, the framework of scope or expansion stands out, followed by the cultural context, and only one mention frames contemporary Spain in terms of retaliation or threat.

Keywords: Islamic State, Voice of Khurasan, Spain, Al-Andalus and digital magazine

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1. Introduction

Terrorist propaganda should not be understood merely as a vehicle for recruitment, coercion, or subjugation, but rather as a sophisticated form of strategic communication aimed at shaping recipients' perceptions (Reed & Ingram, 2017). Within this ecosystem, digital magazines constitute a set of serialized products that function as a mirror of the ideological priorities, tactical shifts, and narrative evolution of terrorist organizations over time (Glausch, 2019; Droogan & Peattie, 2018). These publications not only seek to mobilize but also to impose an alternative symbolic universe that redefines followers' reality and provides them with identity stability in the face of environmental uncertainty (Ingram, 2017).

In the communicative landscape, the Islamic State in the Khorasan Province¹ - ISKP has consolidated a propaganda apparatus of considerable technical sophistication under the Al-Azaim Foundation label (Krause, 2025). Its flagship English-language publication, Voice of Khurasan (VoK)², launched in early 2022, has become the only large-format³ magazine published uninterruptedly by an Islamic State affiliate following the loss of territorial control in Iraq and Syria (Krause, 2025). Precisely because of its native digital dissemination, the organization has adapted to blocks by strategically migrating to Rocket.Chat to ensure the continuity of its communicative infrastructure in the face of increasing censorship on Telegram. It has also shielded its financing, as documented by Tulga (2024) regarding the use of the Monero cryptocurrency.

Within this discursive framework, not exclusive to the Islamic State, Spain is treated as an object of constant interest that operates simultaneously on two levels: as a modern nation that is a pillar of the "crusader coalition" and as the mythologized Al-Andalus, a land that jihadist doctrine considers legally non-renounceable. This symbolic weight is reinforced by the claim over enclaves such as Ceuta, Melilla, and even Gibraltar, which link the glory of past conquests to a future expansion presented as inevitable (Stearns, 2009; Torralba-Rodríguez, 2019; Torres-Soriano, 2020).

Despite the relevance of this province, academia has primarily focused its efforts on analyzing now-defunct titles such as *Inspire* (Droogan & Peattie, 2016; Ingram, 2017), linked to Al-Qaeda, and *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah*, or *Konstantiniyye* (Glausch, 2019; Jacoby, 2023; Kaczkowski, 2019; Lakomy, 2021; Marone & Olimpio, 2020; Reed & Ingram, 2017; Van Der Krogt, 2021; Ubayasiri, 2019; Wignell, Tan, O'Halloran & Lange, 2017), linked to the Islamic State.

Although incipient studies focusing specifically on Voice of Khurasan have emerged in the last three years, such as those conducted by Hautaniemi-Forsberg (2024), Parale (2023), Rath &

1 The group originated from various dissident factions, mostly from Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in January 2015. Its name refers to the historical region of Khorasan, which encompasses territories in northeastern Iran, southern Turkmenistan, and northern Afghanistan (Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024; Krause, 2025).

2 Published in Pashto as *Khurasan Ghag*

3 Although *Voice of Khurasan* has been the most prominent and active magazine of the organization in the post-caliphate phase for an international audience, the weekly *Al-Naba*, whose first issue dates back to 2010 (Kadivar, 2021), stands as the most consistent and longest-running editorial effort of the organization (Europol, 2023).

Tollersrud⁴ (2025), Tulga (2024), or Krause (2025), a critical gap remains regarding longitudinal and census-style analyzes that examine the complete magazine series with a focus on a specific geographic object, particularly Spain.

Thus, this research aims to systematically examine the discursive presence of Spain in the complete series of Voice of Khurasan. The objective is to analyze the direct and indirect references in the issues published by the magazine by identifying their frequency, typology, and discursive frame. The specific objectives are:

SO1. To determine the distribution of references to Spain across the published issues.

SO2. To classify the mentions by their nature, distinguishing between references to the contemporary Spanish state, historical-territorial references, and geostrategic references.

SO3. To identify the recurrent discursive frames associated with these mentions based on seven defined categories.

Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1. References to Spain will be minority in absolute terms but will be concentrated in a limited number of issues.

H2. Historical-territorial references will predominate over direct mentions of the contemporary Spanish state.

H3. When the mention is in contemporary terms, it will be integrated into frames of retaliation or threat, while when it is historical-territorial, it will appear associated with a grievance and a promise of the caliphate's return.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Magazines as a Strategic Communicative Artifact

Jihadist digital magazines are considered highly sophisticated communicative artifacts that function as serialized products, delivered through a professional-level editorial design (Droogan & Peattie, 2018; Winter, 2015). These publications are not mere newsletters but strategic communication devices designed to establish a “competitive system of meaning” (Ingram, 2017, p. 10) that shapes the reader's perception of reality (Ubayasiri, 2019). Moreover, their periodicity allows for constant exposure that seeks to saturate the individual's informational environment to facilitate the normalization of discursive frames previously considered abstract (Winter, 2015). As products with usually stable production routines, these media operate as cognitive bridges that close the distance

4 They extend their analysis to the Arabic version *Sawt al-Khorasan*.

between the reader, transformed into a potential sympathizer, and the action represented (Droogan & Peattie, 2018).

From a functional perspective, the magazines seek to legitimize their signatories, disseminate their identity, mobilize, and intimidate (Ubayasiri, 2019; Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024). Indeed, the analysis of titles such as *Dabiq* – linked to the Islamic State – or *Inspire* – linked to Al-Qaeda – shows how a group identity is constructed based on an absolute dichotomy between “us” and “the enemy” (Ingram, 2017; Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024). This legitimizing narrative draws on various historical and religious frames to present the organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Muslim community in the face of “Western grievances” (Ubayasiri, 2019; Kaczkowski, 2019). Likewise, the magazines act as a powerful mobilization engine that seeks to transform passive support into violent actions by using a victimization narrative to present terrorism as an urgent necessity (Winter, 2015; Kaczkowski, 2019).

The operational dimension represents another distinctive feature, visible through technical sections that provide, for example, detailed manuals for carrying out attacks (Reed & Ingram, 2017; Lakomy, 2021; El-Nashar & Nayef, 2022). Spaces such as “Open Source Jihad” in Al-Qaeda’s *Inspire* magazine or “Just Terror Tactics” in the Islamic State’s *Rumiyah* offer practical knowledge on the manufacture of explosives or the use of vehicles as weapons (Reed & Ingram, 2017; Wignell et al., 2017). Some previous studies note that the emphasis of these contents has evolved significantly in response to the military and territorial conflicts of the issuing groups (Lakomy, 2021; Wignell et al., 2017). While expansion phases prioritized physical migration (*hijrah*) and the building of a caliphate, stages of greater military pressure have shifted the focus toward individual jihad⁵ on Western soil (Lakomy, 2021).

Within the methodological debate, the systematic analysis of these pieces allows for the inference of communicative patterns and the study of reference frames without resorting to overinterpretation (Torres-Soriano, 2020; Rath & Tollersrud, 2025). Thus, through content and discourse analysis, it is possible to map the ideological evolution and quantify the weight of different reference objects in the group’s worldview (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Rath & Tollersrud, 2025). This scientific approach enables the identification of how the strategic interaction between text and image reinforces central messages and adapts propaganda to different contexts (Kaczkowski, 2019; Wignell et al., 2017). In this way, the study of these magazines provides fundamental empirical knowledge about the structure, strategy, and real priorities of terrorist organizations (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Torres-Soriano, 2020).

5 In this context, the term “individual jihad” refers to the propagandistic appeal for decentralized violent action undertaken on one’s own initiative – without the need for travel, organizational affiliation, or direct tactical direction – which can materialize through low-complexity attacks known as “do-it-yourself” (Wignell et al., 2017; Reed & Ingram, 2017).

2.2. The Khorasan Province

The self-proclaimed Khorasan Province of the Islamic State has been recognized as one of the most dynamic and active branches of the Islamic State worldwide (Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024; Zelin, 2024). Its external communication⁶ is centralized under the Al-Azaim Foundation, which has expanded its production into multiple languages to reach audiences far beyond its regional environment (Europol, 2023; Rath & Tollersrud, 2025). Within this ecosystem, the magazines *Voice of Khorasan* (VoK), published in English, and *Sawt al-Khorasan* (SaK), published in Arabic⁷ are the key editorial communicative artifacts (Rath & Tollersrud, 2025). These publications not only seek public legitimization of the group (Webber, 2022) but also serve to challenge the authority of their rivals and project an image of invulnerability in the face of military setbacks (Europol, 2023; Tulga, 2024).

In academia, key recent contributions include the studies conducted by Rath and Tollersrud (2025), which suggest that ISKP employs a differentiated communication strategy depending on the language and audience. While SaK tends to include more explicit threats and strategic advice directed at regional actors, VoK maintains a predominantly ideological and political critique aimed at an international audience (Rath & Tollersrud, 2025). Alongside this, Parale's (2023) research stands out, analyzing how VoK's rhetoric uses an interested interpretation of Quranic texts to construct a group identity based on the fulfillment of duty and martyrdom. Overall, both studies agree that the perception of the enemy is strongly conditioned by geographic proximity and the doctrinal positioning of its adversaries.

Beyond the communicative aspect, ISKP's external operations have acquired a pan-provincial and integrated character thanks to a digital infrastructure that has adapted to blocks (Zelin, 2024), allowing the group to leverage encrypted applications both to obtain financing and to instruct its sympathizers (Europol, 2023). Likewise, research on decentralized technologies has highlighted how "swarmcast"⁸ (Fisher, 2015) facilitate the persistence of these messages in the face of content moderation efforts (Macdonald & McCafferty, 2024). These dimensions reflect an internationalization of the message that seeks to polarize Western societies and mobilize support in South and Central Asia (Europol, 2023; Rath & Tollersrud, 2025).

6 By external communication – outside the organization itself – we refer to a strategic information ecosystem designed to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct the behavior of specific audiences through the legitimization of one's own cause, the construction of the enemy's identity, and the recruitment of followers for operational purposes (Ingram, 2017; Ubayasiri, 2019; Winter, 2015).

7 Although both outlets operate under the media umbrella of the ISKP's Al-Azaim Foundation, there is a clear strategic differentiation based on language and audience profile. While *Voice of Khorasan* (VoK) is aimed at an international and Western audience, focusing on ideological condemnation and theological instruction to consolidate the group's dogma, *Sawt al-Khorasan* (SaK) adopts a much more regional and operational perspective.

8 The term, coined by Fisher (2015), refers to a model of dissemination and organization on networks designed to ensure a continuous and persistent online presence. The concept is metaphorically linked to a swarm of bees, which constantly disperses and regroups during flight; that is, the communicative infrastructure persists even if one or several accounts are removed.

2.3. *Spain as a Privileged Object of Jihadist Propaganda*

Beyond the analysis of the Islamic State as a communicative emitter, Spain occupies a singular position in the global jihadist imaginary, becoming established in the literature as a “structural target” of perennial threat (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Torres-Soriano, 2020). Unlike other Western countries, whose relevance is purely reactive to their foreign policies, Spain is perceived as a land under illegitimate occupation (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Van Der Krogt, 2021). Such is the consideration that the 11-M attacks established an “archetypal attack” (Torres-Soriano, 2020, p. 11) in the global jihadist narrative, interpreted by the organization – Al-Qaeda – as a strategic victory that demonstrated its capacity to force profound political changes, specifically the withdrawal of troops from Iraq following an unexpected electoral shift (Reinares, 2017). This precedent is recurrently used to coerce other Western societies, suggesting that terrorism can break a state’s political will. In the contemporary sphere, the Spanish state has habitually been identified as an active member of the “crusader coalition”, which justifies violence, in the eyes of the organization, in terms of retaliation (Marone & Olimpio, 2023; Torres-Soriano, 2009).

Within this conception, the Al-Andalus resource functions as a symbolic repertoire that articulates narratives of grievance, obligation, and the promise of return (Stearns, 2009). Propaganda constructs this territory as a “lost paradise” that must be reintegrated into the caliphate through jihad (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Van Der Krogt, 2021). This claim is not mere rhetorical ornament; it is an “individual obligation” that links current Muslims to a mythic past of splendor (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Ubayasiri, 2019). In this way, Spain appears bifurcated: as the current aggressor state and as the usurped sacred land that demands an Islamic “reconquest” (Torrallba-Rodríguez, 2019).

A concrete and relatively recent example of this symbolic repertoire, outside the editorial field, is the video that the Islamic State dedicated to the Barcelona attacks of August 17, 2017. In a message published by the Central Media Office⁹ under the signature of *Wilāyah al-Khayr*¹⁰ and titled *The First Rain: The Raid of Barcelona*, a continuous sequence of scenes is shown in just under three minutes. Dynamic images of the moments following the attack are combined with static images of bodies and security forces, as well as a close-up of two organization fighters acting as spokespersons. While the first appears with his face covered, the second – later identified as Muhammad Yasin Ahram Pérez, alias “El Cordobés” – in polished Spanish and with his face uncovered, threatens verbatim: “With the permission of Allah, Al-Andalus will become what it once was: land of the caliphate”.

9 Until the fall of the last strongholds in Baguz, in eastern Syria, it was the highest body of the Islamic State responsible for the creation, coordination, and distribution of all official propaganda of the group, tasked with dictating the organization’s narrative strategy. Its precise role today is unknown.

10 Literal translation: “Province of Goodness/Kindness.” It is the name by which the Islamic State referred to the Deir ez-Zor region in Syria, which it controlled until 2018 (Fishman, 2021).

Returning to the editorial plane, countries are treated as “objects” that allow the delimitation of the enemy’s identity and the reaffirmation of the emitter group’s identity (Marone & Olimpio, 2023; Stempień, 2022). Although the presence of Spain in titles such as *Dabiq* or *Rumiyah* is often episodic, its symbolic charge is maximal when linked to the “extinction of the gray zone”¹¹ (Al-Ghazzi, 2018; Torres-Soriano, 2020). Methodological precedents in the study of other countries, such as Stempień (2022) on Turkey or Marone and Olimpio (2023) on Italy and the Vatican, underscore the utility of these mentions for inferring and situating the strategic priorities of the organizations. Another precise example of this symbolic repertoire is observed in issue 13 of *Rumiyah*¹², where the communicative exploitation of attacks on Spanish soil has served to feed the frame of the “inevitable victory” (Glausch, 2019).

3. Methodology

This study examines textual references to Spain in Voice of Khurasan through a mixed-methods design based on quantitative content analysis, intended to count the presence and distribution of these references across the examined issues, and qualitative analysis, aimed at interpreting the discursive frames associated with said references. As suggested by classical approaches to content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017), this combination of methods allows for the counting of manifest patterns in a stable set of texts and the attribution of meaning to these patterns through conceptual categories previously defined in a codebook. In addition, this methodological approach aligns with previous studies examining jihadist terrorist editorial products described earlier and, more specifically, with analyzes that study the image of a country as a propaganda object through the localization of these mentions, their typological classification, and the conceptualization of their frames (Marone & Olimpio, 2023; Stempień, 2022; Torres-Soriano, 2009, 2020).

The sample consists of all 46 issues of the English-language magazine Voice of Khurasan, published between January 2022 and June 2025. The issues are available in .pdf format with recognizable text and were obtained from Jihadology.net (Zelin, 2021). Each issue constitutes a sampling unit, whose pages have been examined in full without omitting any section. Meanwhile, the recording unit consists of each mention within its fragment, where the recognition of discursive frames is exclusive according to the interpretation of the context. Although it is acknowledged that jihadist magazines are multisemiotic products in which text and image mutually reinforce each other,

11 This theoretical-strategic concept was originally formulated in the article “The Extinction of the Grayzone,” published in issue 7 of *Dabiq* magazine. It defines the “gray zone” as the space of coexistence and neutrality occupied by Muslims residing in the West who have not joined the caliphate. The strategy of groups such as the Islamic State consists of using terrorist attacks as catalysts for polarization; the goal is not only to cause physical harm but also to provoke a reaction of intolerance and suspicion in Western societies that forces the “crusaders” themselves to destroy that intermediate space (Gartenstein-Ross, Barr & Moreng, 2016; Ingram, 2017; Marone & Olimpio, 2023).

12 The Spain Attacks. (August–September 2017). *Rumiyah*, (13), 41.

this study prioritizes the specificity of the strategic and doctrinal narrative. This is recognized as a limitation, and it is suggested as a future line of research.

The analysis process was developed in two phases. First, a systematic keyword search organized into three levels was applied with the aim of locating explicit mentions, which were expanded, where appropriate, through iterative expansion of the dictionary to other related terms. Level 1 was oriented toward identifying direct mentions of the contemporary state and its demonyms – “Spain”, “Spanish”, and possible toponymic variants; Level 2 toward signaling historical-territorial repertoires – “al-Andalus”, “Andalusia”, “Andalus”; and Level 3 was based on geostrategic references – “Gibraltar”, “Strait of Gibraltar”.

Within those issues in which at least one reference was detected and confirmed, an expanded contextual search was conducted; that is, the paragraph of appearance was reviewed, as well as the remaining paragraphs that make up the article. The goal was to identify implicit references that are not always captured in concrete terms, such as geographic enumerations, allusions to those “occupied lands”, or fragments where toponyms function as territorial metonymies. If during this review new terms linked to Spain emerged, they were added to the dictionary. Irrelevant coincidences or those that could not be verified were excluded.

Second, each of the detected references was coded using a codebook structured around: type of reference – according to the level – and the associated discursive frame¹³. After locating and cataloging the country’s mentions, their nature was classified and the frame interpreted.

The analysis model (Table 1) is based on the proposal developed by Marone & Olimpio (2023) and Stempień (2022), insofar as it directly follows the logic of the “country as an object”: the central variable is Spain and it is measured whether it appears, how it appears – in its context – and for what purpose it is used in that discourse; it also draws on the studies developed by Torres-Soriano (2009, 2020) by incorporating the dual inscription of the Spain referent – Level 1 and Level 2. Level 3 is included due to its strategic importance within the jihadist imaginary (Stearns, 2009).

Regarding the development of the interpretation of the discursive frame of these mentions, the study is based on seven discursive frames: the “Retaliation or Threat” frame, which presents violence as a legitimate defensive response to the interference of Western states in Muslim lands, using a “topos of revenge” to justify attacks against civilian populations labeled as “crusaders” (Ubayasiri, 2019; Van Der Krogt, 2021); the “Historical Grievance” frame, which employs the so-called “takfiri anachronism” (Al-Ghazzi, 2018) to project the “traumas” of the past – such as the loss of Al-Andalus in 1492 – onto the current geopolitical context, endowing present conflicts with a trans-temporal

¹³ In the context of this study, the discursive frame is conceptualized as the dominant strategic function through which the text activates a textual reference to Spain in its immediate context. It is specified as an interpretive pattern, defined in the codebook, that organizes the meaning of these references by giving them an argumentative function. In the classical terms of framing theory, it is the interpretive principle that gives meaning to certain aspects of the referent and orients its understanding toward a specific reading (Entman, 1993).

religious meaning (Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024); closely linked, the “Occupied Lands or Obligation” frame, which defines the peninsular territory as *dar al-islam* [land of Islam] under infidel usurpation, turning the struggle for its recovery into an irrenounceable individual duty – *fard ‘ayn* – for every Muslim (Ingram, 2017; Torres-Soriano, 2009, 2020); the “Return or Restoration” frame, which proposes the utopia of the caliphate as the only political system with divine sanction against the “decadence” of modern nation-states, promising a return to the prophetic methodology and religious authenticity (Gartenstein-Ross, Barr & Moreng, 2016); the “Scope or Expansion” frame, which relies on the logic of the slogan *baqiya wa tatamaddad* [remaining and expanding], projecting an image of victory and constant growth to generate a “momentum” effect that attracts new followers and conceals operational weaknesses (Winter, 2015); the “Geostrategy” frame, which defines the enemy according to its role in the international system, framing the struggle as a bipolar clash between the “camp of faith” and coalitions perceived as members of the UN or NATO (Ubayasiri, 2019); and finally, the “Cultural Context” frame, which aims to provide ontological security to followers through the extensive and selective use of doctrinal sources – Quran and hadiths – offering a stable social identity and simplified responses to complex existential crises (Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024; Jacoby, 2023).

Table 1. Analysis model for coding references to Spain in *Voice of Khurasan*

Dimension	Category	Definition
Type of reference (TR)	Contemporary Spain (TR1)	Explicit mention of Spain as a current state/actor or its demonym/language (“Spain”, “Spanish”).
	Al-Andalus/Andalusia (TR2)	Explicit mention of “al-Andalus”, “Andalusia” or “Andalus”.
	Gibraltar/Strait (TR3)	Explicit mention of “Gibraltar” or “Strait of Gibraltar”.
Discursive frame (MD)	Retaliation or Threat (MD1)	The mention is integrated into a logic of retaliation, punishment or direct threat (attack target, “revenge”, persecution, intimidation) attributed to actions of the West or coalitions fighting the organization.
	Historical Grievance (MD2)	The mention activates a historical trauma or injustice (loss, expulsion, cultural destruction, “atrocities”) and projects it onto the present as a moral foundation.
	Occupied Lands or Obligation (MD3)	The mention defines the territory as “occupied Islamic land” and/or links its recovery to a religious duty (e.g., individual obligation, “liberate”, fard ‘ayn).
	Return or Restoration (MD4)	The mention articulates a promise or future vision of return, territorial restoration or renewed rule/governance over the referred space.
	Scope or Expansion (MD5)	The mention functions as an extreme geographic marker to project range of action, victory or transnational unity.
	Geostrategy (MD6)	The mention is used in material-strategic terms (routes, checkpoints, blockade, maritime control, economic collapse, route security).
	Cultural Context (MD7)	The mention fulfills a didactic/explanatory function (history, science, culture, general doctrinal argumentation).

Source: Own elaboration based on the contributions of Marone & Olimpio (2023), Stempień (2022) and the dual inscription of the Spain referent proposed by Torres-Soriano (2009, 2020).

The coding was carried out in Atlas.ti 25 (version 25.0.1.32924), while the statistical processing was performed in IBM SPSS Statistics (version 31.0.0.0) using the counts exported from the qualitative analysis software. To avoid false positives, generic metonymic expressions –“coalition”, “the West, crusaders”, “kuffar”, etc. – were excluded due to their low specificity. Thus, attribution was based exclusively on the explicit markers defined in the three levels of the dictionary.

4. Results

Following the analysis, 17 textual occurrences referring to Spain were identified throughout the sample, distributed across 11 different issues, which equates to coverage of 23.9% of the total series. This distribution is not homogeneous and shows a progressive concentration of mentions in the most recent issues.

When references are observed by year (Table 2), in 2022 there were 3 occurrences in 3 of the 19 total issues of this period – 15.8% - while in 2023, 4 occurrences were observed in 3 of 12 issues – 25%. The greatest concentration occurs in 2024, with 10 occurrences distributed across 5 of 12 issues – 41.7% - confirming an increase in both coverage and intensity. In the 2025 segment, no references were detected using the applied dictionary.

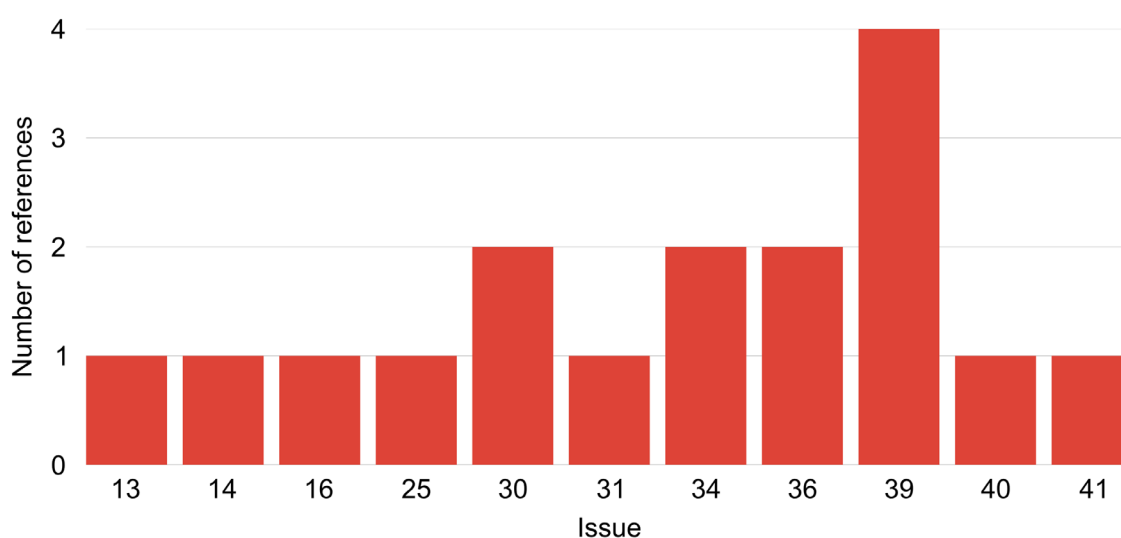
Table 2. Annual distribution of references (Coverage and intensity)

Year	Published issues	Numbered items	Coverage (%)	Total occurrences
2022	19	3	6,5%	3
2023	12	3	6,5%	4
2024	12	5	10,9%	10
2025	3	0	0,0%	0
Totals	46	11	23,9%	17

Source: Own elaboration.

In the issues that do contain references (Figure 1), the intensity ranges from 1 to 4 mentions, with issue 39 containing the most with 4 references, followed by issues 30, 34, and 36 with 2 mentions each, while issues 13, 14, 16, 25, 40, and 41 each contain a single reference.

Figure 1. Number of references in issues with presence (N=11)



Source: Own elaboration.

The typological classification of the 17 identified occurrences confirms that the dominant repertoire is not the mention of the contemporary Spanish state but rather the symbolic inscription of Spain as a historical-religious repertoire. In aggregate terms (Table 3), historical-territorial references to Al-Andalus/Andalusia account for 12 of the 17 occurrences – 70.6% – while mentions of contemporary Spain total 4 occurrences – 23.5%. Direct allusions to the Strait of Gibraltar are reduced to a single occurrence – 5.9% – indicating that this vector does not constitute a stable axis in the discourse but rather a punctual resource within a broader strategic argument.

Table 3. Distribution of occurrences by type of reference (TR).

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Scope/Expansion	5	29,4%	29,4%
Cultural context	3	17,6%	47,1%
Retaliation/Threat	2	11,8%	58,8%
Historical injustice	2	11,8%	70,6%
Occupied territories/Obligation	2	11,8%	82,4%
Geostrategy	2	11,8%	94,1%
Return/Restoration	1	5,9%	100%
Total	17	100%	

Source: Own elaboration.

This pattern is reinforced by the distribution by year (Table 4). In 2022, the mentions are divided between contemporary Spain and Al-Andalus/Andalusia, with no presence of Strait mentions. In 2023, a relative balance is observed between the previously mentioned types, while in 2024 a dominant presence of Al-Andalus/Andalusia references is identified, with 8 mentions out of the 10 detected in the entire period.

Table 4. Annual distribution of occurrences by type of reference to Spain (N=17).

			Contemporary Spain	Al-Andalus/Andalusia	Gibraltar/Strait of Gibraltar	Total
Year	2022	Count	1	2	0	3
		% within the year	33,0%	66,7%	0,0%	100%
		% within the TA	25,0%	16,7%	0,0%	17,6%
	2023	Count	2	2	0	4
		% within the year	50,0%	50,0%	0,0%	100%
		% within the TA	50,0%	16,7%	0,0%	23,5%
	2024	Count	1	8	1	10
		% within the year	10,0%	80,0%	10,0%	100%
		% within the TA	25,0%	66,7%	100%	58,8%
Total	Count		4	12	1	17
	% within the year		23,5%	70,6%	5,9%	100%
	% within the TA		100%	100%	100,0%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Continuing with the identification of discursive frames (Table 5), the analysis reveals that the most frequent is the Scope or Expansion frame, with 5 occurrences (29.4%), used to project an imaginary of transregional presence and continuity of the group's expansionist aspirations. In second place appears the Cultural Context frame with 3 occurrences – 17.6% – where the terms “Spain” and “Spanish” are incorporated as cultural, historical, and linguistic references within doctrinal-type arguments, without Spain being positioned as a direct territorial objective in these contexts. The remaining frames show a secondary presence of 2 occurrences each – 11.8% – while the Return or Restoration frame appears punctually with a single occurrence – 5.9%.

Table 5. Distribution of discursive frames (MD) in the total of occurrences.

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Scope/Expansion	5	29,4%	29,4%
Cultural context	3	17,6%	47,1%
Retaliation/Threat	2	11,8%	58,8%
Historical injustice	2	11,8%	70,6%
Occupied territories/Obligation	2	11,8%	82,4%
Geostrategy	2	11,8%	94,1%
Return/Restoration	1	5,9%	100%
Total	17	100%	

Source: Own elaboration.

Advancing to the interaction between the type of reference and the discursive frame (Table 6), it is observed that the latter are not distributed randomly. References to contemporary Spain are associated with the Cultural Context frame – 3 of 4 total occurrences; 75% – while the Retaliation/Threat frame appears exceptionally – 1 of 4; 25% – linked to the inclusion of Spain among the countries of the global coalition fighting the Islamic State and presented as a target. In contrast, references to Al-Andalus/Andalusia are primarily linked to the Scope/Expansion frame – 5 of 12; 41.7% – followed by Occupied Lands/Obligation and Historical Grievance – 2 occurrences each; 16.7% – indicating that the toponym functions as a flexible marker: on the one hand, as a western limit to reinforce the narrative of global territorial aspiration, as a “usurped” land that activates the duty to recover it, and on the other, as a memory of grievances linked to episodes of military defeat and cultural destruction. Finally, the geostrategic reference is concentrated in the Geostrategy frame, where Gibraltar/Strait is integrated into an argument about maritime routes and checkpoints, without sufficient continuity to constitute a thematic axis manifested throughout the series.

Table 6. Discursive frames by type of reference (TR x MD).

		Retaliation/Threat	Historical injustice	Occupied territories/Obligation	Return/Restoration	Scope/Expansion	Geostrategy	Cultural context	Total
Contemporary Spain	Count	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	4
	% within the TA	25,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	75,0%	100%
Al-Ándalus/Andalusia	Count	1	2	2	1	5	1	0	12
	% within the TA	8,3%	16,7%	16,7%	8,3%	41,7%	8,3%	0,0%	100%
Gibraltar/Strait of Gibraltar	Count	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	% within the TA	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	100%	0,0%	100%
Total	Count	2	2	2	1	5	2	3	17
	% within the TA	11,8%	11,8%	11,8%	5,9%	29,4%	11,8%	17,5%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

To illustrate the traceability of the interpretive process, Table 7 presents an illustrative quote for each discursive frame, showing the assignment of each occurrence to its corresponding frame, evidencing the heterogeneity of references to Spain in the located issues of the magazine.

Table 7. Illustrative quotes by discursive frame (MD) and type of reference (TR).

Discursive framework	Type of reference	Issue (Year)	Page	Direct quote
Retaliation/Threat	Contemporary Spain	34 (2024)	76	"The soldiers of the Islamic State targeted the citizens of the member countries of this coalition in [...] Brussels, Spain , London [...] They leapt and took revenge".
Historical Injustice	Al-Ándalus/Andalusia	31 (2023)	19	"[...] Crusaders burned library of Palestine and that of Tripoli. And did the same in Andalusia , where Ferdinand and Isabella put all Muslims works to flames [...]"
Occupied territories/Obligation	Al-Ándalus/Andalusia	30 (2023)	47	"The first wall of the Islamic territory spreads from Andalusia to southern part of Africa, and the second wall is from western part of Africa to Indonesia [...]"
Return/Restoration	Al-Ándalus/Andalusia	36 (2024)	26	"[...] you will see the armies of Islam roaming inside the palaces and great forts of Andalusia [...]"
Scope/Expansion	Al-Ándalus/Andalusia	14 (2022)	43	"[...] the history of the Islamic conquest [...] and the conquest of Andalusia testify the impotency of the then ruling powers [...]"
Geostrategy	Gibraltar/Strait of Gibraltar	39 (2024)	36	"Consider the strategic locations [...] the Red Sea, and even the Strait of Gibraltar . The security of these maritime routes directly benefits countries like [...]"
Cultural context	Contemporary Spain	30 (2023)	19	"[...] At the time when the scientific method came about in Spain , it was seen that what the church was teaching was not true. This led to a silent revolution".

Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of symbolic selection, references to Spain concentrate on a limited and explicit repertoire. The analysis reveals the clear prevalence of the historical-territorial referent Al-Andalus/Andalusia – 12 of 17 occurrences – over mentions of the contemporary Spanish state – 4 of 17 – and geostrategic allusions – 1 of 17. The presence of Spain as a direct operational target is minority: within the set, only one occurrence places the term “Spain” in a statement of retaliation or threat associated with the coalition, while the rest of the mentions of this type are integrated into a cultural, historical, or linguistic context, without presenting the country as a primary territorial vector.

On the other hand, it is noted that the applied dictionary does not retrieve implicit references to Spain, although neither do unambiguous synonyms or metonymies appear that would allow attribution of the referent to Spain without these precise markers. Finally, the studied series also presents some relevant absences for the descriptive characterization of the object, as no mentions of cities, enclaves, or contemporary landmarks associated with Spain were detected. In fact, particularly in the 2025

segment, no occurrences were recorded under the operationalized terms, such that the presence of Spain is delimited to a limited set of issues and discursive uses.

5. Conclusions

This research set out with the objective of identifying and characterizing the textual references to Spain in the complete set of Voice of Khurasan, consisting of 46 issues published between January 2022 and June 2025. The analysis model drew inspiration from works that treat the country as an object within jihadist editorial products (Marone & Olimpio, 2023; Stempień, 2022) and from the tradition of studying Spain as a propaganda referent (Torres-Soriano, 2009; 2020).

The results describe a clear pattern: the mentions are infrequent in sample terms – the 23.9% that contain at least one reference – but in annual terms, they show an increase in coverage and intensity throughout 2024, along with a typological and discursive composition that clearly privileges the historical-territorial repertoire.

First, the temporal distribution suggests that Spain does not constitute a constant axis throughout the series but rather a referent that emerges episodically and concentrated in certain issues. The noted jump in 2024 – with 10 occurrences in 5 issues, an annual coverage of 41.7% – contrasts with the lower values of 2022 and 2023 and with the absence of references in the 2025 segment according to the applied dictionary. Without inferring causality, this evolution is consistent with the logic of magazines as serialized products with content sensitive to conjunctures, where certain geographic objects gain visibility when they prove useful for reinforcing narrative priorities and legitimizing doctrinal frames.

Second, the classification by type of reference confirms that, in this outlet, Spain is presented predominantly as a historical-religious repertoire. The majority of occurrences are inscribed in Al-Andalus/Andalusia – 70.6% – while contemporary Spain represents 23.5% of cases and references to Gibraltar a residual 5.9%. This distribution suggests that the focus shifts from an operational reading with Spain as a current priority target toward a more symbolic reading to articulate promises, grievances, or imagined borders. This idea aligns with previous literature on the value of Al-Andalus as a repertoire with high symbolic density and mobilizing capacity, especially when linked to concrete ideas of “usurped” lands, religious duty, or historical continuity (Stearns, 2009; Torres-Soriano, 2009; 2020; Van Der Krogt, 2021).

The Al-Andalus/Andalusia reference often functions as a rhetorical geographic limit through the discursive frame of scope or expansion – 29.4% – useful for reproducing an effect of continuity and aspirational projection. At the same time, the secondary presence of occupied lands or obligation and historical grievance – 11.8% each – shows that the referent is also activated as a “due land” or as a memory of defeat. That is, the same toponym does not always push toward the same function, as it

can operate as a promise of expansion, a duty, or a grievance depending on the rhetorical context of the article.

Third, the interaction between the type of reference and the discursive frame clarifies the status of contemporary Spain within the corpus. Mentions of “Spain/Spanish” are primarily associated with a cultural context; that is, they are integrated into doctrinal or cultural arguments without presenting Spain as a territory to be recovered or as a priority target. Only one occurrence frames the country in a retaliation or threat frame as part of a list of countries whose citizens would be objects of violence. This distribution suggests that, in Voice of Khurasan, the contemporary Spanish state operates more as an auxiliary referent than as a sustained primary enemy. However, this does not mean that Spain is irrelevant in the jihadist imaginary, but rather that, in this examined corpus, its explicit presence mostly adopts non-direct territorial forms, which are indirectly captured under the direct occurrences of Al-Andalus/Andalusia.

Finally, these results provide a useful methodological observation for the state of the question: the search for implicit references to Spain, beyond explicit terms, does not yield verifiable findings. This absence is interpreted cautiously: either the corpus uses the Spain referent mostly implicitly when activated, or the implicit forms remain diluted in metonymies that are too broad to allow specific meaning attribution without overinterpretation. In short, Spain appears in Voice of Khurasan primarily through a historical-territorial repertoire and as a resource of expansion or scope, rather than as a sustained contemporary priority target.

6. References

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