

# FACT SHEET: THE ISLAMIC STATE'S APOCALYPTIC BELIEFS

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Updated: September 4, 2015

“We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea.”

—Major General Michael K. Nagata, U.S. Special Operations commander in the Middle East<sup>1</sup>

## Quotes From ISIS leaders and operatives:

- “The Mahdi will come any day.”—*Abu Ayyub al-Masri, one of the founders of ISIS.*<sup>2</sup>
- “The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat continues to intensify—by Allah’s permission—until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq.”—*Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, one of the founders of ISIS, cited in Dabiq, the official magazine of the Islamic State, Issue #1.*<sup>3</sup>
- “The hypocrites and those who obstruct the path to Allah will say to you, ‘Do you think anything of what you want will ever be achieved? Do you really think that the Islamic Khilāfah [caliphate] or even just the Islamic State will ever be established? That is something that can never happen and it is closer to imagination than reality.’ So if they say such to you, then . . . say to them, ‘Indeed, Allah will grant the Muslims the conquest of Rome, just as Allah’s Messenger promised’ He also said, ‘We perform jihād here while our eyes are upon al-Quds. We fight here, while our goal is Rome with good expectations concerning Allah that he makes us the keys for the Prophetic good tidings and godly decrees.’”—*Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, cited in Dabiq, Issue #4.*<sup>4</sup>
- “The Hour will not be established until the Romans land at al-A’maq or Dabiq [two places near each other in the northern countryside of Halab]. Then an army from al-Madinah of the best people on the earth at that time will leave for them. When they line up in ranks, the Romans will say, ‘Leave us and those who were taken as prisoners from amongst us so we can fight them.’ The Muslims will say, ‘Nay, by Allah, we will not abandon our brothers to you.’ So they will fight them. Then one third of them will flee; Allah will never forgive them. One third will be killed; they will be the best martyrs with Allah. And one third will conquer them; they will never be afflicted with fitnah.”—*The Prophet Muhammad is believed to have said these words, cited in “Introduction: The Return of the Khalifah,” Dabiq, Issue #1.*<sup>5</sup>
- “Our last message is to the Americans. Soon we will be in direct confrontation, and the sons of Islam have prepared for such a day. So watch, for we are with you, watching.”—*ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, audio recording, January 21, 2014.*<sup>6</sup>

- “Rush, O Muslims, to your state. It is your state. Syria is not for Syrians and Iraq is not for Iraqis. The land is for the Muslims, all Muslims. . . . This is my advice to you. If you hold to it you will conquer Rome and own the world, if Allah wills.”—*ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, audio recording, July 2014.*<sup>7</sup>
- “We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted. This is his promise to us; he is glorified and he does not fail in his promise. If we do not reach that time, then our children and grandchildren will reach it, and they will sell your sons as slaves at the slave market.”—*Excerpt from an article titled, “Indeed, Your Lord Is Ever Watchful,” by the official ISIS spokesman, in Dabiq, Issue #4.*<sup>8</sup>
- “As for the name of the magazine, then it is taken from the area named Dabiq in the northern countryside of Halab [Aleppo] in Sham. This place was mentioned in a hadith describing some of the events of the Malahim [what is sometimes referred to as Armageddon in English]. One of the greatest battles between the Muslims and the crusaders will take place near Dabiq.”—*Excerpt from the “Introduction: The Return of the Khalifah,” in Dabiq, Issue #1.*<sup>9</sup>
- “O Ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy—the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the Jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews.”—*Amirul-Mu’minin, quoted in Dabiq, Issue #1.*<sup>10</sup>
- “God has chosen us! We have the Truth! You’re either with us or you’re a traitor. . . . Only those who fight with the Mahdi will enter paradise.”—*Unidentified ISIS fighter in Syria.*<sup>11</sup>
- “If you think all these mujahidin came from across the world to fight Assad, you’re mistaken. They are all here as promised by the Prophet. This is the war he promised—it is the Grand Battle.”—*Unidentified Sunni fighter in Syria.*<sup>12</sup>

#### Quotes from “What ISIS Really Wants” by Graeme Wood:

- “The Islamic State, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), follows a distinctive variety of Islam whose beliefs about the path to the Day of Judgment matter to its strategy, and can help the West know its enemy and predict its behavior.”<sup>13</sup>
- “The Islamic State has its share of worldly concerns (including, in the places it controls, collecting garbage and keeping the water running), but the End of Days is a leitmotif of its propaganda.”<sup>14</sup>
- During the last years of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, the Islamic State’s

immediate “founding fathers, by contrast, saw signs of the end times everywhere. They were anticipating, within a year, the arrival of the Mahdi—a messianic figure destined to lead the Muslims to victory before the end of the world.”<sup>15</sup>

- “Now that it has taken Dabiq, the Islamic State awaits the arrival of an enemy army there, whose defeat will initiate the countdown to the apocalypse.”<sup>16</sup>
- “An anti-Messiah, known in Muslim apocalyptic literature as Dajjal, will come from the Khorasan region of eastern Iran and kill a vast number of the caliphate’s fighters, until just 5,000 remain, cornered in Jerusalem.”<sup>17</sup>
- “Just as Dajjal prepares to finish them off, Jesus—the second-most-revered prophet in Islam—will return to Earth, spear Dajjal, and lead the Muslims to victory.”<sup>18</sup>
- “That the Islamic State holds the imminent fulfillment of prophecy as a matter of dogma at least tells us the mettle of our opponent.”<sup>19</sup>

#### Quotes from “ISIS Fantasies of an Apocalyptic Showdown in Northern Syria” by William McCants:

- “The meadow outside the small village of Dabiq, Syria, is a strange setting for one of the final battles of the Islamic apocalypse. Although close to the Turkish border, ‘Dabiq is not important militarily’ observed a leader in the Syria opposition. And yet the Islamic State fought ferociously to capture the village this summer because its members believe the great battle between infidels and Muslims will take place there as part of the final drama preceding the Day of Judgment.”<sup>20</sup>
- “In a prophecy attributed to Muhammad, the Prophet predicts the Day of Judgment will come after the Muslims defeat Rome at al-A’maq or Dabiq, two places close to the Syrian border with Turkey. Another prophecy holds that Rome’s allies will number 80. The Muslims will then proceed to conquer Constantinople [Istanbul].”<sup>21</sup>

#### Quotes from “How ISIL Out-Terrorized Bin Laden” by William McCants:

- “The Islamic State’s brutality and its insistence on apocalypse now and caliphate now set it apart from al-Qaeda, of which it was a part until 2014. We’re used to thinking of al-Qaeda’s leader Osama bin Laden as the baddest of the bad, but the Islamic State is worse. Bin Laden tamped down messianic fervor and sought popular Muslim support; the return of the early Islamic empire, or caliphate, was a distant dream. In contrast, the Islamic State’s members fight and govern by their own version of Machiavelli’s dictum “It is far safer to be feared than loved.” They stir messianic fervor rather than suppress it. They want God’s kingdom now rather than later. This is not Bin Laden’s jihad.”<sup>22</sup>
- “In some ways, the difference between Bin Laden and the Islamic State’s leaders is generational. For Bin Laden’s cohort, the apocalypse wasn’t a great recruiting pitch.

Governments in the Middle East two decades ago were more stable, and sectarianism was more subdued. It was better to recruit by calling to arms against corruption and tyranny than against the Antichrist. Today, though, the apocalyptic recruiting pitch makes more sense. Titanic upheavals convulse the region in the very places mentioned in the prophecies. Sunnis and Shi'a are at war, both appealing to their own versions of prophecies to justify their politics.”<sup>23</sup>

- “The French scholar of Muslim apocalypticism, Jean-Pierre Filiu, has argued that most modern Sunni Muslims viewed apocalyptic thinking with suspicion before the United States invaded Iraq in 2003. It was something the Shi'a or the conspiracy-addled fringe obsessed over, not right-thinking Sunnis. Sure, the Sunni fringe wrote books about the fulfillment of Islamic prophecies. They mixed Muslim apocalyptic villains in with UFOs, the Bermuda triangle, Nostradamus, and the prognostications of evangelical Christians, all to reveal the hidden hand of the international Jew, the Antichrist, who cunningly shaped world events. But the books were commercial duds.”<sup>24</sup>
- “The U.S. invasion of Iraq and the stupendous violence that followed dramatically increased the Sunni public's appetite for apocalyptic explanations of a world turned upside down. A spate of bestsellers put the United States at the center of the end-times drama, a new 'Rome' careering throughout the region in a murderous stampede to prevent violence on its own shores. The main antagonists of the End of Days, the Jews, were now merely supporting actors. Even conservative Sunni clerics who had previously tried to tamp down messianic fervor couldn't help but conclude that 'the triple union constituted by the Antichrist, the Jews, and the new Crusaders' had joined forces 'to destroy the Muslims.’”<sup>25</sup>
- “The Iraq war also changed apocalyptic discourse in the global jihadist movement. The languid apocalypticism of Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri now had to contend with the urgent apocalypticism of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq, and his immediate successors. Iraq, the site of a prophesied bloodbath between true Muslims and false, was engulfed in a sectarian civil war. As Zarqawi saw it, the Shi'a had united with the Jews and Christians under the banner of the Antichrist to fight against the Sunnis. The Final Hour must be approaching, to be heralded by the rebirth of the caliphate, the Islamic empire that had disappeared and whose return was prophesied.”<sup>26</sup>
- “Because of the impending Final Hour, Zarqawi's successor, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, quickly dissolved al-Qaeda in Iraq in order to establish the Islamic State in 2006. Masri rushed to found the State because he believed the Mahdi, the Muslim savior, would come within the year. To his thinking, the caliphate needed to be in place to help the Mahdi fight the final battles of the apocalypse. Anticipating the imminent conquest of major Islamic cities as foretold in the prophecies, he ordered his commanders in the field to conquer the whole of Iraq to prepare for the Mahdi's coming and was convinced they

would succeed in three months. The Islamic State's forces fanned out across the country, only to be recalled a week later because they were spread too thin. When those close to Masri criticized him for making strategic decisions on an apocalyptic timetable, Masri retorted, 'the Mahdi will come any day.'"<sup>27</sup>

## END NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Eric Schmitt, "In Battle to Defang ISIS, U.S. Targets Its Psychology," *New York Times*, December 28, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/29/us/politics/in-battle-to-defang-isis-us-targets-its-psychology-.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/29/us/politics/in-battle-to-defang-isis-us-targets-its-psychology-.html?_r=0); also cited by Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic* magazine, March 2015 issue, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by William McCants, "How ISIL Out-Terrorized Bin Laden," *Politico*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/08/isis-jihad-121525>.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in the first edition of the ISIS magazine, *Dabiq*, p. 3, <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isis-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See *Dabiq*, Issue #4, p. 4, <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See *Dabiq*, Issue #1, p. 5, <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isis-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Cited by Amb. Brett McGurk, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and Deputy Special Presidential Envoy to the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, in written Congressional testimony for the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, February 5, 2014, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20140205/101716/HHRG-113-FA00-Wstate-McGurkB-20140205.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Damien McElroy, "Rome will be conquered next, says leader of 'Islamic State'," *UK Telegraph*, July 1, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10939235/Rome-will-be-conquered-next-says-leader-of-Islamic-State.html>.

<sup>8</sup> See *Dabiq* Issue #4, p. 7-8.

<http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> See *Dabiq*, Issue #1, p. 5, <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isis-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> See *Dabiq*, Issue #1, p. 11, <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isis-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Malise Ruthven, "Lure of the Caliphate," *The New York Review of Books*, NYR Daily, February 28, 2015, <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2015/feb/28/lure-caliphate-isis/>.

<sup>12</sup> Cited by Jessica Stern, "ISIS's Apocalyptic Vision," Hoover Institute, February 25, 2015, <http://www.hoover.org/research/isis-apocalyptic-vision>.

<sup>13</sup> See Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic* magazine, March 2015 issue, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

<sup>14</sup> See Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic* magazine, March 2015 issue, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

<sup>15</sup> See Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic* magazine, March 2015 issue, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

<sup>16</sup> See Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic* magazine, March 2015 issue, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

<sup>17</sup> See Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic* magazine, March 2015 issue, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

<sup>18</sup> See Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic* magazine, March 2015 issue, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

<sup>19</sup> See Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic* magazine, March 2015 issue, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

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<sup>20</sup> See William McCants, "ISIS Fantasies of an Apocalyptic Showdown in Northern Syria," Brookings Institution, October 3, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2014/10/03-isis-apocalyptic-showdown-syria-mccants>.

<sup>21</sup> See William McCants, "ISIS Fantasies of an Apocalyptic Showdown in Northern Syria," Brookings Institution, October 3, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2014/10/03-isis-apocalyptic-showdown-syria-mccants>.

<sup>22</sup> William McCants, "How ISIL Out-Terrorized Bin Laden," *Politico*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/08/isis-jihad-121525#ixzz3klvE9fP0>.

<sup>23</sup> William McCants, "How ISIL Out-Terrorized Bin Laden," *Politico*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/08/isis-jihad-121525#ixzz3klvE9fP0>.

<sup>24</sup> William McCants, "How ISIL Out-Terrorized Bin Laden," *Politico*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/08/isis-jihad-121525#ixzz3klvE9fP0>.

<sup>25</sup> William McCants, "How ISIL Out-Terrorized Bin Laden," *Politico*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/08/isis-jihad-121525#ixzz3klvE9fP0>.

<sup>26</sup> William McCants, "How ISIL Out-Terrorized Bin Laden," *Politico*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/08/isis-jihad-121525#ixzz3klvE9fP0>.

<sup>27</sup> William McCants, "How ISIL Out-Terrorized Bin Laden," *Politico*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/08/isis-jihad-121525#ixzz3klvE9fP0>.