FRAMES OF MIND: METAPHOR-MORPHOSIS OF MIGRATION INTO FLOODING IN THE BRITISH AND THE BULGARIAN MEDIA DISCOURSE

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Abstract: One of the main areas of research in the field of cognitive linguistics is metaphor as a central tenet of both language and cognition. The more traditional views of its position as a rare and highly original rhetoric and literary device have been challenged by the cognitive enterprise, whose stand in the matter emphasizes its pervasive nature as a basic structuring element of human cognition. Through the prism of cognitive linguistics, the present study researches the cognitive metaphor MIGRATION IS A FLOODING CRISIS in the discourse of two British (the Guardian and the Independent) and two Bulgarian (Standart and Dnevnik) media outlets. The main purpose of the paper is to test a hypothesis concerning the mappings between the domains of floods and immigration, where the structure of a flooding crisis is projected onto the structure of immigrant movement. With the help of lexical items from the sematic fields of flooding and immigration, such as flood, swamp, inundate, pour, burst, flow, influx, wave, flow, (im)migrants, refugees, workers and asylum seekers, 23 example sentences have been excerpted from the online databases of the Guardian, the Independent, Standart and Dnevnik and analyzed qualitatively in order to check the preformulated hypothesis. The main methods of analysis are Critical Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis. The research shows evidence of structuring of migration in terms of a flooding crisis in the researched British and Bulgarian media discourse and finds out that both the British and the Bulgarian media discourse contains examples the same basic structuring projections from the domain of floods towards the domain of immigration, even though the linguistic realization of these mappings differs in the two media discourses. The mappings between the domain of floods and the domain of immigration are as follows: immigrants / refugees / foreign worker are conceptualized as flooding waters and the arrival of large number of immigrants is conceived as a flooding event, the borders between countries are perceived as riverbanks/coastlines, the immigrant's destination countries are envisaged as flooded areas, while immigrants native counties are seen as riverbeds/ocean floors, and the problems caused by immigrants are envisaged as devastations from flooding events. The comparative nature of the study and its research into the Bulgarian media discourse can be considered as one of its contributions. A possible extension of the research could be a comparative diachronic investigation of the frequency of occurrences of different linguistic realizations of the cognitive metaphor MIGRATION IS A FLOODING CRISIS and possible changes in terms of its avoidance, with respect to its dehumanizing effects.
Keywords: cognition, conceptualization, conventional metaphor, mappings, media language

1. INTRODUCTION

For Aristotle metaphor "is the application of alien name by transference". (Aristotle, 2013, p.23). By stating that expressions can be "either current terms or, … rare words or metaphors", he emphasizes the rarity of metaphors and their "exotic" nature (ibid, p.29). His whole discussion of metaphors is in the fields of poetics and rhetorics, but he also states that, for instance, sometimes a metaphor based on the process of sowing, which involves scattering seeds, can be used to denote a process that is otherwise nameless, like "the action of the sun scattering its rays". With that example Aristotle points out that metaphors can be used to express notions, which are impossible to be expressed with conventional linguistic means. Aristotle does not elaborate on that any further, but this same cognitive process has come under the radar of the cognitive enterprise, where metaphors have been recognized as facilitators, enabling the understanding of abstract concepts, like TIME, through processes that are based on our embodied experience, like MOTION (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 167). Research in the representation of TIME in the works of Graham Green has been carried out by Hussain and Ahmed (2025), who found that time was conceptualized in terms of motion, a moving object, limited resource, a starting point/destination, bounded space, an extension, a location, a container, money, destination, a pursuer, an adversary, a container, a changer and a living entity. In sharp contrast to Aristotle's understanding of metaphor as a rare phenomenon, however, Lakoff and Johnson stress in *Metaphors we lie by* the pervasiveness of metaphorical thinking in everyday life (1980, p.3). One of the cognitive metaphors that they list is the structural metaphor, which is a conventional metaphor in which one concept is understood and expressed in terms of another structured, sharply defined concept. Lakoff and Johnson list a lot of examples of such structural metaphors but the first one that appears in the book is the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor, where *claims* are envisaged as *indefensible, arguments* are *attacked, shot down* or *demolished* and criticisms can be *right on target* (ibid, p.4). With structural metaphors a domain is structured in terms of the structure of another domain. This process includes transfer of information between domains with the help of mappings. Fauconnier (1997, p.1) defines

mapping as "a correspondence between two sets that assigns to each element in the first a counterpart in the second", while the domains are recognized as mental conceptual models with only a partial structure. He distinguishes between the following types of mappings: projection mappings, pragmatic function mappings and schemata mappings. Projection mappings constitute partial structural projections between a target and a source domain. This is realized when a speaker describes the target domain with the help of lexical resources from the source domain, which reveals the cognitive construal of parts of the target domain as parts of the source domain. Pragmatic function mappings are the basis for metonymy and synecdoche, where the pragmatic function is used as a link between the two relevant domains. With the help of this type of mapping patients can be matched with the illnesses that they need treatment of, authors can be mapped onto their creations (books, articles etc) or customers can be referred to with the products that they have bought. Schemata mapping is achieved through the use of a general schema, frame or model with structuring intentions. (ibid, pp.9-11).

Kövecses (2002, p.7) illustrates the systematic set of mappings for the LOVE IS A JOURNEY conceptual metaphor in the following way:

Source: JOURNEY	Target: LOVE
the travelers	- the lovers
the vehicle	- the love relationship itself
the journey	- events in the relationship
the distance covered	- the progress made
the obstacles encountered	- the difficulties experienced
decisions about which way to go	- choices about what to do
the destination of the journey	- the goal(s) of the relationship

According to Kövecses the clear correspondence between the structure of the JOURNEY and LOVE is not due to a preexisting similarity between them, but the structure of the domain of LOVE is a result of the metaphorical projection from the domain of JOURNEY, which is proven by the difficulty that one experiences when they try to think of the goal, choice, difficulty etc. in the domain of LOVE without resorting to linguistic expressions from the domain of JOURNEY. The projection is clearly from the domain of JOURNEY to the domain of LOVE. Sometimes two metaphors can share the same domains and seem reciprocal to each other. Lakoff and Turner (1989) state that such is the case with PEOPLE ARE MACHINES and MACHINES ARE PEOPLE. But even though the metaphors work with the same domains, they are considered as two distinct metaphors because different qualities of the two domains are mapped onto each other, with the speed and accuracy of machines mapped onto people in PEOPLE ARE MACHINES and human qualities like the notion of desire and disobedience are mapped onto machines in PEOPLE ARE MACHINES.

Studies of the linguistic expression of the concept of time have suggested a cross-cultural correspondence of the metaphorical nature of its representation. The relationship between ego-moving metaphors and time moving metaphors with respect to emotional valance in temporal condition in the South Slavic language complex (Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian) was researched by Muhić et al. (2025), who found out that the preference for ego-moving temporal expression when discussing pleasant anticipated events and the time-moving temporal expressing when unpleasant of stressful situations are conceived in Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian corresponds to the findings of previous studies in English, like Boroditsky and Ramscar (2002) and Margolies and Crawford (2008). However, metaphorical representations are not always uniform across cultures. Kövecses (2002, pp.183,184) discusses the cross-cultural variation of conceptual metaphors depicting emotional concepts, and reports some cases of conceptual metaphors, which are unique to specific cultures, like ANGER IS (IN THE) HARA metaphor, which is very specific to Japanese, or the Zulu-related ANGER IS (UNDERSTOOD AS BEING) IN THE HEART, as well as the very Chinese HAPPINESS IS FLOWERS IN THE HEART. He also points out that there are culturally related elaborations of conceptual metaphors, which are limited to a language. A good example is the Hungarian elaboration of the BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR THE EMOTIONS and ANGER IS FIRE metaphors as a pipe in which there is a burning substance. Another example is the Zulu elaboration that anger, metaphorically represented with the help of the domain of FIRE can be extinguished with the help of water, an entailment, which is not shared in English even though anger in that language is also represented with the help of the domain of FIRE. In their study of Nurpeisov's cognitive metaphor "footprint is life path" from the novel "Sońǵy Paryz" and its representation in direct translation from Kazakh into Russian and its mediated translation into English, Ainur Alzhanova et al. (2024) state that the correspondence of the frame-element structure of the original structure was incomplete in the translations. Gee (1999, p.77) postulates that metaphors can signal cultural models, while Gonçalves (2023) and Taylor (2021) emphasizes the dehumanizing nature of metaphors of immigration and the representation of nations as endangered containers or houses.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The main methods of the study are Critical Discourse analysis and Content Analysis. The aim of the present article is to track the cognitive metaphor MIGRATION IS A FLOODING CRISIS in the British and the Bulgarian media discourse. The research tries to investigate comparatively whether migration has been conceptualized in terms of floods in newspaper reporting in the UK and Bulgaria. Initially, a hypothesis about the mappings between the domains of floods and migration has been formed, which is illustrated below:

Mappings between the domains of floods and migration

Source: FLOODS	*Target:* MIGRATION
flood waters	people (immigrants/migrants, refugees, foreign workers)
to flood	to arrive in large numbers
riverbanks	borders
flooded areas	foreign countries
a riverbed	an immigrant's native country
devastation	problems caused by immigrants

A selection of 23 sentences, which exemplify the mappings between the domains of FLOODS and the domain of MIGRATION have been extracted from the online databases of *the Guardian, the Independent, Standart* and *Dnevnik* with the help of *flood, swamp, inundate, pour, burst, flow, influx, wave, flow, (im)migrants, refugees, workers, asylum seekers*, and analyzed qualitatively in order to check the hypothesis.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researched data supported the first two mapping pair from the hypothesis, namely that ***immigrants/ refugees/ foreign workers are envisaged in terms of flood waters***. Here are three examples taken from British newspapers, which show the cognitive conceptualization of immigrants as flooding waters:

> [1] In 2024, many voters elected Trump partially out of frustration at the Biden administration's seemingly lax approach to the **influx of migrants** at the US-Mexico border. (I/21.07.2025); [2] Their fellow Channel Islanders in Jersey announced last year that they would not be accepting any refugees, citing concerns that the island would subsequently be **swamped** by thousands of **refugees** currently living legally in the UK. (I/06.02.2016); [3] The feared **flood of workers** from Bulgaria and Romania failed to materialise at Heathrow airport yesterday as citizens of the European Union's two newest member states appeared to prefer to stay at home. (I/03.01.2007)

In the given examples "I" stands for *the Independent*, "G" stands for *the Guardian*, "St" stands for *Standart* and "D" stands for *Dnevnik*. Example [1], taken from the British media discourse, gives a possible explanation for the loss of Joe Biden to Donald Trump by elaborating on its policy concerning immigration to the USA from Mexico. Instead of a more neutral phrase like *migrant movement* the author of the article has opted for the phrase influx of migrants, which comes from the Latin word *influere*, which means *to frow* and is, therefore, water related. In modern English the phrase has, to some extent, lost its strong water connotations and most dictionaries list only the meaning denoting the arrival of many people or things, but some dictionaries, like the online Collins, available at https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/influx do list some water related meanings and thus, the phrase should be considered a more dramatic metaphorical expression than the neutral *migrant movement*. Examples [2] and [3] exemplify clearer flood metaphors, which are used in the context of a dire anticipation of the arrival of immigrants with all the negative consequences attached to that process. The context of example [2] also includes the preventive measures taken to make sure that the Channel Islands are not overcrowded with immigrants, while example [3] reports that the anticipated arrival of job-seekers in large numbers from Bulgaria and Romania after the entrance of the two countries in the EU on January 1st, 2007 was left in tatters. It is clear that the immigrants in the examples are represented as water that threatens to cover the Channel Islands in example [2] and the UK in the example [3]. The noun *swamp* has some really strong negative connotations and can even cause negative reactions, when used by political figures. An example of such criticism is the opinion article in the Guardian called *'Swamped' and 'riddled': the toxic words that wreck public discourse*, available at https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/oct/27/swamped-and-riddled-toxic-phrases-wreck-politics-immigration-michael-fallon.

> [4 BG ex.] На този етап от конфликта между Иран и Израел няма **мигрантска вълна** към Турция. (At this stage of the conflict between Iran and Israel there isn't a migrant wave towards Turkey) (St/19.06.2025); [5 BG ex.] По данни на посолството на Република България в Унгария международните влакове са преустановени за неопределен период. Мярката е въведена заради **мощната вълна от бежанци** през последните дни. От началото на годината у нас са **задържани** над 17 000 **нелегални имигранти**. (According to the embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in Hungary, international trains have been suspended for an indefinite period. The measure was introduced because of the massive wave of refugees in recent days. Since the beginning of the year, more than 17 000 illegal immigrants have been detained in Bulgaria.) (St/06.09.2015);

[6 BG example] В момента първите части са разположени, за да спрат вълна от мигранти, но се оказа, че в момента такава няма (At the moment, the first divisions have been set up to stop the wave of migrants, but it turned out that at the moment it is non-existent.) (D/19.02.2025)

In the text, all translations from Bulgarian into English are mine. The Bulgarian examples [4] and [5] utilize the Bulgarian term *вълна (wave)* when referring to a sudden increase in the number of people or things at the same time. In example [4] the phrase *мигрантска вълна (migrant wave)* is used in the context of a lack of migrant movement towards Turkey, which should serve as a positive piece of news. However, the phrase *at this stage of the conflict* presupposes a likelihood of a future change and the use of *wave* instead of a more neutral word, like *movement* facilitates the expression of anticipation of a more negative development of the conflict. The implementation of the determiner *massive* in example [5] adds to the dramatic effect of the use of the metaphor. The example also touches upon measures aiming at the prevention and alleviation of the negative effects of the anticipated numbers of immigrants, which shows an overlapping of **MIGRATION IS A FLOODING CRISIS** metaphor with the discussed in Gorchev (2022) metaphor **FLOODING CRISIS IS WAR**. This conclusion is further supported by the use of the verb "*задържани (detained)"* and the adjective "*нелегални (illegal)"* when referring to the noun "*имигранти (immigrants)"*. Example [6] further reinforces the connection between the two metaphors.

The next mapping pair, which states that ***country borders are seen as riverbanks or coastlines*** was also supported by the researched data, as illustrated by the following examples:

[7] Syrians **poured across the border** to refugee camps in Turkey today, fleeing a military crackdown that sent troops backed by helicopters and tanks into the northern town that was spinning out of government control. (I/13.06.2011); [8] Hungarian riot police fired teargas and water cannon across the border with Serbia after frustrated crowds, who had gathered there in their thousands when Hungary closed its frontier on Tuesday, tried to **burst through a gate** that connects the two countries. (G/16.09.2015); [9] He (White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan) further cited Egyptian concerns that an invasion of Rafah would send a flood of refugees **over** the Gaza border into Egypt, a development which Egypt has said would prompt them to withdraw from the decades-old Camp David Accords peace treaty with Israel. (I/18.03.2024); [10 BG ex.] Той очаква скоро да има **нова вълна от бежанци към нашата граница**. (He expects to have a new wave of refugees heading for our border soon.) (St/29.10.2015);

If we apply a commutation test to example [7] and substitute the signifier *pour across* with the signifier *cross* we will have a neutral sentence, which uses the normal verb which collocates with the noun *border* used as an object in a sentence that will signify neutrality. The signified of the signifier *cross* is "go from one side to the other", hence the neutrality of the sentence utilizing the normal collocation *cross a border*. On the other hand, especially when it is associated with people, the signified of *pour* is connotatively related to "a great number". So, by replacing the more neutral collocation *cross the border* with the phrase *pour across the border* the author achieves two purposes. First, connotatively, secondary layers of meaning are added, denoting "lots of people" on the one hand and "the distractive power of water" on the other. Second, through the use of less expected linguistic devices a SECOND-ORDER informativity is added to the text, which makes it much more intriguing for the reader and keeps his/her attention (Todorova 2015, p.24). The same effect is achieved in example [8] where the verb *burst* has a similar function to the verb *pour*. Example [9] depicts the possible movement of refugees as a dangerous mass of water, which overcomes its natural boundaries and covers the surrounding areas and is a cause of deep concern. The Bulgarian example [10] is quite similar to [9], because it also talks about expectations and not about real events which have already happened or are in the process of happening. The wave has not reached the border yet and as a result the level of danger denoted by the sentence is lower.

The researched data provided evidence for the existence of metaphorical mappings, where ***foreign countries are conceptualized in terms of flooded areas***, as is seen in the following examples:

[11] Refugees continued to **pour into Russia** across the rocky mountain pass from South Ossetia yesterday, fleeing the violence that threatens to engulf the region. (I/11.08.2008); [12] Refugees pour into China after Burma clashes. (I/29.08.2009); [13 BG ex.] Според тях Ердоган изразил безпокойството си, че атаките в Алепо и в районите около града могат да предизвикат нова **вълна от бежанци към Турция**. (In their view, Erdogan expressed his concern that the attacks in Aleppo and the surrounding areas could cause a new wave of refugees to Turkey) (St/22.10.2015);

Our focus in examples [11] and [12] should be the preposition "into", which denotes a movement to the inside of something and in the Bulgarian example [13] the preposition "към", which has a very similar meaning. They provide the link through which the two domains are connected. In figurative terms, the "stream" of people moves towards the inside of the countries, in these cases Russia, China and Turkey.

[14] 'Relaxing immigration laws would lead to the country being **inundated**' (G/21.10.2014); [15 BG ex.] Поводът е нежеланието на някои държави да приемат повече бегълци, докато други са **залети от**

безпрецедентна вълна от имигранти. (The reason is the reluctance of some countries to accept more refugees, while others are **overwhelmed by an unprecedented wave of immigrants**.) (St/01.09.2015).

Examples (14) and (15) incorporate the verbs "inundate" and the Bulgarian verb "заливам". Both verbs have the sense of completeness that can be described with the phrase "more than enough", so their incorporation in the context of immigration provokes subconscious feeling of oversaturation, which in turn can lead to a negative reaction. Because of its destructive nature flooding is never anticipated with pleasure and the examples again reflect a negative attitude toward immigration as a process.

The researched data provided evidence for the metaphorical conceptualization of ***the native countries of immigrants as riverbeds or sea bottoms***. Nothing comes from nowhere and the same is true when we talk about floodwaters. In a natural flood a lot of factors can lead to a flooding event. It might be caused by heavy precipitation, groundwater or even a burst pipe, but most often the main sources are large bodies of water, like rivers, lakes, seas and oceans. And if we take the hydrological cycle in consideration, no matter what path the water has taken, we can safely assume that any flood is caused by water that directly or indirectly has come from riverbeds, sea beds and ocean bottoms. In the domain of migration there are two terms that describe the participants in the process, the first being emigrants and it denotes people who leave their own country to live in another and the second is immigrants, denoting the people who enter another country to live there permanently. If we compare the structures of the two domains, we will see that the source of flooding is the riverbed or the sea/ocean bottom and the source of migration is a state.

[16] Why are so **many of these states** falling apart now and generating great floods of refugees? (I/07.09.2015); [17] And, it seems, the flow of people **between Libya and Italy** will now change direction. (G/12.10.2004); [18] Gas flows in and **would-be immigrants flow out**, as Italy gets cosy with Libya, reports Sophie Arie (G/12.10.2004);

Example [16] uses a source from the domain of migration i.e. *state* but then uses a lexeme from the domain of a flooding event to denote the greate number of refugees who leave the country. Thus, the example shows that the producer of the sentence has mapped the two domains on a psychological level. In example [17] the mapping has been signified by the noun phrase *the flow of people*, which incorporates a flood-related vocabulary item and the prepositional phrase *between Libya and Italy*. By just considering the phrase in isolation one might think that the source country is Libya but in the context of the sentence it becomes clear that even though normally Libya has been a source country for migration, now there is a likelihood that workers from Italy might go and work in Libya. In example [18], which has been extracted from the same article, the noun *immigrants* has been modified by the adjective *would-be* and Italy as a source country is signified by the preposition *out* in conjunction with the verb *flow*. The adjective *would-be*, which is a compound adjective made up of the modal verb *would* and the verb *be* gives the whole sentence a connotative layer of supposition.

[19] Четвърто, решението на кризата с бежанците е геополитически въпрос, свързан с решаването на сирийската криза и другите конфликти. **Източникът на бежанската вълна е там, в кризисните райони**. (Fourthly, the solution to the refugee crisis is a geopolitical issue related to the resolution of the Syrian crisis and the other conflicts. The source of the refugee wave is there in the crisis areas.) (St/19.09.2015); [20] Спешното е да се прекрати **източникът на бежанската вълна**, а това е **процес от дестабилизираните държави в Африка и Арабския свя**т. (It is urgent to stop the source of the refugee wave, and this is a process from the destabilized countries in Africa and the Arab world.) (St/31.08.2015)

Examples [19] and [20] make an explicit mention that the refugees come from destabilized countries in Africa and the Arab world. The socio-cultural context of some of the articles is a period known as the Arab spring also known as Arab Revolutions, which was marked by the fall of regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and other countries ravaged by civil war. These civil wars forced lots of people to flee and seek asylum in many countries in Europe.

The last mapping pair from the hypothesis the conceptualization of ***the aftermath of immigration as the aftermath of floods*** was also supported by the researched data.

[21] The same article went on to maintain that the Home Office minister's explosive admission follows a successful campaign by the Daily Express to **highlight the immigration issue** and to call for government action to stop the flood of **bogus asylum seekers**. (G/08.06.2002);

In example [21] the mapping is done through the noun phrase *immigration issue* and the prepositional phrase *flood of bogus asylum seekers*. The meaning of *issue* in this context is *problem*, while the *asylum seekers* are described as *bogus*. A synonym of *bogus* is *false*. *Asylum* denotes protection given to someone by a government because they have escaped from fighting or political trouble in their own country. When the asylum seekers are describes as bogus it gives the whole sentence a connotation of conspiracy. Here, the interpretation is left to the reader, with various possibilities.

[22] "Many of the **bogus asylum seekers** flooding into Britain are **cheats and criminals**. . . Look at the Nistor family. These Romanian gypsies have been given a four-bedroom detached house free, plus £230 a month. . .The **decent English family** next door are moving because the Nistors are **too noisy and filthy** to endure any longer." The Sunday People, March 5, 2000 (G/08.06.2002); [23 BG ex.] Според данни на водещи институти **имигрантите** в Европа, **напускащи началното училище**, са **два пъти повече** от европейците. **Имигрантите** са **два пъти повече** в **лагера на безработните**. Пропорционално много повече са и **извършилите престъпления**. (According to data from leading institutes, migrants in Europe leaving school are twice as much as Europeans. Immigrants are twice as many in the unemployed camp. Proportionally, there are many more criminals.) (St/19.09.2015)

Example [22] is more specific in the sense that it also includes the nouns *cheats and criminals* and also gives specific examples of the said problems brought by the immigrants. The English family in the example is described as *decent,* which denotes the idea that they follow moral standards that are acceptable to society. That family is juxtaposed with Romanian gypsy family, described as *noisy and filthy*. A sum of money given as social benefit is also mentioned which hints that these immigrants use the social benefit system of the country but at the same time do not integrate but are nuisance for the other citizens. The Bulgarian example [23] directly corresponds to example [22] with the claims that the immigrants in Europe are less educated and with lower moral standards than the native citizens.

4. CONCLUSION

From the analysed data, it could be concluded that the movement of people has been conceptualized in terms of moving water both in the British and the Bulgarian media discourse. The research shows that the structure of a flooding is projected on the structure of migration with the following mappings: flood waters are mapped onto groups of people, the process of flooding is mapped on the arrival of these people, the riverbanks are mapped on the borders of different countries, the flooded areas are mapped on the foreign countries, the immigrants native the riverbeds are mapped on immigrants' native countries, and the devastation caused by the flooding event is mapped on the problems that are created by the arrival of those groups of people. A wider range of linguistic expression from the domain of floods in their reporting, which include lexical items such as *flood, wave, inundate, swamp, flow, influx, pour, burst* in combination with (*im)migrants ((и)мигранти), refugees (бежанци), worker (работници), asylum seekers (търсещи убежище)* have been utilized by the British media to denote the sudden arrival of large groups of people, while the Bulgarian media use a more limited range of expressions such as *вълна, поток, приток, заливам.* While the implementation of certain expressions with highly negative connotations, such as *be swamped by immigrants* on the part of famous politicians has been criticised by the British media, the use of the conceptual metaphor MIGRATION IS A FLOODING CRISIS is evident as recently as 2025, which proves the postulate that metaphorical thinking is a central cognitive process.

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